

32. Imperative Mood

Lesson in a Nutshell

The imperative mood is the mood of command. Like the subjunctive mood, it is found only in the present and aorist tenses. Unlike English, Greek has a third person imperative and the ability to indicate ongoing aspect when it makes a command.

The imperative mood is the mood used for commands. It is much the same in Greek as it is in English. However, Greek has two nice additions.

Addition #1 The Third Person Imperative

In English, the implied subject of the imperative is always second person: you!

If I say...

Listen up!
or
Quit slouching!

You assume that I mean

(you) Listen up!
or
(you) Quit slouching!

But Greek has a second AND a third person imperative. There is no great way to translate a third person imperative. The best way to explain the third person imperative is by an example.

One of the things Jesus sometimes said to the crowds was,

ὁ ἔχων¹ ὦτα ἀκούετω.
The one having ears let him hear!

¹ This is a participle. We will understand it very soon!

ἀκούετω is the third person imperative. Do you see how him/her/it is being commanded? We translate it with “let him/her _____.” But this is a pale substitution for the Greek imperative. The Greek is stronger. It means something more like:

The one having ears.... **HEAR!**

Addition #2 **Continuous Aspect**

Remember that as soon as we leave the indicative mood, time is no longer a factor.

As we saw with the subjunctive mood, there are two aspects that can be captured with the present and aorist tenses.

Ongoing aspect is captured by the present tense.

Undefined aspect is captured by the aorist tense.

These are the two tenses used by the imperative mood as well. In other words....

The imperative mood is found in the

Present Tense

and

Aorist Tense

only!¹

In English, the imperative is always undefined. If I tell you to study or to mow the lawn, the aspect is undefined. I am not telling you anything about the *kind* of action involved.

But Greek gives the option of the present tense, which communicates an ongoing state of affairs.

There is a great example of this in John 8. Jesus has just forgiven a woman caught in the act of adultery. Having forgiven her, he issues an imperative.

πορεύου καὶ μηκέτι ἀμάρτανε.
Go and no longer sin.

¹ There actually is a perfect imperative, but it is rare (only four in the entire New Testament).

We translate this, “Go and sin no more.” But both *πορεύου* and *ἀμάρτανε* are present tense. Jesus is commanding an ongoing state of life, not just making an undefined statement. This nuance is lost in English and almost impossible to translate without awkwardness.

The Forms

With the subjunctive mood, we found that the forms were easy and that there were lots of clues to help us spot them.

The same is true of the imperative. Context will help you to expect an imperative.

Even better, the endings never change.

Imperative Mood						
	active		middle		passive	
Pr	2s	<i>λύε</i> (You) loose!	(You) loose (for yourself)!	2s	<i>λύου</i> (You) be loosed!	
	3s	<i>λύετω</i> Let him loose!	Let him loose (for himself)!	3s	<i>λύέσθω</i> Let him be loosed!	
	2p	<i>λύετε</i> (You) loose!	(You) loose (for yourself)!	2p	<i>λύεσθε</i> (You) be loosed!	
	3p	<i>λύέτωσαν</i> Let them loose!	Let them loose (for themselves)!	3p	<i>λύέσθωσαν</i> Let them be loosed!	
Ao	2s	<i>λύσον</i> (You) loose!	2s <i>λύσαι</i> ← same as above	2s	<i>λύθητι</i> (You) be loosed!	
	3s	<i>λύσάτω</i> Let him loose!	3s <i>λύσάσθω</i>	3s	<i>λυθήτω</i> Let him be loosed!	
	2p	<i>λύσατε</i> (You) loose!	2p <i>λύσασθε</i>	2p	<i>λύθητε</i> (You) be loosed!	
	3p	<i>λύσάτωσαν</i> Let them loose!	3p <i>λύσάσθωσαν</i>	3p	<i>λυθήτωσαν</i> Let them be loosed!	
2 Ao	Second Aorist is identical to present except for the stem change.					

In the
third person singular
second person plural, and
third person plural,
the endings are always...

τω

τε

τωσαν

in the active voice, and

σθω

σθε

σθωσαν

in the middle or passive voice.

Nice, huh? As you would expect, there is a $\sigma\alpha$ or $\theta\eta$ in the aorist.

As you might also expect, there is no augment in the aorist, since outside of the indicative, tense has nothing to do with time.

The only trick is to learn the second person singular endings (in blue). These are fairly common, so do your best to lodge them in your brain.

As usual, a second aorist will not tell you it is an aorist by using $\sigma\alpha$. Instead, it will undergo a **stem change**. But that is old news to you by now!