"Evidence that Commands a Verdict": Determining the Semantics of Imperatives in the New Testament

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Abstract: This article discusses the semantics of the imperative mood (directive attitude) in biblical Greek. The author leads into this discussion by first defining "semantics" (meaning) from the perspective of two major interpretive paradigms that are operative in current linguistic studies of biblical Greek: the logical-philosophical paradigm, which undergirds Chomskyan linguistic theory, and the ethnographic-descriptive paradigm, which lies behind Hallidayan Systemic Functional Linguistics. The semantics of the imperative mood is then discussed from each of these perspectives, and it is argued that an SFL approach to the imperative is the most linguistically defensible. Examples are provided from the New Testament. (Article)

1. *Introduction*

In 1989, Stanley E. Porter published his tome on verbal aspect in the Greek of the New Testament.[1] In many ways, that publication was responsible for (re-)igniting interest in the careful, critical study of the verb in biblical Greek.[2] A short time later, in an

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1. Porter, *Verbal Aspect*.
2. As Campbell (*Advances*, 45–47) points out, scholars such as Stanley E. Porter and Buist M. Fanning, through their works on and debates about verbal aspect theory, not only revived interest in the Greek verb, but essentially "relaunched Greek scholarship in general" (45).

article published in the early 1990's, Dr. Porter remarked, "As any student of Greek knows, the verb lies at the heart of serious analysis of the Greek language, if for no other reason than the verb can do so much and consequently appears in so many different constructions."[3] A host of additional publications on various features of the Greek verb, including elementary[4] and intermediate Greek[5] grammars that foreground and perhaps even frontground the verb, indicate that Dr. Porter still strongly believes this to be the case. What is more, the literature on the Greek verb has also burgeoned, as others have joined the scholarly dialogue in order to explicate its every feature. Thus, over the span of nearly four decades, the study of the verb has ascended to and has remained among the top areas of research among both aspiring and established scholars of biblical Greek.

Although the literature concerning the Greek verb and its various features has grown exponentially over the past three to four decades, coverage of each feature of the verb has not been evenly distributed. Much of the discussion—in some cases "debate" may be a more appropriate term—has been concerned with this or that flavor of verbal aspect in relation to tense/temporality and/or *Aktionsart*.[6] For a number of years, Porter, Fanning, and McKay were the major players in this debate, but more recently others such as Olsen, Decker, Campbell, and Huffman have joined the conversation.[7] Of course, not all of the issues wrapped up in this discussion have been resolved, so further dialogue remains in order and will, no doubt, ensue.

Another area of the study of the verb that has gained momentum in recent years is that which concerns verbal voice. On this front, discussion has centered in the main around the question of whether or not deponency is a legitimate category for

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3.   Porter, "Greek Language and Linguistics," 12.

4.   Porter et al., *Fundamentals of New Testament Greek*.

5.   Porter, *Idioms*.

6.   See Campbell, *Advances*, 109–13 and now Runge and Fresch, *The Greek Verb Revisited*. Of course, much of this discussion stems from the debate between Porter and Fanning (see Porter, "Defense of Verbal Aspect," 28–38; Porter, *Verbal Aspect*; Fanning, *Verbal Aspect*; McKay, *A New Syntax*).

7.   See now Campbell, *Advances*, 109–13.

verbs that appear only in middle voice in certain tense-forms.[8] In 1908, Moulton appraised the category of deponency as "unsatisfactory."[9] Roughly a quarter of a century later in his massive grammar of New Testament Greek, the heralded grammarian Robertson claimed that the category should not be used at all—but he does go on to describe these verbs with the equally debatable term "defective."[10] More recently, others including Miller, Taylor, Conrad, and Pennington have led the charge to dispense altogether with the concept of deponency in regards to these verbs.[11]

In a manner of speaking, verbal mood has merely "been along for the ride" in this discussion. This in no way is intended to suggest that scholars have neglected this facet of the Greek verb; in fact, verbal mood has, indeed, received significant attention. However, because much of this attention has occurred within the scope of the dialogue pertaining to verbal aspect, coverage of verbal mood has been limited more or less to its relationship with the indicative mood.[12] Recent works by both Campbell and Huffman have, however, begun to consider more intentionally the non-indicative moods, but even these works do so under the rubric of verbal aspect.[13] The point here is not to suggest that these works do not provide quality coverage of verbal mood, or to imply that "in the wild" mood and aspect—or any of the features of the verb, for that matter—are somehow independent of one another. However, it is arguable that more and more thorough research focusing on the semantics of the individual

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8.   See now Campbell, *Advances*, 91–104.

9.   Moulton, *Prolegomena,* 153. See also Campbell, *Advances*, 92.

10.   Robertson, *A Grammar of the Greek New Testament*, 332–33. See also Campbell, *Advances*, 92.

11.   Miller, "Deponent Verbs," 423–30; Taylor, "Deponency and Greek Lexicography," 167–76; Conrad, "New Observations on Voice," 1–2; Pennington, "Setting Aside 'Deponency,'" 181–203. See also Campbell, *Advances*, 93–97.

12.   See, e.g., Porter, *Verbal Aspect*, 163–239, which, in part one, briefly describes all verbal moods in light of aspect, but in the end, focuses on the indicative mood.

13.   See Campbell, *Verbal Aspect*; Huffman, *Verbal Aspect Theory*.

moods as they stand in opposition to one another needs to be done. A recent article by Porter is, in my opinion, a step in the right direction.[14] Although the primary concern of this particular article has to do with practicing better and more appropriate linguistic modeling of Hellenistic Greek (especially by Systemic Functional linguists), he makes his point by developing a system network model of the Greek verbal mood system, and by providing the twelve or so different realization statements that the system network describes.[15]

The purpose of this article is to help stimulate exactly this kind of deeper thinking and modeling as it pertains to verbal mood and, specifically, the imperative mood (or directive attitude). As a launching point, I begin with a comment regarding a major hurdle that continues to stymie progress with regard to modeling the semantics of the imperative mood (or any other category of biblical Greek, for that matter), namely resistance towards a necessary paradigm shift with regard to how semantics or meaning is, itself, defined.[16]

2. *The Meaning of the Imperative Mood (Directive Attitude)*

2.1 What Do You Mean by "Meaning"?

Nida and Louw begin their book *Lexical Semantics of the Greek New Testament* by stating a number of problems—nine of them, actually—with respect to "doing" lexical semantics. Here is what they deem problem number one:

> In no area of New Testament studies is there such a dearth of valid information and such a wealth of misinformation as in lexical semantics . . . . But in large measure this is also true of linguistics in general, since there are so many disparate views about the nature and role of lexical meaning and about the procedures which need to be employed in sorting out the nagging problems about the meaning of

14.   Porter, "Systemic Functional Linguistics," 9–47.

15.   See Porter, "Systemic Functional Linguistics," 27–28.

16.   For an example of this resistance with regard to other areas of biblical Greek, see Peters, "A Response to Dan Wallace," 202–10.

words and how meaning can best be described. *In fact, there is no consensus about the meaning of meaning.[17]*

Indeed, this problem is pervasive, affecting every sort of linguistic investigation at every level, including the study of verbal mood. Getting over this hurdle will require one to think carefully and critically about how "semantics" (or "meaning") gets defined, and the specific ways it is modeled in relation to various linguistic phenomena, whether one is describing the meaning of the imperative, of verbal mood more generally, or of any other linguistic category. Of course, this is no simple task, and it is not likely to be accomplished fully in the space of this article, yet it seems a necessary point of departure.

It appears that two linguistic paradigms dominate current literature, and as a result of the presuppositions of each of these paradigms, the meaning of meaning takes different shapes. In what follows, I will describe briefly each of these paradigms and their major presuppositions about semantics. I will also demonstrate how proponents of each paradigm tend to describe the semantics of the imperative mood. I will then suggest why I think one of these paradigms provides a more promising way forward both with regard to defining "semantics" and with regard to modeling the meaning of the imperative.

2.2 *The Logical-Philosophical Paradigm*
The first of these views may be called the "philosophical" or "logical-philosophical" paradigm.[18] The "normal science"[19] (to use a Kuhnian descriptor) of this approach to language dates back to the scholastic philosophers, whose penchant was to recover Greek philosophy.[20] According to Lyons, the Scholastics, like the Stoics, "were interested in language as a tool for analysing the structure of reality"; thus, they "set out to reduce all sciences, including grammar, to a set of propositions whose

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17. Nida and Louw, *Lexical Semantics*, 1 (italics mine).
18. See Halliday, "Language as Code and Language as Behaviour," 3–4.
19. See Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, 23–34. See also Peters, "Response to Dan Wallace," 203–4.
20. Greer and Lewis, *A Brief History of the Western World*, 257.

truth could be demonstrated conclusively by deduction from first principles."[21] Propelled by these ideals and obviously influenced by Platonic thought, these philosophers searched for universal and invariant (i.e., "pure" or "ideal") Forms from which all actual forms in use are derived.[22] The tendency within this paradigm has been, and still is, to theorize with this Platonic presupposition as one of the major guiding forces, so that language ends up bifurcated into, on the one hand, ideal instances of language and, on the other hand, real, actual instances of language in use (often referred to as "natural language")[23]—the classic example being Saussure's split between *langue* and *parole*[24] or more recently Chomsky's division of Competence and Performance.[25]

Halliday argues that the main organizing principle of the logical-philosophical approach is the *rule*, such that the code becomes represented in terms of *rules of grammar*.[26] He notes that when the central concern lies with rules of Forms and forms of rules, social context and structure "tend to get idealized out of the picture."[27] To compensate for this loss, models of linguistic pragmatics, most of which are logic-heavy, have been formulated in order to explain, by means of this or that felicity condition being met and/or this or that logical entailment, how it is that the ideal linguistic Form got "transformed" into an actual instance that humans would consider meaningful in a given context of situation. Grice's theory of implicature[28] and Austin's Speech Act

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21. Lyons, *Theoretical Linguistics*, 14–16 (esp. 14). See also Halliday, "Language as Code and Language as Behaviour," 4.

22. Lyons, *Theoretical Linguistics*, 14.

23. Halliday ("Language as Code and Language as Behaviour," 4) denotes, "philosophical grammarians tend to refer to language as 'natural language'." See Porter, "Studying Ancient Languages," 148–49.

24. Saussure, *Course in General Linguistics*, 8–17.

25. Chomsky, *Language and Mind*, 102–4.

26. Halliday, "Language as Code and Language as Behaviour," 5.

27. Halliday, "Context of Linguistics," 79, 85.

28. Grice, "Logic and Conversation," 41–58; Grice, "Further Notes on Logic and Conversation," 113–28. See Levinson, *Pragmatics*, 97–166 for an overview.

theory (including Searle's revision),[29] Brown and Levinson's politeness theory,[30] or some variation and/or combination of these, tend to be the theories and models most commonly deployed for this purpose. In the end, the impact of this ideal-vs.-real presupposition on the definition of "semantics" is to see it as a kind of "meaning in a vacuum," so to speak, in which the ideal linguistic Form has an inherent meaning that is *prior to* and, therefore, *unaffected* by any sort of contextual or cotextual phenomena.[31]

2.3 *The Ethnographic-Descriptive Paradigm*

The second paradigm has been called the "ethnographic-descriptive" paradigm.[32] This paradigm, according to Halliday, "has its origins in classical linguistic theory, with its orientation towards the text," that is, "towards 'auctores' rather than 'artes,' in the terms of the medieval metaphor."[33] It is represented in the empiricist writings of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, and in modern times in the works of Sapir, the Prague School, Malinowski, Firth, and Hjelmslev,[34] and it is also prominent in the works of Hasan and, of course, of Halliday himself.[35]

A significant distinction between this and the logical-philosophical paradigm is that this paradigm dispenses with the Platonic ideal-vs.-real vivisection,[36] modeling the relationship between *language as system* and *language as instance* as different endpoints along a single cline—which is dubbed (rather

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29. Austin, *How to Do Things with Words*; Searle, *Expression and Meaning*. See Levinson, *Pragmatics*, 226–83 for an overview.

30. See Brown and Levinson, *Politeness*.

31. See Fantin, *The Greek Imperative Mood*, 62; Wallace, *Greek Grammar*, 2 ("affected" and "unaffected"). See also Dvorak, "To Incline Another's Heart," 602.

32. Halliday, "Language as Code and Language as Behaviour," 4–5.

33. Halliday, "Language as Code and Language as Behaviour," 4.

34. Halliday, "Language as Code and Language as Behaviour," 4.

35. See, for example, Hasan, "Place of Context," 168–70; Halliday, "Context of Linguistics," 74–91.

36. See Halliday, "Language as Code and Language as Behaviour," 4; Halliday, "Context of Linguistics," 76–78; Halliday, *Social Semiotic*, 51–52; Hasan, "Place of Context," 167–70.

unimaginatively) as "the cline of instantiation."[37] For Halliday, a cline provides a suitable analogy for describing the kind of relationship that exists between language and text. He writes,

> "System" and "instance" are . . . not different things; they form . . . [a] complementarity. There is only one phenomenon here, not two; what we call language (the system) and what we call text (the instance) are two observers of that phenomenon, observing it from different distances . . . To the "instance" observer the system is the potential, with its set of probabilities attached; each instance is by itself unpredictable, but the system appears constant through time. To the "system" observer, each instance redefines the system, however infinitesimally, maintaining its present state or shifting its probabilities in one direction or the other.[38]

Yet theorists working within this paradigm use the model of a cline for more than just describing the relationship between the linguistic system and linguistic instance. They also use it as a means of modeling *social context*. Here, theorists position *context of culture* at the system end of a cline and *context of situation* at the instance end. In this way, context of culture[39] may be understood as a *behavior potential* and context of situation as an *instance* of that potential.[40]

> Instance is what is immediate and experienced, system is the ultimate point of the theorization of what is experienced and imaginable by extrapolation. System thus takes shape through the distillation of the relations among the significant properties of instances: the system of

37.   Halliday and Matthiessen*, Halliday's Introduction*, 27–28. See also Hasan, "Place of Context," 168–70.

38.   Halliday, *The Essential Halliday*, 50. See also Hasan, "Place of Context," 169.

39.   Geertz (*The Interpretation of Cultures*, 89) defines "culture" as those "patterns of meanings embodied in symbols, a system of inherited conceptions expressed in symbolic forms by means of which men communicate, perpetuate, and develop their knowledge about and attitudes of life." Similarly, when Halliday refers to "context of culture," which he gleans from Malinowski, he refers generally to that which stands behind various semiotic practices that imbues them with significance and value. He also abstracts this from the work of Sapir and Whorf. See Halliday, "Context of Situation," 6–7; Halliday, "Context of Culture and of Situation," 67–68.

40.   See Halliday, *Social Semiotic*, 40–41.

culture is not simply an inventory of all its situations; it is an organization of the possible features of all possible situations in all their possible permutations, where "possible" means socially recognizable—something that the acculturated can interpret, act on and in, and evaluate; in addition, both system and instance are sensitive to perturbations in each other's properties. What this means is that anything new entering the system of culture will enter only through variation in properties associated with some context of situation, i.e., cultures change through human social practices.[41]

Still further, a relationship is posited between the contextual cline and the linguistic cline. The contextual cline runs parallel to but at a higher stratum than the linguistic cline, and the relationship between these clines is defined as one of *realization*, where "realization" refers to the process by which content or meaning becomes expression.[42] Figure 1 is Halliday's visualization[43] of the relationships between the four categories of context of culture, context of situation, language as system, and language as text in the two different kinds of relationships, instantiation and realization, into which they may enter with each other.
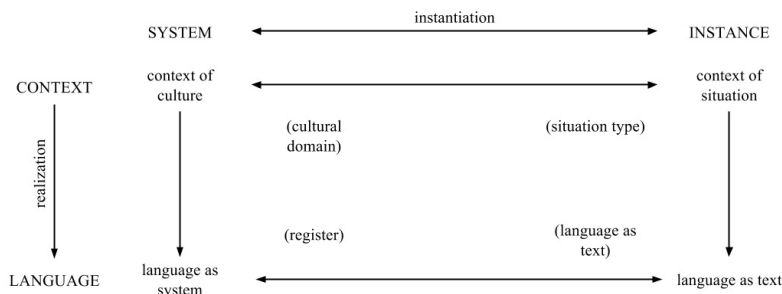

Figure 1 Instantiation and Realization

41.   Hasan, "Place of Context," 169.

42.   On realization, see Halliday, *Social Semiotic*, 39–40; Hasan, "Place of Context," 170.

43.   As produced in Hasan, "Place of Context,"169, which she recreated from Halliday, "The Notion of 'Context' in Language Education," 275. Hasan notes that the earliest version of this figure was published in 1992 in Le and McCausland, eds., *Language Education*.

In the figure, Hasan uses horizontal continua to represent the relationship of instantiation and vertical continua to represent the relationship of realization. Instantiation, described generally with the horizontal continuum at the top of the figure, positions SYSTEM at the left end of the continuum and INSTANCE at the right end of the continuum. Realization is described generally by the vertical continuum at the far left of the figure; CONTEXT is positioned at the top of the continuum and LANGUAGE at the bottom. The main "rectangle" portion of the figure depicts the relationships between the four categories.[44]

The four categories can be organized into two distinct sets by reference to each relation. Thus, set (1) consists of the members (a) CONTEXT OF CULTURE and (b) LANGUAGE AS SYSTEM (see the left column). Set (2) consists of the members (a) CONTEXT OF SITUATION and (b) LANGUAGE AS TEXT (the right column). The two members of each pair are related to each other realizationally, so that 1a is to 1b as 2a is to 2b. These four categories can be re-classed by reference to the relation of instantiation: set (3) shown along the top line of the rectangle consists of two members, (a) CONTEXT OF CULTURE and (b) context of situation,[45] while set (4) shown along the bottom line of the rectangle consists of (a) LANGUAGE AS SYSTEM, and (b) LANGUAGE AS TEXT. The two members of each pair are related by instantiation, so that 3a is to 3b as 4a is to 4b. Thus, each category enters directly into two relations, and also indirectly into some relation with the remaining other category.

In short, what this means from a system perspective is that context of culture gets *realized* in or construed by the language system, and from an instance perspective, context of situation gets realized in or construed by text. Hasan concisely describes

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44. Also portrayed in Figure 1 are cultural domain, register, situation type, and text type. Hasan calls cultural domain and register sub-systems, describing them in terms of "likeness viewed from the 'system' end"; she refers to situation type and text type as "instance types," describing them as "likeness viewed from the 'instance' end." See Hasan, "Place of Context," 169 (in her version of the figure).

45. Oddly, Hasan does not put CONTEXT OF SITUATION in all caps. It appears to be a typographic error.

the process as follows: looking from the perspective of system, "contextual choices ACTIVATE[46] semantic choices activate the lexicogrammatical ones; looking [from the instance perspective] lexicogrammatical choices CONSTRUE semantic choices construe contextual ones."[47] Note carefully that "semantics" in this paradigm is *not* connected with the meanings of words or even the meanings of forms, inherent or otherwise; rather, semantics is defined as an *interface* between contextual choices and linguistic choices, that is, where context and language interact.[48] Put another way, "semantics is the transformation of the eco-social environment into a meaning potential in terms of the topological domains of experience and social interaction [i.e., Field, Tenor, and Mode]."[49] So then, a person makes the context-activated and context-constrained choice to "behave" or "act" linguistically, which then gets realized into linguistic form with further selections from the lexicogrammatical system. These lexicogrammatical selections are then encoded, so to speak, into either spoken text (phonology) or written text (graphology).

This has the effect of placing both the linguistic system and linguistic instance squarely within the constraints of social context. "It does not set up any opposition between the system and its use, but instead attempts to handle code and behaviour under a single rubric."[50] "The perspective is a 'socio-semantic' one, where the emphasis is on function rather than on structure; where no distinction is made between language and language behaviour; and where the central notion is something like that of

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46. Note that "ACTIVATE" does *not* mean "dictate." That is, the semantic options/choices that are "activated" by contextual options/choices are probabilistic rather than direct correlates. See Porter and O'Donnell, "The Greek Verbal Network," 3–41; Halliday, "Language as System and Language as Instance," 76–92; O'Donnell, *Corpus Linguistics and the Greek New Testament*, 31–32.

47. Hasan, "Place of Context," 170.

48. Halliday, "Methods-Techniques-Problems," 82–83.

49. Halliday, "Methods-Techniques-Problems," 83.

50. Halliday, "Language as Code and Language as Behaviour," 4.

'meaning potential'—what the speaker 'can mean' with what [s/he] 'can say' as a realization of it."[51]

3. *Is There Such a Thing as Contextless (or "Unaffected") Meaning?*

So how does this impact our discussion of the Greek imperative mood? Consider this definition of the semantics/meaning of the imperative mood from Fantin's 2010 book on the imperative form:

> The *semantic* meaning of the imperative mood is the raw, naked imperative. It is the imperative mood at its essence. It is the meaning which is unaffected by either context or lexical contribution. If the imperative could exist without any lexical verbal meaning and in isolation from any context, what would remain would be the semantic meaning of the *imperative*. No more, no less.[52]

Further, he claims that the imperative is

> "the mood of *intention* . . . the mood furthest removed from certainty . . . [the mood which] moves in the realm of *volition* . . . and *possibility*."[53] The imperative portrays *intention* in the sense that it merely presents a potential and intended state of the verbal idea. As the imperative is produced, it is only potentially realized. *Actuality* depends on the response of the addressee(s).[54]

Clearly, this definition falls squarely within the boundaries of the logical-philosophical paradigm, imagining as it does that a Form of the imperative exists outside of and thus unaffected by any level of context. There are a number of problems with conceiving the imperative in this way; I point out only two major ones here. First, this view assumes that meaning can and does exist apart from context. Fantin, for example, argues that if a form does not bear meaning,[55] then it makes no sense to use a

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51. Halliday, *Explorations*, 69.
52. Fantin, *Greek Imperative Mood*, 122 (italics original).
53. Fantin, *Greek Imperative Mood*, 133, quoting Wallace, *Greek Grammar*, 485.
54. Fantin, *Greek Imperative Mood*, 133.
55. It is not clear whether Fantin is thinking here of the ideal Form or

particular form.[56] It is the form, so he argues, that evokes a field of meaning.[57] But this line of argumentation is weak for at least two reasons. First, as the so-called conventionalists argued millennia ago and as many modern linguists continue to uphold today,[58] the formal features of the imperative, as with *all* linguistic formal features, are conventional and arbitrary and not natural, eternal, and immutable.[59] The verbal endings –τω, –σθω, –τε, –σθε, –τωσαν, and –σθωσαν that one finds in the New Testament both came into existence and exhibited variation over time as the result of a tacit "social contract" among those who were users of the Greek language.[60] These forms did not naturally or inherently carry the sense of commanding or directing. The selection of these forms became associated with contexts in which people sought to direct the behaviors, thoughts, feelings, or beliefs of others, and their use in such contexts then became habitualized.[61] Second, to presume that because the imperative form (or any form for that matter) evokes a field of meaning that it must of necessity be naturally imbued with inherent meaning is untenable. Neither the formal features nor the words of a language, nor even the linguistic system itself is the locus of meaning; rather, meaning derives from the sociocultural system of the language users.[62] The reason that linguistic forms evoke a field of meaning is because the use of

actual form—or if the ideal Form in the protasis and the actual form in the apodosis.

56. Fantin, *Greek Imperative Mood*, 126 n. 12.

57. Fantin, *Greek Imperative Mood*, 126 n. 12.

58. See Porter, "Studying Ancient Languages," 156–59. Eggins (*Introduction to Systemic Functional Linguistics*, 14) notes "Semiotic systems [of which language is one], then, are arbitrary social conventions by which it is conventionally agreed that a particular meaning will be realized by a particular representation."

59. This is the age-old argument between the naturalists and the conventionalists (see Lyons, *Theoretical Linguistics*, 4–6).

60. See Lyons, *Theoretical Linguistics*, 4.

61. See Berger and Luckmann, *Social Construction of Reality*, 34–46.

62. See Neufeld, "Introduction," 3; Malina, *Christian Origins and Cultural Anthropology*, 3–5; Rohrbaugh, *The New Testament in Cross-Cultural Perspective*, x–xii.

those signs has become associated with particular situational contextual frames within a culture. When those contexts of situation recur, they at once activate and constrain (but do not dictate) certain kinds of meaning that are appropriate to the context, which in turn activates and constrains lexicogrammatical options, which may be selected by the language user to make meaning in that context of situation in a sensible way. If someone in the colloquy perceives as "nonsense" what the other has said or written, it is typically because she or he is somehow unaware of or has misinterpreted the field, tenor, and/or mode of the context of situation.[63]

A second problem with the logical-philosophical view of the imperative as defined above is in the way it appears to equate the meaning of the form with a compliant response on the part of the hearer or reader. As stated—viz., that "as the imperative is produced, it is only potentially realized" and that "actuality depends on the response of the addressee(s)"[64]—this position does not seem to account for the fact that a hearer or reader may receive a command, completely understand that it is a command, but then *resist* that command and not actually comply. In such a scenario, it is not so much that imperatival meaning was *not* made; rather, it *was* made but was *resisted* or *rejected*.[65] Further, a scenario in which an imperative was issued but the hearer or reader did not comply because she or he did not understand the directive as such does not necessarily imply that imperatival meaning was not made. It may simply be the case that the addressee did not rightly understand the context in which the

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63. This is, essentially, the notion of "fluency" from the ethnographic-descriptive perspective. That is, one is "fluent" in a language not because she or he has mastered enough of the rules of the grammar of a given language, but because she or he has learned how to use language to make meanings with language in ways that are appropriate in various contexts of situation as allowed by context of culture. See Halliday, *Explorations*, 45. See also Hymes, "Toward Ethnographies of Communication," 14.

64. Fantin, *Greek Imperative Mood*, 133.

65. Porter (*Verbal Aspect*, 168) writes, "A command or prohibition can always be rejected, and thus does not refer to a future event but merely a posited one."

imperative was uttered or, for some other reason, was not able to connect the directive to the features of the context of situation.

Now consider the following definition of the Greek imperative mood theorized from the ethnographic–descriptive paradigm:

> In cultural and situational contexts where it is appropriate, the imperative mood form grammaticalizes the language user's selection of directive attitude,[66] which is the typical or congruent[67] selection from the linguistic system when a language user proposes to direct someone's behavior, thoughts, beliefs, and/or feelings.[68]

As argued in the previous section, the advantage of this definition is that from the start it considers meaning as being contextually activated and constrained. It presumes that the context of situation has activated "GIVE A DIRECTIVE" as a meaning potential, and has skewed the probability toward actually doing so.[69] In other words, the contextual variables of Field, Tenor, and Mode have been instantiated in a way that constrains the use of language, making it more probable that, in addition to positive or negative polarity, the language user will make lexicogrammatical selections in order to realize [-ASSERTIVE: + DIRECTIVE] (i.e., neither assertive attitude

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66. "Attitude is a semantic category, associated with the predicate of a clause, which expresses the manner in which an author chooses to view and portray an action in relation to reality. It is grammaticalized through an author's selection of [grammatical] mood. Assertive attitude is grammaticalized through the indicative mood, Directive attitude through the imperative mood, Projective attitude through the subjunctive mood and Contingent attitude through the optative mood. The semantic value of the future tense-form is included as an attitude value at the clause level. Expective attitude is grammaticalized by the future form" (OpenText.org, "Clause Level"). See also Porter, *Idioms*, 53.

67. On congruent and metaphorical modes of meaning, see Halliday, "Introduction," 20–23; Halliday and Matthiessen, *Halliday's Introduction*, 659–731 (under "metaphorical modes of expression").

68. This definition is based on my own work in SFL and CDA (e.g., Dvorak, "Prodding with Prosody," 85–120; Dvorak, "To Incline Another's Heart," 599–624; and Dvorak, "Not Like Cain," 1–19). See also Fairclough, *Analysing Discourse* and *Discourse and Social Change*, as well as Porter's description of the imperative in *Idioms*, 220–29 and *Verbal Aspect*, 166, 168.

69. See Porter and O'Donnell, "The Greek Verbal Network," 3–41.

[grammaticalized as indicative mood] nor projective attitude [grammaticalized as subjunctive or optative mood]).[70] This view also presumes, of course, that within the contexts of culture and situation, the language user who would issue a command or prohibition has assumed the social role of "ONE WHO MAY MAKE DEMANDS ON ANOTHER IN THE COLLOQUY" as is deemed appropriate by the social context. If not, the other(s) in the colloquy will most likely respond with some form of social sanction as a means of correction.

This view is also advantageous for what it helps interpreters to determine when looking at text from the instance end of the cline. Consider, for example, Phlm 17, where Paul writes, εἰ οὖν με ἔχεις κοινωνόν, προσλαβοῦ αὐτὸν ὡς ἐμέ, 'If, therefore, you have me as a partner, *receive* him [i.e., Onesimus] as me.' Here the instance of imperative mood tells us that Paul interpreted the context of situation in such a way that, despite claiming earlier in the letter that he would not be so bold as to command Philemon, he nevertheless believed that it would not be completely out of bounds to take up the role of "ONE WHO MAY MAKE DEMANDS ON ANOTHER IN THE COLLOQUY"—even if it meant putting solidarity with Philemon at a greater level of risk. Of course, interpreters do not know with certainty if Philemon did, indeed, receive Onesimus "no longer as a slave but as a beloved brother" (οὐκέτι ὡς δοῦλον ἀλλ' ὑπὲρ δοῦλον, ἀδελφὸν ἀγαπητόν), but one should not doubt that Paul did, through the use of the imperative form, make the meaning of a directive. Moreover, a decision as to whether or not interpreters should consider this command as an entreaty or a petition (i.e., a weaker or less forceful command) should be made on the basis of the social and cultural context in which the letter was produced, the genre in which it is realized (i.e., letter of recommendation), and situational variables (especially Field and Tenor)—not on the sensitivities of the interpreter. One might suspect that because, culturally, the social process of recommendation (even in letter form) "tended to give the recipient a higher place of honour . . . [in order] to gain the acquiescence to the [recommender's]

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70. See Porter, "Systemic Functional Linguistics," 27–28.

request" with regard to the one being commended,[71] Paul's directive may be interpreted as an entreaty or petition. Nevertheless, *it is still a directive*, and it would still likely put solidarity between Paul and Philemon at some risk, which, apparently, is something that Paul is willing to do on behalf of Onesimus.

To be fair, the ethnographic–descriptive paradigm is not without its challenges. One issue involves the notion of realization. Porter summarizes the main issue here: "No one has yet to devise mapping rules or speech-act classes so as to create a sufficiently formalized relationship between discourse and semantics. They rely upon congruence, typicality, and predictability, but cannot create strongly correlative formalization."[72] What was discussed above with regard to Philemon described a function of directive attitude that appears to be congruent with the context of situation; that is, context of situation activated the exchange role of DEMANDING, in this case a demand for a service, which then was realized congruently with an imperative mood form from the lexicogrammar. However, what about Phlm 20 where Paul writes, ναὶ ἀδελφέ, ἐγώ σου ὀναίμην ἐν κυρίῳ, 'Yes brother, would that I benefit from you in the Lord?' Could the use of the optative mood form be intended as a command that has been realized non-congruently? Readers are fortunate in this instance that Paul follows this statement with the congruently realized directive ἀνάπαυσόν μου τὰ σπλάγχνα ἐν Χριστῷ, 'Refresh my heart in the Lord.' With respect to such non-congruent realizations, I follow Halliday and consider them a kind of interpersonal metaphor, where mood/attitude is realized incongruently (e.g. assertive attitude where directive attitude would be congruent) *for contextual reasons*.[73] Of course, not every SFL practitioner is satisfied with this explanation,[74] which confirms Porter's point that more and better theorizing and

71. Tite, "How to Begin and Why?" 80.
72. Porter, "Systemic Functional Linguistics," 39.
73. See Halliday and Matthiessen, *Halliday's Introduction*, 698–707.
74. E.g., see Porter, "Systemic Functional Linguistics," 25–26.

modeling pertaining to semantics and the realization process is required. The area of ideational and interpersonal metaphor (or grammatical metaphor in general) is one that is ripe for further investigation, theorizing, and modeling.

4. *Conclusion*

In conclusion, the ethnographic-descriptive approach from which Systemic Functional Linguistics stems seems to be the most promising way forward. The main reason for this, as I have tried to argue, is that this approach maintains that meaning is ultimately grounded in the social system and that language was developed as a semiotic system that humans could use to make and exchange meanings with one another. Logical-philosophical theories of meaning and pragmatic methodologies such as Speech Act Theory fail to provide a way forward because they "require knowledge of the language user's intention, which cannot be deduced from individual sentences,"[75] but require additionally an interpretation of the social context in which the utterance was produced—both the context of culture and of situation, which at once activates and constrains the kinds of meanings that can be made and/or construed. In short, it seems that the more appropriate way of theorizing the "meaning of meaning" is to view it as a social construction, and that the entire enterprise of meaning-making with language, both in terms of meaning potential and instance, is at once activated and constrained by the contexts of culture and of situation.

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75. Porter, "Systemic Functional Linguistics," 37.

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