Topic 15. *Grammatical tense does express time.*

Examine the relationship between grammatical tense, relative time, and verbal aspect in ancient Greek. Time sequences events. Tense inflects characteristics of action words. Verbal aspect expresses an author's perspective about an action. Relative time is one of numerous kinds of verbal aspect. Ancient grammarians agree—relative time is the primary function of tense. Some claim that certain types of verbal aspect are more dominant than relative time. This contradicts both the claims of ancient grammarians and also modern linguists. Relative time is the first and most important implication of grammatical tense. However, verbal aspect is useful to illuminate nuances of grammatical tense.

Consider a current debate about the relationship between grammatical tense and verbal aspect. In particular, examine the relationship between grammatical tense and time.

Examine time.

Tense and time are distinct properties. Use the two terms in completely different ways.

Tense assigns an action to one of seven categories. These categories express a perspective of the author about *when* an action[1] occurs. Tense is a grammatical property of action words. Identify the tense of an action by its morphology. Tense is related to time, but it does not equal time.

Define time.

Time is the relative measurement of the order of events. Time is a property assigned to the events themselves—it is not a property of language. The analysis of time belongs to the fields of physics, history, philosophy, and psychology.

Time is an abstract notion, built on esoteric philosophical ideas. Since the function of tense depends on time, grammatical tense has an esoteric nature.

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1. An *action*, or *verb*, is a word that identifies the behavior in a sentence.

The time of every event is relative to some other event—an event is either before, during, or after another event in time. Time establishes the order of a set of events—this event occurred first, then another, and so on. Events may share the same order in time.

So, the definition of time is necessarily circular. Time orders events, but positioning an event in time is always relative to some other event.

Examine the elements of relative time.

Every event must have order relative to some standardized *fixed event*. For example, the hours of a day are relative to the center event of the night, namely, 12:00 am. The year of an era can be relative to the purported birth of Jesus, that is, AD 0 which equals 0 BC. The rotation of a Ferris wheel is relative to an event when the purple car was located at the ground level.

There must be a standardized time *increment*. The location of an event is the number of increments between the event and another fixed event, for example, some event occurs at a number of increments after the fixed event. A year is the period for the earth to revolve around the sun. A month is the period for the moon to revolve about the earth. A day is the period for the earth to rotate on its axis. A second is one sixtieth portion of one sixtieth of one twenty-fourth of a day. The frequency length of an atomic transition is one period. One revolution of a Ferris wheel is the period for the purple car to return to the ground level.

Even these standards are esoteric. The actual date of the birth of Jesus is unknown.[2] The calendar has undergone many adjustments to accommodate error and variation.[3] The length of a year, month, day, and second are not fixed because the rotation of heavenly bodies varies.[4] The Ferris wheel does not always revolve at the same rate.

Without both an arbitrary relative *fixed event* and an *increment*, it is impossible to discuss time. The definition of time references other undefined things. Therefore, the composition of time is necessarily transcendental.

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2. Dionysius Exiguus, a sixth century monk, developed the method of numbering years from the birth of Jesus. The exact year of the birth of Jesus is uncertain, but it is likely not the year Dionysius calculated.

3. The Roman calendar was imprecise. This caused significant drift between the calendar date and the seasons. In 46 BC, Julius Caesar revised the calendar. This calendar inserts a leap day every four years. Calendar drift still occurred due to imprecision. So, in 1582, during the papacy of Gregory XIII, some European states adopted a calendar revision. The current calendar uses a modified system for leap days. Even the existing system produces an error of one day before 5000 AD.

4. The International Earth Rotation and Reference Systems Service (IERS) determines when to insert 'leap seconds' into the calendar. These leap seconds recalibrate the calendar with actual variations in the rotation of the earth. Alerts regarding changes in the position of the earth are published through bulletins, at http://www.iers.org/IERS/EN/Publications/Bulletins/bulletins.html. Even the definition of a second varies: 9,192,631,770 periods of the cesium 133 atom is not actually a fixed interval.

The concept of time is independent of the fields of linguistics and grammar. However, language makes heavy use of time.

Examine tense.

Grammatical tense indicates characteristics of action words from the perspective of an author. This is a grammatical property of language, not a property of time. However, it depends on the concept of time.

Tense is an objective property.

Aspect is an author's depiction of actions. Greek lacks formal structures that definitively identify aspect. Aspect exists only by conforming to some proposed system of meaning.

Aspect is not an inflection of action words. Grammatical tense *is* inflected—aspect is the meaning assigned to that tense. Someone must examine clues in a statement to determine its aspect.

So, aspect is a *subjective* property.

Unlike aspect, action words inflect a definitive tense. The tense of an action is objectively determined by its inflection. Tense is independent of the other properties of action words, that is, personhood, mood, agency, number, and person.

There are no actions without a grammatical tense. Every action inflects either in the present, imperfect, aorist, future, perfect, pluperfect, or future perfect tense. An action must have one tense and only one tense. Unlike most rules of language, grammar, and syntax, these rules are without exception.

So, grammatical tense is an *objective* property of action words.

Tense depicts relative time.

Tense primarily depicts the relative time of the action. The author uses an explicit or implied fixed event time as the *orientation* time for all other event times. The orientation time is often the moment of production of the composition. Tense expresses the event time *relative* to this orientation time.[5]

Present tense represents a relative time *simultaneous* to the orientation time, for example, καὶ νῦν ἐρωτῶ σε '(so, right now, while I am writing this letter) I urge you' 2 John 1:5, or ἀσπάζεταί σε τὰ τέκνα 'your children greet you (while I write the final salutations of this letter)' 2 John 1:13. By the time the recipients

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5. Compare with Halliday, *Halliday's Introduction to Functional Grammar*, p. 144, Comrie, *Tense*, pp. 9-13, and Declerk, *The Grammar of the English Verb Phrase*, pp. 22, 95, 97-98, 110-113.

read the letter, the urging and the greeting are in the past, not the present. The present tense expresses the event times relative to the *moment of production*.

Past tenses represent a relative time *prior* to the orientation time, for example, ἐξῆλθον εἰς τὸν κόσμον 'they withdrew (at a prior time before I wrote this letter) into the world' 2 John 1:7. The withdrawal is complete before the letter production begins.

Future tense represents a relative time *after* the orientation time, for example, μεθ᾽ ἡμῶν ἔσται 'it will be (from now on into the distant future) with us' 2 John 1:2. This statement promises what will happen following the time of production.

<div align="center">*Figure 111. Examine relative time.*</div>

Past.	Present.	Future.
orientation time	orientation time	orientation time
ἐξῆλθον 'withdrew'	ἐρωτῶ 'urge'	ἔσται 'will be'
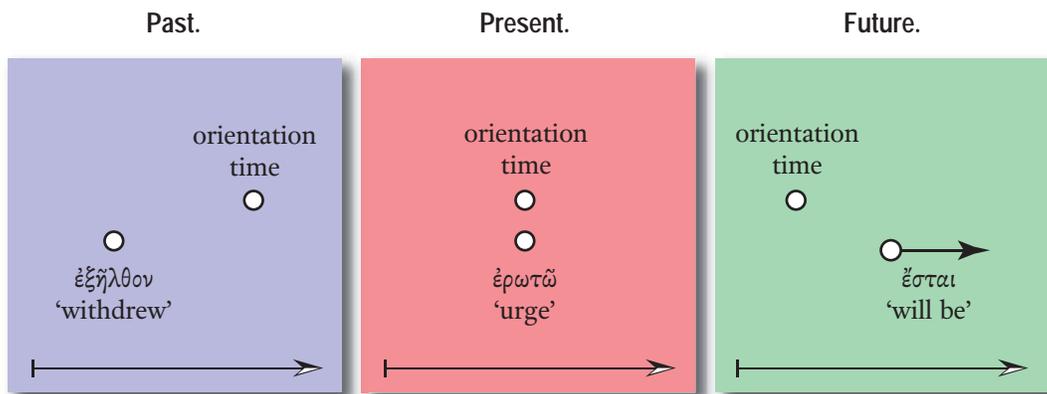
Greek has multiple past tenses: aorist and imperfect, but also perfect, pluperfect, and future perfect. However, if tense *only* expresses relative time, then Greek does not distinguish these multiple past tenses.

Admittedly, grammatical tense is far more complex than simply expressing relative time alone. But, that is still what grammatical tense indicates first and most.

Examine continuity.

There is a subtle difference between the continuity of some grammatical tenses. *Continuity*, also called *aktionsart*,[6] describes how an event progresses.[7]

Discrete, also called *punctual*, progress depicts the action as if it occurs at one instant, for example, πολλοὶ πλάνοι ἐξῆλθον 'many deceivers withdrew (at some

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6. It is inexplicable how an obscure German phrase better explains a grammatical concept to English readers. Dealing with the vocabulary of linguists is sometimes exasperating. Aktionsart means continuity.

7. Compare with Comrie, *Aspect*, pp. 41-44, Declerck, *Grammar of the English Verb Phrase*, pp. 49-50.

particular point in the past)' 2 John 1:7. The elder depicts the withdrawal as a sudden instant.

Continuous, also called *durative*, progress portrays the action as if it occurs uninterrupted over a duration of time, for example, οὐχ ὡς ἐντολὴν καινὴν γράφων σοι· ἀλλ᾽ ἣν εἴχομεν ἀπ᾽ ἀρχῆς 'I am not writing to you about a new command—it is the one we were having (on an ongoing basis) from the beginning' 2 John 1:5. The elder depicts the possession of the command over an entire period of time. Alternatively, the author may depict an action iterating multiple times over a period, for example, ἑκουσίως γὰρ ἁμαρτανόντων ἡμῶν 'we deliberately keep on sinning (over and over)' Hebrews 10:26.[8]

Figure 112. Examine continuity.

Discrete.	Continuous.
○ ἐξῆλθον 'withdrew'	←→ εἴχομεν 'having'
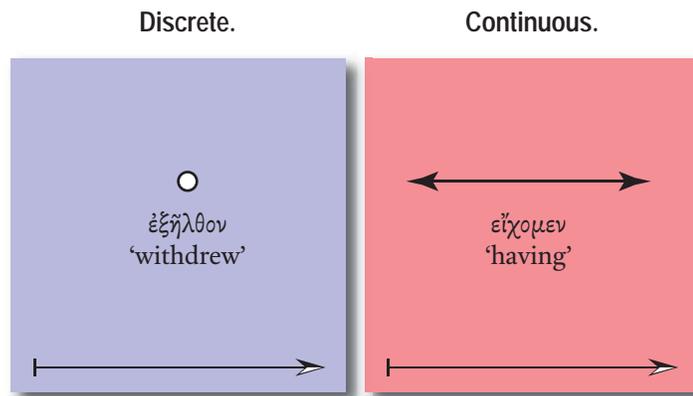
Past time has a tense with *discrete* continuity, the aorist tense, and a tense with *continuous* continuity, the imperfect tense.

This still leaves some unresolved problems. Some tenses do not have separate grammatical forms to distinguish discrete and continuous actions.

There is only one inflection of present time, that is, the present tense. Present tense can depict a *discrete* event, for example, ὁ πονηρὸς οὐχ ἅπτεται αὐτοῦ 'the evil one cannot touch him (at one moment)' 1 John 5:18. Present tense can depict a *continuous* event, for example, τρέχει οὖν καὶ ἔρχεται πρὸς σίμωνα πέτρον 'she was (in the process of) running and met Simon Peter' John 20:2.

There is only one inflection of future time, that is, the future tense. Future tense can depict a *discrete* event, for example, πολλοὶ γὰρ ἐλεύσονται ἐπὶ τῷ ὀνόματί μου λέγοντες· ἐγώ εἰμι ὁ χριστός 'many will arrive (at some moment) in

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8. Strictly speaking, this definition turns the mathematical concept of continuity on its head by conflating continuity with repetition. However, this sense of continuity is a characteristic of linguistics, not mathematics. The linguistic definition is more flexible and less precise.

my name and say, I am the messiah' Matthew 24:5. Future tense can express a *continuous* event, καὶ ἔσεσθέ μου μάρτυρες 'you will become (from now on) my witnesses' Acts 1:8.

So, some past tenses can depict discrete continuity, and some can express continuous continuity. The continuity of present and future tenses must be determined from context, not grammar. The development of inflected continuity did not evolve similarly among the different tenses.[9]

Examine relevance.

By itself, simple relative time does not explain the function of the perfect family of tenses, that is, the perfect, pluperfect, and future perfect tenses. These tenses are associated with prior action. However, they are different from the other past tenses. They are different from each other.

The perfect family express the *relevance* of a prior action. The action is important at some relevant time, whether in the past, present, or future.[10]

The *perfect* tense focuses attention on the *current* relevance of a prior action, for example, εὕρηκα ἐκ τῶν τέκνων σου περιπατοῦντας ἐν ἀληθείᾳ 'I have discovered (which occurred in the past, but is under consideration right now) some of your children walking in the truth' 2 John 1:4.

The *pluperfect* tense focuses attention on a *prior* relevance of an even more prior action, for example, σκοτία ἤδη ἐγεγόνει 'it had become (which occurred in the distant past, but is also under consideration in the less distant past) dark already' John 6:17.

Although not found in the Christian Bible, the *future perfect* tense focuses attention on the *later* relevance of a prior action, for example, ἑστήξω παρ' αὐτόν 'I will have stood (which will occur later on in the future, but will be under consideration even later) beside him' Aristophanes, *Lysistrata*, 634.[11]

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9. While grammar can describe a language as a system, language often has characteristics that do not neatly fit a system. The development of a language is usually accidental. No one plans linguistic change. Change happens through random events. A linguist merely tracks the properties of the system.

10. Compare with Comrie, *Tense*, pp. 24-26, Comrie, *Aspect*, pp. 52-64, Declerck, *Grammar of the English Verb Phrase*, pp. 37-38.

11. The author surveyed several individuals about several sentences, including an English statement in the future perfect tense. Many expressed confusion and bewilderment with this sentence. Only after explaining the context in detail were they able to understand how the statement made any sense. Even then, respondents claimed that they would never use this tense. This corroborates its rarity.

Figure 113. Examine relevance.

Prior.	Current.	Later.

orientation time

orientation time

orientation time

ἐγεγόνει
'had become dark'

εὕρηκα
'have discovered'

ἑστήξω
'will have stood'
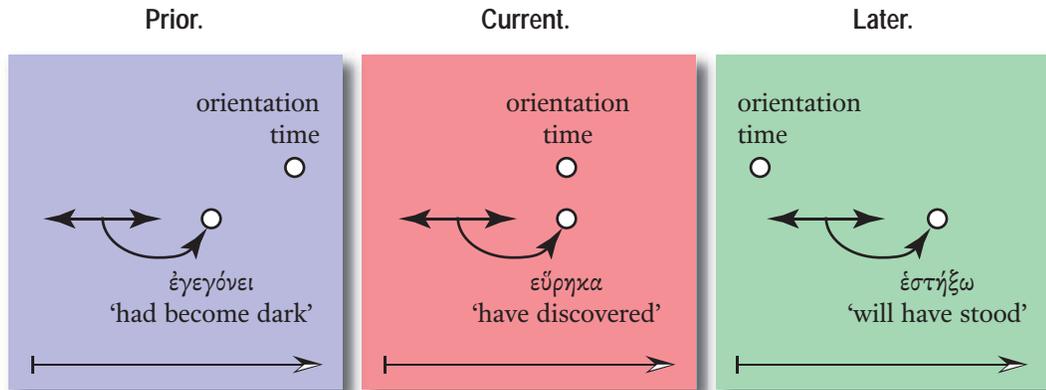
Examine exceptions.

Some actions diverge from a simple relative time expression. They still retain the natural time of their grammatical tense, just in a more sophisticated sense.

The *futuristic* present depicts a certain future event viewed from the present perspective, for example, καὶ ἐὰν πορευθῶ καὶ ἑτοιμάσω τόπον ὑμῖν· πάλιν ἔρχομαι καὶ παραλήμψομαι ὑμᾶς πρὸς ἐμαυτόν 'when I go, I will prepare a place for you—I will come back and bring you with me' John 14:3, οἱ λοιποὶ φόβον ἔχωσιν 'everyone else will be afraid' 1 Timothy 5:20. This is not an aberration of tense. Future tense expresses what has not yet happened. So, an action in the future tense expresses a degree of uncertainty. Placing a future event in the present tense expresses a higher degree of confidence that it will, in fact, occur. This is a nuance of the present tense. These texts could be translated with the same sense using the present tense in English, for example, καὶ ἐὰν πορευθῶ καὶ ἑτοιμάσω τόπον ὑμῖν· πάλιν ἔρχομαι καὶ παραλήμψομαι ὑμᾶς πρὸς ἐμαυτόν 'when I go, I will prepare a place for you—I am going to come back and bring you with me' John 14:3, οἱ λοιποὶ φόβον ἔχωσιν 'everyone else can experience fear' 1 Timothy 5:20.[12] The English futuristic present has the same function.[13]

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12. Porter, *Verbal Aspect*, p. 75, uses a similar example to suggest that the present tense does not express present time, πρὸς σὲ ποιῶ τὸ πάσχα μετὰ τῶν μαθητῶν μου 'with you I am going to make the passover with my disciples' Matthew 26:18. Note that even though Porter says that Matthew 26:18 cannot refer to the present tense, pp. 77-78, but yet his own translation *uses* the present tense 'I am going to make' to translate the sense of the text. The futuristic present can express what you are going to do right away, at a time very close to the present.

13. See the futurish tense forms, Declerck, *The Grammar of the English Verb Phrase*, pp. 106-108.

The *historic* present narrates a past event with the present tense, for example, ἰησοῦς οὖν πάλιν ἐμβριμώμενος ἐν ἑαυτῷ ἔρχεται εἰς τὸ μνημεῖον 'Jesus was feeling deeply emotional again while he went into the tomb' John 11:48, τὸ δὲ πνεῦμα ῥητῶς λέγει 'the spirit specifically stated' 1 Timothy 4:1. This is not an aberration of tense. An author may express relative time as if he is present in the narrative current to the prior moment the event occurred. This also is a nuance of the present tense. The historic present also legitimately translates with a present tense, for example, ἰησοῦς οὖν πάλιν ἐμβριμώμενος ἐν ἑαυτῷ ἔρχεται εἰς τὸ μνημεῖον 'Jesus was feeling deeply emotional again while he goes into the tomb' John 11:48, τὸ δὲ πνεῦμα ῥητῶς λέγει 'the spirit specifically states' 1 Timothy 4:1.[14] The English historic present has the same function.[15]

A *perfective* present expresses a present event which came into being in the present, for example, ταῦτά σοι γράφω 'I am writing this to you' 1 Timothy 3:8. This is another nuance of the present tense.[16] The perfective present mimics the perfect tense.

The *universal*, also called *gnomic*, present expresses a general truth that is true at all times, for example, ἀγαπῶμεν ἀλλήλους 'love each other' 2 John 1:5. The universal present includes the present moment, but extends to all times before and after the present as well. If the author wants to express a universally true principle, he must use some tense. The present tense is satisfactory.[17]

The aorist tense does not have to express an event at a single moment. It can express an event occurring over a period of time, for example, ἐβασίλευσεν ὁ θάνατος ἀπὸ ἀδὰμ μέχρι μωϋσέως 'death ruled from Adam to Moses' Romans

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14. Porter, *Verbal Aspect*, p. 78, uses a similar example, καὶ ἔρχονται πάλιν εἰς ἱεροσόλυμα. καὶ ἐν τῷ ἱερῷ περιπατοῦντος αὐτοῦ ἔρχονται πρὸς αὐτὸν οἱ ἀρχιερεῖς καὶ οἱ γραμματεῖς καὶ οἱ πρεσβύτεροι 'they came again to Jerusalem—when he went into the temple, the high priests, scribes, and elders came to meet him' Mark 11:27. He objects that the reader must understand that he has to move from past to present and back again, which is exactly what the historic present accomplishes. It works in English just like it works in Greek.

15. For example, Charles Dickens uses the historic present, "If the funeral had been yesterday, I could not recollect it better. The very air of the best parlour, when I went in at the door, the bright condition of the fire, the shining of the wine in the decanters, the patterns of the glasses and plates, the faint sweet smell of cake, the odour of Miss Murdstone's dress, and our black clothes. Mr. Chillip *is* in the room, and *comes* to speak to me." *David Copperfield*, chapter nine.

    The gospel of John uses the historic present extensively, for example, ἀφῆκεν τὴν ἰουδαίαν καὶ ἀπῆλθεν πάλιν εἰς τὴν γαλιλαίαν. ἔδει δὲ αὐτὸν διέρχεσθαι διὰ τῆς σαμαρείας. ἔρχεται οὖν εἰς πόλιν τῆς σαμαρείας 'So, he left Judah. He went back to Galilee. He *passes* through Samaria. He *arrives* at a town in Samaria.' John 4:3-5.

    The historic present is common in casual English speech. See Declerck, *The Grammar of the English Verb Phrase*, pp. 176-178.

16. There are similar cases in English—see Declerck, *The Grammar of the English Verb Phrase*, pp. 27-28.

17. Porter, *Verbal Aspect*, p. 78, offers two other examples of a present tense used as a universal principle, πᾶν δένδρον μὴ ποιοῦν καρπὸν καλὸν ἐκκόπτεται καὶ εἰς πῦρ βάλλεται 'every tree that does not bear fruit is thrown into the fire' Matthew 7:19, ἱλαρὸν γὰρ δότην ἀγαπᾷ ὁ θεός 'God loves a cheerful giver' 2 Corinthians 9:7. These examples do not violate the present tense when expressed as a universal. For similar English examples, see Declerck, *The Grammar of the English Verb Phrase*, pp. 130-131.

5:14.[18] This use depicts a continuous event occurring over a period of time collectively as if it were a single event. Paul admits that the rule of death occurred over a period of time. But remember, aspect is not a claim about reality—aspect is the author's choice about the *depiction* of an event. Paul depicts a continuous reign as if it occurs at a single instant. Expressive exceptions do not violate the general rule.

Some exceptions reflect differences in expression between Greek and English. For example, καὶ φωνὴ ἐγένετο ἐκ τῶν οὐρανῶν· σὺ εἶ ὁ υἱός μου ὁ ἀγαπητός, ἐν σοὶ εὐδόκησα is typically translated in English 'a voice came from heaven: you are my beloved son—I am pleased with you' Mark 1:11.[19] The tense of the action is the aorist, which represents past time, but the statement is sensible translated in the English present tense. But, the time aspect also makes sense translated in past time, 'I was pleased with you'. It may not be the most pleasing English translation, but the sense of past time works fine in Greek. This example does not violate the past aspect of the aorist tense. It does demonstrate the subtleties of translation.

Another expressive difference comes from a use of the perfect tense, ἐγὼ βαπτίζω ἐν ὕδατι· μέσος ὑμῶν ἔστηκεν ὃν ὑμεῖς οὐκ οἴδατε 'I baptize with water—among you stands one you do not know' John 1:26.[20] Both actions are expressed in past time with a perfect tense, but translate better in the English present tense. This is the most direct sense in English. However, the meaning in Greek is likely, 'I baptize with water—but among you has been standing someone that you have not known' John 1:26. There is nothing wrong with this translation—except that it is not the most readable plain English expression. This is another subtlety of translation—it is not a violation of the temporal sense of the Greek perfect tense.

Many other alleged counterexamples are not counterexamples at all.

Examine tense and mood combinations.

Moods other than the statement mood express time differently. The order, wish, and possibility moods naturally express claims about the future.

An *order* issues at some point but expects implementation afterwards, for example, βλέπετε ἑαυτούς '(I order you now to) watch yourselves (from now on)' 2 John 1:8.

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18. Campbell, *Basics of Verbal Aspect*, p. 35, offers this example.
19. Campbell, *Basics of Verbal Aspect*, p. 36, offers this example.
20. This is another example from Campbell, *Basics of Verbal Aspect*, p. 47.

A *wish* expresses a hope at some point that fulfills afterwards, for example, *ναί, ἀδελφέ, ἐγώ σου ὀναίμην ἐν κυρίῳ* 'yes, brother, I wanted you (then) to show me some benefit (later on, when Onesimus arrives) in the lord' Philemon 1:20, *ὁ δὲ θεὸς τῆς ὑπομονῆς καὶ τῆς παρακλήσεως δώῃ ὑμῖν τὸ αὐτὸ φρονεῖν ἐν ἀλλήλοις κατὰ χριστὸν ἰησοῦν* '(I issue a wish that) the God of patience and comfort may give you (from this point forward) a common mindset with each other with respect to the messiah, Jesus' Romans 15:5, *τὸ καθ' ἡμέραν ἀνακρίνοντες τὰς γραφὰς εἰ ἔχοι ταῦτα οὕτως* 'they examined the scriptures every day to determine whether they (might actually, after more consideration in the future) contain these things' Acts 17:11.

A *possibility* makes a claim now about a future likelihood, *ἵνα ἐν αὐτῇ περιπατῆτε* '(starting now) you must live (from this point forward) by them' 2 John 1:6.

Tense in these moods relates a future event. Some other aspect distinguishes the tenses in non-statement moods. Every non-statement mood appears in the present, perfect, and aorist tenses. The wish mood also appears in the future tense.

Grammatical time involves complex situation time relationships. This is not because tense is timeless. It is because language is so varied that many complex time relationships exist.[21] Even a simple statement may relate to multiple events and the times they occur. Grammatical tense helps place those events in time.

Tense depicts more than just the relative time of events. For example, the aorist and imperfect tenses differ in continuity, and the perfect family of tenses express different relevant times. Tense can combine with non-statement moods to express aspect at a future time. Tense can express relative time and other aspects simultaneously.

Examine verbal aspect.

Verbal aspect[22] is a narrator's depiction of an action.

Aspect does not state a fact about the action—the narrator is not necessarily making a claim. Aspect communicates a *point-of-view* about an action. For example, whether an action is depicted as occurring instantly or continuously is the author's choice. It is not an assertion about reality. The elder does not claim that he was happy at only one instant, *ἐχάρην λίαν* 'it made me very happy'

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21. What if the fixed time is not the moment of production? For example, apocalyptic literature can narrate a future fixed time. Even more complex aspects of tense exist.

22. 'Verbal aspect' has become the standard name of this characteristic. It could just as well be described as point-of-view, depiction, perspective, representation, or expression. Here, it is just called 'aspect'.

2 John 1:4. He *depicts* his happiness at one instant in response to a discovery, ἐχάρην λίαν· ὅτι εὕρηκα 'it made me very happy because I discovered' 2 John 1:4. This depiction helps make his point—the discovery *causes* his sudden happiness. This choice of aspect is not a factual claim about the duration of his happiness.

Aspect can have multiple perspectives. Even the experts often confuse or conflate different types of aspect.

Aspect is not a modern invention. However, some experts have brought aspect to the foreground in grammatical studies. This has been particularly true for some who apply linguistics to biblical studies. This is a welcome clarification of the function of grammatical tense.[23]

Relative time, continuity, and relevance are kinds of aspect.

Different languages may express aspect in different ways. However, many principles apply across multiple languages. Aspect is not a single concept. There are multiple types of aspect for action words.

Some distinguish the property of time from the concept of aspect.[24] However, authors use grammatical tense to express their perspective of relative time. Therefore, time *is* a kind of aspect. Event time is *not* mutually exclusive from aspect. Actions indicate the aspect of relative time by the inflection of grammatical tense.

Examples are abundant, for example, εἰ δέ τι ἠδίκησέν σε ἢ ὀφείλει, τοῦτο ἐμοὶ ἐλλόγα 'but if he has harmed you (from wrongdoing that occurred before, in the past) in any way, or he owes you (in any outstanding account that exists now, in the present) anything, charge it to me (giving immediate permission, right now, at the present moment)' Philemon 1:18. Paul chooses tense, that is, the aorist, present, and present tenses respectively, to express the perspective of relative *time*. This is the typical and most dominant function of grammatical tense. Exceptions and special cases do not cancel or diminish this function.

Continuity is a kind of aspect.[25] *Continuity* expresses the author's perspective about whether an action is discrete or continuous. Continuity separates the aorist and imperfect tenses. However, continuity is expressed in other tenses, such as the present and future tenses.

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23. That is not to say that all conclusions about aspect are valid. But, relative time by itself does not explain all the functions of grammatical tense.

24. Porter, *Verbal Aspect*, pp. 76-83, denies that tense expresses time at all. He distinguishes relative time from grammatical tense. He claims that tense primarily expresses what he calls verbal aspect.

25. Porter, *Verbal Aspect*, pp. 83-84, treats continuity as if it is not a kind of aspect.

Relevance is a kind of aspect. *Relevance* expresses the author's perspective about *when* a prior action is under review. Relevance is characteristic of the perfect family of tenses, that is, the perfect, pluperfect, and future perfect tenses.

Again, verbal aspect is the narrator's point-of-view about an action. Following are several other types of aspect.

Examine completeness aspect.

Tense can express the aspect of completeness. *Completeness* depicts an action as a *whole* or in *part*.

A *whole* action expresses the entire action, also called *perfective*,[26] for example, πολλὰ ἔχων ὑμῖν γράφειν· οὐκ ἐβουλήθην διὰ χάρτου καὶ μέλανος 'I have many things to write to you—however, I will not use (including the entire letter production process) paper and ink' 2 John 1:12. The intentions of the elder are depicted in their entirety. Actions in the aorist tense often depict whole events.

A *partial* action expresses a limited view, also called *imperfective*, for example, οὐχ ὡς ἐντολὴν καινὴν γράφων σοι 'I am not writing (in the middle of this process) to you about a new command' 2 John 1:5. The situation time of writing is ongoing, without specifying the beginning or end. However, the author is focused on a particular period during the letter production. Actions in the present, imperfect, and future tenses often depict events partially.

Figure 114. Examine completeness.

Whole.   **Partial.**

οὐκ ἐβουλήθην
'will not use'

γράφων
'writing'

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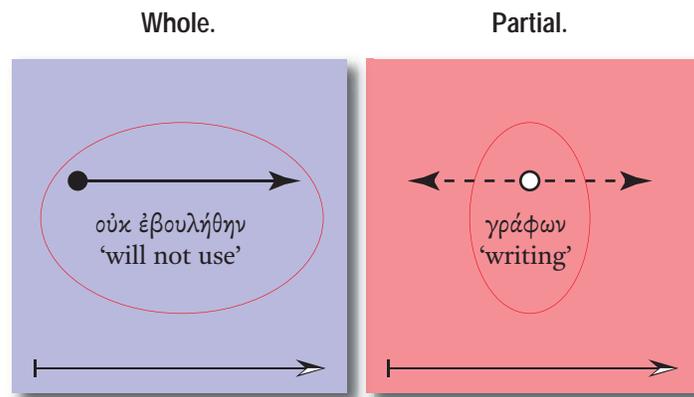
26. *Perfective* and *imperfective* are terrible names. They are too similar to existing names of tenses, that is, the perfect and imperfect tense. They are difficult to distinguish and easy to confuse. These names do not correspond well to their function. They do not help students of language understand the function of aspect. *Whole* and *part* are better descriptions. Once again, linguists should be experts communicators and ambassadors of their field. Choose clear naming conventions.

Completeness does not describe the objective nature of the action—aspect only defines how the narrator subjectively chooses to *depict* the action. It is not that the action actually occurs in whole or in part. It is that the narrator chooses to *depict* the action for his purposes of expression.

Examine scope aspect.

Tense can express the aspect of scope. *Scope* depicts an event from the *outside* or on the *inside*.

On one hand, the narrator can describe an *outside* action externally, for example, ἐντολὴν ἐλάβομεν παρὰ τοῦ πατρός '(we report that) the father gave us a command' 2 John 1:4. The narrator depicts the situation as an external reporter.

On the other hand, the narrator can describe an *inside* action internally, for example, οὓς ἐγὼ ἀγαπῶ ἐν ἀληθείᾳ 'I (myself) truly love them' 2 John 1:1. The narrator depicts this situation as an internal participant.

Figure 115. Examine scope.

Outside. **Inside.**

ἐλάβομεν
'gave'

ἀγαπῶ
'love'
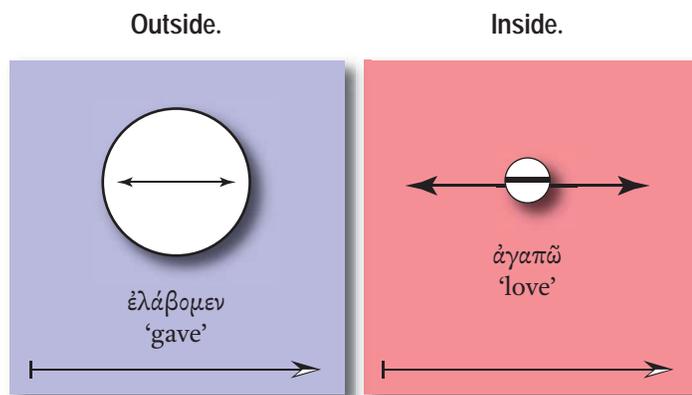
Examine proximity aspect.

Tense can express the aspect of proximity. *Proximity* depicts an event *remotely* or *closely*.

On one hand, the narrator can depict a *remote* action from far away, for example, πολλοὶ πλάνοι ἐξῆλθον εἰς τὸν κόσμον '(I heard that) many deceivers have withdrawn into the world' 2 John 1:7. Remote reporting is common in narrative.

On the other hand, the narrator can depict a *close* action as near, for example, οὐκ ἐβουλήθην διὰ χάρτου καὶ μέλανος 'I will not (personally) use paper and ink' 2 John 1:12. Close communication is common in discourse.

Completeness, scope, and proximity are similar kinds of aspect. They often occur in parallel. However, they are not the same, by definition. They do not always occur simultaneously because they are functions of context.

Figure 116. Examine proximity.

Remote.

Close.

ἐξῆλθον
'have withdrawn'

οὐκ ἐβουλήθην
'will not use'
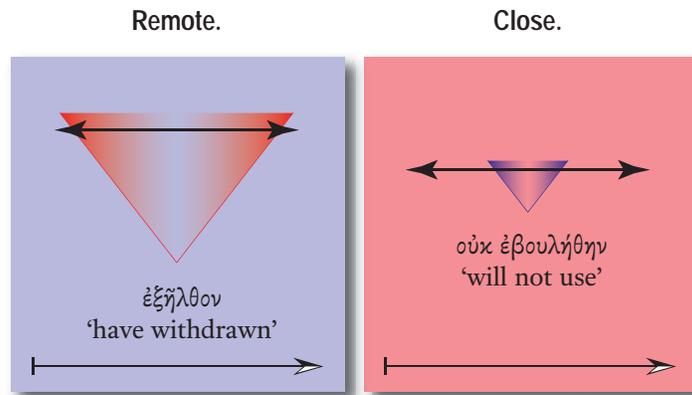
Examine focus aspect.

Tense can express the aspect of focus. *Focus* depicts an event from the *beginning*, at the *end*, or as an *ongoing* process.

The narrator may focus on the *beginning* of the process, also called *ingressive* or *inchoative*, for example, εἰ δέ τις τῶν ἰδίων καὶ μάλιστα οἰκείων οὐ προνοεῖ 'suppose a family member, especially her immediate household, refuses to take care of her (from the beginning)' 1 Timothy 5:8. Her refusal disrupts the process from the start.

The narrator may focus on the *end* of the process, also called *egressive*, for example, καὶ μὴ μένων ἐν τῇ διδαχῇ τοῦ χριστοῦ· θεὸν οὐκ ἔχει 'they do not stick to the teaching about the messiah: therefore God is not with them (any more at the end of the process)' 2 John 1:9. God withdraws at the end as a consequence of false teaching.

The narrator may depict an action as an *ongoing* process, or *progressive*, for example, ἐλπίζω γενέσθαι πρὸς ὑμᾶς 'I hope (before, now, and until I visit) to visit with you' 2 John 1:12. The elder has been hoping to visit, and will continue to hope until he actually visits.

Figure 117. Examine focus.

Beginning.	End.	Ongoing.

οὐ προνοεῖ
'refuses'

οὐκ ἔχει
'is not with'

ἐλπίζω
'hope'
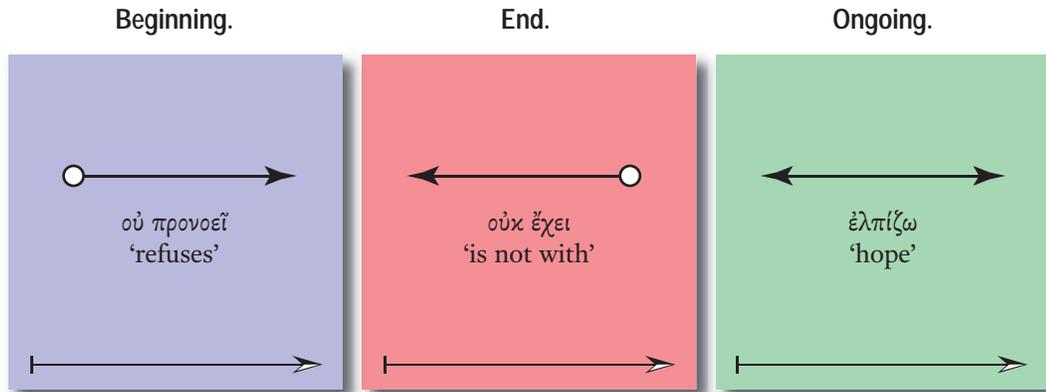
Examine frequency aspect.

Tense can express the aspect of frequency. *Frequency* depicts the number of times an event occurs.

The narrator can depict an event that occurs *once*, also called *semelfactive*, for example, ἐρωτῶ σε· ... ἵνα ἀγαπῶμεν ἀλλήλους 'I urge you (once, at this moment, right now): ... love each other' 2 John 1:5. The elder issues this command on a single occasion.

The narrator can depict a *repetitive* event that occurs multiple times, also called *iterative*, for example, προσμένει ταῖς δεήσεσιν καὶ ταῖς προσευχαῖς νυκτὸς καὶ ἡμέρας 'she asks (over and over) in prayer day and night' 1 Timothy 5:5. The widow prays multiple times on different occasions in succession.

Figure 118. Examine frequency.

Once.	Repetitive.

ἐρωτῶ
'urge'

προσμένει
'asks'
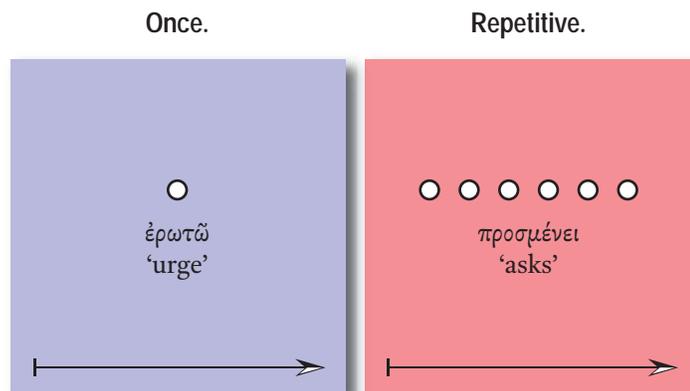
Examine boundedness aspect.

Tense can express the aspect of boundedness. *Boundedness* depicts an event with or without end boundaries.

On one hand, the narrator can depict an event with definitive beginning and end as *bounded*, for example, εὕρηκα ἐκ τῶν τέκνων σου περιπατοῦντας ἐν ἀληθείᾳ 'I discovered (in a particular case) some of your children walking in the truth' 2 John 1:4. The discovery started and concluded on some occasion.

On the other hand, the narrator can depict an event with indefinite beginning and end as *unbounded*, for example, οἱ μὴ ὁμολογοῦντες Ἰησοῦν χριστὸν ἐρχόμενον ἐν σαρκί 'they are denying (as a general practice) that Jesus the messiah physically lived' 2 John 1:7. Because the deceivers have no plans to change, their conduct continues without bound.

Figure 119. Examine boundedness.

Bounded.	Unbounded.
εὕρηκα 'discovered'	μὴ ὁμολογοῦντες 'are denying'
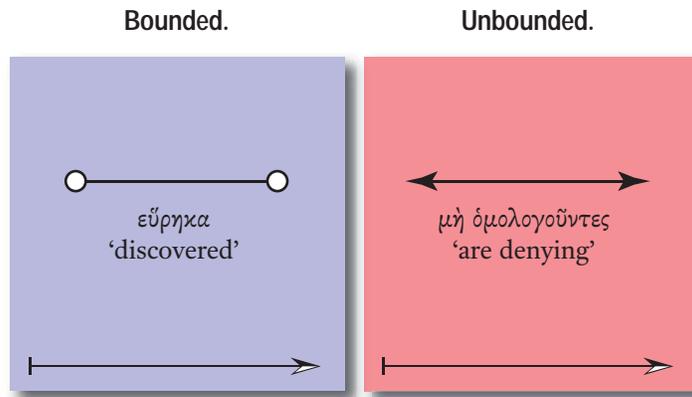
Examine habit aspect.

Tense can express the aspect of habit. *Habit* depicts an event as *permanent* or *temporary*.

The narrator may depict an event that never changes as *permanent*, for example, ἐκ τῶν τέκνων σου περιπατοῦντας ἐν ἀληθείᾳ 'your children live (on and on) in the truth' 2 John 1:4. The children behave this way in all situations.

The narrator may depict an event that might change as *temporary*, for example, ἐχάρην 'I became happy (for a period of time)' 2 John 1:4. The elder expresses his happiness only in response to this event. He is not always happy.

Figure 120. Examine habit.

Permanent.   Temporary.

περιπατοῦντας
'live'

ἐχάρην
'became happy'
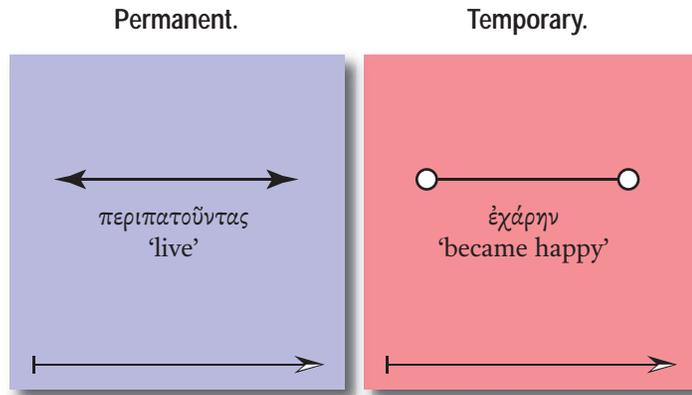
Examine emphasis aspect.

Tense can express the aspect of emphasis. *Emphasis* depicts an event with or without intensity.

The narrator can express an event that simply occurs as *ordinary*, for example, ἐλπίζω γενέσθαι πρὸς ὑμᾶς 'I hope (non-emphatically) to visit with you' 2 John 1:12. The elder expresses a typical level of hope. There is no indication of vividness.

The narrator can express an event that occurs with extraordinary emphasis as *intense*, for example, οὓς ἐγὼ ἀγαπῶ ἐν ἀληθείᾳ 'I (strongly) love them truly' 2 John 1:1, or, ἐχάρην λίαν 'it made me very happy' 2 John 1:4. The author expresses a heightened and more emotive type of love and happiness. He emphasizes these actions to draw attention to his earnestness.

Figure 121. Examine emphasis.

Ordinary.   **Intense.**

ἐλπίζω
'hope'

ἐγὼ ἀγαπῶ
'I *love*'
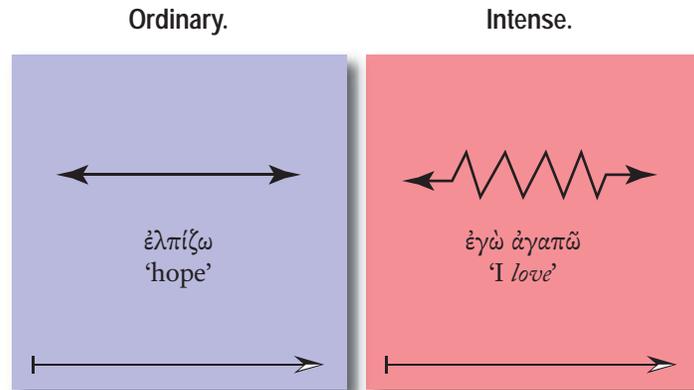
Examine identity aspect.

Tense can express the aspect of identity. *Identity* depicts an event as an *equation* or as a *declaration*.

An *equation* expresses sameness between a subject and a predicate, for example, αὕτη ἐστὶν ἡ ἀγάπη 'this is (equal to) love' 2 John 1:6. This aspect typically occurs with action words that indicate existence, for example, εἶναι 'be', γίνεσθαι 'become', and ὑπάρχειν 'exist'.

The narrator can express an action simply as a *declaration*, for example, ἀσπάζεταί σε τὰ τέκνα 'your children (engage in the behavior to) greet you' 2 John 1:13. The greeting is an event, not an equation of identities.

Figure 122. Examine identity.

Equation.   **Declaration.**

A = B.

ἐστὶν
'is'

A.

ἀσπάζεταί
'greet'
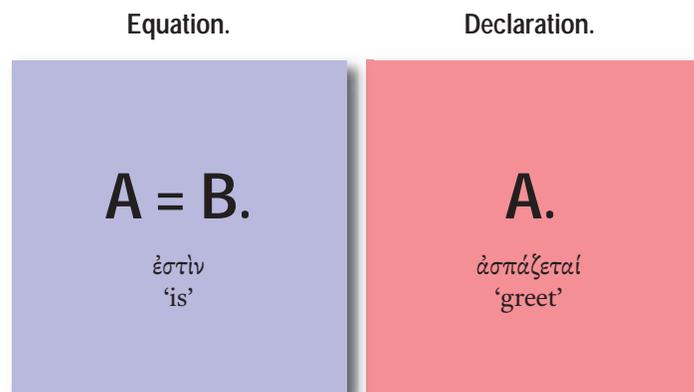
Examine principle aspect.

Tense can express the aspect of principle. *Principle*, also called a *gnomic*, depicts an event either as a universal or plain statement.

A narrator can make an ordinary statement a *plain* principle, for example, τις ἔρχεται πρὸς ὑμᾶς 'someone comes (in the normal sense) to you' 2 John 1:10. The author expresses relative time in the plain sense of the present tense.

A narrator can state a wise proverb or general truth as a *universal* principle, for example, ἀγαπῶμεν ἀλλήλους 'love each other (which is a principle for all times)' 2 John 1:5. This sentence is not just an ordinary statement—the author expresses a universal truth valid at all times. This sentence is packaged with a possibility mood, present tense action. However, the author indicates that the claim was true, is true, and will be true forever.

Figure 123. Examine principle.

Plain.   **Universal.**

ἔρχεται   ἀγαπῶμεν
'comes'   'love'
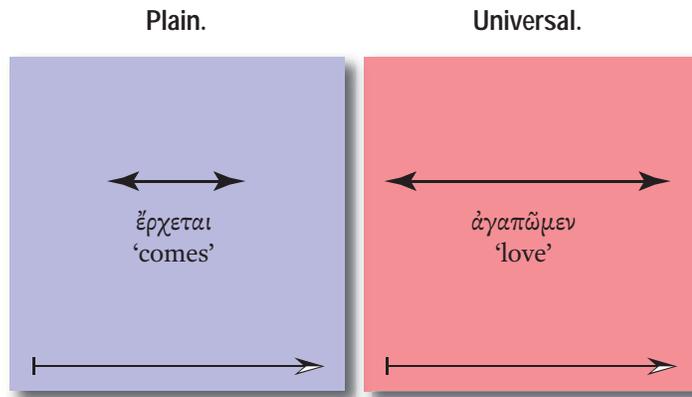
Aspect types may overlap.

There may be other types of aspect. The large number of possibilities explains why it is difficult to identify aspect. There is not just one kind.[27]

Different aspect types may overlap. They overlap in different ways and for different reasons in different examples. This overlap also explains why it is difficult to identify aspect.

Many experts discuss aspect as if it is a single concept. They may provide multiple overlapping but competing definitions. Different experts may use dif-

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27. Campbell, *Basics of Verbal Aspect*, p. 32, suggests that the number of kinds of aspect is unknown. He suggests there could be as many as four types. There are far more than four different kinds of aspect. This is because the nuances of language are subtle and multiple. Language comes from highly complex and creative intellect—that of humans. The diversity of human communication is virtually limitless.

ferent definitions from each other, then speak about them as if they are talking about the same thing. Experts may switch between different definitions in the same discussion without acknowledging the different types of aspect.

Some invent illegitimate competitions between aspect types. For example, relative time aspect and completeness aspect can coexist within the same instance of an action, for example, ἐχάρην λίαν 'it made me very happy' 2 John 1:4. The elder expresses a *declaration* about his *complete* happiness in the relative *past* time from a *close* perspective as a *temporary* event. Grammatical tense may express rich perspectives.

However, grammatical tense still primarily expresses *when* the action occurs.

Different elements may express aspect.

Greek lacks formal structures that objectively identify aspect. Aspect exists in the mind of the author. He intends to transfer it into the mind of the beholder. Aspect is not part of the inflection of the action. Every action inflects grammatical *tense*. The interpreter must infer aspect from the tense and other elements. Those elements include grammatical tense, qualifying words and phrases, the semantic range of the word, and the broader context.

Grammatical tense expresses aspect. Every action has a tense. The grammatical tense of every action is determined absolutely and solely by inflection, for example, εὕρηκα 'I have found' 2 John 1:4 inflects the perfect tense of εὑρίσκειν 'find'. An action may not cancel grammatical tense. Every action inflects exactly one tense, without exception.

A *qualifying word* or *phrase* can express aspect. A possessive qualifier clause can depict iteration, for example, προσμένει ταῖς δεήσεσιν καὶ ταῖς προσευχαῖς νυκτὸς καὶ ἡμέρας 'she asks in prayer day and night' 1 Timothy 5:5. A prepositional clause can clarify the relative time, for example, καὶ μεθ' ἡμῶν ἔσται εἰς τὸν αἰῶνα 'it belongs (in the future) to us forever' 2 John 1:2. A qualifier can suggest intensity, for example, ἐχάρην λίαν 'it made me very happy' 2 John 1:4, or relative time, for example, καὶ νῦν ἐρωτῶ σε 'I urge you (right now)' 2 John 1:5.

The *semantic range* of a word can express aspect.

Actions of existence often describe a state of equality instead of an event, for example, ἡ χαρὰ ἡμῶν ᾖ πεπληρωμένη 'we can become completely happy' 2 John 1:12.

τύπτω 'I strike' would tend to be momentary, for example, καὶ ἄρξηται τύπτειν τοὺς συνδούλους αὐτοῦ 'he started to beat the other slaves' Matthew 24:49, while

ἀγάπω 'I love' can be continuous 'οὓς ἐγὼ ἀγαπῶ ἐν ἀληθείᾳ' I truly love you all' 2 John 1:1.

Some words necessarily reference other actions that occur later, like planning, hoping, and promising. For example, ὑμῖν γράφειν οὐκ ἐβουλήθην 'I do not (now) intend to write to you (in the future)' 2 John 1:12, ἀλλὰ ἐλπίζω γενέσθαι πρὸς ὑμᾶς '(now) I hope to visit you (later on)' 2 John 1:12, καὶ αὕτη ἐστὶν ἡ ἐπαγγελία ἣν αὐτὸς ἐπηγγείλατο ἡμῖν 'this is the promise which he (then) promised (to give) to you (later on)' 1 John 2:25, καὶ ἐπηγγείλατο δοῦναι αὐτῷ '(then) he promised to give it to him (afterwards)' Acts 7:5.

The situation *context* can express aspect. There is nothing about λέγειν 'speak' that requires the action to be continuous or momentary. However, when the narrator issues a prohibition, speaking a greeting is depicted discretely, not continuously, χαίρειν αὐτῷ μὴ λέγετε 'do not speak (at any moment) a greeting to him' 2 John 1:10.

A sentence indicates the aspect of time as a consequence of all of these elements. This includes the inflected tense because tense fundamentally indicates relative time. It is not because other elements indicate relative time separate from a timeless tense.[28] The different elements express relative time collectively, not separately. The other elements provide support and clarity to the relative time expressed by the inflection of tense.

Multiple elements express aspect.

Even some experts confuse grammar, qualifiers, semantics, and context. Some argue that *only* grammatical tense can express aspect. Grammar, qualifiers, semantics, and context do not independently determine aspect. They do so collectively.[29]

Some types of aspect may be similar, and even difficult to distinguish on a case-by-case basis. However, different kinds of aspect are not the same.[30] Any of these points-of-view can operate separately, together, or not at all in the imple-

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28. Against Porter, *Verbal Aspect*, pp. 81-83.

29. This agrees with McKay, "Time and Aspect," pp. 227-228.

30. Some views of aspect are overly complex because they conflate distinct types of aspect. For example, one definition is, "Greek verbal aspect is a synthetic semantic category (realized in the form of verbs) used of meaningful oppositions in a network of tense systems to grammaticalize the author's reasoned subjective choice of conception of a process." Porter, *Verbal Aspect*, p. 88. This definition has multiple levels of dependent clauses, parenthetic clauses, multiple modifiers and qualifiers, and multiple prepositional clauses. Porter may fail to distinguish different kinds of aspect because he lost the forest among the trees.

Aspect is a simple concept: Aspect is a narrator's *depiction* of an action.

mentation of different actions. Aspect does not express a *single* characteristic, but a *group* of characteristics.[31]

Some argue that an author's choice of tense fundamentally assigns aspect, but not the aspect of time.[32] Some claim that tense *only* qualifies the closeness of the author to the action. Each of these claims is suspect.

Avoid false distinctions between semantics and pragmatics.

Some linguists make false distinctions between semantics[33] and pragmatics. They claim that aspect is genetically embedded into the word.

> *Semantics* refers to the values that are encoded in the verbal form. These values are unchanging. ... *Pragmatics* refers to the expression of values in context and in combination with other factors. ... Pragmatic values can change from context to context. ... Aspect is a semantic value. ... *Aktionsart*, on the other hand, is a pragmatic value.[34]

Grammatical tense is an objective, unchangeable property of an action instance. Any given action form has one and only one tense. Thus tense is an example of this definition of semantics. Tense is a value encoded into the word by inflection. So, grammatical tense is a semantic value by this definition. Verbal aspect is not.

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31. Porter defines verbal aspect only within certain spheres: completeness, scope, and proximity, *Verbal Aspect*, p. 91. He mixes them as if they are one, which they are not. He ignores the other kinds of aspect, as if they do not exist. He treats aspect as if it has *one* kind, winner take all.

32. "I do not believe that the verbal endings convey temporal reference," Porter, *Linguistic Analysis of the Greek New Testament*, p. 178. "In Greek a verb tense-form expresses primarily the grammatical meaning of *aspect*; it is not synonymous with nor primarily focused on where a situation is located in time," Decker, *Reading Koine Greek*, p. 222. "Greek verbs grammaticalize aspect, rather than time (past, present, future) or *Aktionsart* (kind of action, or how the action actually takes place, e.g., punctiliar, durative)," Matthewson, *Verbal Aspect in the Book of Revelation*, pp. 16-17. "Greek does not express time by the form ('tense') of the verb, so the sentence may be considered tenseless grammatically," Decker, "Verbal Aspect in Recent Debate," p. 3. "Verbs are not primarily concerned with time or with objectified action, but with a subjective perspective on action," Porter, "The Greek Language of the New Testament," p. 117. "It is true, as now certainly appears to be the case, that the inflexions of the ancient Greek verb signal aspect (as well as voice and mood) but not time," McKay, "Time and Aspect in New Testament Greek," p. 209. "In Greek the sentence is tenseless, while the proposition is tensed," Porter, *Verbal Aspect*, p. 83.

   Campbell is uncommitted: "The issue of whether or not Greek verbs are tenses remains unresolved," *Basics of Verbal Aspect*, p. 32. Campbell correctly understands that "aspect and tense happily coexist," *Advances in the Study of Greek*, p. 109. He fails to recognize that time is itself one of many kinds of aspect, but he is on the right track.

33. This is a special, atypical use of the word 'semantics'. Semantics normally refers to the meaning associated with a word. It is an unfortunate and unhelpful use of the word.

34. Campbell, *Basics of Verbal Aspect*, pp. 22-24.

Some even suggest that semantics refers to *meaning* inherently contained within a word.[35] There is no meaning within a word apart from context.[36] Without context, a word is just a meaningless sequence of symbols, sounds, or letters. Aspect is not a semantic value. It is inferred—it does not follow from morphology. Advocates for the 'semantic' value of aspect make a stronger case than the evidence allows. They should retract the claim. This distinction between semantics and pragmatics falls apart on careful inspection.

The meaning of a word is determined by many considerations: morphology, the semantic range of the word elsewhere, the syntactic context, figures of speech, historical context, and many other factors. All these factors are functions of context. They are not contained interior to the word separate from context. Even morphology expresses meaning from exterior context—other similar morphologies of the same word establish the function of form.

All aspects, including time, scope, and continuity, are subjective properties. The hearer must infer aspect from context. The intended aspect of a tense form is correctly determined only by subjectively evaluating the intent of the author. Aspect is not an absolute property of tense. So, aspect is not an example of this definition of semantics.[37]

Examine ancient grammarians on tense.

Ancient linguists comment on grammatical tense. Just as with modern linguists, some ancient claims are legitimate, and others are illegitimate. However, these grammarians are ancient Greek native speakers. They taught and wrote about grammar contemporary to the Hellenistic Greek period. They explain tense from the perspective of an insider.

Aristotle claims that tense expresses time.

Aristotle was a student of Plato, a Greek philosopher, and a scientist during the fourth century BC. He was the tutor of the conquering Macedonian king,

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35. "Semantics refers to the a-contextual meaning, that is, a tense-form's meaning apart from a specific context," Naselli, "A Brief Introduction to Verbal Aspect," p. 18-19. Compare Decker, "Verbal Aspect in Recent Debate," p. 2, note 8, p. 3. "The root fallacy is a matter of pragmatic not semantic definition," p. 12. No—the root fallacy is assigning meaning to a word apart from context, as if a word 'contains' meaning in-and-of-and-by itself. That is exactly what some claim about verbal aspect, that it is an objective property of grammar, and not a subjective function of application. Tense is grammatical. Aspect is matter of application, including the aspect of time and all other aspects.

36. Silva, *Biblical Words and Their Meanings*, pp. 103-108, explains why words do not contain inherent meaning apart from context. This claim has been so thoroughly debunked that it is surprising to find linguists still making the claim. This betrays a prejudice against evidence. It appears that Campbell has decided in advance that tense does not express time, and makes the facts conform to this thesis.

37. There are no unchangeable properties of semantics. Meaning is necessarily changeable. Porter, *Verbal Aspect*, pp. 14-16, seems to make the same mistake in his understanding of aspect as an unchangeable property of tense.

Alexander III, the so-called Alexander the Great. His work *On Interpretation*[38] deals with the relationships between language and logic. As a native Greek speaker, he asserts that tense expresses situation time. This lies at the heart of his argument about tense choice, ῥῆμα δέ ἐστι τὸ προσσημαῖνον χρόνον· οὗ μέρος οὐδὲν σημαίνει χωρίς 'an action word expresses time—there is no example that fails to do so'. This is a forceful and accurate claim.

Aristotle gives an example, τὸ δὲ ὑγιαίνει ῥῆμα· προσσημαίνει γὰρ τὸ νῦν ὑπάρχειν 'the word ὑγιαίνει, he is healthy, is an action that indicates that the situation occurs *right now*' (emphasis added). ὑγιαίνει 'he is healthy' inflects in the present tense. Aristotle uses a *temporal* qualifier to describe the function of the present tense. To Aristotle, relative *time* is the primary function of tense. He asserts that the tense system varies from a default form, that is, the present tense.

Aristotle mentions another kind of aspect. What he calls ἀόριστον 'indefinite' is the aspect named *continuity* in this commentary.

ῥῆμα δέ ἐστι τὸ προσσημαῖνον χρόνον· οὗ μέρος οὐδὲν σημαίνει χωρίς. καὶ ἔστιν ἀεὶ τῶν καθ' ἑτέρου λεγομένων σημεῖον.	An action word expresses time. There is no example that fails to do so. An action always references some other named thing.
λέγω δ' ὅτι προσσημαίνει χρόνον, οἷον ὑγίεια μὲν ὄνομα, τὸ δὲ ὑγιαίνει ῥῆμα· προσσημαίνει γὰρ τὸ νῦν ὑπάρχειν.	By saying, προσσημαίνει χρόνον 'it indicates time', I distinguish between a thing, ὑγίεια 'health', and the action, ὑγιαίνει 'he is healthy'. The action indicates that the situation occurs right now.
καὶ ἀεὶ τῶν καθ' ἑτέρου λεγομένων σημεῖόν ἐστιν, οἷον τῶν καθ' ὑποκειμένου ὑποκειμένου ἢ ἐν ὑποκειμένωι.	An action always references some other named thing, for example, something related to the subject, the subject itself, or something inside the subject.

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38. Aristotle, περὶ ἑρμηνείας, *On Interpretation*, 3. The translation is by the author.

τὸ δὲ οὐχ ὑγιαίνει καὶ τὸ οὐ κάμνει οὐ ῥῆμα λέγωο προσσημαίνει μὲν γὰρ χρόνον καὶ ἀεὶ κατά τινος ὑπάρχει.

I am not saying that the expressions οὐχ ὑγιαίνει 'he is not healthy' or οὐ κάμνει 'he is not sick' are simply behaviors. They always depict a time and reference a subject.

τῆι δὲ διαφορᾶι ὄνομα οὐ κεῖται· ἀλλ' ἔστω ἀόριστον ῥῆμα, ὅτι ὁμοίως ἐφ' ὁτουοῦν ὑπάρχει, καὶ ὄντος καὶ μὴ ὄντος.

There is no special name for a type, so let it be an ἀόριστον 'indefinite' action. It occurs at any time equally. It can occur at a particular time or not.

ὁμοίως δὲ καὶ τὸ ὑγίανεν ἢ τὸ ὑγιανεῖ οὐ ῥῆμα, ἀλλὰ πτῶσις ῥήματος· διαφέρει δὲ τοῦ ῥήματος, ὅτι τὸ μὲν τὸν παρόντα προσσημαίνει χρόνον, τὰ δὲ τὸν πέριξ.

The same applies to the actions ὑγίανεν 'he was healthy' or ὑγιανεῖ 'he will be healthy'— they are not default action forms. They vary from the default form. The default action expresses παρόντα 'present' time. The others express πέριξ 'another' time.

Aristotle wrote *On Poetics*[39] to define and describe the characteristics of dramatic literature. Along the way, he discusses the components of language. Both things and action words inflect. One difference between them is that action words express time, ῥῆμα δὲ φωνὴ συνθετὴ σημαντικὴ μετὰ χρόνου 'an action is a group of sounds that indicates *time*' (emphasis added), while things do not, ὄνομα δέ ... ἄνευ χρόνου 'a thing ... does not indicate time'.

Again, Aristotle gives examples to illustrate his point. An action in the present tense βαδίζει 'he is walking' expresses present time. An action in the perfect tense βεβάδικεν 'he has been walking' expresses past time. Aristotle claims that grammatical tense necessarily indicates the *time* the action occurs.

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39. Aristotle, περὶ ποιητικῆς, *On Poetics*, 1457a. The translation is by the author.

ὄνομα δέ ἐστι φωνὴ συνθετὴ
σημαντικὴ ἄνευ χρόνου ἧς μέρος
οὐδέν ἐστι καθ᾽ αὐτὸ σημαντικόν·
ἐν γὰρ τοῖς διπλοῖς οὐ χρώμεθα
ὡς καὶ αὐτὸ καθ᾽ αὐτὸ σημαῖνον,
οἷον ἐν τῷ θεόδωρος τὸ δῶρος οὐ
σημαίνει.

A thing is a group of sounds that does *not* indicate time. None of them individually means anything. We do not use compound sounds as if some subgroup means something by itself. For example, δῶρος 'gift' has no special meaning in the name θεόδωρος 'Theodore'.

ῥῆμα δὲ φωνὴ συνθετὴ σημαντικὴ
μετὰ χρόνου ἧς οὐδὲν μέρος
σημαίνει καθ᾽ αὐτό, ὥσπερ καὶ
ἐπὶ τῶν ὀνομάτων· τὸ μὲν γὰρ
ἄνθρωπος ἢ λευκόν οὐ σημαίνει τὸ
πότε, τὸ δὲ βαδίζει ἢ βεβάδικεν
προσσημαίνει τὸ μὲν τὸν παρόντα
χρόνον τὸ δὲ τὸν παρεληλυθότα.

An action is a group of sounds that *does* indicate time. None of them individually indicates anything, just like with things. The things ἄνθρωπος 'man' or λευκόν 'white' do not indicate *when*. However, the action βαδίζει 'he is walking' indicates a time in the present. βεβάδικεν 'he has been walking' indicates a time in the past.

Dionysius Thrax claims that tense expresses time.

Dionysius Thrax lived in Alexandria, Egypt. He studied under Aristarchus of Samothrace, the director of the great library of Alexandria. During the second century BC, Dionysius wrote *The Art of Language*.[40] *The Art of Language* evaluates proper composition by understanding the characteristics of the parts of speech.

Dionysius addresses action inflection: Tense expresses *time*. This is not to deny that Greek actions might represent other characteristics to native speakers. However, Dionysius presumes that tense inflection indicates *when* the action occurs, that is, χρόνοι τρεῖς· ἐνεστώς, παρεληλυθώς, μέλλων 'there are three times: present, past, future'.[41]

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40. Dionysius Thrax, τέχνη γραμματική, *The Art of Language*. The Greek text is online at http://www.hs-augsburg.de/~harsch/ graeca/Chronologia/S_ante02/DionysiosThrax/dio_tech.html#13. The translation is by the author. This is not the occasion to discuss possible pseudipigraphical origins. Regardless, *The Art of Language* discusses Greek grammar contemporary to the Hellenistic period.

41. Porter, *Verbal Aspect*, pp. 19-20, exploits ambiguities in *The Art of Language*. These objections could be answered here. But this is unnecessary and off-topic. One thing is clear: Dionysius thinks that actions fundamentally inflect *time*, not some other aspect.

ῥῆμά ἐστι λέξις ἄπτωτος. ἐπιδεκτικὴ χρόνων τε καὶ προσώπων καὶ ἀριθμῶν. ἐνέργειαν ἢ πάθος παριστᾶσα.

An action does not inflect the grammatical role. It can inflect tense, person, number. It can represent both passive and active agency.

παρέπεται δὲ τῶι ῥήματι ὀκτώ· ἐγκλίσεις, διαθέσεις, εἴδη, σχήματα, ἀριθμοί, πρόσωπα, χρόνοι, συζυγίαι.

An action has eight characteristics: mood, agency, origin, composition, number, person, time, relation.

ἐγκλίσεις μὲν οὖν εἰσι πέντε· ὁριστική, προστακτική, εὐκτική, ὑποτακτική, ἀπαρέμφατος.

There are five moods: statement, order, wish, possibility, impersonal.

διαθέσεις εἰσὶ τρεῖς· ἐνέργεια, πάθος, μεσότης. ἐνέργεια μὲν οἷον τύπτω. πάθος δὲ οἷον τύπτομαι. μεσότης δὲ ἡ ποτὲ μὲν ἐνέργειαν ποτὲ δὲ πάθος παριστᾶσα. οἷον πέπηγα διέφθορα ἐποιησάμην ἐγραψάμην.

There are three agencies: active, passive, middle. An active example is τύπτω 'I hit'. A passive example is τύπτομαι 'I was hit'. The middle can sometimes represent active and sometimes passive, for example, πέπηγα 'I have solidified', διέφθορα 'I have been ruined', ἐποιησάμην 'I made for myself', ἐγραψάμην 'I took notes'.

εἴδη δὲ δύο· πρωτότυπον καὶ παράγωγον. πρωτότυπον μὲν οἷον ἄρδω. παράγωγον δὲ οἷον ἀρδεύω.

There are two origins: basic, derivative. A basic example is ἄρδω 'I water'. A derivative example is ἀρδεύω 'I water crops'.

σχήματα τρία· ἁπλοῦν, σύνθετον, παρασύνθετον. ἁπλοῦν μὲν οἷον φρονῶ. σύνθετον δὲ οἷον καταφρονῶ. παρασύνθετον δὲ οἷον ἀντιγονίζω φιλιππίζω.

There are three compositions: plain, compound, relation. A plain example is φρονῶ 'I think'. A compound example is καταφρονῶ 'I condescend'. Relation examples are ἀντιγονίζω 'I ally with Antigonus' or φιλιππίζω 'I ally with Philip'.

ἀριθμοὶ τρεῖς· ἑνικός, δυϊκός, πληθυντικός. ἑνικὸς μὲν οἷον τύπτω. δυϊκὸς δὲ οἷον τύπτετον. πληθυντικὸς δὲ οἷον τύπτομεν.

There are three numbers: single, double, multiple. A single example is τύπτω 'I hit'. A double example is τύπτετον 'both hit'. A multiple example is τύπτομεν 'we hit'.

πρώσοπα τρία· πρῶτον, δεύτερον, τρίτον. πρῶτον μὲν ἀφ' οὗ ὁ λόγος. δεύτερον δὲ πρὸς ὃν ὁ λόγος. τρίτον δὲ περὶ οὗ ὁ λόγος.

There are three persons: first, second, third. The first person is the narrator. The second person is the recipient. The third person is some other party under discussion.

χρόνοι τρεῖς· ἐνεστώς, παρεληλυθώς, μέλλων. τούτων ὁ παρεληλυθὼς ἔχει διαφορὰς τέσσαρας· παρατατικόν, παρακείμενον, ὑπερσυντέλικον, ἀόριστον.

There are three times: present, past, future. The past has four variations, including imperfect, perfect, pluperfect, aorist.

ὧν συγγένεια τρεῖς· ἐνεστῶτος πρὸς παρατατικόν, παρακειμένου πρὸς ὑπερσυντέλικον, ἀορίστου πρὸς μέλλοντα.

Tense has three relations: present to imperfect, perfect to pluperfect, aorist to future.

Dionysius of Halicarnassus uses tense as time.

Dionysius of Halicarnassus was a Greek historian and linguist. He came to Rome as an instructor of rhetoric after the Roman civil wars of the first century BC.

The Arrangement of Words[42] is a tutorial on how best to organize words in composition. He discusses how to choose the best words by their inflection. Dionysius calls tense inflection χρόνων 'times'. This corroborates that grammatical tense expresses time according to Dionysius.

ἐπὶ δὲ τῶν ῥημάτων, πότερα κρείττω λαμβανόμενα ἔσται, τὰ ὀρθὰ ἢ τὰ ὕπτια.	Regarding action words, it might be better to choose either the active or passive agency.
καὶ κατὰ ποίας ἐγκλίσεις ἐκφερόμενα. ἃς δή τινες πτώσεις ῥηματικὰς καλοῦσι, κρατίστην ἕδραν λήψεται.	There might be a preference to use a particular mood. So, some particular inflectional form is selected to provide the best setting.
καὶ ποίας παρεμφαίνοντα διαφορὰς χρόνων.	It may indicate the different χρόνων 'times'.
καὶ εἴ τινα τοῖς ῥήμασιν.	The other action characteristics follow similarly.

Apollonius Dyscolus claims that tense expresses time.

Apollonius Dyscolus lived in Alexandria, Egypt during the second century AD. His works on grammar and syntax are detailed and extensive. He addresses tense inflection in his discussion of qualifiers.

Apollonius is a native Greek writer, speaker, and grammatical analyst. All the qualifiers that define time are temporal. They correlate to the relative time typical of the different tenses. Apollonius suggests that action inflection may identify other kinds of aspect. However, it is impossible that he believes tense is independent of time. The following citation is from *On Adverbs*.[43]

τὰ χρονικὰ ἐπιρρήματα συμφωνοῦσαν τοῖς τοῦ ῥήματος χρόνοις ποιεῖται σύνταξιν.	Time qualifiers agree grammatically with action tense.

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42. διονύσιος ἀλεξάνδρου ἁλικαρνᾶσσεύς, περὶ συνθέσεως ὀνομάτων, Dionysius of Halicarnassus, *The Arrangement of Words*, Chapter 6. The translation is by the author.

43. ἀπολλονιου ἀλεξανδριως, περι ἐπιρρημάτων, Apollonius Dyscolus, *On Adverbs*, 19. The translation is by the author.

οἷον τὸ ἐχθές παρῳχημένῳ συντετάξεται, ἐχθὲς ἔγραφον, ἐχθὲς ἔγραψα.

For example, τὸ ἐχθές 'yesterday' combines with the past tense, ἐχθὲς ἔγραφον 'yesterday, I was writing', or, ἐχθὲς ἔγραψα 'I wrote yesterday'.

τὸ γὰρ αὔριον ἀντικείμενον τῷ παρῳχημένῳ, οὐ συντετάξεται ἢ πάλιν τοῖς ὁμολογοῦσι τὸ μὴ παρῳχῆσθαι, αὔριον γράφω, αὔριον γράψω, αὔριον ἀναγινώσκω.

However, τὸ αὔριον 'tomorrow' is incompatible with the past tense. They do not agree. Yet, non-past qualifiers are compatible with certain tenses, αὔριον γράφω 'I am writing tomorrow', αὔριον γράψω 'I will write tomorrow', αὔριον ἀναγινώσκω 'I am reading tomorrow'.

τὰ μέντοι οὐ διορίζοντα τὸν χρόνον, κοινὴν δὲ παράτασιν δηλοῦντα τοῦ παντὸς χρόνου, συμπαραλαμβάνεται κατὰ πάντα χρόνον, ὡς ἔχει τὸ νῦν ἐφρόνησα, νῦν φρονῶ, νῦν φρονήσω· ἤδη ἔγραψα, ἤδη γράφω, ἤδη γράψω. ὁ αὐτὸς λόγος συντεινέτω ἐπὶ πάντων τῶν τοιούτων.

However, some qualifiers do not require a particular tense. They each cooperate with any tense, for example, τὸ νῦν ἐφρόνησα 'I thought now', νῦν φρονῶ 'I am thinking now', νῦν φρονήσω 'I will think now', or, ἤδη ἔγραψα 'I wrote already', ἤδη γράφω 'I am writing already', ἤδη γράψω 'I will write already'. There are other words that work like this.

Longinus claims that tense expresses time.

Longinus produced a work *On the Sublime*[44] sometime between the first and third century AD. This work discusses the characteristics of high quality writing. The exact identity of Longinus is uncertain.

Longinus discusses the use of the historic present. In a narrative in the παρεληλυθότα 'past', the author may switch from a past tense πεπτωκὼς 'he has

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44. Longinus, *On the Sublime*, 25. The translation is by the author.

fallen' to a present tense παίει 'he thrusts'.[45] This depicts the narrative as if it occurs as a ἐναγώνιον πρᾶγμα 'current expression'.

Longinus understands that a narrative naturally occurs at a prior *time*. However, the author switches to the present tense to make the event more vivid. Longinus understands that grammatical tense expresses *time*.

ὅταν γε μὴν τὰ παρεληλυθότα τοῖς χρόνοις εἰσάγῃς ὡς γινόμενα καὶ παρόντα, οὐ διήγησιν ἔτι τὸν λόγον, ἀλλ ἐναγώνιον πρᾶγμα ποιήσεις.	When you present matters from the past as if they are occurring in the present, it will no longer function as a narrative. Instead, you express it as if it is a current expression.
πεπτωκὼς δέ τις, φησὶν ὁ ξενοφῶν, ὑπὸ τῷ κύρου ἵππῳ καὶ πατούμενος παίει τῇ μαχαίρᾳ εἰς τὴν γαστέρα τὸν ἵππον· ὁ δὲ σφαδάζων ἀποσείεται τὸν κῦρον, ὁ δὲ πίπτει.	"He has fallen," says Xenophon, "under the horse of Cyrus. When the horse steps on him, he thrusts his sword into the horse's belly. While the horse bucks, he throws Cyrus. Then he falls."
τοιοῦτος ἐν τοῖς πλείστοις ὁ θουκυδίδης.	This type of expression occurs frequently in Thucydides.

Byzantine grammarians claim that tense expresses time.

Stephen of Alexandria, *Commentary on Aristotle*, comments on Stoic grammarians in the seventh century AD.[46]

Manuel-Maximus Planudes wrote a Greek grammar in the thirteenth century AD, *The Dialogue*.[47]

The Byzantine grammarians reflect on earlier Stoic grammars. It is difficult to develop a robust Stoic grammatical system because their works no longer exist.[48]

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45. Longinus gives this example of the historic present from Xenophon, *Cyropaedia*, 7.1.37. Longinus suggests that the historic present is common in Thucydides. Many modern experts also discuss this phenomenon, for example, George, "The Temporal Characteristics of the Historical Present in Thucydides."

46. See the text and translation in Robins, *The Byzantine Grammarians*, pp. 229-230.

47. See the text and translation in Robins, *The Byzantine Grammarians*, pp. 230-231.

48. This diminishes Porter's attempt, *Verbal Aspect*, pp. 20-22, to reconstruct the Stoic system in support of his view of verbal aspect.

Ancient grammarians claim that tense expresses time.

The perspective of ancient Greek grammarians is that tense inflection expresses relative event time.[49] A broad range of ancient linguists indicate this independently. The contemporary native Greek-speaking experts say far less to support other views of verbal aspect.

This is a powerful indication that grammatical tense inflection *primarily* expresses the situation time. This creates suspicion about the claim that tense principally expresses some *other* type of verbal aspect. It makes it difficult to claim that tense is *independent* of time.

Never use superlatives.[50]

Tense is not absolute. Neither is aspect. With language, little is absolute. This does not mean that paradigms are useless. Experts should just tread carefully with absolute statements.

Aspect is one element expressing the authorial intent of grammatical actions. For example, the perfect family of tenses express relevance and the aorist tense depicts discrete continuity. However, grammatical tense first and primarily expresses the aspect of time.[51]

Only a few experts in biblical studies claim that tense never depicts time at all. They misuse or misunderstand the work of other linguists.[52] For the most part, the extremists about aspect are not primarily linguists, but experts in biblical literature who use linguistics.

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49. This opposes the claim made by Porter that "this debate began with the Greeks themselves," *Verbal Aspect*, p. 17. There is no such debate about aspect among the ancient grammarians. Porter admits that "Dionysius's scheme is clearly temporally oriented," *Verbal Aspect*, p. 20. The Byzantine grammarians do not deny that grammatical tense expresses time. See Robins, *The Byzantine Grammarians*, pp. 227-233.

50. This is a deliberate oxymoron.

51. Remember, placing an event in relative time is as much a kind of aspect as any other.

52. Some suggest that they completely misread or misunderstand earlier studies. See Runge, "Contrastive Substitution and the Greek Verb."

Most linguists do not claim that aspect cancels the function of time in the Greek action word.[53] They treat other types of aspect as supplemental to the aspect of time.

Attempts to absolutely systematize language typically fail. Systems are still useful to describe tendencies, but they usually are not absolutes. Not only can tense indicate relative time—it usually does.

Who gets to decide what something means?

Grammarians and linguists cannot *assign* meaning to texts.[54] Only the speaker or writer is capable of *controlling* intent when he produces a linguistic composition.[55] Grammarians can only try to *discover* the intent of the author. Claims about intent must follow from the evidence.

Just because a system is consistent, or that it eliminates the most anomalies, does not determine that the system is valid. A grammatical system is valid because it accurately reflects the intent of the author, not because it is internally consistent.[56] Aspect does not trump time in grammatical tense, according to the ancient grammarians, according to most people who use tense, according to modern experts in linguistics, and according to me when I read and use language.

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53. This is certainly the perspective of some key linguists. For example, Comrie, "The basis of the discussion in the body of this book is that tense is grammaticalised expression of location in time," *Tense*, p. 9, compare pp. 9-13, 36-55. "Primary tense means past, present or future at the moment of speaking; it is time relative to 'now'," Halliday, *Halliday's Introduction to Functional Grammar*, p. 144. "The historical present behaves syntactically as a past tense with respect to sequence of tenses where the older Indo-European languages have this feature," Kiparsky, "Tense and Mood," p. 30. "For all languages it holds that 'past time reference' characterizes prototypical uses of [the perfective]—single, completed events will be in the 'typical cases' be located in the past," Dahl, *Tense and Aspect Sytems*, p. 79. "In my usage of the word *tense* Ancient Greek has three tenses: a past, a present, and a future tense," Bary, "Tense in Ancient Greek Reports," p. 30. "It is now generally accepted that tense involves, not just temporal reference as such, but deictic temporal reference: i.e., that is involves reference to a point or interval of time which is determined in relation to the moment of utterance," Lyons, *Linguistic Semantics*, p. 313. This is the position taken here.

     Although the subject here is about the expression of tense with the Greek verb, the relationship of tense and aspect is not terribly different from English. See Chapter 2, "Towards a theory of tense and time," in Declerck, *The Grammar of the English Verb Phrase*, pp. 91-170. This opposes the claim that Greek has a completely different grammaticalization of time.

54. Dictionaries do not *define* words. Dictionaries attempt to express the range of *possibilites* of meaning. Whether they succeed or not is a matter of investigation. Meaning comes from authorial intent, not linguistic analysis. Grammarians attempt to *discover* the meaning of an author, not *assign* meaning to the author.

55. There is a philosophical debate about whether language is 'alive', that is, whether a recipient can determine meaning after production. That is not the definition of 'meaning' here—meaning is set by the original intent of the author at the moment of production. This question belongs to the fields of philosophy and political science, not linguistics. The reader can only decide how to *apply* the meaning of the original intent. The meaning of the text does not change—the application can change. Meaning and application are independent concepts.

56. This is Porter's support for his theory of verbal aspect: "A competent semantic description of tense usage in Greek must account for and explain at least the following sets of instances according to a unified semantic theory," *Verbal Aspect*, p. 75.

Greek and English tense functions are similar.[57] English tense expresses time.[58] Ancient Greek likely does, too.

Tense first depicts time.

Even non-statement moods depict time. Exceptions to natural time still depict time, just with more sophistication.

A tense may have other functions, but it still places an action in time. This is not a minor function of tense. Time assignment is the main function of tense.

Sez who? Aristotle sez so. Dionysius Thrax sez so. Apollonius Dyscolus sez so. Longinus sez so. I sez so. You sez so. They sez so. We all sez so.

It is easy to play semantic word games with time—time itself is such a slippery concept. Do not be fooled, though: Assigning relative time to actions is the chief function of tense.

Action words can also reflect the author's perspective about other functions of aspect, but secondarily to the aspect of time.

In no way does this diminish the welcome focus on verbal aspect. Aspect helps to clarify the many ways that an author expresses intent by choosing a grammatical tense. Tense is far more sophisticated than just expressing relative time. It just does not cancel the aspect of relative time.

Examine related literature.

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2. Apollonii Dyscoli. *Qvae Svpersvnt*. Grammatici Graeci. Part 2. Volume 1. Fascicle 1. Adiecervnt Richardvs Schnieder and Gvstvvs Vhlig. Lipsiae, Germany: B. G. Tevneri, 1878. Online at http://schmidhauser.us/apollonius/works/adverbs.pdf.

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57. Some verbal aspect advocates claim that "the traditional term *tense* has a somewhat different meaning in Greek than it does in English," Decker, *Reading Koine Greek*, p. 222. This differs from the claims of the native ancient Greek speaking grammarians. This is assigning meaning by fiat in order to justify a theory. Decker claims that "because aspect in English is not as proiminent as it is in Greek, it may seem to be more complicated than it really is," Reading Koine Greek, p. 223. Aspect is just as prominent in English as it is in Greek. See Declerck, *Grammar of the English Verb Phrase*, pp. 28-38,

58. How can anyone know this? I know what I mean when I speak English. When I choose the tense of an action, I am indicating the aspect of time. I asked several people to describe what was the difference in meaning between several sentences. Each sentence differed only by the tense of the action. Ten out of twelve respondents named the difference as *time*.

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