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# The survival of the optative in New Testament Greek

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## Abstract

This article offers new insights on the status of the optative in New Testament Greek, mapping it against the diachronic encoding of modality in Ancient Greek in light of typology and pragmatics. Virtually all available scholarship on the subject focusses on the ‘decline’ of the optative; in this article, we choose to focus on its survival in fixed expressions and specific types of speech acts. Through a comprehensive reanalysis of the New Testament data, we argue that the optative is ‘pushed out’ of the strict domain of modality and syntax and into that of illocution and pragmatics. Evidence from ancient grammatical thought, sociolinguistics, and language contact corroborates this view.

## Keywords

New Testament Greek – optative – pragmatics – modality – ancient grammarians

## 1 Introduction

### 1.1

The optative is notoriously employed to encode modal meanings and functions in Ancient Greek, and there is general agreement that this mood is in decline in post-classical Greek and in the language of the New Testament (Horrocks

2010: 102; McKay 1993; Debrunner 1969: §§ 189–191; Turner 1963; Schwyzer 1950: 337 ff.). However, it is still unclear what the precise reasons for this decline and eventual demise are, and—more interestingly—why this mood survives at all to a certain extent. Despite the number of studies of post-classical (and, specifically, New Testament) syntax, there does not seem to be an up-to-date study of this topic that takes into account recent advances in research on typology and modality, along with the textual and pragmatic dimensions. This paper, which also offers a reanalysis of the entire relevant material from the New Testament (henceforth, *NT*), is a first step to fill this gap.

## 1.2

In what follows, we first offer an outline of the diachronic evolution of the optative from Homeric<sup>1</sup> to Late Greek (section 2). A review of the existing literature provides a useful background for an in-depth analysis of the *NT* corpus. Also, a somewhat comprehensive “history of the Greek optative” is still missing. Here, its functions are not only classified according to the traditional grammatical distinctions but also evaluated within a theoretical framework based on the recent literature on typology, modality and the realis-irrealis continuum, with a focus on the use of optatives as directives (section 3). In addition, we propose a new quantitative and qualitative analysis of all optative forms attested in the *NT* (section 4; cf. the Appendix for the dataset). We conclude (section 5) with some observations on the survival of the optative, discussing the role of Atticism, language contact, and the evidence from ancient grammarians. We argue that these factors contribute of an explanation of how the optative is preserved in fixed constructions which are associated to specific speech acts (pseudo-directives and pseudo-questions) and at the same time becomes somewhat detached from the inherited modal system.

## 2 The optative from Early to Late Greek

### 2.1

In Homeric Greek (henceforth, *HG*), the optative is employed in a variety of functions, some of which continue into Classical Greek (henceforth, *CG*), while others are taken over by different forms. Here, we offer a synthetic account, mostly based on Willmott’s recent work.<sup>2</sup>

1 As of today, no optatives have been identified in Mycenaean Greek.

2 Willmott 2007, from which texts and translations of this sub-section are taken.

## 2.1.1

In main clauses, the optative may express wishes, either positive (*Il.* 2.417–418 [...] πολέες δ' ἄμφ' αὐτὸν ἑταῖροι πρηγέες ἐν κονίησιν ὁδὰξ λαζοῖατο γαίαν 'and may many comrades fall head-first round him in the dust and gnaw the earth!') or negative, with μή (*Il.* 2.260 μηδ' ἔτι Τηλεμάχοιο πατῆρ κεκλημένος εἶην 'May I no longer be called the father of Telemachus!'; *Od.* 7.316 [...] μη τοῦτο φίλον Διὶ πατρὶ γένοιτο 'let this not be the will of Father Zeus'). These constructions are quite common in epic poetry, and the optative is found in all persons, in the singular and in the plural, regardless of the presence of one of the modal particles (ἄν, κε, κεν, κ').<sup>3</sup> Willmott (2007: 125 ff.) also notes that those cases in which the optative was thought to be (by e.g. Monro 1891: § 299b) a more polite replacement for the imperative (as, e.g. *Il.* 1.20 παῖδα δ' ἐμοὶ λύσαιτε φίλην, τὰ δ' ἄποινα δέχεσθαι 'release my darling child, and accept this ransom') are the exception rather than the rule, as the subject of the optative generally does not coincide with the addressee or the actual agent of the action wished for (e.g. in *Il.* 1.42 τίσειαν Δαναοὶ ἐμὰ δάκρυα σοῖσι βέλεσσιν 'may the Danaans suffer your arrows as payment for my tears').

## 2.1.2

Another function of the optative in main clauses is that of expressing potentiality/possibility. These are, however, catch-all terms, and Willmott argues that a more fine-grained analysis is possible. The optative is used to express 'unreal' conditionals in the apodosis (e.g. *Il.* 1.255–257 ἢ κεν γηθήσαι Πρίαμος Πριάμοιο τε παῖδες / ἄλλοι τε Τρῶες μέγα κεν κεχαροῖατο θυμῷ / εἰ σφῶν τάδε πάντα πυθόιατο μαρναμένοϊν, 'Priam and Priam's sons and all the Trojans would exult and rejoice in their hearts, if they heard the two of you battling like this'),<sup>4</sup> but also in independent main clauses in which a conditional reading is possible (e.g. *Il.* 4.94–95 τλαίης κεν Μενελάω ἐπιπροέμεν ταχὺν ἰόν, / πάσι δέ κε Τρῶεσσι χάριν καὶ κῦδος ἄροιο 'Would you dare to shoot off an arrow at Menelaus? Then you'd win glory and fame in the eyes of all the Trojans').

However, Willmott argues that the optative is not restricted to 'more remote possibility' (as per the traditional account, e.g. Hahn 1953: 70–77 and 150–152), because it is also found in contexts in which it depicts a more likely situation, both in main clauses (e.g. *Il.* 3.220 φαίης κε ζάκοτόν τέ τιν' ἔμμεναι ἄφρονά τ'

3 Traditional accounts (e.g. Monro 1891: § 300) maintain that the optative with the modal particle "does not express *wish* (which is essentially unconditional), or even direct *willingness* on the part of the speaker, but only *willingness to admit a consequence*".

4 In this example, optatives can be found also in the protasis, cf. 2.1.4 *infra*.

αὐτως ‘you’d call him a sullen fellow or just a plain fool’) and in subordinate protases (e.g. *Il.* 5.273 εἰ τοῦτω κε λάβοιμεν, ἀροίμεθα κε κλέος ἐσθλόν ‘if we took them both, we’d win ourselves great fame’). Rather than remote possibility, in Willmott’s opinion (2007: 124) the optative should be qualified as a verbal form expressing “negative epistemic stance” and “unreal events” (we return to this in section 3). More generally, she convincingly argues that moods in *HG* should be analysed in their own right, and not by using the categories of *CG*.<sup>5</sup>

### 2.1.3

This is particularly true if one considers the usage in subordinate clauses. The commonly-found claim that the optative follows the so-called ‘sequence of moods’ (i.e. is found in dependent clauses embedded under a main verb in a historic tense—cf. 2.2.3 *infra*) is wrong. Willmott shows that, in fact, Homer has both optatives following main clauses with a non-past verb and subjunctives following main clauses with a past verb: see, respectively, the purpose clauses at *Od.* 17.248–250 (ὦ πόποι, οἶον ἔειπε κύων ὀλοφώϊα εἰδώς, / τόν ποτ’ ἐγών ἐπι νηὸς ἐϋστέλμοιο μελαίνης / ἄξω τῆλ’ Ἰθάκης, ἵνα μοι βίοτον πολὺν ἄλφοι ‘Humph! How, skilled in crafty things, the dog has spoken, whom I’ll take sometime on a well-benched black ship far away from Ithaca, so he can fetch me much substance’) and *Il.* 19.354 ([...] ἦ δ’ Ἀχιλῆϊ / νέκταρ ἐνὶ στήθεσσι καὶ ἀμβροσίην ἐρατεινὴν / σταῆξ’, ἵνα μὴ μιν λιμὸς ἀτερπῆς γούναθ’ ἵκηται ‘into the breast of Achilles she shed nectar and pleasant ambrosia that grievous hunger-pangs should not come upon his limbs’).

### 2.1.4

As for its use in conditionals, the optative may be found in both apodoses and protases of conditionals referring to present (*Il.* 23.274–275 εἰ μὲν νῦν ἐπὶ ἄλλῳ ἀεθλεύοιμεν Ἀχαιοὶ / ἦ τ’ ἂν ἐγὼ τὰ πρῶτα λαβῶν κλισίην δὲ φεροίμην ‘Now if we Achaians were contending for the sake of some other hero, I myself should take the first prize away to my shelter’) and past hypothetical situations (*Il.* 5.311–312 καὶ νύ κεν ἔνθ’ ἀπόλοιτο ἄναξ ἀνδρῶν Αἰνείας, / εἰ μὴ ἄρ’ ὄξυ νόησε Διὸς θυγάτηρ Ἀφροδίτη ‘And then Aeneas, the captain of men, would have died, if Zeus’s daughter Aphrodite had not been quick to notice him’; further examples in MONRO 1891: § 300c), as well as future situations (as in e.g. *Il.* 8.196–197 εἰ τοῦτω κε λάβοιμεν, ἐέλποίμην κεν Ἀχαιοὺς αὐτονουχὶ νῆων ἐπιβησέμεν ὠκειάων ‘If

5 This is the more traditional stance: for instance, Monro thought that “except in one or two rare Homeric uses of the pure Opt., the usage of the Opt. in independent sentences is nearly the same in Homer as in later Greek” (Monro 1891: § 300).

we could capture these two things [i.e. the shield of Nestor and the corselet of Diomedes], I might/would hope the Achaians might/would embark this very night on their fast-running vessels’); the last is known as the ‘future less vivid’ in Classical Greek (cf. 2.2.4 *infra*).

Another peculiarity (noted by Colvin 2016) is the occurrence of the optative (rather than the indicative, which one would expect in *CG*) in a past counterfactual apodosis (*Od.* 1.236–247 [...] ἐπεὶ οὐ κε θανάοντι περ ὦδ’ ἀκαχοίμην, / εἰ μετὰ οἷς ἐτάροισι δάμη Τρώων ἐνὶ δῆμῳ ‘since I would not have grieved thus for his death, if he had fallen at Troy with his comrades’).

### 2.1.5

We have already noted in passing (2.1.1 *supra*) that *HG* shows greater flexibility in the employment of modal particles compared to *CG*: the ‘textbook rule’ by which an optative without particle in main clauses expresses wish and the optative with the particle expresses potentiality (cf. 2.2.1 and 2.2.2 *infra*) is clearly contradicted by cases such as *Il.* 6.281–282 ([...] ὡς χεῖ οἱ αὐθι / γαῖα χάνοι [...] ‘may the earth gape open and swallow him’) and *Il.* 4.18–20 (εἰ δ’ αὖ πως τόδε πᾶσι φίλον καὶ ἡδὺ γένοιτο, / ἦτοι μὲν οἰκέοιτο πόλις Πριάμοιο ἀνακτος, / αὐτίς δ’ Ἀργεῖην Ἑλένην Μενέλαος ἄγοιτο ‘if everyone thought this was a good idea, Priam’s city might remain inhabited, and Menelaus might take the Argive Helen back home’), in which we find the opposite situation. But there is more: as Willmott (2007: 20) duly notes, we even have examples in which coordinated clauses are found with and without the particle, as in *Il.* 14.190–191 ἦ ῥά νύ μοί τι πίθοιο φίλον τέκος ὅττι κεν εἴπω, / ἦέ κεν ἀρνήσαιο κοτεσσαμένη τό γε θυμῷ ‘would you listen, child, to what I will say? Or would you refuse, angry in your heart’.

## 2.2

In Classical Greek, the optative still covers a wide range of functions, which we summarise here by taking examples, translations and terminology (in most cases) from the recent *CGCG*.

### 2.2.1

In main clauses, the so-called ‘cupitive’ optative is used to express wishes, either on its own or with εἴθε, εἰ, γάρ, or ὡς (*Soph. Aj.* 550–551 ὦ παῖ, γένοιτο πατρὸς εὐτυχέστερος / τὰ δ’ ἄλλ’ ὁμοῖος ‘Child, I wish that you become more fortunate than your father, but equal in all other respects’); the negation is μή (*Soph. Ant.* 928–929 μὴ πλείω κακὰ / πάθειεν ‘May they suffer no more evil’).

## 2.2.2

Still in main clauses, it may be employed, along with the particle *ἄν*, to:

1. describe actions which might hypothetically occur (e.g. Hdt. 7.135.2 εἰ δοίητε ὑμέας αὐτοὺς βασιλείῃ ... ἕκαστος *ἄν* ὑμέων ἄρχοι γῆς Ἑλλάδος δόντος βασιλέος 'Should you deliver yourselves to the king, each of you would rule over land in Greece at the bequest of the king'), often as the apodosis of a conditional sentence;
2. make cautious statements (Pl. *Resp.* 444d ἀρετὴ μὲν ἄρα, ὡς ἔοικεν, ὑγιειὰ τέτις *ἄν* εἶη κάλλος καὶ εὐεξία ψυχῆς 'virtue, then, would—as it appears—be a kind of health and beauty and good condition of the soul');
3. express a cautious command or request, in the second person, often as the apodosis of a conditional sentence (Aesch. *Cho.* 105–106 λέγοις *ἄν* εἴ τι τῶνδ' ἔχεις ὑπέρτερον / ... / λέξω, κελεύεις γάρ, τὸν ἐκ φρενὸς λόγον 'If you have a better way than this, please explain it (lit. 'you might say it'). [...] I will voice my inmost thoughts, since you bid me to');<sup>6</sup>
4. comply with a request or cautiously take permission, in the first person (Eur. *Or.* 638–640 ME. λέγ' ... // OP. λέγοιμ' *ἄν* ἤδη '(Menelaus:) Speak [...] // (Orestes:) I will go ahead and speak then'); express an emphatic negation, with οὐ (Soph. *Phil.* 103 πρὸς βίαν δ' οὐκ *ἄν* λάβοις 'you can never take him by force'). This is known as the 'potential' optative.

## 2.2.3

One of the most common uses in subordinate clauses is the so-called 'oblique' optative, that is the optative found in historic sequence (i.e. when the verb of the main clause is in the imperfect, aorist, or pluperfect) in:

1. indirect statements (Lys. 12.74 εἶπε ... ὅτι παρασπόνδους ὑμᾶς ἔχοι 'he said that he held you to be oathbreakers');
2. indirect questions (Pl. *Resp.* 615c ἔφη ... παραγενέσθαι ἐρωτωμένω ἐτέρω ὑπὸ ἐτέρου ὅπου εἶη Ἀρδιαίος ὁ μέγας 'he said ... that he had been present when one was asked by another where Ardiaeus the great was');
3. fear clauses (Xen. *Cyr.* 2.1.11 ἔδρεια μὴ ... πάθοιτέ τι 'I was afraid ... that you might suffer something');
4. purpose clauses (Thuc. 1.126.1 ἐπρεσβεύοντο ... πρὸς τοὺς Ἀθηναίους ἐγκλήματα ποιούμενοι, ὅπως σφίσιν ὅτι μεγίστη πρόφασις εἶη τοῦ πολεμεῖν 'making complaints, they sent messengers to the Athenians, in order to have as great an excuse for waging war as possible');

<sup>6</sup> Here it is *κελεύεις* that shows that the optative is felt to be a request. On performative verbs in Ancient Greek, see e.g. Revuelta Puigdollers 2017: 19.

5. causal clauses referring to an alleged/reported reason (Thuc. 2.21.3 τὸν Περικλέα ... ἐκάκιζον ὅτι στρατηγὸς ὢν οὐκ ἐπεξάγοι 'they abused Pericles on the ground that, although he was their general, he did not lead them out');
6. effort clauses (Xen. Cyr. 8.1.43 ἐπεμελείτο δὲ ὅπως μήτε ἄπιστοί ποτε ἔσονται 'he took care that they would never be without food or drink');<sup>7</sup>
7. subordinate (including relative) clauses within subordinate clauses<sup>8</sup> (Xen. Cyr. 6.1.33 ἠπειλήσε τῇ γυναικί ὅτι εἰ μὴ βούλοιο ἐκούσα, ἄκουσα ποιήσοι ταῦτα 'he threatened the woman that if she did not choose it willingly, she would do these things against her will').<sup>9</sup>

According to the *communis opinio*, such a use of the optative is optional in most of these clauses, and there are several instances in which a different mood is employed or, as commonly thought, retained (e.g. the subjunctive in purpose clauses).<sup>10</sup>

#### 2.2.4

In subordinate clauses, the optative is also used to refer to habitual or repeated action in the past (when the verb of the main clause is in the imperfect) in temporal (Hdt. 1.162.2 ὅπως γὰρ τειχίρας ποιήσειε, τὸ ἐνθεῦτεν χώματα χῶν πρὸς τὰ τείχεα ἐπόρθεε 'Whenever he had locked them up inside their walls, he would next heap up mounds against the walls and destroy the city'), conditional (Dem. 23.209 ὑμῖν δέ, εἴ τι δέοισθε, χρήματα ὑπήρχε κοινῇ πλείστα τῶν πάντων Ἑλλήνων

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- 7 This is a rather uncommon use, and these clauses appear identical to purpose clauses, the only difference being the verb of the main clause.
  - 8 The 'cupitive' optative, which is typical of main clauses, may also be used in those subordinate clauses in which the moods of the independent sentences can be retained (indirect statements, indirect questions, result clauses, causal clauses, and digressive relative clauses)—though it must be said that this is a rare use.
  - 9 The optative in the protasis (ποιήσοι) is itself an oblique optative, used in an indirect statement (cf. above). The most recent history of the studies on the oblique optatives may be found in Faure 2010: 573–589 and Faure Forthcoming.
  - 10 The reason for this essentially has to do with perspective. For instance, in indirect statements the use of the oblique optative signals that the temporal perspective adopted by the reporter is their own, while the retention of the mood of the corresponding direct speech signals that the perspective given is that of the reported speaker. In purpose clauses, the subjunctive presents the intention from the perspective of the subject of the main clause, whereas the optative signals a purpose as if it were 'moderated' by the actual speaker/narrator. For examples, cf. CGCG: 509–510 and 530. This has been recently questioned, and the oblique optative, which is thought to have essentially a temporal function, is viewed as a grammaticalized use of this mood which regularly appears in all subordinate clauses with a finite verb (Faure 2010: 629). We wish to thank Richard Faure for drawing our attention to this problem.

'And you had, if ever you lacked something, funds surpassing all Greeks in your treasury'; N.B. the main clause has an imperfect), and restrictive relative clauses (Xen. *Cyr.* 5.3.55 καὶ οὐς μὲν ἴδοι εὐτάκτως καὶ σιωπῇ ἰόντος, προσελαύνων αὐτοῖς ... ἐπήγει 'and whomever he saw moving in an orderly fashion and in silence, he approached and praised'). This is called 'iterative' optative and one might perhaps describe it as the historic sequence corresponding to the 'iterative' subjunctive that we find in the same type of clauses (cf. e.g. Willmott 2007: 175 for Homer). One should note that not all instances of conditional clauses show habitual/repeated action: if we look at e.g. Aeschin. 3.231 εἰ μὲν τις τῶν τραγικῶν ποιητῶν ... ποιήσειεν ἐν τραγωδίᾳ τὸν Θερσίτην ὑπὸ τῶν Ἑλλήνων στεφανούμενον, οὐδεὶς ἂν ὑμῶν ὑπομείνειεν 'if some tragic poet ... should portrait Thersites in a tragedy being crowned by the Greeks, none of you would abide it', we may see that in this conditional clause (introduced by εἰ) the speaker refers to something which is possible, but not very likely (in this case, the plot of a tragedy). The future conditional with optatives in both the protasis and the apodosis is known as 'future less vivid'. Similarly, restrictive relative clauses with a potential conditional value (referring in particular to a remotely possible action) can also be construed with an optative (Xen. *An.* 1.3.17 ἐγὼ γὰρ ὀκνοίην μὲν ἂν εἰς τὰ πλοῖα ἐμβάινειν ἃ ἡμῖν δοίη 'For I would hesitate to embark in the vessels that he might give us'; N.B. the main clause has an optative with ἂν). This is another 'potential' use of the optative which is quite common, and which we call 'conditional' optative, as it is exclusively found (with εἰ) in protases of conditional sentences.<sup>11</sup>

## 2.2.5

The optative may be found with the particle ἂν in restrictive relative clauses referring to a possible action (e.g. Eur. *Hel.* 224 οὐκ ἔσθ' ὅτου θίγοιμ' ἂν ἐνδικώτερον 'there is no one whom I might touch with more right'). Digressive relative clauses adopt the same moods and tenses as independent sentences, so one may find employed both the potential optative (with ἂν; more common; e.g. Xen. *An.* 5.6.9 Ἄλυν ... , ὃν οὐκ ἂν δύναισθε ἄνευ πλοίων διαβῆναι 'the Halys [...] which you could not cross without boats') and the cupitive optative (rarer; e.g. Eur. *Hel.* 269: τοιαῦτ' ἐβούλευσ'. ὧν ἐμοὶ δοίη δίκην 'Such were his schemes: may he requite me for them').

11 It is worth mentioning that the label 'potential' comes from the *CGCG*, and it is probably given because it is found in subordinate clauses whose main clauses have the potential optative (with ἂν) seen in 2.2.2 above. We have chosen a different denomination in order to avoid confusion.



## 2.2.6

Finally, the finite verb of subordinate clauses whose main clause contains a cupitive optative (without ἄν; cf. 2.2.1 above) or a potential optative (with ἄν; cf. 2.2.2 above) may be found in the optative: e.g. Ar. *Pax* 412–413 βούλονται ἄν ἡμᾶς πάντας ἐξολωλέναι, / ἵνα τὰς τελετὰς λάβοιεν αὐτοὶ τῶν θεῶν ‘They’d want us all annihilated, so they could take over the rites of the gods themselves’; Ar. *Vesp.* 1431 ἔρδοι τις ἦν ἕκαστος εἰδείη τέχνην ‘May everyone perform the craft that he is knowledgeable of’. This is commonly known as ‘attraction’ of moods.

## 2.2.7

Summing up, the constructions in which the optative is found in *CG* are:

- a. Main clauses expressing
  - i. wishes
  - ii. hypothetical situations (with ἄν)
  - iii. cautious statements (with ἄν)
  - iv. cautious commands or requests (with ἄν)
  - v. compliance with a request or cautious taking of permission (with ἄν)
  - vi. emphatic negation (with ἄν)
- b. Subordinate clauses in historic sequence (= ‘oblique’ optative), in
  - i. indirect statements
  - ii. indirect questions
  - iii. fear clauses
  - iv. purpose clauses
  - v. causal clauses referring to an alleged/reported reason
  - vi. effort clauses
  - vii. subordinate and relative clauses within subordinate clauses
- c. Temporal and conditional subordinates and restrictive relative clauses referring to habitual or repeated action in the past (‘iterative’ optative)
- d. Conditional clauses and restrictive relative clauses with a potential conditional value (‘conditional’ optative)
- e. Restrictive relative clauses referring to possible actions (with ἄν)
- f. Subordinate clauses whose main clause contains an optative (‘attracted’ optative)

Schematically:

	– ἄν	+ ἄν
Main clauses	Cupitive optative	Potential optative
Subordinate clauses	Oblique optative Iterative optative Conditional optative Attracted optative	Possible action in restrictive relative clauses <sup>12</sup>

If we compare the situation of *CG* with that of *HG*, it emerges that the uses of the optative are more restricted, especially in conditional sentences, in ‘secondary sequence’ (the ‘oblique’ optative), and with respect to the employment of the modal particle in main clauses.

### 2.3

It is generally agreed that in κοινή Greek (henceforth, *KG*) the optative undergoes further decline, losing ground to the subjunctive, to the indicative, and to different periphrases.<sup>13</sup> Before moving on to some considerations on the Biblical corpus, with reference to both the *Septuaginta* (henceforth, *LXX*) and the Greek of the New Testament (*NTG*), it is worth noting that the three main uses one finds in *CG*—cupitive and potential in main clauses, and oblique in subordinate clauses—decline at different rates. As Evans (1999: 489) puts it, “the historic sequence function is the first to be lost, while the volitive and potential uses last rather longer, the volitive proving most robust”.

12 Richard Faure (p.c.) draws our attention to the fact that the distinction between this usage and the potential optative might be purely artificial, as the optative may be found with ἄν in any ‘main-clause-like’ subordinate clause like ὅτι/ὥς, as well as in indirect interrogative clauses.

13 “The optative disappeared quite quickly in non-literary registers of the Koine, except in its ‘core’ meaning of expressing a wish, because its classical use in various kinds of subordinate clause in past time contexts was often semantically opaque, as in reported speech, or already subject to replacement by subjunctives, as in final clauses; various modal auxiliaries were also available to take on the sense of possibility which, in conjunction with the particle ἄν [an], it conveyed in main clauses” (Horrocks 2010: 102). Cf. also Debrunner 1969: §§ 189–191, and Schwyzler 1950: 337 ff.

## 2.3.1

In the Greek of the *LXX*,<sup>14</sup> the optative preserves many of the usages that we have seen in *CG*, even though it generally follows the trends just outlined for (an early phase of) *KG*. According to Turner's figures (Turner 1963: 119), out of 539 optative tokens, 475 are in main clauses and 64 are in subordinate clauses; most main clause optatives express wishes (434), and only a few (41) are potential; as for subordinate clauses, 26 are conditional, 18 comparative (cf. 2.3.1.4), 13 final, and 7 'oblique'.<sup>15</sup>

The distribution of the forms in the *LXX* is often used as a stylistic and chronological indicator. For instance, more than 40% of these optatives (222 out of 539) are found in two poetical books, *Psalms* and *Job*, where most forms are in the third person, a few in the first, and only two (δῶγῃς in *Ps.* 84:8 and εὔροιτε in *Ruth* 1:9) in the second (Muraoka 2016: 321).

## 2.3.1.1

The optative, which is employed in main clauses to express a realisable wish, which is called 'desiderative' by Muraoka, is the most common use of this mood in *LXX* Greek, as we just saw. It is attested evenly and in all persons (with a preference for first and third person), and it is negated by the particle μή: e.g. *Deut.* 33:27 ἀπόλοιο 'may he perish'; *Ps.* 32:22 γένοιτο τὸ ἔλεός σου, κύριε, ἐφ' ἡμᾶς 'May your mercy, Lord, be upon us!'; *Ruth* 1:9 δῶγῃ κύριος ὑμῖν καὶ εὔροιτε ἀνάπαυσιν 'May the Lord give you and may you find rest'; *Is.* 28:22 μὴ εὐφρανθεῖητε 'may you not rejoice'; *Gen* 34:11 Εὔροισι χάριν ἐναντίον ὑμῶν 'may I find favour before you'; *1 Macc.* 9:10 Μὴ γένοιτο ποιῆσαι τὸ πρᾶγμα τοῦτο 'God forbid that (I) should do this thing'.

The optative may be found in a clause introduced by ὄφελον (as in e.g. 4 *Kingdoms* 5:3L Ὀφελον ὄφθειγῇ ὁ κύριός μου ἐνώπιον τοῦ προφήτου 'I wish that my lordship sought an audience with a prophet'). Interestingly, such a usage is unattested before *LXX* Greek.<sup>16</sup> Optatives may also be co-ordinated with imperatives (e.g. *Gen.* 9:27 πλατύναι ὁ θεὸς τῷ Ιαφεθ καὶ κατοικησάτω ἐν τοῖς οἴκοις τοῦ Σημ, καὶ γενηθήτω Χανααν παῖς αὐτῶν 'May God enlarge Japheth and let him dwell in the tents of Shem, and let Canaan be his servant'; N.B.: the verbs of the Masoretic text are co-ordinated jussives), with subjunctives in prohibitions

14 The examples and translations in this section are taken from Muraoka 2016.

15 It seems that Turner is not including the 'final' optative under the category of 'oblique', as is traditionally done and as we have done throughout this paper.

16 On the development of some forms of the verb ὀφείλω into an illocutionary particle, see Revuelta Puigdollers (2017: 34 ff.), and on ὀφείλων as an apparent substitute for ὥς + FUT. PTCP., see Kölligan 2020.

(e.g. *Lam.* 2:18 μὴ δῶς ἔκνηψιν σεαυτῆ, μὴ σιωπήσαιτο ‘don’t give rest to yourself; may it not fall silent’), and with futures (e.g. *Gen.* 48:16 εὐλογῆσαι [...] καὶ ἐπικληθήσεται ἐν αὐτοῖς τὸ ὄνομά μου [...], καὶ πληθυνθείησαν ‘May he bless ... and my name shall be carried on in them ... and may they multiply’).

### 2.3.1.2

The so-called ‘potential optative’, which is the other main classical usage (along with the modal particle ἄν) in main clauses (cf. 2.2.1 *supra*), is also found in *LXX* Greek, often in rhetorical questions: e.g. *Gen.* 23:15 πῶς ἂν κλείψαμεν ‘how could we possibly steal!; *Deut.* 28:67 τὸ πρωῖ ἔρεις Πῶς ἂν γένοιτο ἑσπέρα; καὶ τὸ ἑσπέρας ἔρεις Πῶς ἂν γένοιτο πρωῖ ‘in the morning you will say “how could it become evening?” And in the evening you will say “how could it become morning?”’. Potential optatives are also found in the apodosis of conditional sentences: e.g. *Job* 31:7–8 εἰ ἐξέκλινεν ὁ πούς μου, ἐκ τῆς ὁδοῦ, εἰ δὲ καὶ τῷ ὀφθαλμῷ ἐπηκολούθησεν ἡ καρδιά μου εἰ δὲ καὶ ταῖς χερσίν μου ἠψάμην δῶρων, σπεύραμι ἄρα καὶ ἄλλοι φάγοισαν, ἄρριζος δὲ γενοίμην ἐπὶ γῆς ‘if my step has turned aside from the way and my heart has gone after my eyes, and if any spot has stuck to my hands, then let me sow, and another eat, and let what grows for me be rooted out’.

Muraoka (2016: 325) observes that, unlike *CG*, *LXX* Greek does not have “a potential optative which expresses what could have happened in the past”.<sup>17</sup> However, just as in *CG*, we do find relative clauses which feature an optative: *Est.* 8.32L ἡ πόλις καὶ ἡ χώρα, ἣτις κατὰ ταῦτα μὴ ποιῆσαι ‘a city or a region which does not act accordingly’.

### 2.3.1.3

In subordinate clauses, the ‘oblique optative’ is found in purpose clauses (e.g. *4Macc.* 17:1 ἵνα μὴ ψαύσειέν τις τοῦ σώματος αὐτῆς, ἑαυτὴν ἔρριψε κατὰ τῆς πυρᾶς ‘she threw herself into the fire so that nobody might touch her body’),<sup>18</sup> indirect questions (*2Macc.* 3:37 τοῦ βασιλέως ἐπερωτήσαντος ..., ποίός τις εἶη ἐπιτήδειος ‘when the king asked what sort of person was possibly suitable’), and indirect statements (*2Macc.* 4:1 ἐκακολόγει τὸν Ὀνίαν, ὡς αὐτός τε εἶη ... ‘he kept accusing Onias that he was ...’).

A type of ‘conditional’ optative that is similar to that of *CG* is found in protases of hypothetical conditional sentences: *Is.* 49:15 εἰ καὶ ἐπιλάβοιτο ταῦτα γυνή, ἀλλ’ ἐγὼ οὐκ ἐπιλήσομαί σου ‘even if a woman [could] forget them, I shall not forget you’. The “iterative optative” found in *CG* (cf. 2.2.4 *supra*), instead, is absent from *LXX* Greek.

17 Cf. fn. 50 below for the discussion of the one possible exception.

18 This usage is restricted to *4Macc.* and is thought to be a typical trait of Atticistic practice (Muraoka 2016: 326, fn. 2 with further references).

## 2.3.1.4

A rather peculiar usage is that of the so-called ‘comparative optative’ (Evans 1999), which Muraoka treats as an ‘oblique optative’ in modal-comparative clauses. It is introduced by  $\acute{\omega}\varsigma \epsilon\iota$  (or  $\acute{\omega}\varsigma\epsilon\iota$ ) or simple  $\acute{\omega}\varsigma$ : e.g. *Deut.* 32:11  $\acute{\omega}\varsigma \acute{\alpha}\epsilon\tau\acute{\omicron}\varsigma \sigma\kappa\epsilon\pi\acute{\alpha}\sigma\alpha\iota$  νοσσιάν αὐτοῦ ‘[a]s an eagle would watch over its nest ...’; *Num.* 11:12 Λάβε αὐτοὺς εἰς τὸν κόλπον σου, ὡσεὶ ἄρραι τιθηνός τὸν θηλάζοντα ‘take them into your bosom, as a nurse might lift up the sucking child’. Evans (1999: 497–498) counts nine examples in the *Pentateuch*,<sup>19</sup> and Turner lists nine more in the rest of the *LXX*<sup>20</sup>—which is a relevant number, especially in light of the fact that this construction is very rare in *CG*,<sup>21</sup> but sometimes found in *HG*.

Evans convincingly argues that its presence is not attributable to interference with the Hebrew but probably betrays an intentional Homeric reminiscence due to an attempt at an elevated style. This is certainly the most convincing of the three options he lays out (the other two being an Ionicism and a colloquialism), but one thing that seems to have gone unnoticed is the fact that most of these constructions are in direct speech and share the ‘timeless’ nature of gnomic sentences, in their reference to universal experiences or generic truths. As we see in 3.5 *infra*, this usage seems consistent with some ‘core’ features of the optative.

## 2.3.2

In *NTG*, the optative is generally thought to be losing further ground. According to Boyer’s count (1988: 140), only 68 out of 28,121 verb forms are optatives. As was the case for *HG*, the functions of the optative are classified according to the categories of *CG*: in main clauses, *NTG* grammars<sup>22</sup> distinguish between an optative of wish (without  $\acute{\alpha}\nu$ )—which is the most common—and a potential optative (with  $\acute{\alpha}\nu$ , though not consistently); in subordinate clauses, the ‘oblique optative’ has nearly disappeared, with the notable exception of indirect questions (in particular in *Luke*, cf. 4.3 *infra*).

19 Besides the aforementioned passages, Evans lists *Gen.* 33:10, *Num.* 22:4, *Deut.* 1:31, 1:44, 8:5, 28:29.

20 Turner 1963: 131, fn. 1 and Evans 1999: 497, fn. 43: *Jud.* 16:9 (B), *Ps.* 82:15, *Prov.* 23:7, 25:26, *Is.* 11:9, 21:1, 46:20, *Ez.* 1:16. Turner believes that the occurrence of these optatives in these books is a reason to group them together from the point of view of redaction.

21 There are only five examples in Herodotus, two in Plato, one in Pseudo-Plato, and none in Thucydides, Lysias, Xenophon, Plato, Demosthenes, Aeschylus, Sophocles, Euripides, Aristophanes, and Menander (Evans 1999: 499–500).

22 The most complete treatment is still Turner 1963: 118–133.

## 2.3.3

It is worth noting in passing that in Medieval and Modern Greek the optative fell into disuse in popular speech; in the written sources, it first became interchangeable with the future indicative and the aorist subjunctive (Horrocks 2014) and was later replaced by constructions such as ἄμποτε να + subjunctive (Holton et al. 2019: 1758). The optative is completely absent from Modern *dimotikí*, with the exception of fixed expressions such as μή γένοιτο and θεός φυλάξοι (Evans 2003).

## 2.4

Two reasons for the demise of the optative are generally adduced: the phonological identity with subjunctive forms in most of the paradigm (both /oi/ and /ε:/ eventually merge with /i/)<sup>23</sup> according to some, a purely syntactic change (the optative began to be replaced by other moods and constructions) according to others.<sup>24</sup> We do not think that one thesis necessarily excludes (or, vice-versa entails) the other, but on this occasion we focus, instead, on the reasons for the survival of the optative and on its most frequent and long-lived functions. Its use in the Biblical texts is sometimes motivated by stylistic features (some forms are thought to be tied with the overt attempt to imitate Attic prose) and the textual genre (the liturgical content and value of the Scriptures); some scholars also wonder whether sociolinguistic factors and linguistic contact played a role in the fate of the optative.<sup>25</sup> These questions are hinted at

23 See e.g. Redondo 2018: 184, who is following (and quoting) Gil 1987. Deciding whether or not this was a determining factor depends on the chronology one accepts for changes in κοινή Greek vowels. Cf. the ‘classic’ system developed by Teodorsson (1977, 1978) and Horrocks’s (2010: 160–170) reassessment.

24 For Evans (1999: 490–491), “The loss of the optative is a genuine removal from the verbal system, not a result of phonetic changes, as in the case of the subjunctive. It is caused by simplification of the modal system, with speakers losing awareness of the special functional properties of the optative which distinguished it from the subjunctive on the one hand and the future indicative on the other”. This position goes back at least to Schwyzer: “Daß lautliche Gründe [...] den Zusammenfall von Konjunktiv und Optativ und dadurch den Verlust des Optativs verschuldet haben, ist ausgeschlossen, weil οι und η erst sehr spät zusammenfielen, der Ersatz des Optativs durch den Konjunktiv aber schon in der Ptolemäerzeit beginnt. Die Ursache vielmehr in der syntaktischen Schwäche des Optativs: die beiden alten Hauptbedeutungen des Optativs (Kupitiv und Potential) sind unter sich stark verschieden, und der oblique Gebrauch durchbricht die begriffliche Einheit noch mehr; anderseits steht der kupitive Optativ innerlich dem volitiven Konjunktiv, der potentiale Optativ dem prospektiven Konjunktiv nahe und steht der oblique Optativ vielfach im Austausch mit dem Konjunktiv” (Schwyzer 1950: 337).

25 For instance, Schwyzer 1950: 337 suggests, quite interestingly, that that the decline of the optative might be due to the fact that in Hellenistic times many speakers of Greek were not native speakers.

sparingly in the literature, but still remain mostly unanswered. As we see from the discussion and the analysis presented in the next sections, an updated theoretical framework and a fresh look at the data have the potential to shed some light on these issues.

### 3 The optative between typology, modality, and realness

#### 3.1

Up to this point, we have adopted the terminology and reported the classification that grammars of Ancient Greek employ when they deal with the optative. In this section, we review those paradigms which have the potential to help us shed light on the evolution of the Greek optative. As becomes clear, its most persistent functions are better understood through a multi-level analysis which considers typology, reality status, modality, and pragmatics.

#### 3.2

Starting with typology, for Dobrushina et al. (2013) the term ‘optative’ refers to “an inflected verb form dedicated to the expression of the wish of the speaker”. Although most languages regularly express this meaning, relatively few have a morphological category which is exclusively dedicated to it. The following examples show different ways of expressing optative meanings: Engl. *May he rest in peace!* and Lat. *Requiescat in pace*. Considering that the optative domain is heterogeneous from both a formal and a semantic point of view, Dobrushina (2011) also proposes a distinction between two different types: the ‘performative optative’, which is used to bless or curse, and the ‘desiderative optative’, which is employed to express the speaker’s wishes or dreams.<sup>26</sup> In Dobrushina et al. (2013), these are called “OPT1” and “OPT2”. One may find the first type in those European languages which have a set of idiomatic blessing or cursing formulae based on non-productive formal patterns. For example, Germanic languages may use obsolete forms of subjunctive: cf. Engl. *God save the queen!* and Nor. *Leve fedrelandet!* ‘Long live the fatherland!’ (Steblin-Kamenskij *apud* Dobrushina 2011).

Desiderative optatives are even more rarely expressed by dedicated moods and, in most European languages, pure wishes (those over which the speaker has no power whatsoever) are normally encoded either by non-morphological

26 As explained by Wierzbicka (1972: 143), “[t]he essential difference between blessing and cursing on the one hand, and wishing on the other hand seems to consist in the assumption of the power of one’s words in the first case, and their powerlessness in the second”.

means (such as modal verbs), or by modal forms which are also used for other functions (e.g. conditional clauses, volitional complement clauses, epistemic usages, etc.). This is the case of the subjunctive mood: cf. Engl. *If only life were lived in reverse* and It. *Se solo avessi più tempo!* 'If only I had more time!'

As Dobrushina (2011) shows, Caucasian languages display an extraordinary density of optatives, and also separate forms for performative and desiderative functions; the uniqueness of this area is even more evident in the *WALS* map (Dobrushina et al. 2013), in which only 48 languages out of 319 (that is, 15% of the total) have an inflectional optative.

### 3.3

It is clear that the category identified by typologists coincides only in part with the functions of the Greek optative, which is in fact tied to other notions and domains such as the *potential*, which is a commonly accepted catch-all term (cf. Willmott 2007), and the *irrealis*, which needs to be qualified further. Before doing that, however, a brief terminological detour on the label 'optative' gives us the chance to underline a rather substantial issue.

Strictly speaking, as van der Auwera & Schalley (2004: 87–90) point out, in the classical languages the term is a misnomer because in Latin it denotes a *functional* category (which the authors call 'use category') and a specific meaning of the subjunctive mood, whereas in Ancient Greek it refers to a *formal* category (called 'form category').<sup>27</sup> However, it turns out that the expression of wishes is *not* the main function of such a form. As Duhoux (2000: 226) notes, the overwhelming majority of optatives found in Classical Greek corpora (99.6% following the counts by Sanspeur and 93.3% according to those of Chanet) have potential values. It is only by *NTG* times that the optative of wish becomes relatively dominant (63,8% vs. 36.2%, cf. also van der Auwera & Schalley 2004: 90).<sup>28</sup> Now, if the encoding of wishes is a marginal function, not only does the term 'optative' remain inconsistent with the definitions proposed by typologists, but other problems also arise when one looks at the synchronically attested values in a diachronic dimension.

27 As is well known, from a formal point of view the Latin subjunctive 'absorbed' the inherited optative (cf. e.g. *si(e)m, si(e)s, si(e)t < \*h<sub>1</sub>s-ieh<sub>1</sub>-m, \*h<sub>1</sub>s-ieh<sub>1</sub>-s, \*h<sub>1</sub>s-ieh<sub>1</sub>-t*). On mood and modality in Latin, see e.g. Magni 2010.

28 To be precise, Duhoux distinguishes between *contexts intellectifs* and *contextes volitifs*, as follows: "[d]ans les *contextes intellectifs*, l'optatif exprime un procès à venir dont la possibilité est envisagée par la sphère de la perception, comme dans le français "Ceci *pourrait se produire* (je le pense)". Dans les *contextes volitifs*, cette possibilité est envisagée par la sphère de la volonté: "Si ceci *pourrait se produire* !" (= "Ceci *pourrait se produire* [et je le souhaite]").



## 3.4

Any hypothesis on the original features of the optative and its position within the Indo-European modal system must remain speculative, but the ongoing debate seems to have found some firm points and promising developments. The comparison between the languages in which the optative is best attested, i.e. Greek, Vedic Sanskrit (Whitney 1889: 215, 219; Dahl 2010: 230; Gotō 2017: 362), and Avestan (Hoffmann & Forssman 2004: 178), allows scholars to reconstruct ‘potentiality’ and ‘wish’ as basic functions. Also, the difference between optative and subjunctive, which was traditionally described in terms of degree along a scale of possibility and probability (e.g. Whitney 1889: 216), is currently often conceptualized within the domain of irrealis (Greenberg 1986, Tichy 2002, Tichy 2006: 304–305).<sup>29</sup>

In this framework, Willmott criticises the idea that the optative is a past-time variant of the subjunctive and expresses remote possibility (cf. 2.1.2 *supra*). In her opinion, the use of both cupitive and potential optatives with present- and future-time reference, along with the absence of the *hic et nunc* specification in secondary endings, point to the ‘timeless’ and ‘unreal’ nature of this mood (Willmott 2007: 115, 123 and 150–151).<sup>30</sup> In this perspective, she elaborates on Greenberg’s continuum, which places the uses of the Greek moods along a gradient in which the optative is more irrealis than the subjunctive and the subjunctive is, in turn, more irrealis than the indicative. Her discussion of the ways in which this cline intersects the epistemic and deontic uses of the moods, however, leaves two issues aside: the definition of the realis-irrealis dimension and its relationship with modality.

## 3.5

The term *modality* refers to a conceptual domain that can be encoded through a wide range of linguistic means and grammatical categories. Scholars define and subdivide this realm according to different criteria: Bybee et al. (1994: 176–181) distinguish four broad sub-domains (agent-oriented, speaker-oriented, epis-

29 Actually, as Greenberg (1986: 247) duly notes, the notion that “the subjunctive is closer semantically to the indicative while the optative represents the irrealis end of the continuum derives ultimately from the discussion in Delbrück (1871: especially 17, 25)”.

30 As is well known (Lazzeroni 1977; 1982), the so-called ‘primary’ endings were formed by adding the *hic et nunc* deictic particle *\*-i* to the secondary endings, which “were the normal or at least ‘neutral’ markers of person and diathesis” when the optative “came into being” (Gonda 1956: 47). Assuming an earlier situation where tense was not an obligatory part of the verb system, we could speculate that the emergence of the primary endings led to a transitional system of morphosyntactic contrasts based on the realis-irrealis dichotomy, in which formations with secondary endings (in particular optatives and injunctives) were

temic and subordinating modality).<sup>31</sup> In their opinion, the Greek optative represents “the wish or hope of the speaker expressed in a main clause” and is part of the speaker-oriented modalities.<sup>32</sup> These are typically found in directive utterances<sup>33</sup> and are encoded by imperative, prohibitive, optative, hortative, admonitive or permissive forms and constructions. Conversely, notions like volition, desire and evidentiality are excluded from the realm of modality in van der Auwera & Plungian (1998), who restrict the use of the term *modal* to those categories whose functions can be described by the concepts of *possibility* and *necessity*. More recently, Portner (2009: 1) suggests that “modality is the linguistic phenomenon whereby grammar allows one to say things about, or on the basis of, situations which need not be real”. Leaving aside the (not-so-immediate) definition of the term *real*, the very reference to the notion of reality reminds us of the realis-irrealis dimension, which largely overlaps with modality, but also encompasses notions that are commonly viewed as non-modal (e.g. the future tense).<sup>34</sup>

### 3.5.1

For our purposes, it is not important to discuss whether realisness can be considered as a fully-fledged grammatical category (as per Elliot 2000: 80), but it suffices to define realis and irrealis as the two poles of a semantic continuum which languages divide and encode in different ways (as per Mauri & Sansò 2012b). The endpoints of this continuum are respectively defined on the basis of the actualization vs. non-actualization of a given State of Affairs (henceforth,

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co-opted to encode different shades of ‘non-actuality’. The presence of (only) primary and/or secondary endings in PIE subjunctives is still a disputed matter (cf. Willmott 2007: 114–115).

- 31 In their view, these are independent semantic domains, whose connections are mainly diachronic rather than synchronic.
- 32 This types of modality “do not report the existence of conditions on the agent, but rather allow the speaker to impose such conditions on the addressee” (Bybee et al. 1994: 179).
- 33 Directives are a type of speech act that speakers perform when they are attempting to have the addressee carry out an action. They include requests, advice, commands, invites, and entreats.
- 34 The main positions in the current debate have recently been summarized as follows (Mauri & Sansò 2012a): 1. Irrealis is a sort of ‘mega-modality’ subsuming a number of modal subdomains pertaining to the general notion of ‘epistemic uncertainty’ (Givón 2001: 308); 2. Realis and irrealis are employed as descriptive equivalents of traditional labels for moods such as ‘indicative’, ‘subjunctive’, ‘optative’, ‘conditional’, etc. (Timberlake 2007: 326–329); 3. Realis and irrealis are opposite values of a grammatical category called ‘reality status’, which is distinct from modality (Elliot 2000); 4. Realis-irrealis and modality largely coincide and should not be kept separate (Bybee 1998, De Haan 2012).

SoA); however, while realis seems to be a cross-linguistically well-defined concept covering a rather narrow semantic area, irrealis is a wider notion with substantial cross-linguistic variation and no clearly discernible semantic core.<sup>35</sup> As van der Auwera & Zamorano (2016) observed, the non-classical adjective *irrealis*, which is totally absent from the Library of Latin Texts-A, emancipated itself into a general term, indicating what is not real or ‘not factual’, ‘not veridical’, and often also including what is potential. Accordingly, the conceptual structure of the realis-irrealis continuum can be imagined as going from *factual* via *possible* to *counterfactual*, with further possible internal subdivisions.

Be that as it may, since the irrealis “implies that a SoA belongs to the realm of the imagined or hypothetical, and as such it constitutes a potential or possible event but it is not an observable fact of reality” (Elliot 2000: 66–67), the potential uses of the Greek optative can safely be linked to this pole. Furthermore, the irrealis extreme of the continuum also attracts the wish-related uses via their relationship with directives. As is evident in what follows, it is in this type of speech act that the optative in the *NT* is best preserved.

### 3.6

Greek and Indo-Iranian employ a variety of formal means to encode various types of directives: injunctives and subjunctives for prohibitions (with *mā* in Sanskrit and *μή* in Greek, respectively), optatives for wishes, subjunctives for exhortations, and of course imperatives (but also infinitives and futures) for orders. Such variation is motivated by the inherently hybrid and multifaceted nature of directive situations, i.e. situations which, in principle, can be characterised as being logically unactualized but, in fact, display different levels of realisness according to various factors.

Mauri & Sansò (2012b) suggest that positive directive situations presuppose three main functional components: a) the speaker’s wish that a SoA becomes true, b) the appeal to the addressee(s) to help make this SoA true, and c) the expectation that the desired SoA is brought about in the near future. In addition, the performer(s) of the action(s) required may coincide: (i) with the addressee, (ii) with the speaker, (iii) with a third party, or (iv) with any possible combination of (i)-(iii). The most typical directive is thus a manipulative speech act in which the speaker has authority over the addressee and, therefore, high expectations concerning the fulfilment of their wish. Moreover, the

35 In this respect, we may agree with Bybee’s criticism: “the term ‘irrealis’ is simply too general to be useful, except as a pointer to a very broad domain” (Bybee 1998: 269). Symptomatic of the importance to define such areas is the fact that the second edition of Palmer’s monograph on modality (Palmer 2001) contains a new chapter on “Realis and irrealis”.

situation “is deeply rooted in the deictic here-and-now in which the speech act is uttered” (Mauri & Sansò 2012b: 151).

### 3.6.1

In Greek, most directives are normally expressed by imperative forms and for O’Sullivan (2011: 86, fn. 44) “it is a curious fact that indirect, third-person prayers in archaic and classical Greek are invariably expressed in the optative rather than the imperative”.<sup>36</sup> He also adds that “it is hard to tell whether this change of mood is simply a linguistic convention or indicates a different perception of what was an appropriate expression of requests in direct and in indirect situations”. A plausible explanation is that in optative situations the focus is on the first component (i.e. the wish that a SoA becomes true) and speakers may either express their desire without any direct appeal to an addressee,<sup>37</sup> or launch an appeal to a third party, who is indirectly involved as a mediator in the fulfilment of the wish.<sup>38</sup> These pseudo-directives<sup>39</sup> are generally characterised by lower expectation and control over the actualisation of the desired SoA, which is not depicted as imminent.<sup>40</sup> Furthermore, third-person perform-

- 36 On this point see also Ziegler 1905: 19–25 and Justus 1993: 135–136, 143. The most recent monograph-length account of orders and requests in Ancient Greek is Denizot 2011. Following Basset’s theories (Basset 1989), she claims that optatives are more suitable for conveying indirect and polite orders than imperatives and infinitives, because they allow the speaker to adopt “un point de vue fictif sur le procès comme sur les interlocuteurs de la situation d’*énonciation*” (Denizot 2011: 447). It is also worth noting that imperatives often occur in magical texts, where the idea of control over the supernatural powers invoked is implied (we wish to thank Daniel Kölligan for bringing our attention to this matter).
- 37 As in *Il.* 3.300 ὦδέ σφ’ ἐγκέφαλος χαμάδις ῥέει ὡς ὄδε οἶνος ‘may the brains be thus poured forth upon the ground as this wine’; *Acts* 8:20: Πέτρος δὲ εἶπεν πρὸς αὐτόν· τὸ ἀργύριόν σου σὺν σοὶ εἴη εἰς ἀπώλειαν ... ‘Peter answered: “May your money perish with you ...”’.
- 38 As in *Il.* 1.17–19 Ἄτρεΐδαι τε καὶ ἄλλοι εὐκνήμιδες Ἀχαιοί, / ὑμῖν μὲν θεοὶ δοῖεν Ὀλύμπια δώματ’ ἔχοντες / ἐκπέρσαι Πριάμοιο πόλιν, εὖ δ’ οἴκαδ’ ἰκέσθαι ‘Sons of Atreus and well-greaved Achaeans, may the gods who dwell on Olympus give you Priam’s city to plunder, and a safe passage home’; *1 Thess.* 3:12 ὑμᾶς δὲ ὁ κύριος πλεονάσαι καὶ περισσεύσαι τῇ ἀγάπῃ εἰς ἀλλήλους καὶ εἰς πάντας ... ‘May the Lord make your love increase and overflow for each other and for everyone else ...’.
- 39 We used the label *pseudo-directive* instead of *indirect directive* because, as per the Searlean account, an indirect speech act occurs when the speaker appears to be performing a primary speech act A, while in fact performing a secondary speech act B. A prayer or a curse, however, is *per se* a sort of request, and cannot be viewed as a speech act “performed by means of another” (Searle 1975: 60).
- 40 Unfulfillable wishes of the ‘if only’ type normally feature the modal (secondary) indicative since they “do not express hope for the realization of an action, but rather serve as a regretful or resigned comment on a situation which can no longer be altered” (CGCG: 486–487).

ers are not necessarily present when the wish is stated, and when it comes to supernatural powers invoked in prayers, blessings, or curses, they are in fact typically distant from the place where the directive situation occurs.<sup>41</sup> As for Greek, we can therefore say that optative situations are ‘more irrealis’ than both commands and prohibitions because they involve a further dimension of non-actualization besides directivity and negation: a suspension of the spatio-temporal component (the *hic et nunc* of the utterance), both when the optative situation implies a positive wish (as in θεός φυλάξοι), and when it implies a negative wish (as in μή γένοιτο).<sup>42</sup>

### 3.6.2

The encoding of sub-types of directives that belong to the irrealis end of the continuum is the most persistent function of the optative, which in *CG* was primarily used to express other logically unactualised situations, in particular possible ones (cf. 3.4 *supra*). Leaving aside the question of the diachronic priority between the synchronically attested meanings, ‘possibility’ is a crucial semantic area, where the irrealis sphere intersects the domain of modality. However, the overlaps between possible and desired SoAs seem to point to a further functional domain, that is, illocution. The various types of directives are indeed on the border between modality and illocution, which concerns the functions of the sentence as an illocutionary speech act.<sup>43</sup> Regardless of the (more or less direct) form-function correlations, the illocutionary force of a sentence depends on the speaker’s communicative intention and emerges from the context (König & Siemund 2007: 282–283). Furthermore, illocutionary force indicating devices (or IFIDs), which include intonation contour, punctuation, and particles, also contribute to show the illocutionary act the speaker is

41 These characteristics are apparently consistent with the formal features of the optative, which, thanks to its secondary endings (see fn. 29 *supra*), seems apt to encode situations in which both the desired SoA and the intended performer are distant from the speaker’s *here-and-now* (though it is a common feature of prayers to rhetorically seek the location of the deity in order to address it; cf. Macedo 2018). On the other hand, the first person, with its remarkable primary ending (-οι/σαι)-μι, implies situations in which the performer of the action(s) required to bring about the desired SoA coincides with the speaker (and the *ego* of the Bühlerian *Zeigfeld*, i.e. the deictic origin of an utterance). Evidently, different participants determine which specific parts of the directive scenario are activated and, therefore, the relevant level of realism.

42 For specific observations on prohibitives, see van der Auwera & Devos (2012).

43 While present in both agent- and speaker-oriented modality, as per Bybee et al. (1994), directives fall instead outside the strict definition of modality of van der Auwera and Plungian, who consider them as pertaining to the domain of illocution (van der Auwera & Plungian 1998: 83).

performing while uttering the sentence. Moods too are grouped amongst these devices and can act as modulators, making a speech act either ‘stronger’ or ‘weaker’. For instance, the optative signals that positive and negative wishes are to be taken as ‘less real’ and ‘more indirect’ than commands and prohibitions, respectively (this point is elaborated on in 5.4).

### 3·7

In this section we have seen that no theoretical paradigm precisely captures all the functions of the Greek optative, and that—on the contrary—the terminology can sometimes be misleading. At the same time, we have suggested that the interplay between modality, realness, and pragmatics may open new perspectives on the evolution of the optative and its emerging role as a modulator of illocutionary force in pseudo-directives. To complete the diachronic picture, in the next section we present a quantitative and qualitative analysis of the dataset from the *NTG* corpus.

## 4 The optative in the New Testament corpus

### 4·1

In the *NT*, there are 73 tokens (and 31 types) of optatives:<sup>44</sup> 41 are found in main clauses and 32 in dependent clauses. Only two (*Acts* 8:31 and 17:18) out of the 41 main clause optatives are accompanied by the modal particle ᾗ; the fixed expression μή γένοιτο accounts for 15 more main clause optatives. As for dependent clauses, 13 optatives are in indirect questions,<sup>45</sup> three are in indirect statements/object clauses,<sup>46</sup> eight are in conditional clauses,<sup>47</sup> two are in temporal clauses, one is in a purpose clause, and one in a modal clause.<sup>48</sup> A relatively high concentration is found in *Luke* and *Acts*. It is generally said that, among the other Gospels, only *Mark* has one secure example (5:43), but our

44 We have manually collected them using the Nestle-Aland edition, and checked them against the data in Turner 1963, Boyer 1988, and McKay 1993. Cf. the *Appendix* for tokens and forms in their context. Turner (1963: 128) also mentions a λάβοι at *Mark* 12:2, but this does not appear in the Nestle-Aland edition. The figure reported in Muraoka 2016: 320, fn. 2 (“It is a commonplace to mention that in *NTG* there occur a mere 39 optatives”) is clearly incorrect.

45 Without ᾗ: *Luke* 1:29, 3:15, 8:9, 18:36, 22:33; *Acts* 17:11, 17:27 [×2], 21:33; with ᾗ: *Luke* 15:26, *John* 13:24; *Acts* 5:24, 10:17.

46 *Mark* 5:43, 9:30; *Luke* 6:11, 9:46, 27:12.

47 *Acts* 20:16, 24:19, 25:20, 27:39; *1 Cor.* 14:10, 15:37; *1 Pet.* 3:14, 3:17.

48 Temporal: *Acts* 25:16 [×2]; purpose: *Mark* 14:10; modal: *Mark* 14:11.

count reveals that there are five more instances, sometimes found in *variae lectiones*, and often neglected because they are thought to be due to the corrections of Atticistic copyists or redactors.<sup>49</sup>

#### 4.2

Very few main clause optatives (*Mark* 8:37, *Acts* 8:31, 17:18) are of a potential nature, the rest being used to express wishes, blessings, or curses (this group includes the 15 *μή γένοιτο*). A famous example features in the cursing of the fig tree, an episode which is found in *Mark* (11:14 *καὶ ἀποκριθεὶς εἶπεν αὐτῇ· μηκέτι εἰς τὸν αἰῶνα ἐκ σοῦ μηδεὶς καρπὸν φάγοι· καὶ ἤκουον οἱ μαθηταὶ αὐτοῦ* ‘Then he said to the tree, “May no one ever eat fruit from you again.” And his disciples heard him say it.’). The presence of *φάγοι* in a speech delivered by Jesus has led to the hypothesis of an intentional high-register feature which is supposed to underline his status (Lee 1985); other ‘high-register’ features of Jesus’ language are adduced, but as far as the optative is concerned this claim seems to rest exclusively on the assumption that at the time its potential use was an Atticistic feature. From our perspective, this should be seen as a remarkable instance of performative optative (cf. 3.2 *supra*), and the power of Jesus’ words is confirmed by the perlocutive sequel added in the alternative version of *Matthew*, where, however, the curse is in the subjunctive (21:19 *καὶ λέγει αὐτῇ· μηκέτι ἐκ σοῦ καρπὸς γένηται εἰς τὸν αἰῶνα· καὶ ἐξηράνθη παραχρῆμα ἡ συκὴ* ‘Then he said to it, “May you never bear fruit again!” Immediately the tree withered’).<sup>50</sup> A parallel passage such as this is particularly useful for an analysis of variation in the use of moods. There are at least three differences between the versions attested in *Mark* and *Matthew*, and these could account for the different moods. In *Matthew* 21:19 all actants involved in the curse are present, the actualisation of the SoA does not depend on a third agent, and the consequences of the curse take place immediately. Conversely, in *Mark* 11:14, where the optative is used, the same curse involves indefinite third-person actants (*μηδεὶς καρπὸν φάγοι*), either present or absent, and the consequence of the curse is not spelled out. In other words, the situation denoted by the subjunctive is more ‘realis’ and better framed within a *hic et nunc*, which is otherwise suspended when the optative is employed. One should however note the *varia lectio* *γένειτο* in  $\aleph$ ,  $\Theta$  and Origen, which seems to point to a certain degree of functional overlap, at least in later Greek, or influence from the frequent *μή γένοιτο*. Two more passages (*Acts*

49 The forms *γνοί*, *παραδοί*, and *δοί* are not included in Boyer’s count, probably because the author follows Turner in considering them subjunctives.

50 *Luke* 13: 6–9 has a similar episode (the “parable of the barren fig tree”), but this contains no curse directed at the tree itself and is therefore useless for our purposes.

8:20, *Jude* 1:9) feature an optative in a curse or imprecation, which in *NT* is usually expressed through the imperative (e.g. the fixed expression ἀνάθημα ἔστω ‘let him be accursed’ in *Gal.* 1:8); a confirmation of this comes from *Acts* 1:20, which contains the imperative λαβέτω to quote *Ps.* 108:8, which originally has the optative λάβοι (Boyer 1988: 132). The so-called ‘less vivid’ future condition, which features optatives in both the apodosis and the protasis (cf. 2.1.4 and 2.2.4 *supra*), is another Classical use that is lost in the *NT*.

#### 4.3

Optatives have disappeared from most subordinate clauses, often being replaced by the subjunctive (as in, e.g., purpose clauses). However, the ‘iterative optative’ (cf. 2.2.4 *supra*) is still found in εἰ τύχοι (*1 Cor.* 14:10, 15:37), which seems to be a fixed expression. Elsewhere, this construction is replaced by ἄν + indicative (e.g. *Mark* 6:56, *Acts* 2:45, 4:35, *1 Cor.* 12:2) or, more rarely, by ὅταν + imperfect or aorist (only 1× in *Mark* 3:11). An interesting peculiarity of *Luke* and *Acts* is the relative frequency of optatives in indirect questions (6× in both). This, along with the fact that 20 out of 29 potential optatives are in questions led Boyer (1988: 133–134) to suggest that “the added “potentiality” which inherently is involved in a question may have made it more likely that the optative should survive there”. We can modify this assumption in light of what we have argued above about the use of the optative in pseudo-directives (cf. 3.6.1 *supra*). Since all potential optatives in main clauses are in rhetorical questions introduced by an interrogative pronoun or adverb (τί in *Mark* 8:37 and *Acts* 17:18, and πῶς in *Acts* 8:31),<sup>51</sup> one can assume that the use in pseudo-questions favoured the survival of the optative in indirect questions as well. Also, it is worth noting that these are introduced by the same formal means as direct ones, so it is not surprising that optatives are relatively abundant in interrogative contexts.

51 In the *LXX*, optatives are often found in rhetorical questions. Muraoka (2016: 323–325) lists a few (*Gen.* 23:15, 44:8, *Deut.* 28:67 *Ep. Je* 29, 39, *Deut.* 33:7, *Je* 9:2, *Ez.* 15:2) and observes that the potential optative is never used for SoA that could have been true in the past, unlike in *CG* (cf. 2.3.1.2 *supra*). The only possible exception is *Gen.* 44:8 (πῶς ἂν κλέψαμεν ‘how could we possibly have stolen?’); as Muraoka remarks, though, “Judah might be denying the likelihood of such a thing happening at all, not only in the past, but also now and in the future” (Muraoka 2016: 325). This would indirectly confirm our point about the ‘timeless’ nature of the optative.



## 5 The optative between Atticism, language contact, and grammatical theory

### 5.1

The preceding discussion has confirmed the retention of optatives in fixed expressions but has also highlighted their frequency within specific types of speech acts. In the next paragraphs, we discuss three factors that may help explain the usages observed above and the functional evolution of this mood. We consider the role of Atticism, language contact, and the Stoic grammatical theory.

### 5.2

As mentioned in 2.3 and 4, the use of the optative in the *LXX* and *NT* has often been tied with the overt attempt to imitate Attic prose by later authors. The pressure to ‘Atticize’ came mainly from rhetorical schools, lexicographers, and grammarians, who included the optative in its full range of classical functions among the basic hallmarks of correct Attic usage. According to Boyer (1988: 140): “[t]he optative had practically disappeared from the common language, and only later received a temporary revival by Atticizing purists who were attempting to restore the literary language of Greece’s golden age”.<sup>52</sup> On the other hand, these tendencies go hand in hand with the typology of these texts, whose peculiar genre is highlighted in Turner’s observations (1963: 131–132): “one must not reject too lightly the possibility that the optatives in the *NT* owed their preservation in some measure to their incidence in the pompous and stereotyped jargon of devotion. These optative phrases are decidedly formal. [...] The retention of the optative at a time when everywhere they were diminishing need not surprise us in view of their value for the liturgy”.

However, the intentional use of such high-register features seems to contradict the assumption that “the Scriptures were written and rendered in the language of the people” (Turner 1963: 131).<sup>53</sup> But the inconsistency becomes only

52 Atticism is frequently associated with the cultural period called the ‘Second Sophistic’, which is usually localized in the academic centers of the Greek-speaking world (Alexandria, Athens and, to a lesser degree, Rome) during the first three centuries CE. In this environment, beside the promotion of a plain style against the opulent Asiatic fashion, linguistic Atticism also favored the use of Attic lexical and grammatical forms which were replaced or abandoned in the κοινή.

53 Cf. however the opposite view of Lee (1985: 9): “It is not true, as is sometime believed, that the *NT* was written in popular Greek pure and simple”. In more recent years, Léonas (2005: 238 ff.) identified a “hieratic register” in the language of the *Septuagint*, which was then adopted in subsequent translations, including the *NT*. We wish to thank Liana Tronci,

apparent if, looking at the history of the optative, one distinguishes between a *revival*, mainly due to cultivated redactors, and a *survival*, partly due to natural speakers. Since these two phenomena involve different motivations, their linguistic effects are also different. On the one hand, stylistic needs tend to preserve structures and meanings that were recessive at the time; on the other, popular speech continues to employ expressions and functions that reflect the last relic of the optative. Yet, we must not forget that non-standard forms of Greek were also spoken by large communities of non-native speakers.<sup>54</sup>

### 5.3

In this respect, a topic that needs to be briefly re-addressed is the role that language contact might have played in the fate of the optative in post-Classical Greek. Of course, a complete reassessment of the issue goes well beyond the limits of this paper but, in the literature, there are hints at the fact that non-native speakers must have found it difficult to acquire the modal system of CG and that this is a plausible reason for the decline of the optative.<sup>55</sup> This is probably true, but in our view the role of language contact in contributing to the survival of the optative is far more interesting. Users of Greek as a foreign language probably learned isolated forms in fossilized locutions such as *μὴ γένοιτο*, *θεὸς φυλάξοι*, *εἰ τύχοι*, which were part of everyday language (cf. 2.3.3 *supra*). But the optative was also employed in more extended formulas and multiword ‘chunks’<sup>56</sup> like ready-made greetings and wishes, or set legal phrases, as one can also see from the evidence in first-millennium CE papyri, e.g. *χαίροις, κυρία μου* (P. Oxy. 112), *ἡ ἔνοχος εἶην τῷ ὄρκῳ* (P. Oxy. 82, 7–8), *ὁ μὴ εἶη* (P. Oxy. 1473, 12–13).<sup>57</sup>

In this scenario, we can therefore imagine two coexisting dynamics: on the one hand, the bleaching of the *syntactic rules* that govern the usage of the optative (e.g. the ‘oblique’ type), and on the other, the strengthening of the

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who also contributed to the discussion in very recent times (Tronci 2020), for this reference.

54 On multilingualism in Roman Palestine and sociolinguistic issues in the New Testament, see Ong 2016 and 2022 with further references.

55 This position goes back at least to Schwyzler (1950: 338): “Auch waren die Feinheiten des Optativgebrauchs für die unteren Schichten der Griechen und besonders für die Nichtgriechen schwer zu handhaben”. Wallace (1996: 462), too, maintains that the reason for the decline of the optative in κοινή Greek is that “it was too subtle for people acquiring Greek as a second language to grasp fully”; similarly, Muraoka (2016: 320): “one can appreciate the resistance to it on the part of non-native speakers of K[oiné] G[reek]”.

56 On the role of fixed constructions and multiword ‘chunks’ in second language acquisition, cf. e.g. Ellis 2003.

57 Examples from Horn 1926: 147, 149, 152; further examples in Bentein 2019: 141, 146.

*pragmatic functions* that maintain this mood alive in language use.<sup>58</sup> As for the connection with particular kinds of speech acts, further motivations can perhaps be found by going back to the origin of the term ‘optative’ and its conception within the ancient grammatical theory—which has been hitherto partially neglected.

#### 5.4

If in Classical Greek the expression of wishes was not the prevailing function of the optative (as we noted in 3.4 *supra*), how does one explain its traditional denomination? As is well known, the Latin term *optativus* is a calque on the Greek adjective εὐχτικός ‘expressing a wish, a prayer’, and O’Sullivan (2011: 83) wonders why the Greek grammarians privileged this label, at the expense of the potential meanings and functions. According to Jannaris (1897: 563), the name could have been chosen late, probably when the wishing or praying function was virtually the only function left. An alternative explanation can be found in the division of the λόγος into types, which goes back to Protagoras and is later elaborated and expanded by the Stoics. In a passage by Diogenes Laërtius (Diog. Laert. 9.53–54) we read that διεἶλέ τε τὸν λόγον πρῶτος εἰς τέτταρα· εὐχολή, ἐρώτησιν, ἀπόκρισιν, ἐντολήν [...], οὗς καὶ πυθμένεας εἶπε λόγων ‘He was the first to divide speech into four kinds—prayer, question, answer, command [...], which he even named ‘foundations of speech.’ [transl. Huitink & Willi 2021]

Evidently, the four ‘bases’ of the λόγος correspond to different kinds of speech acts (Schenkeveld 1984: 330, Lallot 1989: 162, Shalev 2008: 249), which can be roughly mapped onto the traditional moods: “prayer and command immediately suggest optative and imperative, and the indicative is the invariable mood of an answer” (O’Sullivan 2011: 84–85).<sup>59</sup> Prayers are also included in the Stoic taxonomy of the so-called λεκτὰ αὐτοτελή ‘complete sayables’,<sup>60</sup>

58 The optatives found in *variae lectiones* (cf. 4.1 *supra*) seem to be compatible with contact-induced change, as they attest to the synchronic variation that inevitably accompanies processes of this sort. Yet, it is also true that “the optative has disappeared as a separate modal category, except in certain fossilized survivals which assume increasingly lexical grammatical character” (Evans 1999: 490).

59 As for questions, O’Sullivan adds that the connection with the subjunctive “is less immediately clear but may be based on the ‘interrogative subjunctive’, one of the most common of the few independent uses of the mood” (2011: 85). For a comparison between the classification of moods in Dionysius Thrax and the sentence types in Protagoras, cf. also van der Auwera & Zamorano 2016: 12–14.

60 The Stoic account of ‘sayables’ leaves many issues concerning their nature and exact number unsettled. Schenkeveld, who defines the λεκτὰ as “the contents of thought to be expressed in words”, observes that the distinction between λεκτὰ ἐλλιπή (incomplete or deficient sayables) and λεκτὰ αὐτοτελή (complete sayables) “runs parallel to that between

which for Schenkeveld (1984: 351) “were the starting-point for a Stoic distinction of moods, which comprised grammatical moods as well as a specific group of adverbs and some particles”.<sup>61</sup>

If we accept this view, it is therefore plausible that the concept of optative could be derived from its recurrent association with prayers and curses (as can be seen from the Stoic label ἀρατικόν) or wishes and solemn requests (as is evident from the usual term εὐκτικόν).<sup>62</sup> The Greek perspective on the moods, which diverges from that of modern scholarship, in its focus on actual uses rather than on abstract meanings, could thus motivate not only the naming of the optative as the mood for prayers and wishes (εὐκτική ἔγκλισις), but also its tenacious survival in specific kinds of speech acts.

### 5.5

As seen in section 4, *NTG* optatives are used to issue requests that expect no fulfilment and ask questions that expect no answer. Because of its intrinsic emphasis, the εὐκτική ἔγκλισις is indeed perfectly suitable to prayers and blessings, but also to rhetorical questions, i.e. pseudo-questions that do not require information and may correspond by implicature to indirect assertions (both affirmative, as in *Acts* 17:18 τί ἂν θέλοι ὁ σπερμολόγος οὗτος λέγειν; ‘What is this babbler trying to say?’ = ‘he is just talking nonsense’, and negative, as in *Mark* 8:37 τί γὰρ δοῖ ἄνθρωπος ἀνάλλαγμα τῆς ψυχῆς αὐτοῦ; ‘What can anyone give in exchange for their soul?’ = ‘nothing can be given in exchange’) or indirect directives (as in *Acts* 8:31 πῶς γὰρ ἂν δυναίμην ἐάν μή τις ὁδηγήσει με; ‘How can I [understand it], unless someone explains it to me?’ = ‘someone should explain’). In the last example, we may observe a sort of ‘deferred’ perlocutionary effect (Philip sits next the Ethiopian official and answers his questions on the Scriptures). However, in most utterances with an optative, expected results of

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parts of sentences and whole sentences” (1984: 301). Therefore, he suggests describing the latter “by using the notion of illocutionary force as a typical *speech act*” (Schenkeveld 1984: 330). The speakers’ intention in producing utterances seems indeed to be in the background of the classification of ‘complete sayables’ by Diogenes Laërtius (*Lives*, 7.66), who lists: ἀξιώματα καὶ ἐρώτημα καὶ πύσματα καὶ προστακτικὸν καὶ ὀρκικὸν καὶ ἀρατικὸν καὶ ὑποθετικὸν καὶ προσαγορευτικὸν καὶ πράγματα ὅμοιον ἀξιώματι ‘assertions, inquiries, questions, commands, oaths, prayers, suppositions, addresses, and quasi-assertions’. On this passage, see also the discussion in Shalev (2008: 251).

61 On the interaction between particles and moods, see La Roi 2019.

62 The adjective ἀρατικόν derives from the archaic verb ἀράομαι ‘pray, invoke, curse’, which seems to lose ground with respect to εὐχομαι ‘pray, promise, declare solemnly’, the verb to which both the noun εὐχολή (epic form of εὐχή ‘prayer, vow’) and the adjective εὐκτικόν ‘precative’ are related.

the speech act tend to remain in the background (cf. the cursing of the fig tree in *Mark* 11:14), because both rhetorical questions and positive/negative wishes are to be taken as 'less real' and 'more indirect' than actual questions, commands, and prohibitions.

As mentioned above (cf. 3.6.2), phenomena pertaining to modality can serve as indicators and modulators of illocutionary force. The weakening direction of modulation is mitigation, a concept first applied to pragmatics by Fraser (1980), who inspired research on the strategies for attenuating or boosting illocutionary force (cf. e.g. Holmes 1984).<sup>63</sup> In this perspective, the optative turns out to be a mitigating device which allows speakers to obtain 'indirectedness' on different levels.<sup>64</sup> As we have seen, pseudo-directives are characterized by a de-focalization of the deictic origin of the utterance, since optative situations usually imply a spatio-temporal displacement, which suspends the *here-and-now* of ongoing communication (cf. 3.6.1). The detachment of the utterance from its deictic origin through the strategic manipulation of one or more components of the *I-here-now* triad is a form of mitigation through *de-actualization* (Caffi 2007: 66). In pseudo-directive contexts, the relation of the optative with the non-actual dimension of irrealis unfolds in terms of *non-imminence*.

Furthermore, even the speaker can be de-focused when the optative utterance features some 'impersonalization mechanism' (Brown & Levinson 1987: 273) to obtain generalising or gnomic effects<sup>65</sup> (as in the rhetorical question seen above, *Mark* 8:37 *τί γάρ δοί ἄνθρωπος ...*), or to attribute responsibility to an external agent or factor (as in *Acts* 8:20 *τὸ ἀργύριόν σου σὺν σοὶ εἶη εἰς ἀπώλειαν* 'May your money perish with you', or *Jude* 1:2 *ἔλεος ὑμῖν καὶ εἰρήνη καὶ ἀγάπη πληθυνθείη*. 'Mercy, peace and love be yours in abundance'). The use of the optative for 'strategic mitigation' is also evident in *1Peter* 3:17, where the parenthetical *εἰ θέλοι τὸ θέλημα τοῦ θεοῦ* 'if it is God's will' attenuates an indirect directive utterance beginning with *κρείττον γάρ* 'for it is better [...]'. But formulaic expressions, like the enunciative mitigating device *εἰ τύχοι*, more often serve for 'ritual mitigation', "i.e. mitigation typically realized by routine formulae or 'indirect

63 Mitigation strategies can operate on three scopes, or domains, namely, propositional content, illocutionary force, and the deictic origin of the utterance (Caffi 2007: 49).

64 "Fraser defines mitigation as a strategy used to remove or sweeten the unwelcome effects of speech acts expressing orders, bad news, criticism, etc., thus shifting the focus from illocution to perlocution" (Caffi 2007: 67). Of course, mitigating operations also have a direct bearing on politeness. On the connection between indirectedness and politeness, see Caffi (2007: 63–64).

65 The same mechanisms can be observed in gnomic and proverbial statements in comparative constructions (cf. *Deut.* 1:31, 8:5), where the 'timeless' nature of the optative and the de-focalization of the *origo* of the utterance clearly emerge.

speech acts' that have become catachreses, such as clichés expressing politeness" (Caffi 2007: 86). These, as we have seen, are the most frequent contexts and long-lasting functions of the optative, the evolution of which now seems clearer, in the light of the interaction between irrealis, illocution, and mitigation. The fact that the optative tends to survive in these usages seems consistent with the progressive loss of modal functions which leads to its "removal from the verbal system" (Evans 1999: 490). As the possibility-related uses begin to disappear, the optative gradually slips out of modality, towards the end of the irrealis cline and into the domain of illocution.

## 6 Conclusions

In this study, we have offered new perspectives on the survival of the optative in post-classical Greek, with a specific focus on the language of the New Testament. Through a comprehensive reanalysis, we have tried to frame the data within the history of the optative, and—more generally—to map them against the diachronic encoding of modality in Ancient Greek. We have argued that the optative became detached from the modal system and mostly survived in fossilized constructions associated with specific speech acts, namely pseudo-directives and pseudo-questions. In these contexts, it also served as a modulator of illocutionary force.

Our theory complements the traditional explanations about the decline of the optative and unifies them in a coherent framework. Multiple factors—such as the functional overlap with other moods/constructions, the phonetic similarity of modal markers, and the acquisition of Greek by non-native speakers—converge to relegate the optative to contexts in which illocution and pragmatic factors have a greater weight than modality and syntactic rules.

This view goes hand in glove with the way modal distinctions were interpreted in ancient grammatical thought. Moods were not conceived as abstract grammatical categories; rather, verbal forms were classified according to their contexts or effective functions. The similarity of this classification to the contemporary Speech Act theory was noticed in the literature early on but had not yet been applied to the study of moods in New Testament Greek. At the same time, the exclusive focus on the decline of the optative has perhaps prevented scholars from noticing the complex dynamics occurring between a learned revival and a natural survival.

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## Appendix

TABLE 1 Optative tokens

γένοιτο (17×)	<i>Luke</i> 1:38, 20:16; <i>Acts</i> 5:24; <i>Rom.</i> 3:4, 3:6, 3:31, 6:2, 6:15, 7:7, 7:13, 9:14, 11:1, 11:11; <i>1 Cor.</i> 6:15; <i>Gal.</i> 2:17, 3:21, 6:14
εἴη (12×)	<i>Luke</i> 1:29, 3:15, 8:9, 9:46, 15:26, 18:36, 22:23; <i>John</i> 13:24; <i>Acts</i> 8:20, 10:17, 20:16, 21:33
δῶή (4×)	<i>Rom.</i> 15:5; <i>2 Thess.</i> 3:16; <i>2 Tim.</i> 1:16, 1:18
θέλοι (3×)	<i>Luke</i> 1:62; <i>Acts</i> 17:18; <i>1 Pet.</i> 3:17
δύναιτο (2×)	<i>Acts</i> 27:12, 27:39
δυναίμην (1×)	<i>Acts</i> 8:31
ἔχοι (2×)	<i>Acts</i> 17:11, 25:16
ἔχοιεν (1×)	<i>Acts</i> 24:19
πληθυνθείη (3×)	<i>1 Pet.</i> 1:2; <i>2 Pet.</i> 1:2; <i>Jude</i> 1:2
κατευθύναί (2×)	<i>1 Thess.</i> 3:11; <i>2 Thess.</i> 3:5
τύχοι (2×)	<i>1 Cor.</i> 14:10, 15:37
ἀγιάσαι (1×)	<i>1 Thess.</i> 5:23
βούλοιτο (1×)	<i>Acts</i> 25:20
ἐπιτιμήσαι (1×)	<i>Jude</i> 1:9
εὔροιεν (1×)	<i>Acts</i> 17:27
εὐξαίμην (1×)	<i>Acts</i> 26:29
καταρτίσαι (1×)	<i>Hebr.</i> 13:21
λάβοι (1×)	<i>Acts</i> 25:16
λογισθείη (1×)	<i>2 Tim.</i> 4:16
οναίμην (1×)	<i>Phil.</i> 1:20
παρακαλέσαι (1×)	<i>2 Thess.</i> 2:17
πάσχοιτε (1×)	<i>1 Pet.</i> 3:14
περισσεύσαι (1×)	<i>1 Thess.</i> 3:12
πλεονάσαι (1×)	<i>1 Thess.</i> 3:12
πληρώσαι (1×)	<i>Rom.</i> 15:13
ποιήσαιεν (1×)	<i>Luke</i> 6:11
στηρίξαι (1×)	<i>2 Thess.</i> 2:17
τηρηθείη (1×)	<i>1 Thess.</i> 5:23
φάγοι (1×)	<i>Mark</i> 11:14
ψηλαφήσειαν (1×)	<i>Acts</i> 17:27
γνοί (2×)	<i>Mark</i> 5:43, 9:30
παραδοί (2×)	<i>Mark</i> 14:10, 14:11
δοί (1×)	<i>Mark</i> 8:37

TABLE 2 Optatives in context

Verbal form	Reference	Context (Nestle—Aland)	NIV translation
γνοῖ	Mark 5:43	καὶ διεστείλατο αὐτοῖς πολλὰ ἵνα μηδεὶς γνοῖ τοῦτο, καὶ εἶπεν δοθῆναι αὐτῇ φαγεῖν.	He gave strict orders not to let anyone know about this, and told them to give her something to eat.
δοῖ	Mark 8:37	τί γὰρ δοῖ ἄνθρωπος ἀντάλλαγμα τῆς ψυχῆς αὐτοῦ;	Or what can anyone give in exchange for their soul?
γνοῖ	Mark 9:30	Κάκειθεν ἐξεληθόντες παρεπορεύοντο διὰ τῆς Γαλιλαίας, καὶ οὐκ ᾔθελεν ἵνα τις γνοῖ.	They left that place and passed through Galilee. Jesus did not want anyone to know where they were.
φάγοι	Mark 11:14	καὶ ἀποκριθεὶς εἶπεν αὐτῇ· μηκέτι εἰς τὸν αἰῶνα ἐκ σοῦ μηδεὶς καρπὸν φάγοι. καὶ ἤκουον οἱ μαθηταὶ αὐτοῦ.	Then he said to the tree, 'May no one ever eat fruit from you again.' And his disciples heard him say it.
παραδοῖ	Mark 14:10	Καὶ Ἰούδας Ἰσκαριῶθ ὁ εἰς τῶν δώδεκα ἀπῆλθεν πρὸς τοὺς ἀρχιερεῖς ἵνα αὐτὸν παραδοῖ αὐτοῖς.	Then Judas Iscariot, one of the Twelve, went to the chief priests to betray Jesus to them.
παραδοῖ	Mark 14:11	οἱ δὲ ἀκούσαντες ἐχάρησαν καὶ ἐπηγγείλαντο αὐτῷ ἀργύριον δοῦναι. καὶ ἐζήτηε πῶς αὐτὸν εὐκαίρως παραδοῖ.	They were delighted to hear this and promised to give him money. So he watched for an opportunity to hand him over.
εἶη	Luke 1:29	ἡ δὲ ἐπὶ τῷ λέγω διεταράχθη καὶ διελογίζετο ποταπὸς εἶη ὁ ἀσπασμὸς οὗτος.	Mary was greatly troubled at his words and wondered what kind of greeting this might be.
γένοιτο	Luke 1:38	εἶπεν δὲ Μαριάμ· ἰδοὺ ἡ δούλη κυρίου· γένοιτό μοι κατὰ τὸ ῥῆμά σου.	'I am the Lord's servant,' Mary answered. 'May your word to me be fulfilled.' Then the angel left her.
θέλοι	Luke 1:62	ἐνένευσον δὲ τῷ πατρὶ αὐτοῦ τὸ τί ἂν θέλοι καλεῖσθαι αὐτό.	Then they made signs to his father, to find out what he would like to name the child.
εἶη	Luke 3:15	προσδοκῶντος δὲ τοῦ λαοῦ καὶ διαλογομένων πάντων ἐν ταῖς καρδίαις αὐτῶν περὶ τοῦ Ἰωάννου, μήποτε αὐτὸς εἶη ὁ χριστός ...	The people were waiting expectantly and were all wondering in their hearts if John might possibly be the Messiah.
ποιήσαιεν	Luke 6:11	αὐτοὶ δὲ ἐπλήσθησαν ἀνοίας καὶ διελάλουν πρὸς ἀλλήλους τί ἂν ποιήσαιεν τῷ Ἰησοῦ.	But the Pharisees and the teachers of the law were furious and began to discuss with one another what they might do to Jesus.
εἶη	Luke 8:9	Ἐπρωτῶν δὲ αὐτὸν οἱ μαθηταὶ αὐτοῦ τίς αὐτῇ εἶη ἡ παραβολή.	His disciples asked him what this parable meant.
εἶη	Luke 9:46	Εἰσῆλθεν δὲ διαλογισμὸς ἐν αὐτοῖς, τὸ τίς ἂν εἶη μείζων αὐτῶν.	An argument started among the disciples as to which of them would be the greatest.
εἶη	Luke 15:26	καὶ προσκαλεσάμενος ἓνα τῶν παιδῶν ἐπυθάνετο τί ἂν εἶη ταῦτα.	So he called one of the servants and asked him what was going on.

TABLE 2 Optatives in context (*cont.*)

Verbal form	Reference	Context (Nestle—Aland)	NIV translation
εἶη	Luke 18:36	ἀκούσας δὲ ὄχλου διαπορευομένου ἐπυνθάνετο τί εἶη τοῦτο.	When he heard the crowd going by, he asked what was happening.
γένοιτο	Luke 20:16	ἐλεύσεται καὶ ἀπολέσει τοὺς γεωργοὺς τούτους καὶ δώσει τὸν ἀμπελώνα ἄλλοις. ἀκούσαντες δὲ εἶπαν· μὴ γένοιτο.	He will come and kill those tenants and give the vineyard to others. When the people heard this, they said, 'God forbid!'
εἶη	Luke 22:23	καὶ αὐτοὶ ἤρξαντο συζητεῖν πρὸς ἑαυτοὺς τὸ τίς ἄρα εἶη ἐξ αὐτῶν ὁ τοῦτο μέλλων πράσσειν.	They began to question among themselves which of them it might be who would do this.
εἶη	John 13:24	νεύει οὖν τούτῳ Σίμων Πέτρος πυθέσθαι τίς ἂν εἶη περὶ οὗ λέγει.	Simon Peter motioned to this disciple and said, 'Ask him which one he means.'
γένοιτο	Acts 5:24	ὡς δὲ ἤκουσαν τοὺς λόγους τούτους ὁ τε στρατηγὸς τοῦ ἱεροῦ καὶ οἱ ἀρχιερεῖς, διηπόρουν περὶ αὐτῶν τί ἂν γένοιτο τοῦτο.	On hearing this report, the captain of the temple guard and the chief priests were at a loss, wondering what this might lead to.
εἶη	Acts 8:20	Πέτρος δὲ εἶπεν πρὸς αὐτόν· τὸ ἀργυρίον σου σὺν σοὶ εἶη εἰς ἀπόλειαν ὅτι τὴν δωρεάν τοῦ θεοῦ ἐνόμισας διὰ χρημάτων κτᾶσθαι.	Peter answered: 'May your money perish with you, because you thought you could buy the gift of God with money!'
δυναίμην	Acts 8:31	ὁ δὲ εἶπεν· πῶς γὰρ ἂν δυναίμην ἔάν μή τις ὀδηγήσει με; παρεκάλεσέν τε τὸν Φίλιππον ἀναβάντα καθίσαι σὺν αὐτῷ.	'How can I,' he said, 'unless someone explains it to me?' So he invited Philip to come up and sit with him.
εἶη	Acts 10:17	Ὡς δὲ ἐν ἑαυτῷ διηπόρει ὁ Πέτρος τί ἂν εἶη τὸ ὄραμα ὃ εἶδεν, ἰδοὺ οἱ ἄνδρες οἱ ἀπεσταλμένοι ὑπὸ τοῦ Κορνηλίου διερωτήσαντες τὴν οἰκίαν τοῦ Σίμωνος ἐπέστησαν ἐπὶ τὸν πυλῶνα ...	While Peter was wondering about the meaning of the vision, the men sent by Cornelius found out where Simon's house was and stopped at the gate.
ἔχοι	Acts 17:11	οὗτοι δὲ ἦσαν εὐγενέστεροι τῶν ἐν Θεσσαλονίκῃ, οἵτινες ἐδέξαντο τὸν λόγον μετὰ πάσης προθυμίας καθ' ἡμέραν ἀνακρίνοντες τὰς γραφὰς εἰ ἔχοι ταῦτα οὕτως.	Now the Berean Jews were of more noble character than those in Thessalonica, for they received the message with great eagerness and examined the Scriptures every day to see if what Paul said was true.
θέλοι	Acts 17:18	τινὲς δὲ καὶ τῶν Ἐπικουρείων καὶ Στωϊκῶν φιλοσόφων συνέβαλλον αὐτῷ, καὶ τινες ἔλεγον· τί ἂν θέλοι ὁ σπερμιολόγος οὗτος λέγειν;	A group of Epicurean and Stoic philosophers began to debate with him. Some of them asked, 'What is this babbling trying to say?'
ψηλαφήσειαν	Acts 17:27	ζητεῖν τὸν θεόν, εἰ ἄρα γε ψηλαφήσειαν αὐτὸν καὶ εὔροιεν, καὶ γε οὐ μακρὰν ἀπὸ ἐνὸς ἐκάστου ἡμῶν ὑπάρχοντα.	God did this so that they would seek him and perhaps reach out for him and find him, though he is not far from any one of us.

TABLE 2 Optatives in context (*cont.*)

Verbal form	Reference	Context (Nestle—Aland)	NIV translation
εὔροιεν	Acts 17:27	ζητεῖν τὸν θεόν, εἰ ἄρα γε ψηλαφήσειαν αὐτὸν καὶ εὔροιεν, καὶ γε οὐ μακρὰν ἀπὸ ἐνὸς ἐκάστου ἡμῶν ὑπάρχοντα.	God did this so that they would seek him and perhaps reach out for him and find him, though he is not far from any one of us.
εἴη	Acts 20:16	κεκρίνει γὰρ ὁ Παῦλος παραπλευσαι τὴν Ἐφεσον, ὅπως μὴ γένηται αὐτῷ χρονοτριβῆσαι ἐν τῇ Ἀσίᾳ· ἔσπευδεν γὰρ εἰ δυνατόν εἴη αὐτῷ τὴν ἡμέραν τῆς πεντηκοστῆς γενέσθαι εἰς Ἱεροσόλυμα.	Paul had decided to sail past Ephesus to avoid spending time in the province of Asia, for he was in a hurry to reach Jerusalem, if possible, by the day of Pentecost.
εἴη	Acts 21:33	Τότε ἐγγίσας ὁ χιλιάρχος ἐπελάβετο αὐτοῦ καὶ ἐκέλευσεν δεθῆναι ἀλύσειν δυσίν, καὶ ἐπυνθάνετο τίς εἶη καὶ τί ἐστὶν πεποιηκώς.	The commander came up and arrested him and ordered him to be bound with two chains. Then he asked who he was and what he had done.
ἔχοιεν	Acts 24:19	τινὲς δὲ ἀπὸ τῆς Ἀσίας Ἰουδαῖοι, οὓς ἔδει ἐπὶ σοῦ παρεῖναι καὶ κατηγορεῖν εἰ τι ἔχοιεν πρὸς ἐμέ.	But there are some Jews from the province of Asia, who ought to be here before you and bring charges if they have anything against me.
ἔχοι	Acts 25:16	πρὸς οὓς ἀπεκρίθην ὅτι οὐκ ἔστιν ἔθος Ῥωμαίοις χαρίζεσθαι τινα ἄνθρωπον πρὶν ἢ ὁ κατηγορούμενος κατὰ πρόσωπον ἔχοι τοὺς κατηγοροῦς τόπον τε ἀπολογίας λάβοι περὶ τοῦ ἐγκλήματος.	I told them that it is not the Roman custom to hand over anyone before they have faced their accusers and have had an opportunity to defend themselves against the charges.
λάβοι	Acts 25:16	πρὸς οὓς ἀπεκρίθην ὅτι οὐκ ἔστιν ἔθος Ῥωμαίοις χαρίζεσθαι τινα ἄνθρωπον πρὶν ἢ ὁ κατηγορούμενος κατὰ πρόσωπον ἔχοι τοὺς κατηγοροῦς τόπον τε ἀπολογίας λάβοι περὶ τοῦ ἐγκλήματος.	I told them that it is not the Roman custom to hand over anyone before they have faced their accusers and have had an opportunity to defend themselves against the charges.
βούλοιο	Acts 25:20	ἀπορούμενος δὲ ἐγὼ τὴν περὶ τούτων ζήτησιν ἔλεγον εἰ βούλοιο πορεύεσθαι εἰς Ἱεροσόλυμα κακεῖ κρίνεσθαι περὶ τούτων.	I was at a loss how to investigate such matters; so I asked if he would be willing to go to Jerusalem and stand trial there on these charges.
εὐξαίμην	Acts 26:29	ὁ δὲ Παῦλος· εὐξαίμην ἂν τῷ θεῷ καὶ ἐν ὀλίγῳ καὶ ἐν μεγάλῳ οὐ μόνον σέ ἀλλὰ καὶ πάντας τοὺς ἀκούοντάς μου σήμερον γενέσθαι τοιοῦτους ὅποῖος καὶ ἐγὼ εἶμι παρεκτός τῶν δεσμῶν τούτων.	Paul replied, 'Short time or long—I pray to God that not only you but all who are listening to me today may become what I am, except for these chains.'

TABLE 2 Optatives in context (*cont.*)

Verbal form	Reference	Context (Nestle—Aland)	NIV translation
δύναιτο	Acts 27:12	ἀνευθέτου δὲ τοῦ λιμένος ὑπάρχοντος πρὸς παραχειμασίαν οἱ πλείονες ἔθεντο βουλήν ἀναχθῆναι ἐκεῖθεν, εἴ πως δύναιτο καταστήσαντες εἰς Φοῖνικα παραχειμάσαι λιμένα τῆς Κρήτης βλέποντα κατὰ λίβρα καὶ κατὰ χῶρον.	Since the harbour was unsuitable to winter in, the majority decided that we should sail on, hoping to reach Phoenix and winter there. This was a harbour in Crete, facing both south-west and north-west.
δύναιτο	Acts 27:39	Ὅτε δὲ ἡμέρα ἐγένετο, τὴν γῆν οὐκ ἐπεγίνωσκον, κόλπον δὲ τινα κατενόουν ἔχοντα αἰγιαλὸν εἰς ὃν ἐβουλεύοντο εἰ δύναιτο ἐξῶσαι τὸ πλοῖον.	When daylight came, they did not recognise the land, but they saw a bay with a sandy beach, where they decided to run the ship aground if they could.
γένοιτο	Romans 3:4	μη γένοιτο· γινέσθω δὲ ὁ θεὸς ἀληθής, πᾶς δὲ ἄνθρωπος ψεύστης ...	Not at all! Let God be true, and every human being a liar.
γένοιτο	Romans 3:6	μη γένοιτο· ἐπεὶ πῶς κρινεῖ ὁ θεὸς τὸν κόσμον;	Certainly not! If that were so, how could God judge the world?
γένοιτο	Romans 3:31	νόμον οὖν καταργούμεν διὰ τῆς πίστεως; μη γένοιτο, ἀλλὰ νόμον ἱστανόμεν.	Do we, then, nullify the law by this faith? Not at all! Rather, we uphold the law.
γένοιτο	Romans 6:2	μη γένοιτο. οἵτινες ἀπεθάνομεν τῇ ἁμαρτίᾳ, πῶς ἔτι ζήσομεν ἐν αὐτῇ;	By no means! We are those who have died to sin; how can we live in it any longer?
γένοιτο	Romans 6:15	Τί οὖν; ἁμαρτήσωμεν, ὅτι οὐκ ἐσμέν ὑπὸ νόμον ἀλλὰ ὑπὸ χάριν; μη γένοιτο.	What then? Shall we sin because we are not under the law but under grace? By no means!
γένοιτο	Romans 7:7	Τί οὖν ἐροῦμεν; ὁ νόμος ἁμαρτία; μη γένοιτο· ἀλλὰ τὴν ἁμαρτίαν οὐκ ἔγνων εἰ μη διὰ νόμου.	What shall we say, then? Is the law sinful? Certainly not! Nevertheless, I would not have known what sin was had it not been for the law.
γένοιτο	Romans 7:13	Τὸ οὖν ἀγαθὸν ἐμοὶ ἐγένετο θάνατος; μη γένοιτο.	Did that which is good, then, become death to me? By no means!
γένοιτο	Romans 9:14	Τί οὖν ἐροῦμεν; μη ἀδικία παρὰ τῷ θεῷ; μη γένοιτο.	What then shall we say? Is God unjust? Not at all!
γένοιτο	Romans 11:1	Λέγω οὖν, μη ἀπώσατο ὁ θεὸς τὸν λαὸν αὐτοῦ; μη γένοιτο· καὶ γὰρ ἐγὼ Ἰσραηλίτης εἰμί, ἐκ σπέρματος Ἀβραάμ, φυλῆς Βενιαμίν.	I ask then: did God reject his people? By no means! I am an Israelite myself, a descendant of Abraham, from the tribe of Benjamin.
γένοιτο	Romans 11:11	Λέγω οὖν, μη ἔπταισαν ἵνα πέσωσιν; μη γένοιτο· ἀλλὰ τῷ αὐτῶν παραπτώματι ἡ σωτηρία τοῖς ἔθνεσιν εἰς τὸ παραζηλώσαι αὐτούς.	Again I ask: did they stumble so as to fall beyond recovery? Not at all! Rather, because of their transgression, salvation has come to the Gentiles to make Israel envious.



TABLE 2 Optatives in context (*cont.*)

Verbal form	Reference	Context (Nestle—Aland)	NIV translation
δῶη	Romans 15:5	ὁ δὲ θεὸς τῆς ὑπομονῆς καὶ τῆς παρακλήσεως δῶη ὑμῖν τὸ αὐτὸ φρονεῖν ἐν ἀλλήλοις κατὰ Χριστὸν Ἰησοῦν ...	May the God who gives endurance and encouragement give you the same attitude of mind toward each other that Christ Jesus had.
πληρώσαι	Romans 15:13	ὁ δὲ θεὸς τῆς ἐλπίδος πληρώσαι ὑμᾶς πάσης χαρᾶς καὶ εἰρήνης ἐν τῷ πιστεύειν, εἰς τὸ περισσεύειν ὑμᾶς ἐν τῇ ἐλπίδι ἐν δυνάμει πνεύματος ἁγίου.	May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.
γένειτο	1 Corinthians 6:15	οὐκ οἴδατε ὅτι τὰ σώματα ὑμῶν μέλη Χριστοῦ ἐστίν; ἄρας οὖν τὰ μέλη τοῦ χριστοῦ ποιήσω πόρνης μέλη; μὴ γένοιτο.	Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ himself? Shall I then take the members of Christ and unite them with a prostitute? Never!
τύχοι	1 Corinthians 14:10	τοσαῦτα εἰ τύχοι γένη φωνῶν εἰσὶν ἐν κόσμῳ καὶ οὐδὲν ἄφωνον.	Undoubtedly there are all sorts of languages in the world, yet none of them is without meaning.
τύχοι	1 Corinthians 15:37	καὶ ὁ σπείρεις, οὐ τὸ σῶμα τὸ γενησόμενον σπείρεις ἀλλὰ γυμνὸν κόκκον εἰ τύχοι σίτου ἢ τιος τῶν λοιπῶν.	When you sow, you do not plant the body that will be, but just a seed, perhaps of wheat or of something else.
γένειτο	Galatians 2:17	εἰ δὲ ζητοῦντες δικαιοθῆναι ἐν Χριστῷ εὐρέθημεν καὶ αὐτοὶ ἁμαρτωλοί, ἄρα Χριστὸς ἁμαρτίας διάκονος; μὴ γένοιτο.	But if, in seeking to be justified in Christ, we Jews find ourselves also among the sinners, doesn't that mean that Christ promotes sin? Absolutely not!
γένειτο	Galatians 3:21	ὁ οὖν νόμος κατὰ τῶν ἐπαγγελιῶν [τοῦ θεοῦ]; μὴ γένοιτο: εἰ γὰρ ἐδόθη νόμος ὁ δυνάμενος ζωοποιήσαι, ὄντως ἐν νόμῳ ἂν ἦν ἡ δικαιοσύνη.	Is the law, therefore, opposed to the promises of God? Absolutely not! For if a law had been given that could impart life, then righteousness would certainly have come by the law.
γένειτο	Galatians 6:14	Ἐμοὶ δὲ μὴ γένοιτο καυχᾶσθαι εἰ μὴ ἐν τῷ σταυρῷ τοῦ κυρίου ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ, δι' οὗ ἐμοὶ κόσμος ἐσταυρῶται καὶ ἐγὼ κόσμῳ.	May I never boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through which/whom the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world.
κατευθύναι	1 Thessalonians 3:11	Αὐτὸς δὲ ὁ θεὸς καὶ πατὴρ ἡμῶν καὶ ὁ κύριος ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦς κατευθύναι τὴν ὁδὸν ἡμῶν πρὸς ὑμᾶς.	Now may our God and Father himself and our Lord Jesus clear the way for us to come to you.
πλεονάσαι	1 Thessalonians 3:12	ὑμᾶς δὲ ὁ κύριος πλεονάσαι καὶ περισσεύσαι τῇ ἀγάπῃ εἰς ἀλλήλους καὶ εἰς πάντας καθάπερ καὶ ἡμεῖς εἰς ὑμᾶς ...	May the Lord make your love increase and overflow for each other and for everyone else, just as ours does for you.
περισσεύσαι	1 Thessalonians 3:12	ὑμᾶς δὲ ὁ κύριος πλεονάσαι καὶ περισσεύσαι τῇ ἀγάπῃ εἰς ἀλλήλους καὶ εἰς πάντας καθάπερ καὶ ἡμεῖς εἰς ὑμᾶς ...	May the Lord make your love increase and overflow for each other and for everyone else, just as ours does for you.

TABLE 2 Optatives in context (*cont.*)

Verbal form	Reference	Context (Nestle—Aland)	NIV translation
ἀγιασαι	1 Thessalonians 5:23	Αὐτὸς δὲ ὁ θεὸς τῆς εἰρήνης ἀγιασαι ὑμᾶς ὀλοτελείς, καὶ ὀλόκληρον ὑμῶν τὸ πνεῦμα καὶ ἡ ψυχὴ καὶ τὸ σῶμα ἀμέμπτως ἐν τῇ παρουσίᾳ τοῦ κυρίου ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ τηρηθείη.	May God himself, the God of peace, sanctify you through and through. May your whole spirit, soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.
τηρηθείη	1 Thessalonians 5:23	Αὐτὸς δὲ ὁ θεὸς τῆς εἰρήνης ἀγιασαι ὑμᾶς ὀλοτελείς, καὶ ὀλόκληρον ὑμῶν τὸ πνεῦμα καὶ ἡ ψυχὴ καὶ τὸ σῶμα ἀμέμπτως ἐν τῇ παρουσίᾳ τοῦ κυρίου ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ τηρηθείη.	May God himself, the God of peace, sanctify you through and through. May your whole spirit, soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.
παρακαλέσαι	2 Thessalonians 2:17	παρακαλέσαι ὑμῶν τὰς καρδίας καὶ στηριξάι ἐν παντὶ ἔργῳ καὶ λόγῳ ἀγαθῷ.	[may J.C.] encourage your hearts and strengthen you in every good deed and word.
στηριξάι	2 Thessalonians 2:17	παρακαλέσαι ὑμῶν τὰς καρδίας καὶ στηριξάι ἐν παντὶ ἔργῳ καὶ λόγῳ ἀγαθῷ.	[may J.C.] encourage your hearts and strengthen you in every good deed and word.
κατευθύнай	2 Thessalonians 3:5	Ὁ δὲ κύριος κατευθύнай ὑμῶν τὰς καρδίας εἰς τὴν ἀγάπην τοῦ θεοῦ καὶ εἰς τὴν ὑπομονὴν τοῦ χριστοῦ.	May the Lord direct your hearts into God's love and Christ's perseverance.
δῶη	2 Thessalonians 3:16	Αὐτὸς δὲ ὁ κύριος τῆς εἰρήνης δῶη ὑμῖν τὴν εἰρήνην διὰ παντὸς ἐν παντὶ τρόπῳ. ὁ κύριος μετὰ πάντων ὑμῶν.	Now may the Lord of peace himself give you peace at all times and in every way. The Lord be with all of you.
δῶη	2 Timothy 1:16	δῶη ἔλεος ὁ κύριος τῷ Ὀνησιφόρου οἴκῳ, ὅτι πολλάκις με ἀνέψυξεν καὶ τὴν ἄλυσίν μου οὐκ ἐπαισχύνθη ...	May the Lord show mercy to the household of Onesiphorus, because he often refreshed me and was not ashamed of my chains.
δῶη	2 Timothy 1:18	δῶη αὐτῷ ὁ κύριος εὐρεῖν ἔλεος παρὰ κυρίου ἐν ἐκείνῃ τῇ ἡμέρᾳ.	May the Lord grant that he will find mercy from the Lord on that day!
λογισθείη	2 Timothy 4:16	Ἐν τῇ πρώτῃ μου ἀπολογίᾳ οὐδεὶς μοι παρεγένετο, ἀλλὰ πάντες με ἐγκατέλιπον· μὴ αὐτοῖς λογισθείη.	At my first defence, no one came to my support, but everyone deserted me. May it not be held against them.
ὀνάιμην	Philemon 1:20	ναί, ἀδελφέ, ἐγὼ σου ὀνάιμην ἐν κυρίῳ· ἀνάπαυσόν μου τὰ σπλάγχνα ἐν Χριστῷ.	I do wish, brother, that I may have some benefit from you in the Lord; refresh my heart in Christ.
καταρτίσαι	Hebrews 13:21	καταρτίσαι ὑμᾶς ἐν παντὶ ἀγαθῷ εἰς τὸ ποιῆσαι τὸ θέλημα αὐτοῦ, ποιῶν ἐν ἡμῖν τὸ εὐάρεστον ἐνώπιον αὐτοῦ διὰ Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ, ᾧ ἡ δόξα εἰς τοὺς αἰῶνας [τῶν αἰώνων], ἀμήν.	[may God] equip you with everything good for doing his will, and may he work in us what is pleasing to him, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen.

TABLE 2 Optatives in context (*cont.*)

Verbal form	Reference	Context (Nestle—Aland)	NIV translation
πληθυνθείη	1 Peter 1:2	κατὰ πρόγνωσιν θεοῦ πατρός ἐν ἁγιασμῷ πνεύματος εἰς ὑπακοήν καὶ ῥαντισμὸν αἵματος Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ, χάρις ὑμῖν καὶ εἰρήνη πληθυνθείη.	who have been chosen according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through the sanctifying work of the Spirit, to be obedient to Jesus Christ and sprinkled with his blood: Grace and peace be yours in abundance.
πάσχοιτε	1 Peter 3:14	ἀλλ' εἰ καὶ πάσχοιτε διὰ δικαιοσύνην, μακάριοι. τὸν δὲ φόβον αὐτῶν μὴ φοβηθῆτε μηδὲ ταραχθῆτε.	But even if you should suffer for what is right, you are blessed. 'Do not fear their threats/fear what they fear; do not be frightened.'
θέλοι	1 Peter 3:17	κρεῖττον γὰρ ἀγαθοποιούντας, εἰ θέλοι τὸ θέλημα τοῦ θεοῦ, πάσχειν ἢ κακοποιούντας.	For it is better, if it is God's will, to suffer for doing good than for doing evil.
πληθυνθείη	2 Peter 1:2	χάρις ὑμῖν καὶ εἰρήνη πληθυνθείη ἐν ἐπιγνώσει τοῦ θεοῦ καὶ Ἰησοῦ τοῦ κυρίου ἡμῶν.	Grace and peace be yours in abundance through the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord.
πληθυνθείη	Jude 1:2	ἔλεος ὑμῖν καὶ εἰρήνη καὶ ἀγάπη πληθυνθείη.	Mercy, peace and love be yours in abundance.
ἐπιτιμήσαι	Jude 1:9	Ὁ δὲ Μιχαὴλ ὁ ἀρχάγγελος, ὅτε τῷ διαβόλῳ διακρινόμενος διελέγετο περὶ τοῦ Μωϋσέως σώματος, οὐκ ἐτόλμησεν κρίσιν ἐπενεγκεῖν βλασφημίας ἀλλ' εἶπεν ἐπιτιμήσαι σοι κύριος.	But even the archangel Michael, when he was disputing with the devil about the body of Moses, did not himself dare to condemn him for slander but said, 'The Lord rebuke you!'