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**Korean Society of  
Old Testament Studies**

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*The Linguistics of the Stoics: What is their Contribution to the Understanding of Verbal Aspect?*

*Introduction*

Even though there were some contributions from Plato and Aristotle, a more developed linguistic thinking does not evolve until the time of the Stoics; some even argue that linguistics in the modern sense started only with the Stoics. The central notions of their understanding of time, language and the Greek tenses are found and preserved in the doxographies of others, such as Diogenes Laertius, Stobaeus, Plutarch, Sextus Empiricus and in the scholia (a commentary on grammar etc) of the commentator Stephanos.

This paper looks into the Stoic philosophy of time and briefly how it relates to their tense system.

*How did the Ancient Greeks View Time?*

It has been commented that the concept of time necessarily makes up the centre of any one philosophy, since it relates to how reality is viewed, how one should live as well as matters of life, death and God.<sup>1</sup> As for Greek philosophy, scholars sometimes naively turn to the ancient Greeks for answers to difficult questions, as if the Greeks by default had the right answers. Indeed, the disciples of Pythagoras settled for an answer from their master as the final authoritative answer, and in medieval times a reference to Aristotle—“he said it”—was often enough to settle a matter. This kind of procedure is of course no longer satisfying.

Nevertheless, with regard to the question of how time and the Greek tenses were viewed it is certainly both a legitimate and worthwhile question to pose to the ancient Greeks. How then did they view time? The ideal answer would have been that various Greek philosophers and thinkers held a common and consistent view over a substantial period of time. However, there is no uniform and consistent Greek view of time, but rather a number of views, sometimes even varying within the same philosophical school, as the case seems to be with the Stoics.

*The Stoics and their View of Time*

As for the Stoic view of time, caution must be exercised since the extant material mostly is found in secondary sources and fragments that briefly account for and comment on how the Stoics perceived of time. Moreover, there is a number of Stoic thinkers “each of whom may well have revised their position at some point,”<sup>2</sup> which potentially means that there may be more than one position on the Stoic view of time. Boeri notes that the Stoics generally had a

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1 Tzamalikos, 1991.  
2 Sellars, 2007.