CHAPTER 11


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1 Introduction

Οὖν functions as a post-positive intersentential conjunction that occurs frequently in New Testament literature (489x). In common with most of the conjunctions in ancient Greek (particularly in the Hellenistic period), οὖν suffers from a neglect of careful study and adequate linguistic analysis. Ancient Greek offered a broad range of choice of conjunctions in its linguistic network that was available to ancient speakers and writers. This paper will examine the minimal semantic contribution of οὖν as a signal of logical semantic relationship above the sentence level. The corpus from which the data is drawn will be the New Testament.

Οὖν is often classified as an inferential particle and a co-ordinating conjunction in narrative in the continuation or resumption of a discourse. Inferential particles signal a deduction, conclusion, or summary, whereas the narrative function is said to be temporal. However, this description fails to account for all of its occurrences, it does not clarify any semantic connection between the functions, and it does not recognize the various discourse levels at which οὖν functions. There have been suggestions that οὖν has other rather unusual functions that require additional categories, but most of the discussion has

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1 The most extensive study of conjunctions and particles is the standard work on the classical use of οὖν, by Denniston, *Greek Particles*. Hellenistic use of conjunctions has often been seen as inferior to classical usage, e.g., Thrall, *Greek Particles*.

2 See for example BDF, 234, BDAG, 736–37. In Beale et al., *Interpretive Lexicon*, 77, these two functions are expanded to five categories, claiming a rare use of “but, however” in Rom 10:14, though there is otherwise significant overlap. See also Runge, *Discourse Grammar*, 43–48, where he further nuances the two basic functions given in BDAG, with a focus on the function in narrative. However, also see Wallace who places οὖν in three categories, primarily stressing the functions it has in common with other conjunctions: emphatic, inferential, and transitional (Greek Grammar, 673–74). Denniston, *Greek Particles*, 460–81, has an extensive discussion of the classic use of οὖν.

revolved around the seemingly idiosyncratic use of οὖν in the Gospel of John. The author’s use of οὖν is one of several unusual features that have led E. A. Abbott, for instance, to write a separate grammar for John. However, unless one assumes that the author of John has used οὖν “incorrectly” or inconsistently with what was within a normal or acceptable range in Hellenistic Greek, the significance of the differences is likely to be lost unless there is first some understanding of how οὖν is used in a broader sample in contemporary discourse. Classifying οὖν as an inferential particle confuses one of its particular uses with its general function. Rather, an explanation is needed for a logical-semantic constraint that covers its wider variety of phenomena.

Some have focused on the multifunctionality of οὖν, and have treated its functions in diverse contexts as if those were its meanings. Each time it has been determined that οὖν was used for a different purpose or in a different way, a new meaning has been added to its definition or it has been added to another category. In part, this approach is driven by translation issues in order to provide words in English that can gloss the meaning in that particular function. When the function of the word seems to require a different sort of English gloss than “then” or “therefore,” a new meaning is proposed. Such approaches on the one hand may say as much or more about English than they do about Greek, and on the other hand, they reflect the particularities of descriptions and their immediate context to such an extent that they defy attempts to recognize general patterns. The primary attachment of meaning to genre is particularly problematic in the study of οὖν. As mentioned above, much of the focus has been on the use of οὖν in narrative, and certain functions of οὖν, such as the function as a “transitional conjunction,” are “reserved for narrative material.” Of course, if the term “transitional” is defined as chronological, then by definition it would tend to be limited to narrative. However, if the term were defined more broadly as sequential, then similar patterns may be found in exposition, argument, or exhortation. The question is whether οὖν in narrative has a chronological meaning, or whether the chronological element is supplied by


5 As described by Levinsohn, the approach “is to describe each conjunction in terms of the single constraint that it places on the way the sentence concerned is to be processed with reference to its context.” Levinsohn, *Discourse Features,* 69. See also Fewster’s description of monosemy in Fewster, *Creation Language.*

6 See for example, Dana and Mantey, *Manual Grammar,* 252–53, where in order to correct the treatment of οὖν as having only inferential meanings, the authors report that Mantey wrote his doctoral thesis on “The Meaning of Oòν in John’s Writings,” and published his results in the *Expositor* under “Newly Discovered Meanings for οὖν.”

7 Wallace, *Greek Grammar,* 693.