CHAPTER THREE
LINGUISTIC THEORY AND METHODOLOGY
PART II

1. *Introduction*

Thus far I have established my basic approach to the meaning of the Greek tense-forms. However, the present chapter is devoted to accomplishing two further aims. The first is to clearly set forth the linguistic theory upon which this work is built—Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL). I will offer a brief introduction to SFL as a theory and describe its usefulness not only for an understanding of Greek verbal aspect but, more importantly, for an understanding of how verbal aspect functions in the creation of discourse prominence, particularly in narrative literature, which is a chief overall concern of this work. The main issues I will engage here will be (1) how SFL helps to establish a network of meaningful oppositions for the Greek verbal system, (2) the concepts of markedness, markedness assimilation, and prominence with relation to the textual metafunction of Greek verbs, and closely related, (3) verbal aspect and discourse visualization (i.e., discourse grounding).

The second aim of this chapter is to briefly clarify issues pertaining to the procedure I will use in analyzing instances of divergent tense-form usage in the Synoptic PNs. This will include establishing criteria for choosing significant occurrences of divergence and addressing questions such as the following: (1) can the use of different tense-forms be analyzed when they are not identical lexically? (2) How are tense-forms to be treated

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1 I have found that such discussion is somewhat lacking in Mathewson, and to a lesser extent, in Decker’s work. While both authors do make mention of SFL, it is primarily in recounting Porter’s use of it for developing his theory of verbal aspect (see David L. Mathewson, *Verbal Aspect in the Book of Revelation: The Function of Greek Verb Tenses in John’s Apocalypse* [LBS 4; Leiden: Brill, 2010] 37–39; Rodney J. Decker, *Temporal Deixis of the Greek Verb in the Gospel of Mark with Reference to Verbal Aspect* [SBG 10; New York: Peter Lang, 2001] 12–14, 21–22). That is, they (especially Mathewson) offer little interaction concerning SFL itself and why it is a useful model for studying language in general and Greek verbal aspect in particular.
when they occur in embedded clauses? And (3) how does the content of a text impact the use of various tense-forms at specific points?²

2. **Systemic Functional Linguistics, Verbal Aspect, and Discourse Analysis**

Mathewson has noted that much of past grammatical discussion concerning the Greek tense-forms has tended to isolate the forms from one another.³ Not only is this methodologically unhelpful for ascertaining the meaning and function of Greek verbal forms, but it is also not the way language itself works. That is, as language users, we typically do not understand elements of our language as individual or isolated items, but rather in terms of how they relate on the level of meaning to other items within our language system. This notion—that language is comprised of systems of meaning relations from which language users make semantic choices for functional purposes—is one of the essential tenets of SFL.

2.1. **The Fundamentals of SFL**

As its name suggests, SFL is structured around two main pillars. The first of these is the concept that human language operates as a vast network of semantic relationships. That is, the notion of ‘system’ primarily refers to the network of semantic choices within a given language that are available for a speaker or writer to draw upon.⁴ Thus, a language user begins with a set of semantic paradigms that, once choices are made, are realized through linguistic forms.⁵ As Michael Halliday notes, “A language is treated as a system of meanings, with forms attached to express them. Not grammatical paradigms with their interpretation, but semantic paradigms with their realization.”⁶ This is somewhat of a reversal of traditional

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² By using the phrase ‘the content of a text’ I am simply referring to what is happening on an intra-linguistic level within a text—the interplay of its subject matter, participant roles and references, and its cohesive character. My intent in asking this question is to determine how what an author wishes to recount in a portion of text (in the case of this study, through narrative) influences his or her aspectual choices.
³ Mathewson, *Verbal Aspect*, 37.
⁵ Jeffrey T. Reed, *A Discourse Analysis of Philippians: Method and Rhetoric in the Debate over Literary Integrity* (JSNTSup 136; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1997) 36.