AKTIONSART IN NEW TESTAMENT GREEK: INFINITIVE AND IMPERATIVE

by

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In my earlier article on Subjunctive Aktionsart in NT Greek I attempted to re-survey the ways in which the present and aorist subjunctive are used. I proposed some revisions to the generally accepted paradigms of usage, and identified distinctive usages by different authors. In this present article I have tried to complete the re-assessment of Aktionsart in NT Greek by a survey of infinitive and imperative usage.

It may not be inappropriate to insert a brief comment here on methodology. In surveying subjunctive Aktionsart usage I was helped by the fact that nearly all subjunctive usage is prefaced by some introductory particle (τίνα, ἀπέστητον, μηδέν, etc.). Using J. B. Smith's Greek-English Concordance to the New Testament (Herald Press 1955) I was able to locate subjunctives without too much labour; and the few cases which have no introductory particle (imperatival and deliberative) are easily located from lists in e.g. J. H. Moulton's Grammar of NT Greek. For infinitives and imperatives, however, there is no such short cut. I went through the text of the

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NT noting each instance with any necessary contextual material. In doing this I will certainly have missed a few occurrences. In fact, only after completing the task did I notice that J. B. Smith's Concordance actually lists the infinitive εἰπω as a separate heading, and so I checked Smith's list of 126 occurrences against my own list. I thought at first count I had missed 6, which was depressing, but then discovered that 4 of the cases do not occur in Kurt Aland's 1983 text which I have used throughout; so I had missed 2. I suspect I am more likely to have missed εἰπω than other infinitives, but I was pleased that even the εἰπω count shows less than 2% overlooked. I trust that those infinitives and imperatives I have missed will not significantly alter the arguments I develop below. And I am doubtless the better for having read the whole text!

My comments about the general nature of NT Aktionsart usage in the earlier article (especially pp. 193-198) are in essence applicable to infinitives and imperatives. The distinction I made there between lexical and non-lexical verbs is equally important in infinitives and imperatives, though there are further distinctions which apply only to infinitives and imperatives. It is also essential to bear in mind, as I mentioned in the earlier article and as K. L. McKay\(^3\) has also stressed, that Greek speakers had (and indeed still have in using imperatives and subjunctives) the option of stressing either the completeness or the continuity of the action. Which they preferred was in many cases a matter of nuance of context or intent which is difficult to analyse, other than to state that the author did prefer the one rather than the other, and to try to get the feel of why he chose that way.

The essential data for the present article are summarised in the tables at the end of the article. In devising such tabulations certain assumptions and pre-suppositions have to be made, and there are doubtless many other ways of organising and presenting the material. In the Infinitives Analysis (see Table (i)) I settled on the 18 categories as listed after reading the gospels and Romans. It would certainly have been possible to reduce the categories, but I was anxious not to miss any distinctions in usage (e.g. between simple verbs of wishing and others taking a prolicative infinitive). I therefore decided not to combine categories for the purposes of this article in case anyone might notice points which have escaped me. Some

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