

The Discourse Function of $\delta\acute{\epsilon}$ in 2 Timothy

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The use and function of $\delta\acute{\epsilon}$ in the New Testament continues to be a significant topic of discussion. In the past couple of decades practitioners of a more linguistic approach have challenged the traditional conception of the meaning and function of *de*. Among these practitioners, however, there is not yet a consensus. This paper will seek to contribute to this discussion by examining the function of $\delta\acute{\epsilon}$ in a specific discourse, 2 Timothy. I will first briefly summarize the discussion on the meaning and function of $\delta\acute{\epsilon}$ and then report the results of my examination of the use of $\delta\acute{\epsilon}$ in 2 Timothy.

Theory: Traditional Grammars to Modern Linguistic Approaches

The history and current state of the discussion of the function of $\delta\acute{\epsilon}$ has been summarized in a number of places most recently by Stephanie Black (*Sentence Conjunction in the Gospel of Matthew*) and Steven Runge (*Discourse Grammar of the Greek New Testament*). Since these are readily available I will only briefly summarize and highlight a few key points.

First, as commonly noted, traditional grammars typically suggested $\delta\acute{\epsilon}$ could serve in contrastive or copulative ways. However, it is interesting that among the traditional grammarians there was more nuance than is sometimes acknowledged. AT Robertson and Winer particularly stand out as ones who in many ways anticipated the more linguistic approaches of today. Concerning $\delta\acute{\epsilon}$ Winer wrote, “*De* is often used when the writer merely subjoins something new, different and distinct from what precedes, but on that account not sharply opposed to it.”¹ He applies this definition to instances of explanation, parenthesis, interruption, introduction of a climax, repetition, and simple connection.²

Robertson took issue with those who argued that the adversative use was the essential idea of $\delta\acute{\epsilon}$. Instead he argued the original sense of $\delta\acute{\epsilon}$ was to link in, a continuative manner, parts of a narrative.³ He writes,

“there is in the word no essential notion of antithesis or contrast. What is true is that the addition is something new and not so closely associated in thought as is true of $\tau\acute{\epsilon}$ and $\kappa\alpha\acute{\iota}$. I prefer therefore to begin with the narrative and transitional (copulative) use of $\delta\acute{\epsilon}$.”⁴

Robertson also notes that Abbott says in Classical Greek $\delta\acute{\epsilon}$ was used to denote “in the next place.” Robertson as well notes the use of $\delta\acute{\epsilon}$ to note “a succession of steps in the same direction”, introducing a new topic, introducing an “explanatory parenthesis” (including illustrations), and resumptive after a parenthesis.⁵ Many of these uses have now been noted and affirmed by modern linguistic investigations.

The modern linguistic approaches have advanced the discussion, often seeking to find the one, central idea inherent in connectives like $\delta\acute{\epsilon}$. There has been some variance of opinion among the practitioners. Here I will mention just two main approaches.

¹ Winer, 552.

² Winer, 553.

³ Robertson, 1183.

⁴ Robertson, 1184.

⁵ Robertson, 1184-85.

Levinsohn, Runge, and Heckert, though they have some differences, represent one significant school of thought on $\delta\acute{\epsilon}$, understanding “development” to be the key sense of the word. In their view $\delta\acute{\epsilon}$ marks development, introduces a new textual unit, and shows the following material develops out of previous material.

Randall Buth critiqued the language of “development”, preferring instead to describe the function of $\delta\acute{\epsilon}$ as denoting “shift.” Some kind of shift is indicated by $\delta\acute{\epsilon}$. It could be a shift to or from background material, moving narrative forward- “Shift’ ... could be forwards, backwards, or sideways.”⁶ This language of “shift” also acknowledges a contrastive use as one sort of possible shift. Stephanie Black has affirmed and developed Buth.

Now as we turn to the text to test these hypotheses, one example from 2 Timothy can illustrate well the confusion over $\delta\acute{\epsilon}$. Concerning the first $\delta\acute{\epsilon}$ of 2:22, which precedes the command to flee youthful lusts, Mounce writes: “The first *de* is difficult to translate. It is more than a simple connective, because there is a contrast between being an honorable vessel (v 21) and fleeing from lusts (v 22). The context requires an inferential sense, ‘therefore, so.’”⁷ Knight says the exact opposite of Mounce: “*de* provides a simple connection to what precedes. It is difficult to ascertain whether any contrast is intended.”⁸ Marshall states, “*de* is a loose connective, contrastive rather than adversative.”⁹ We could use a more clear understanding of this common connective.

***De* in 2 Timothy**

In some ways I would like to simply walk through each occurrence of $\delta\acute{\epsilon}$ in 2 Timothy recreating the process of this study. However, the most effective process is probably to share my results according to the various uses I have seen in 2 Timothy.

First, some general observations.

- It will not work to say $\delta\acute{\epsilon}$ always introduces new discourse units. $\delta\acute{\epsilon}$ is indeed used at the high discourse level marking a shift from one major topic to the next. However, it is also used at the inter-sentence level joining two words or phrases (e.g. 4:4). To call this a “new discourse unit” is not helpful. Even when it joins independent clauses it is not clear to me how it is helpful to say this is introducing a new discourse unit.
- Related to this, Heckert has argued that “whatever the different uses of $\delta\acute{\epsilon}$ may be in a particular context, the basic function is always to indicate the next step which the author takes in his presentation.”¹⁰ This does not hold for 2 Timothy. It is not always clear that the material introduced by $\delta\acute{\epsilon}$ is a “new step” in the discourse.
- Heckert has also argued: “The proposition introduced by $\delta\acute{\epsilon}$ always builds on a previous one and makes a significant contribution to the argument.”¹¹ This also does not hold in 2 Timothy. First, the language of “significant contribution” is too vague and subjective. Second, the occurrences of

⁶ Buth, “On Levinsohn’s ‘Development Units,’” *START* 5 (1981): 53-56.

⁷ Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles*, 533.

⁸ Knight, *The Pastoral Epistles*, 419.

⁹ Marshall, *Pastoral Epistles*, 763.

¹⁰ Heckert, 41.

¹¹ Heckert, 49.

δέ in 2 Timothy do not bear this out. It is very difficult to tell that δέ marks the following material as a “significant contribution” in various places. [see examples below]

In the end, “shift” is the best descriptor I could find for what δέ marks in the discourse of 2 Timothy. Sometimes δέ marks the move to a new topic or paragraph. Other times it marks a shift to an illustration or from Paul’s particular experience to a universal truth for believers. Sometimes it seems to mark the return to the main topic after a digression of some sort. In other places it seems to mark contrast, plain and simple. In a few places it may mark prominence (as Heckert has suggested).

In what follows I will provide examples of each of these categories.¹²

1. *Shift to new topic (new unit)- 3:1(“know this”); 3:10 (Su)*

In 3:1 and 3:10 δέ marks the transition to a new paragraph. Obviously δέ is not necessary for marking such a transition since various such transitions have occurred before we get to chapter 3. However, in these two instances, the shift which δέ marks is in fact a move to a new topic. This is similar to what Robertson noted and Callow noted in 1 Cor. Callow noted that when δέ functioned in this way there were often other markers which occurred with δέ and, not surprisingly “A major change of topic.” This holds true in 2 Timothy as well.

In 3:1 *τοῦτο ... γίνωσκε* helps to signal a move to a new topic (similar to *περί* plus a genitive does in 1 Cor).¹³ In 2:14-26 Paul addressed Timothy directly with a series of 2d person singular imperatives. 3:1 marks the shift to a more in depth description of the opponents Timothy is to resist. Second singular imperatives now recede. The opponents who have been present in the previous paragraph now come to the forefront. Thus, “Now know this” signals a shift to a new topic.¹⁴

After 3:1-9 a new unit begins at 3:10. This shift to a new unit is marked by *σύ δέ*. Here again δέ marks a shift to a new unit. The use of *σύ* strengthens the shift as the discussion moves from primarily a discussion of the opponents to a description of what Timothy should be. This shift to a focus on Timothy is highlighted by the initial *su*. There is then an inherent sense of some contrast: “they are like this; **but, you** be this way.” This contrast, though, grows out of the shift.¹⁵

2. *Introducing an illustration- 2:20; 3:8*

As stated earlier, Robertson said δέ was used to introduce an illustration. Poythress also noted that in the gospel of John δέ sometimes served to introduce parenthetical information, background

¹² Every occurrence of δέ is analyzed except for those in a *μεν ... δέ* construction (1:10b; 2:20b; 4:4).

¹³ Hanson, *The Pastoral Epistles*, 143, calls this a “transitional phrase” which introduces a new topic.

¹⁴ Runge and Levinsohn say δέ shows that the new point emerges from the previous material. It is certainly true that 3:1-5 emerges naturally from 2:14-26. However, this occurs elsewhere without *de*. Usually new material emerges from the previous material. Perhaps what they mean is that this is not an entirely new point. However, this would be difficult to square with 1 Cor where *δε περι* does in fact introduce a completely new topic. Robertson (1184) says the new topic introduced by δέ can be “in entire harmony with the preceding discussion,” i.e. not presented as adversative. If this is what Runge and Levinsohn mean, then, that would make sense here.

¹⁵ S. Black has also noted in Matthew that δέ is used in places where a distinct shift in subject occurs (166-67).

or explanation.¹⁶ Callow also notes this use in 1 Cor.¹⁷ A similar use can be found in 2 Timothy when *δέ* introduces illustrative material.

The first example of this occurs in 2:20. In this section Paul has been urging the avoidance of the evils of the false teachers. 2:19 closed with a call to turn away from evil. *De*, then, in 2:20, introduces the illustration of vessels for honor and dishonor which would be contained in a large house. This image serves to reinforce the call to purity by using a common image to illustrate how purity leads to usefulness. *δέ* marks a shift from the exhortation to illustration.

This same use can be seen in 3:8. The unit, from 3:1-7 has been detailing the vices of the opponents. In 3:8 *δέ* introduces an Old Testament illustration of false teachers opposing God's truth: "just as Jannes & Jambres opposed Moses, so also these men oppose the truth."

3. ***Shift from particular to general (Paul's experience to universal truth for believers) - 3:12; 4:8***
 Similar to the previous point, is the use of *δέ* to mark a shift from Paul's experience to universal truths for all believers which can be seen in 3:12 and 4:8. In 3:11 Paul lists some of his sufferings with which Timothy was acquainted. Then 3:12 opens with *καί δέ*. Contrast will not work here, and the use with *καί* prepares us to expect something other than contrast. What in fact occurs is a shift from Paul's own experience of suffering to a comment that *all* who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution.¹⁸ Thus, *δέ* marks a shift from the particulars of Paul's life to a general truth.

This occurs again in 4:8. From 4:6 to 4:8a the focus is on Paul, his endurance and the crown he expects. Then, *δέ* marks the shift (*οὐ μόνον ... ἐμοὶ ἀλλὰ καὶ πᾶσι*) to the universal truth which can be seen in Paul's experience.

4. ***Return to main topic:1:5; 2:16; 4:5;4:12; 2:22-24; 3:13-14; 4:17***

Another type of shift which *δέ* marks in 2 Timothy is a shift back to the main topic after some sort of digression.¹⁹ The first occurrence of *δέ* in the letter seems to fit this use. In 1:5 Paul mentions Timothy's sincere faith, acknowledges this faith first dwelt in Lois and Eunice and then *δέ* introduces these words: "I am persuaded that (this faith dwells) also in you." It is difficult to see how this comment is in contrast to what preceded. There is, though, clearly a shift in "subject." What it seems to mark is the return to the topic of Timothy's faith (already explicitly stated earlier in the verse) after the mention of the faith of his mother and grandmother.

2:16 also fits in this category. 2:14-18 focus on the evils of the opponents and the need to avoid them. 2:15 obtrudes in this discussion as it urges Timothy to positive virtues. The movement could be illustrated this way:

V14- Avoid evil

¹⁶ V. S. Poythress, "The Use of the Intersentence Conjunctions *De*, *Oun*, *Kai*, and *Asyndeton* in the Gospel of John," *NovT* 26 (1984): 326.

¹⁷ Callow, 185.

¹⁸ On 3:12 Ellicott refers the reader back to his comments at 1 Timothy 3:10, where he states *καί δέ* functions to "define more sharply, expand, or strengthen, the tenor of the preceding words."

¹⁹ Cf. Robertson, 1185. Also, Callow, 187, noted a resumptive use similar to this in 1 Cor.

V15- Pursue good

Vv16-18- Avoid evil

2:16 is introduced by *de*. Because the topic shifts from positive to negative this shift involves contrast. The *δέ* though seems to signal a shift back to the main point of the unit. This helps to mark 2:15 as a digression from the main theme.

Levinsohn has argued that when *δέ* links a negative characteristic with a following positive one “the characteristic or proposition associated with *δέ* is more significant.”²⁰ The order in this text is reversed: a positive idea is linked by *δέ* with a negative one, but the observation seems to hold. While it would be difficult to say which truth is more important (the one in 2:15 or the one in 2:16), in terms of the discourse, the evils of the opponents, which is reintroduced by *δέ*, is the main point.

Δέ in 4:5 also marks a return. In 4:1-2 the focus is on Timothy’s perseverance in proper ministry. 4:3-4 ground (*γάρ*) this exhortation in a discussion of the opponents. 4:5 then opens with *σὺ δέ* marking a shift back to Timothy specifically and positive ministry. This shift then does contain the idea of contrast since Timothy and the opponents are direct opposites.

4:12 is one of the more difficult occurrences of *δέ* in 2 Timothy to analyze, and few have commented on it (presumably because the impact is minimal, though perhaps these less weighty uses are the best places to note the function of a particle). In the context Paul is listing people who are away or are with him. Contrast is not evident. Is Paul really contrasting Mark’s “usefulness in ministry” with the leaving of Tychicus in Ephesus? It is also difficult to see how v12 “makes a significant contribution to the argument”, in Heckert’s terms.²¹ Even a shift is not easy to discern (unless it is such a vague shift as to a new person, which has already been regularly occurring in this list). It seems simply to introduce the last name in a list.

Perhaps *δέ* in 4:12 is marking a return. 4:10 is concerned with various people who are no longer with Paul. 4:11 then introduces one who is with Paul (Luke) and one who should be brought (Mark). 4:12, introduced by *δέ*, then returns to simply noting another person who is no longer with Paul.²²

I will include under this heading two clusters of *δέ* occurrences which are similar to “return to main topic.” They in fact reveal *δέ* being used to mark shifts back and forth between positive and negative examples. Several of the examples previously cited under this heading also involve the shift between negative and positive (a common occurrence in 2 Timothy).

First, this is seen in 2:22-24. This text contains a string of 4 independent clauses, each one an exhortation, and each one being introduced by *δέ*.

δέ flee youthful desires (negative)

²⁰ Levinsohn, “Constraint,” 325.

²¹ “The proposition introduced by *δέ* always builds on a previous one and makes a significant contribution to the argument” (Heckert, 49).

²² Kelly, *The Pastoral Epistles*, says something similar on the flow of thought without reference to *δέ*.

- δέ pursue righteousness ... (positive)
- δέ avoid foolish controversies (negative)
- δέ be gentle²³ (positive)

It is difficult in this case for me to see the value of understanding δέ as showing the reader that each of these statements is a new “discourse unit.”²⁴ What is communicated by the fact that this series of commands is linked at each point by *de*?

The variance of opinion among the commentators on this text has already been noted. It can be seen that these four commands hold together simply because they are a series of commands to Timothy. The first δέ then marks the shift from previous material to this series of commands. As noted earlier, a δέ in 2:20 marked a shift to an illustration grounding a call to holiness which leads to usefulness. This illustration ends at v21. The shift from the illustration to the series of commands in 2:22-24 is marked by δέ. This δέ has sometimes been understood as contrastive-good works vs. youthful desires. However, the sentence in v21 as a whole is about cleansing oneself. “Flee youthful lusts” is not in contrast to such cleansing but appears to be a restatement of that comment, now in imperative form.

Perhaps just as δέ marked the move to illustration, so in 2:22 it marks the shift away from the illustration to commands which arise naturally out of the truth or the illustration. This would also mark a return to second person imperatives which had been common in 2:14-16, but had disappeared until 2:22.²⁵ This is even similar to the resumptive use. 2:19 called for turning away from unrighteousness. δέ in 2:20 marked a shift to an illustration of the need to avoid wickedness. Then, δέ marks the shift to exhortation. The flow would look like this:

- Proposition (2:19) [cited as an authoritative quote]²⁶
- Illustration (2:20-21)
- Exhortation (2:22-26)

Δέ marks the shift to each stage.

Having argued for at least one understanding of the δέ in 2:22, the other occurrences of δέ in the series need to be examined. The commands here alternate between positive and negative as noted above. There is clearly a sense of contrast here. However, we have seen that in 2 Timothy δέ is often used without any sense of contrast (as others have noted elsewhere). “Shift” still works as a helpful category. Here the shift is between positive and negative, and, thus, the shift has a contrastive sense. Because the commands are polar opposites contrast would be obvious without δέ. It seems the use of δέ punctuates this series giving it emphasis, highlighting the stark shifting back and forth.

Then this series has a weighted ending. After three consecutive 2s imperatives we have δεῖ plus an infinitive. Furthermore the infinitive has a complex, contrasting object (“not this but that”).

²³ This clause is functionally though not formally imperative (δεῖ μάχεσθαι).

²⁴ Levinsohn, “Constraints,” 318, explains the function of δέ as showing “the material concerned is a new ‘discourse unit’ that develops from previous material.” He further explains, “A ‘discourse unit’ consists of one or more propositions and ‘presents a new development in the discourse’.” (citing his own *Textual Connections in Acts*, 179).

²⁵ Kelly also notes a connection back to 2:15-16.

²⁶ The source of the quote is debated. See Marshall, 757-59.

The last item in the series is grammatically more complex with far more elaboration. This fits what has been noted elsewhere of how writers in the ancient world often emphasized a certain item in a list.²⁷ Thus, the use of *δέ* for each command, plus the weighted ending, gives a certain emphasis to this section.

The other location where *δέ* marks rapid shifts back and forth, between positive and negative, is in 3:13-14. We have already noted that *δέ* marks the shift to a new unit in 3:10. Then, at 3:12 *δέ* marks the shift from Paul's experience to universal truth. These two previously discussed occurrences of set up occurrences in 3:13 and 3:14. Having stated that Paul has suffered (3:10-11) and that all believers will suffer (3:12), Paul shifts to a statement of the progress of evil men (3:13). The content of verses 12 and 13 are inherently contrasting. *δέ* here marks the shift away from Timothy (and other believers) to "evil men." 3:14 then shifts immediately and starkly back to Timothy with the *οὖν δέ*. Timothy and proper ministry remain the focus to the end of this unit (3:17). Thus, 3:13 protrudes from this unit much like 2:15 did in its unit (noted above). 2:15 stood out as an exhortation to positive behavior amongst warnings against negative. 3:13 is the opposite- it protrudes as a negative amongst surrounding exhortations to positive behavior. Thus, *δέ* marks the shift to this protruding element.

Οὖν δέ in 3:14 is another resumptive use of *de*, marking a return to direct statement to Timothy which had been in view before the shifts at 3:12 and 3:13. This resumptive use is supported by several other elements in 3:14. First, *οὖν δέ* is not only a marker, it is an exact repetition from 3:10 which naturally causes the reader to connect the verses. Second, 3:14 refers to those from whom Timothy learned and 3:10-11 had presented Paul as Timothy's chief example and teacher. Thus key terms and themes from 3:10-11 reappear in 3:14, supporting the idea that *δέ* in 3:14 marks a shift back to the topic of 3:10-11.

Lastly, in this section, I will include one example where *δέ* seems to mark a shift from an introductory foil to the main topic. 4:17 contains the only occurrence of *οὖν δέ* in 2 Timothy. There clearly is a contrast here. Everyone abandoned Paul, but the Lord stood by him and strengthened him.²⁸ It seems, though, that *δέ* is also marking a shift from the introductory foil to the main point of the unit. A new unit is introduced with *asyndeton* in 4:16 with the first mention of Paul's defense. 4:16 states Paul's abandonment. In 4:17, though, *δέ* marks a shift to *κύριος* who stood by Paul. The rest of the unit is devoted the Lord's faithful provision and rescue, concluding with a doxology to the Lord. The abandonment of men does not appear again. Thus, it appears that *δέ* in 4:17 marks a shift from a foil to the main topic.

5. *Temporal Shift- 1:10*

1:10a contains the only occurrence of *δέ* with *νῦν* in 2 Timothy, and, not surprisingly, it indicates a temporal shift (*δέ* is a marker of shift and *νῦν* is a temporal indicator). Within a gospel statement 1:9b-10a makes clear both the eternal plan and the contemporary revelation of

²⁷ John T. Fitzgerald, "The Catalogue in Ancient Greek Literature," in *The Rhetorical Analysis of Scripture, Essays from the 1995 London Conference*, ed. Stanley E. Porter and Thomas H. Olbricht (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1997), 275-93.

²⁸ Assonance, synonyms and thematic repetition between the sentences heighten the contrast.

salvation. The shift from what God did “before eternal ages” and the contemporary revealing is marked by $\delta\epsilon\ \nu\upsilon\nu$. One could suggest a contrast between past time and present time, but the $\delta\epsilon$ could just as easily be rendered as “and.” Temporal shift is the real point.

6. *Miscellaneous- 3:5; 2:5 (list: A, $\delta\epsilon$ B, C): 4:20*

Lastly, here are three occurrences which did not fit particular categories.

First, in 3:5 $\delta\epsilon$ seems to denote a clear contrast. It links two participles at the close of a vice list describing the false teachers. The $\delta\epsilon$ does not link items in this list, but simply functions between two parts of the last item (a low-level function). $\delta\epsilon$ here functions to contrast having the form of godliness and denying its power. It is reasonable that a particle which marks shifts could be used to mark a contrasting shift. Contrast seems to be the sole purpose of $\delta\epsilon$ here.

Second, in 4:20 $\delta\epsilon$ functions to link two independent clauses in a unit which is loosely connected in terms of greetings and travel plans. None of the other statements in this unit are linked by connectives. Verse 20 seems to protrude from the unit, almost as if having forgotten to mention the travels of two other people back in 4:9-15, Paul tosses them in now amongst the greetings. This “left-over” travel statement contains two parts joined by $\delta\epsilon$. There does not seem to be an intended contrast between them. In what way would Erastus remaining in Corinth contrast with Trophimus being left in Corinth due to sickness? One would have to assume that Trophimus did not want to leave but Erastus did, or that Trophimus’ absence is understandable but Erastus’ is not, or some other conjecture. Contrast is at least not apparent. At the same time, it would seem a strain to call this a “shift” or “development.” The clause introduced by $\delta\epsilon$ here is not “significant” information in terms of the discourse. $\Delta\epsilon$ simply seems to connect two pieces in a fairly non-descript way here.

Third, in 2:5 $\delta\epsilon$ occurs in a list of three proverbial statements (2:4-6) which Timothy is to interpret and apply. Item 1 and 2 of the list are connected by $\delta\epsilon$.²⁹ There is no obvious contrast between these two items, and $\delta\epsilon$ seems simply to connect one item in a list to the next. Ellicott says $\delta\epsilon$ introduces a new image. This is undoubtedly true, but it is not clear why there is no such connective between items 2 and 3 in the list. What is the significance of $\delta\epsilon$ between the first two items in light of the fact that there is no connective between items 2 and 3? Minor says $\delta\epsilon$ “marks the new thought of reward,”³⁰ but it is not clear that “reward” is the key new idea in 2:5. If single-minded devotion is the point in 2:4, the main new idea in 2:5 could be “lawfully”, obeying the rules. Each of these three statements contributes new information, but only one is marked by $\delta\epsilon$. I am not yet able to account for this.

Conclusion

Analysis of the use of $\delta\epsilon$ in 2 Timothy convinces me that “shift” is the best way to describe the overall function of $\delta\epsilon$. Various sorts of shifts were seen to be marked by $\delta\epsilon$, and no doubt it might be used to mark various other sorts of shifts in other discourses. As noted by others, there can be a significant difference in the way $\delta\epsilon$ is used when it is used at a lower level (joining simply two terms in a sentence)

²⁹ One could debate whether or not the $\kappa\alpha\iota$ should be taken with $\delta\epsilon$ or not.

³⁰ Minor, 47.

and when it is used at a higher level (joining larger units of a discourse). At the higher level δέ functions as a discourse marker signaling a shift, whether to supporting material (e.g. illustration), from particular to general (deriving a lesson), returning to the main topic, or a series of shifts back and forth between key ideas in the discourse.

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