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Journal of Translation
ISSN 1558-7282 (online)
https://siljot.org

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Journal of Translation 3 (1), 2007: 1–8.
https://doi.org/10.54395/JOT-53TYH

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Verb Ranking in Koine Imperativals

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Abstract

This article proposes a cline of Greek imperativals, that is, a progressive ordering of Greek imperativals from a totally unmitigated command to a highly mitigated exhortation. It grows from a study of 1 Cor. 10:6–10. In this passage, the Apostle Paul shifts from a first person form of the verbal construction to a second person form, then to two first person forms, and finally back to a second person form. I did not find the explanations in the commentaries for these usages to be satisfactory. I accordingly propose that the use of the different persons is to be seen as part of an increase in marked prominence.

Along with the change in persons in the imperatival forms, there is a change in the imperativals themselves, going from a purpose clause to the imperative γίνεσθε 'be' used with a substantive, to two uses of the hortatory subjunctive, followed by a second person imperative form of the verb. This, along with an increase in marked prominence in this passage, suggests a cline of mitigation for Greek imperativals. In the passage in 1 Corinthians, the imperativals proceed up the cline from a highly mitigated exhortation to a totally unmitigated command.

I followed material written by Neva Miller on imperativals in Romans 12, work done by Robert Longacre on 1 John, on Biblical Hebrew and on discourse in general, and work done by Ernst Wendland on 1 Peter. This article also examines an increase in marked prominence in the text in 1 Corinthians, and uses this to support the thesis of a perceived decrease in mitigation in the imperatival forms.

Included in this article in particular is the proposal that the imperative of γίνομαι 'be' plus a substantive occupies a place in a cline of imperativals below (more mitigated than) hortatory subjunctives. It also proposes that the switch from a first person form to a second person form, back to first person forms, and then to a second person form, is to be understood as a part of an increase in marked prominence. Thus, all of the imperativals in this passage can be perceived as exhortations directed to the Corinthians.

1. Introduction

This paper proposes that Koine Greek uses a cline of imperatival forms to go from a totally unmitigated command to a highly mitigated exhortation.

1.1 The Need for the Proposal

This proposal comes out of a study of 1 Corinthians 10:6–10. In this passage, Paul uses four different imperatival forms. In the process, he uses both first person and second person forms. For instance, he writes, "Do not worship idols" (v. 7), and "Let us not commit sexual immorality" (v. 8). Some commentators either explain the use of the first and second person forms in these instances in ways which are here considered to be inadequate for the most part, or else they do not address the matter. For instance, Barrett notes that Paul uses the first person in v. 6, and writes that "the first person is not simply a mark of modesty and tact; Paul believed that he too needed to heed and act on the warning" (Barrett 1968:334). He

notes the use of the second person in v. 10, and attributes this to "Paul now addressing the Corinthians directly" (Barrett 1968:226). Concerning the second person form in v. 7, Meyer writes, "in the second person, because of the *special* danger to which his readers, *from their circumstances,* were exposed" (Meyer 1884:222–223).[1] Then, when commenting on v. 10, Meyer writes that Paul uses the second person to indicate that the people were not to murmur *against the divinely commissioned teachers* (Paul, Apollos, and others)" (Meyer p. 224). However, Godet writes, "The transition from the second person (*that ye become not,* v.7) to the first (*that we commit not*) seems to arise from the fact that the second danger was much more common than the first, and might apply to Christians in general" (Godet 1971:62).

Concerning the use of the first person in v. 8, Robertson and Plummer (1963:204) write that "the Apostle …thus once more put[s] himself on a level with his readers." Concerning the use of the second person in v. 10, they suggest that Paul is warning the Corinthians who "might be disposed to murmur against him for his punishment of the incestuous person, and for his severe rebukes in this letter" (Robertson and Plummer 1963:206). Godet (1971:65) notes a variation between the first person and the second person forms in v. 10. He believes that the second person form is to be preferred, and also writes that "we have here an admonition altogether special, applicable only to the Church of Corinth, like that of v. 7, where already the second person was used."

Mare (1976:249–250) writes that Paul "softens its force [the force of the exhortation in v. 8] by including himself in the exhortation." Then on v. 9, Mare writes, "Observe the plural pronoun 'we,' with which Paul includes himself in cautioning the Corinthians against complaining as Israel did."

Fee (1987:452:fn.9) sees the use of the first person "throughout the following argument, with the notable exceptions in vv. 7, 10, 12–14, 18–22," as a continuing use of "we/us" in 9:24–27. He writes further, "The first and fourth [sentences] begin with an imperative, followed by 'even as some of them.' The first and fourth are second plural imperatives; the second and third, hortatory subjunctives (first person plural imperatives), thus creating an AB-BA pattern. *But that may be incidental to the fact that Paul, by the very nature of the argument, would exclude himself from the first and fourth item"* (Fee 1987:452:fn.16). Fee notes the use of the second person in v. 10, and attributes this to a grumbling against "Paul in their letter." (See comments above for a similar interpretation by Robertson and Plummer.) In his comments on vv. 8–10, Conzelmann (1975:168) writes that "The tone is intensified by the change from the imperative of v. 7 to the first person plural," which would agree with the thesis of this article. However, in a note on v. 19, he writes, "Does the return to direct address (imperative) imply an intentional dig at the bravado of the strong?" Other commentators do not address the matter (Bruce, Hodge, Morris). Orr and Walther only write that "The imperative [of v. 10] was accommodated in some MSS to the hortatory of the previous verse"(1976:246). With respect to the forms of v. 9, Thiselton notes only that "a form of μή with the subjunctive is used," and writes that this may imply "that the addressees were already doing it [that is, putting the Lord to the test]" (Thiselton: 2000:740) .

One explanation for Paul's use of the second person in v. 7 is that Paul could not include himself in such a prohibition, as suggested by Fee. But a reader could ask, "Why not? If Christ was tempted by Satan to fall down and worship him, and if the Corinthians were potentially subject to the temptation to worship idols, why should Paul, presumably because he was an apostle, not be subject to the temptation to worship idols?" Regarding the exhortation in v. 8, some commentators write that Paul is softening his command. However, these commentators offer no satisfactory explanation for this softening. One might ask why Paul softens his command to abstain from sexual immorality when he so strongly denounced it earlier, as in 1 Cor. 5, and again in 1 Cor. 6, where he writes that the sexually immoral will not inherit the kingdom of God. This paper proposes that 10:8 indeed employs a partially mitigated exhortation, but a reason for that mitigation is presented that does not lessen Paul's abhorrence of immorality.

1.2 The Proposal

First Corinthians 10:6–10 suggests a cline for imperatival forms that range from highly mitigated exhortations (10:6) to a form that represents a totally unmitigated command (10:10). The cline is:

[1] Emphasis added.

1. A command presented in a purpose clause
2. A command presented with a form of γίνομαι plus a substantive
3. A command using a first person plural subjunctive
4. A command using a second person imperative

The cline, presented with the most unmitigated form appearing first, is as follows. The successive lines present forms that have a supposedly increasing degree of mitigation:

1. Second person imperatives
2. First person plural subjunctives
3. γίνομαι + a substantive
4. Purpose clauses

1.3 Methodology

The study recounts work done by Neva Miller on imperativals found in Romans 12, work done by Robert Longacre in 1 John and in Biblical Hebrew, and in discourse in general, and Ernst Wendland's work on 1 Peter. The study then notes two features of 1 Cor. 10:6–10. The first is the proposed increase of forcefulness found in the imperatival forms that has already been mentioned, i.e., the movement from a highly mitigated exhortation to a totally unmitigated command.

The second feature that is examined is an increase in marked prominence in the text, which is taken to corroborate the claim that there is an increase in force in the command forms; both the increase in the force of the commands, and the increase in marked prominence, are used to drive home the point, "Do not sin; if you sin, you will be in extreme danger of falling."

2. Romans 12

In her work on Romans 12, Neva Miller divides the chapter into four sections: vv. 1–5, vv. 6–8, vv. 9–19a, and vv. 19b–21. The first section employs performatives and infinitives in a normal way, along with other verb forms used in a normal way. The second section, vv. 6–8, uses five attributive participles, which have been rendered with an imperatival sense. This section also contains two constructions that employ verbal nouns, which are parallel to the constructions containing the previously mentioned attributive participles. The parallel constructions found in this section and the non-normative way in which the constructions are used suggest a level of marked prominence in this section.

The third section displays an increased level of marked prominence. There is parallel construction involving participles with their complements. In many of these instances, the complements consist of preposed adverbial constructions. These participles are used with an imperatival sense. The section also contains three predicate adjectives used with an imperatival sense and two infinitives used as imperativals. The frequency of these constructions, and the repetition of form with the imperatival participles in particular, suggest the increased amount of marked prominence mentioned above.

The fourth section is taken to be the climax of this segment of Scripture. The constructions of this section return to what is seen to be a more normal use of the language, but not entirely so. There are five imperatives expressed by finite verbs in the imperative mood. One of these is a second person plural form; however, four are second person singular forms.

We can take these observations about finite verbs, participles, adjectives, infinitives, and verbal nouns and apply them to the matter of mitigation of imperativals. Miller sees the attributive participles of the second section as being softer forms of command. She says that a person could supply a third person imperative with these participles so that they would express an imperative. Thus, these attributive participles can be seen as exhortations with some degree of mitigation, and furthermore, the attributive participle and the third person imperative will at times express the same degree of mitigation of command.

The third section contains imperatival adjectives (vv. 9, 10a, and 11a), multiple imperatival participles, and two imperatival infinitives (v. 15). There are also some second person plural finite verbs in the imperative mood. The amount of marked prominence in these verses makes it difficult, if not impossible, to propose an

ordering of verb forms to indicate the strength with which they express a command, since one of the features of peak[2] is to use conventional forms in non-conventional ways. Nevertheless, one thing is evident, and a second item can be proposed. The fact that adjectives, participles, and infinitives are used with an imperatival sense indicates that these items can indeed be used as imperatives. Secondly, it can be noted that the majority of the imperatival forms in this section are adjectives, participles, and infinitives, although there are some finite verbs that are used in the imperative mood. Since there is a preponderance of these forms in the section that precedes the climax, where one would expect the strongest imperatival forms to be used, one can imagine that these three forms, the imperatival adjective, the imperatival participle, and the imperatival infinitive, have a degree of mitigation in comparison to finite verbs used in the imperative mood.

Miller suggests that the imperatival infinitive "encodes a moral duty" that is just short of "an outright command." The fact that the two infinitives in this section directly follow three finite verbs in the imperative mood lends support to Miller's thesis.

There are some specific things to note from Miller's work. With respect to the imperatival adjectives of the third section, Miller indicates that these adjectives may be used with an imperative form of γίνομαι 'be' in their fuller expression. She bases this on the fact that although the first three adjectives are used "without grammatical connection," the fourth adjective, φρόνιμοι 'conceited', is used with γίνεσθε 'be'.

In addition, Miller states that an "adjective encodes a state proposition." Also, as noted above, imperatival participles and infinitives are softer forms of command, or, they are mitigated imperativals. As suggested by her comment on the supplying of a third person imperative with the attributive participles of vv. 6–8, third person imperatives can be a mitigated form of command.

Finally, imperatival participles and third person imperatives may (at times, at least) express the same degree of mitigation of exhortation.

3. 1 John

Different forms of exhortation occur in 1 John. Longacre claims that the exhortations move from highly mitigated forms to completely overt commands as the discourse moves to its peaks (1992:277). He proposes that two highly mitigated forms are conditional clauses and relative clauses. In these clauses, the ideas are presented, "If we say 'a' we are on the wrong side with bad consequences. If we say 'b' we are on the right side with good consequences." The effect is "to get us on the right side of things and line up with the forces with positive consequences" (Longacre:1992:272). The second set of mitigated exhortations, the relative clauses, presents the sense, "Everyone who does so and so is on the wrong side, while everyone who does the opposite course of action is on the right side" (p. 274). A relative clause can also present the "third 'ideal' person," e.g., "A good American does thus," with the implied exhortation, "Do thus."

An example from 1 John of the mitigated exhortations is found in

> ὁ λέγων ἐν τῷ φωτὶ εἶναι καὶ τὸν ἀδελφὸν μισῶν ἐν τῇ σκοτίᾳ ἐστὶν ἕως ἄρτι·
> The one who says that he is in the light and yet hates his brother is in the darkness to the present time.
>
> ὁ ἀγαπῶν τὸν ἀδελφὸν αὐτοῦ ἐν τῷ φωτὶ μένει καὶ σκάνδαλον ἐν αὐτῷ οὐκ ἔστιν·
> The one who loves his brother remains in the light, and there is not cause in him to make another person sin (2:9–10).

Other forms of exhortation include, in addition to second person plural imperatives, the following: third person imperatives, forms which employ the first person plural ὀφείλομεν 'we ought' (3:16; 4:11), and first person plural subjunctives (3:18; 4:7). The movement from highly mitigated commands to overt commands would roughly follow the order in the list above.

[2] A peak in a discourse is a place of "turbulence," where changes are employed to highlight or emphasize that portion of the discourse. A peak may serve to present a "cumulative development" of a discourse to the point where the peak occurs (See Longacre 1989: 18–19.)

Of note here is the fact that Longacre recognizes a range of forms of exhortation that goes from highly mitigated forms to overt commands. Included in the mitigated forms are conditional clauses and relational clauses. The "most forceful" are the "imperative and the word 'ought'" (l992:278). Concerning the form with ὀφείλομεν 'we ought', Longacre writes, "Finally, in 3:16b we find the verb ὀφείλομεν 'we ought to'. Here the verb 'ought' is strongly hortatory and is used rather than the imperative, but perhaps it is as strong [as] or stronger than any imperative form" (p. 279). Between the highly mitigated forms and the overt command forms would presumably be the "hortative" (first person plural subjunctives) and the "jussive" (third person imperatives) (p. 278).

4. Biblical Hebrew

Robert Longacre (1989:121) proposes the following cline for verbs in Biblical Hebrew:

Band 1: Primary line of Exhortation	1.1 Imperative (2p) 1.2 Cohortative (1p) } Unranked 1.3 Jussive (3p)
Band 2: Secondary Line of Exhortation	2.1 *ʾāl*+ jussive/imperfect 2.2 Modal imperfect
Band 3: Results/Con-sequences (Motivation)	3.1 *w* (consecutive) perfect 3.2 *lôʾ/pen* + imperfect 3.3 (Future) perfect
Band 4: Setting (Problem)	4.1 Perfect (of past events) 4.2. Participles 4.3. Nominal clauses

Of note here is that in Band 2, there are imperatival forms that "should rank below overt commands and yet above other nonperemptory elements." Also, Band 3 presents "results/consequences of commands rather than the commands themselves." These can serve as motivational material for the commands (Longacre 1989:122).

Finally, in the band furthest removed from the mainline, the material may relate to "setting," and "participles and nominal clauses can be expected … as in the other discourse types" (Longacre 1989:123). The clauses here will be stative, or be closer to that kind of clause (See below, "Genre and Verb Types.")

5. 1 Peter

Ernst Wendland presents the following cline of mitigation of appeals in a study of 1 Peter. The appeals are ranked according to potency, from the strongest to the most mitigated:

1. a simple imperative form
2. some closely associated verbal (e.g., an imperative participle)
3. a direct appeal "I beseech" (παρακαλῶ) by the author to his addressees
4. the performative mention of an order or prohibition followed by indirect speech
5. reference to a specific divine command
6. use of the verbs "ought" (ὀφείλω) or "must" (δεῖ)
7. a "that" (ἵνα) final clause
8. a positive or negative qualitative assertion that implies a related imperative (e.g., "in which you exalt…you exalt with inexpressible joy" = > therefore, rejoice! 1:6,8) (Wendland: 2000:57–58).

Notice that Wendland proposes that the use of ὀφείλω 'ought' or δεῖ 'must' (line 6) ranks below the simple imperative (line 1), whereas Longacre proposed that forms with ὀφείλω could rank as high as outright imperatives, or even higher in his work on 1 John.

6. Genre and Verb Types

One further area of theory needs to be mentioned. Longacre writes that discourse types will be characterized by particular verb types that appear in the mainline clauses, while other verb types will be employed in supportive, or off mainline, clauses (Longacre:1989:21–29). These verb types will follow a cline, where the types differ according to the degree to which the clauses are off the mainline.

For instance, in English, narrative verbs in clauses on the mainline will characteristically occur in the simple past; verbs in clauses that are removed from the mainline, occurring in what he calls band two, will characteristically occur in a past progressive tense/aspect; verbs in clauses in band four will typically be transitive verbs with inanimate objects, and so forth. Other things will characterize these bands as well. For the purposes of this paper, it is significant that stative verbs will be lower on the cline of verbs for narrative discourse. The same holds true for hortatory discourse. (In contrast to this, clauses with stative verbs will occur closer to the mainline in expository discourse.)

7. Increase in forcefulness of exhortations in 1 Cor. 10:6–10

1 Cor. 10:6 contains a purpose clause. This is taken to be the most mitigated form of exhortation occurring in these verses. The purpose clause is:

> εἰς τὸ μὴ εἶναι ἡμᾶς ἐπιθυμητὰς κακῶν(v. 6)
> In order that we do not desire to do evil

This is followed by an exhortation that uses the second person plural form of γίνομαι ‘be’ with a substantive. This is taken to be less mitigated than the previous exhortation, but less forceful than the following ones. The exhortation is:

> μηδὲ εἰδωλολάτραι γίνεσθε (v. 7)
> And do not be idolaters.

The third and fourth exhortations in this series use a first person plural subjunctive. These are taken to be less mitigated than the exhortation of v. 7, but less forceful than the final exhortation. The exhortations are:

> μηδὲ πορνεύωμεν (v. 8)
> And let us not commit sexual immorality.

> μηδὲ ἐκπειράζωμεν τὸν Χριστόν (v.9)
> And let us not test Christ.

The final exhortation is taken to be the most forceful. It is presented as a second person plural imperative. It is:

> μηδὲ γογγύζετε (v. 10)
> And do not grumble.

8. Marked Prominence in 1 Corinthians 10:6–10

An increase in marked prominence can be seen in 1 Cor. 10:6–10 in a repetition of form and in an increase in information going from the purpose clause in v. 6 to the final exhortation in v. 10.

The repetition of form is found in the presentation of an exhortation, followed by a comparison. If the purpose clause of v. 6 is considered to be a highly mitigated command, the parallelism of form can be seen to begin in v. 6, which can be noted in that each of the comparisons is introduced by the term καθώς ‘as’, except in v. 10, where καθάπερ ‘as indeed’, a variation of καθώς, is used. Each of the last three comparisons contains a report of the consequences of the Israelites’ sins. This provides a further element of parallelism, and also provides an increase in information.

This increase in marked prominence is taken to reach a culmination in v. 10. This culmination of marked prominence in v. 10 is taken to coincide with the increase in forcefulness of the exhortations in vv. 6–10,

reaching a culmination in v. 10 with the totally unmitigated command, expressed in the second person imperative.

9. Conclusion

The work of Neva Miller on the imperativals in Romans 12 and the work of Robert Longacre in 1 John and in Biblical Hebrew, along with the change in person and in verbal forms in 1 Cor. 10:6–10, suggest a cline for imperativals in Koine Greek. In her work on Romans 12, Miller noted that the last of four participles occurred with the verb γίνομαι 'be', and that the three participles that preceded the participle that occurred with γίνομαι could be construed as occurring with this verb. With this in mind, the following is suggested as a cline for verb ranking among Koine imperativals, from least to most mitigated:

Second person imperatives
First person plural hortatory subjunctives
Imperative form of γίνομαι + substantive (participle, adjective, noun)
Third person imperatives
Purpose clauses

The comments on genre and verb types that were made earlier suggest that an imperative consisting of γίνομαι 'be' with a substantive will be farther off the mainline than second person verbs in the imperative mood, and so will be farther down the proposed cline of verb ranking among imperativals.

With respect to the second person plural form in 1 Cor. 10:7 and the first person plural form in v. 8, it is proposed here that Paul addresses the Corinthians in both of these exhortations. The second person form is used in v. 7, not because Paul could not include himself in this command, but because he uses the change between first and second person forms as a means of providing marked prominence to the passage. The command also incorporates a form of mitigation that fits the change in forms that are used to arrive at a forceful command in v. 10. Similarly with the command in v. 8, Paul includes himself in the command not to soften the command, but to direct an imperative to the Corinthians in a mitigated form where the mitigation is used as part of a build-up to a forceful command that concludes these five exhortations.

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