Galatians 3:15–25 as the Peak of the Letter: Markedness and Prominence in Pauline Discourse[1]

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This paper seeks to determine the structure of the body of Galatians by outlining a method of linguistic prominence, which identifies elements of the discourse that are highlighted or emphasized. It is in essence a description of the way in which certain elements stand out from the rest of the text based on the linguistic resources of a given language. There are various criteria for determining prominence, at least in Hellenistic Greek, categorized into two overarching types: paradigmatic choice and syntagmatic choice. Paradigmatic choice relates to prominence through the choice of a single linguistic item, while syntagmatic choice relates to prominence through the choice of the structure of word groups, clauses, and clause complexes. My analysis of prominence is applied to the body of Paul's letter to the Galatians (3:1–5:12), in order to determine what part is the most prominent (and thus what Paul emphasizes the most). Using the criteria laid out above, I find that the "prominent peak" of Galatians is in 3:15–25, where a cluster of prominent elements are found.

Keywords: Galatians, discourse prominence, markedness, verbal aspect, systemic functional linguistics, clause structure, clause-complex structure, textual metafunction, discourse analysis.

1. Introduction

Most viewers who pay attention to a story, whether on the screen, on paper, or in a live performance, recognize the climax or peak of the story. For example, in F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby*, the climax is probably the scene at the Plaza Hotel, where Jay Gatsby, Daisy Buchanan, and Tom Buchanan engage in a heated confrontation. In this climax, Gatsby's affair with Daisy is exposed and unraveled, marking the beginning of Gatsby's downfall and eventual demise, and setting the

[1] This paper adapts material, some sections taken verbatim, from David I. Yoon, *A Discourse Analysis of Galatians and the New Perspective on Paul*, LBS 17 (Leiden: Brill, 2019), esp. 124–33, 180–81. Cf. also Yoon, "Prominence in New Testament Discourse: Galatians 1,11–2,10 as a Test Case," *FilNeot* 26 (2013): 3–26; Yoon, "Discourse Analysis and the Textual Metafunction: Analyzing the Texture of Galatians 4,12–20," *FilNeot* 27 (2014): 83–109. Many thanks to my friend and colleague Zachary K. Dawson for his helpful comments on this paper.

stage for the resolution. By contrast, recognizing the climax or peak of expositional works, such as Paul's letters, is perhaps not quite as easily identifiable, at least at surface glance, if such a peak even exists in these types of works.

Of the thirteen letters that bear his name, it is generally understood that Romans and Galatians are among Paul's least disputed letters, since they contain some of his most fundamental thoughts. While there is considerable discussion regarding the center or theme of these letters in the competing commentaries and literature—whether justification, salvation, reconciliation, the law, or another topic—the question of the peak(s) or climax(es) of these letters is equally important to understanding Paul's motivation for writing them, considering that peak and theme are distinguished from each other.[2]

I think it is beneficial to think of *peak* as having a distinct meaning from other terms such as center, main idea, theme, topic, thesis, or main point of the discourse. Robert Longacre defines *peak* as "some sort of climactic development (or developments)."[3] Cynthia Long Westfall relates *peak* to *frontground*, which describe "the most prominent and well-defined entity, element or clause in a given context."[4] These descriptions do not necessarily refer to the main idea or point, i.e., the "aboutness," of a discourse. In other genres, such as a musical piece or a story, the peak is the point of the highest intensity, tension, or perhaps even emotional impact.[5] This might be a powerful guitar solo in a rock song, or an intense final chorus of an anthem, or the moment when the protagonist confronts the villain in a conflict, or a final battle scene. *Peak*, in these examples, is an appropriate term, since it is the highest point of intensity in a piece. But that point of a discourse does not necessarily refer to the main point, although this does not preclude any overlap between peak and main point (depending on other linguistic factors).

[2] However, see Jae Hyun Lee, *Paul's Gospel in Romans: A Discourse Analysis of Rom 1:16—8:39*, LBS 3 (Leiden: Brill, 2010), which analyzes the peak of Romans 1–8, but with a slightly different idea of the function of prominence.

[3] Robert E. Longacre, *The Grammar of Discourse*, TLL, 2nd ed. (New York: Plenum, 1996), 33.

[4] Cynthia Long Westfall, *A Discourse Analysis of the Letter to the Hebrews: The Relationship between Form and Meaning*, JSNTSup 297, LNTS 11 (New York: Bloomsbury, 2005), 35. For clarification, I would distinguish the two terms *peak* and *frontground*, where the peak of the discourse is usually only one (with several sub-peaks), but frontground refers to grounding in relation to background and foreground, and there may be multiple frontgrounded elements in a single discourse. See below for more on the definitions of grounding (background, foreground, and frontground) and peak.

[5] For an example of a musical-linguistic study in emphasis, see Wendy J. Porter, *Early English Composers and the Credo: Emphasis as Interpretation in Sixteenth-Century Music*, Routledge Research in Music (New York: Routledge, 2022).

In written discourse, how is a peak determined? If *peak* refers to the highest point of intensity, it may be assumed that there are other points of intensity that are not quite as high, or intense. These points of intensity can be identified by another term, *prominence*. They stand out from the baseline of the text. Thus, the peak of a work might be an appropriate term to describe the point of the work with the highest cluster of prominent items. This paper explores the notion of *prominence* and *markedness* as it relates to *peak* in determining the climactic height of Paul's letter to Galatians. Before examining the discourse peak, however, it is necessary to lay out an understanding of prominence.

2. Prominence and terminology

In contrast with the linguistic concept of cohesion,[6] which identifies relations of similarity between elements in the text, prominence essentially identifies relations of dissimilarity.[7] Porter and O'Donnell note that "we as interpreters recognize that our texts are not all written on the same monotone plane but that authors make certain parts stand out more than other parts so that they are in some way being linguistically highlighted."[8] Reed states that prominence is "the means by which speakers/authors draw the listener/reader's attention to important topics and motifs of the discourse and support these topics with other less-prominent material."[9] Halliday defines *prominence* as "linguistic highlighting, whereby some feature of the language of a text stands out in some way."[10] It is in essence

[6] See M. A. K. Halliday and Ruqaiya Hasan, *Cohesion in English*, ELS 9 (London: Longman, 1976); Stanley E. Porter and Matthew Brook O'Donnell, *Discourse Analysis and the Greek New Testament: Text-Generating Resources*, LNTG 2 (New York: Bloomsbury/T&T Clark, 2023), 190–223; Yoon, *Discourse Analysis*, 112–18; Yoon, "The Question of Aporiai or Cohesion in the Fourth Gospel: A Response to Urban C. von Wahlde," in *The Origins of John's Gospel*, ed. Stanley E. Porter and Hughson T. Ong, Johannine Studies 2 (Leiden: Brill, 2016), 219–38; among many other works on cohesion.

[7] Jeffrey T. Reed, *A Discourse Analysis of Philippians: Method and Rhetoric in the Debate over Literary Integrity*, JSNTSup 136 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1997), 106; cf. Halliday and Hasan, *Cohesion in English*.

[8] Porter and O'Donnell, *Discourse Analysis*, 129.

[9] Reed, *Discourse Analysis*, 105–6. Other helpful definitions include: "those semantic and grammatical elements of discourse that serve to set aside certain subjects, ideas or motifs of the author as more or less semantically and pragmatically significant than others" (Reed, *Discourse Analysis*, 106; Jeffrey T. Reed and Ruth A. Reese, "Verbal Aspect, Discourse Prominence, and the Letter of Jude," *FilNeot* 9 (1996): 186 [181–200]); and "the use of devices that languages have which enable a speaker to highlight material or make some part of the text stand out in some way" (Westfall, *Hebrews*, 31).

[10] M. A. K. Halliday, *Explorations in the Functions of Language* (New York: Elsevier, 1973), 105.

a description of the way in which certain elements stand out from the rest of the text based on the linguistic resources of a given language.

Prominence is based on a fundamental assumption that in discourse, whether spoken or written, some parts *stand out* in relation to others. Such variation of spoken and written text is evident in that not all parts of a text are of equal status. Some parts of the text serve as background or supporting material, and some are intended to be foreground or mainline material, and perhaps some parts are intended to be frontground or of even more heightened emphasis. The point of determining prominence is to differentiate parts of texts according to these levels. For example, in a speech (whether a sermon in a church service or a classroom lecture), the most dynamic and engaging speakers are ones who utilize variation, sometimes heightening the volume of their voices to emphasize, sometimes lowering the volume to draw in the audience, or sometimes using repetition to catch the audience's attention. These variations help listeners to organize the speech into more or less supporting or mainline material. On the other hand, the most unengaging speakers are ones who speak in monotone, with little to no variation; listeners may have a difficult time digesting their speech. Auditory variation, in these examples, allows the audience to remain engaged and pay attention to certain parts of the speech more specially than other parts (although every speaker probably desires for their audiences to hang on every word they speak!). In written text, there are devices and mechanisms that allow for similar variation, depending on the mode of language and the language itself, for the effect of emphasized attraction. In English, for example, orthographic features such as underlining, italicization, and paragraphing serve to effect prominence. Other structures outside of orthography can be used for prominence, such as repetition, variant word order, or choice of lexis. In Greek, there are also a number of ways in which prominence can be determined, some overlapping with English (and other languages) and some unique to Greek.

One purpose of examining prominence is to identify the part (or parts) of the discourse that stands out noticeably, due to a cluster of prominent items. This may be illustrated by a spoken sermon, where the preacher speaks passionately about a particular point in a heightened tone, conveying emphatic attraction to that part. For example, the preacher might be on the topic of forgiveness, and then continues with the following:

> And because we've been forgiven by God, we must forgive! We forgive because *he* forgave! We forgive because *he* gave his only Son! We forgive because *he* set the example! We forgive because *he* forgave us in the most undeserved way!

Then, perhaps, the preacher pauses in silence for a moment, then says in a hushed tone:

> And because of that, we are to forgive our friends, our enemies, our family, our neighbors—because he first forgave us of our sins.

The point here is not to analyze this brief, artificial discourse, but to illustrate that the preacher—advertently or inadvertently—emphasized this part of his sermon regarding forgiveness, through heightened tonality but probably also repetition of words and other linguistics factors. One way to describe this phenomenon is prominence. And various mechanisms can be used to effect prominence in any language. In this example, however, there is an extended section or cluster of prominence that is used to create what might be called a *peak* of discourse. Thus, as intimated in the introduction, *peak* refers to the heightened climax of the discourse that contains the highest cluster of prominent (frontgrounded) elements, if such a cluster exists. Just like peaks of mountains, where some peaks are noticeably higher than the rest of the mountain range and some are less noticeable, peaks of discourses can also vary.

However, before identifying and outlining these mechanisms, specifically in Greek, it is profitable to distinguish between the various terms associated with prominence, especially the term *markedness*. A fundamental question in the discussion is whether there is a difference between these two terms, among other terms, such as salience, relevance, emphasis, highlighting, or foregrounding.[11] For purposes of this paper, these five terms are more or less similar descriptions of markedness and prominence, and the focus of this study is markedness and prominence. Foregrounding, or (levels of) grounding, in addition, focuses on the levels or grounds of prominence, as described below (section 3, Theory of Prominence).

The relationship between markedness and prominence is complementary, but it is profitable to distinguish the two terms to refer to different

[11] Henning Andersen, "Markedness Theory – the First 150 Years," in *Markedness in Synchrony and Diachrony*, ed. Olga Mišeska Tomić, Trends in Linguistics: Studies and Monographs 39 (Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter, 1989), 11 (11–46), makes an interesting, and apropos, observation that disagreements—in this case, the meaning of markedness—may be due to definitional misunderstandings and applications. He states "that their diametrically opposed views are only *apparently* opposed. This occasionally happens when a term is understood differently by different practitioners, and the notion espoused by one is in fact different from the one rejected by the other" (italics mine). Cf. also Reed, *Discourse Analysis*, 105

Also, of the terms listed here, I use *emphasis*, or its verbal form *emphasize*, in a general sense to describe what a writer does in his or her use of prominence. I also use the term *foregrounding*, as seen below, in the context of grounding along with the levels of grounding involved.

linguistic phenomena. The term *markedness* is traced back to the Prague School of Linguistics, notably to the theories of Roman Jakobson and Nikolai Trubetzkoy.[12] Markedness is based on the supposition that a linguistic system is composed of (a series of and various levels of) binary oppositions, and that between binary oppositions, one item is simpler and more general and the other more complex and more specific. The terms *unmarked* and *marked* are used to label these oppositions, respectively.[13] Thus, the unmarked item is the more general and simpler item, and the marked item is the more complex or specific item. For example, in English, consider the two terms, *understand* and *misunderstand*. Between this binary opposition, *understand* is the general, simpler term, thus unmarked, while *misunderstand* is the more complex—since it contains the unmarked word *understand* but adds a prefix *mis-* to it. Another example in English relates to grammatical markedness, where the present tense is unmarked, and the past tense marked: *walk* vs. *walked*, where the past tense typically adds *-ed* to the simpler present tense form.

Porter and O'Donnell identify five categories of markedness: (1) material markedness, (2) implicational markedness, (3) distributional markedness, (4) positional markedness, and (5) semantic markedness.[14] Material markedness relates to morphological bulk; the morphologically bulkier item is materially marked. Implicational markedness relates to irregularities in a set of related forms; more irregularities of an item mean it is implicationally marked. Distributional markedness relates to the frequency of items; the more frequent, generally speaking, the less marked. Positional markedness relates to word order or constituent order; the default order is unmarked, while a non-default order is positionally marked. Semantic markedness relates to the semantic ranges of the linguistic items; the broader the range, the less marked, and the narrower

[12] Edwin L. Battistella, *Markedness: The Evaluative Superstructure of Language*, SUNY Series in Linguistics (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 1990), 1; Edna Andrews, *Markedness Theory: The Union of Asymmetry and Semiosis in Language* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1990), 1–3; Andersen, "Markedness Theory," 15–27.

[13] Interestingly, and ironically, in the binary oppositions of the two terms, *marked* and *unmarked*, the lexeme *unmarked* itself is marked in relation to its binary opposite *marked*, which is unmarked. However, this illustrates the various categories of markedness, as described in the next paragraph. *Unmarked* might be materially marked but also semantically unmarked by its own definition.

[14] See Porter and O'Donnell, *Discourse Analysis*, 149–51, where in n. 89, they note that they have now abandoned the category of cognitive markedness that was described in Porter, "Prominence," 56–57, in place of semantic markedness, which aligns more closely with an SFL framework. Cf. Stanley E. Porter, *Verbal Aspect in the Greek of the New Testament: With Reference to Tense and Mood*, SBG 1 (New York: Peter Lang, 1989), 178–82; John Lyons, *Semantics*, 2 vols. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977), 2:305–11; Andersen, "Markedness Theory," 12–14.

the range, the more marked an item is. The point, for this paper, is not to examine each category critically, but to illustrate the range of applications that markedness can describe.

In light of markedness being described in this way, the difference between the two terms lies in that markedness is related to the lexicogrammar and prominence related to semantics. The concept of stratification is highly relevant here, related to the strata of language, beginning at phonology (or phonetics or graphology), then to lexicogrammar, then to semantics, and finally to context.[15] This notion of stratification can help distinguish between linguistic highlighting at various strata, and it is probably best to understand markedness to be a description of linguistic highlighting at the lexicogrammar stratum and prominence to the semantic stratum (some might call this stratum pragmatics).[16] The significance of determining prominence is to understand what the writer emphasizes in the text, the material that is to be considered more important, and this is determined through identifying elements in the discourse which are marked in relation to unmarked elements.[17]

Another related term that is helpful in the discussion on prominence is *grounding*. Grounding is a useful term to identify the various levels of prominence as perceived by the interpreter, or "the perception of various levels of accumulated features of markedness,"[18] sometimes labeled background, foreground, and frontground, on a cline from least prominent (background), to more prominent (foreground), to most prominent (frontground).[19] *Background* refers to material that is least prominent in the discourse and serves to provide background information for the

[15] Yoon, *Discourse Analysis*, 71–73.

[16] Some, such as Battistella (*Markedness*, 3) and Ferenc Kiefer ("Towards a Theory of Semantic Markedness," in *Markedness in Synchrony and Diachrony*, ed. Olga Mišeska Tomić, Trends in Linguistics: Studies and Monographs 39 [Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter, 1989], 121 [121–38]), use the term *semantic markedness*, but they seem to use this to refer to lexical or grammatical markedness, without regard to stratification.

[17] See also the explanation in Porter, *Early English Composers*, 36, although she uses different terminology to make a similar distinction between markedness, prominence, and foreground.

[18] Porter, *Early English Composers*, 36.

[19] Stanley E. Porter, "Prominence: A Theoretical Overview," in *The Linguist as Pedagogue: Trends in the Teaching and Linguistic Analysis of the Greek New Testament*, ed. Stanley E. Porter and Matthew Brook O'Donnell, NTM 11 (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix, 2009), 53–55 (45–74). Others, such as Reed, prefer different terms, such as *background*, *theme*, and *focus*, to describe the levels of prominence (see Reed, *Discourse Analysis*, 107–8), while still others note only two levels, background and foreground, or figure and ground (see Stephen Wallace, "Figure and Ground: The Interrelationships of Linguistic Categories," in *Tense-Aspect: Between Semantics and Pragmatics*, ed. Paul J. Hopper, Typological Studies in Language 1 [Philadelphia: John Benjamins, 1982], 201–23). But for consistent terminology and room for more than two levels of prominence, the terms background, foreground, and frontground are utilized here.

discourse. "The background elements seem to function at the level of clause, since these are often used to establish the backbone of a narrative or the supporting historical and descriptive material for a discursive or expositional text."[20] Background material is not unimportant but reflects supporting material in the text. *Foreground* refers to elements that "are those that have significance greater than the simplest structural discourse unit, the clause. The items introduced, whether they be persons, events, motifs or other concepts, are meant to be distinguished from background material, whether this be supporting or mainline discourse."[21] These are elements in the discourse that are important to its flow. Finally, *frontground* refers to "those linguistic elements which stand out somewhat unexpectedly, that is, they are semantically marked, even if they have been previously introduced into the discourse."[22] They carry the most semantic weight and function as attention grabbers in the discourse. Frontground material stands out the most, since it is used for heightened emphasis. Grounding in this study applies mostly to the verbal system in Greek, although it can apply to both paradigmatic and syntagmatic categories.[23]

3. Theory of prominence

In light of the above discussion on prominence, specifically in relation to markedness and grounding, there are various criteria for determining prominence, divided into two overarching categories: paradigmatic choice and syntagmatic choice.[24] Paradigmatic choice relates to prominence through the choice of a single linguistic item (lexis and grammar), while syntagmatic choice relates to prominence through the choice of the order of word groups, clauses, and clause complexes (syntax). Significant categories for determining prominence through paradigmatic choice include verbal aspect (or tense-form), attitude (or mood-form), and causality (or voice-form), all related to the Greek verb. Categories for determining prominence through syntagmatic choice include constituent order within the clause structure and clause complex structure.[25]

[20] Porter, "Prominence," 54.

[21] Porter, "Prominence," 55.

[22] Reed, *Discourse Analysis*, 108.

[23] See, e.g., Porter, "Prominence," 71–73, where he states that when both a thematic and prominent element are combined, it can be considered frontground material.

[24] Porter, "Prominence," 58.

[25] Stanley E. Porter (*Idioms of the Greek New Testament*, 2nd ed., SBG 2 [Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1999], 290) refers to "sentence structure," but I have avoided using the word "sentence" and have opted for "clause complex" in this study. Both refer to the same phenomenon, however.

3.1. Paradigmatic Choice: Verbal Aspect (Tense-Form)

The semantics of verbal aspect primarily reflects ideational meaning, but another semantic effect is its signification of prominence. In other words, verbal aspect has implications for both the ideational metafunction and the textual metafunction, and these two work together in the writer's choice of verbal aspect.[26]

According to the tripartite view of the Greek verb, the three aspects are perfective, imperfective, and stative. This tripartite view can be viewed as in a series of binary oppositions: perfective and non-perfective as the first series of oppositions, and within non-perfective, imperfective and stative as oppositions.[27] The aorist tense-form, grammaticalizing the perfective aspect, is the least marked tense-form in the Greek verbal system; the perfective aspect is categorized as background. The imperfective aspect, grammaticalized by the present and imperfect tense-forms, is more marked and thus is categorized as foreground. The stative aspect, indicated by the perfect and pluperfect tense-forms, is the most marked and categorized as frontground. The future form is considered aspectually vague and so does not convey prominence according to the Greek aspectual system. So, while the primary function of aspect is to convey the subjective choice of the writer's conveyance of the progress of action (ideational metafunction), the secondary semantic function of aspect is to convey prominence in the discourse (textual metafunction).[28]

Discussion of mainline and supporting material is helpful, especially in light of two basic discourse types and the constituents of the mainline and supporting material for each of these.[29] For narrative texts, such as the Gospels, mainline is maintained by the use of the perfective aspect reflecting background material, while supporting material is maintained by using the imperfective and stative aspects—both are supporting material, but the imperfective aspect reflects the foreground while the stative aspect reflects frontground. Other supporting material, such as the use of infinitives and participles in secondary or embedded clauses, can be used as subordinate background material to the mainline. In discursive or expositional texts, such as the Pauline Epistles, the mainline is maintained by the use of the imperfective aspect reflecting foreground, while

[26] Porter, *Verbal Aspect*, 180; Porter, *Idioms*, 23.

[27] Porter and O'Donnell (*Discourse Analysis*, 149) describe markedness, not in terms of privative opposition, but in terms of a cline of markedness, from least marked to most heavily marked. However, whether a cline or a series of binary or privative oppositions, both seem to describe the same phenomenon of multiple levels of markedness of a single category.

[28] Reed (*Discourse Analysis*, 113) notes that one of the functions of aspect is to indicate prominence in the discourse.

[29] Porter, "Prominence," 57–58. See also Longacre, *Grammar of Discourse*, 21–29, although he applies mainline and supporting material differently than here and in Porter.

supporting material is maintained by the use of the perfective and stative aspects—the perfective aspect reflects background material while the stative aspect reflects frontground material. Infinitives and participles in secondary or embedded clauses are also used to provide further supporting material within each of these grounds. The difference in mainline and supporting material between these two different types of texts, narrative and discursive, is tied to the nature of these texts themselves, as well as the ideational meanings of the verbal aspects. Narrative texts usually describe events and stories that are depicted as complete. Thus, the mainline of the story is presented through the perfective aspect. Discursive texts, however, reflect ideas and processes as they unfold, and thus the mainline of the discourse is presented through the imperfective aspect. So, for purposes of this study, which is focused on prominence in a discursive text, mainline material is maintained by the foreground (through the imperfective aspect) and supporting material is maintained by the background (through the perfective aspect) if it is less prominent material, and the frontground (through the stative aspect) if it is more prominent material. Since aspectually vague verbs (such as εἰμί) or non-aspectual verbs (i.e., the future form) do not depict an aspectual system, and hence are neither perfective, imperfective, nor stative, they are considered to be either mainline or supporting material depending on the co-textual environment in which they appear.[30] If they appear in a narrative text surrounded by perfective aspect verbs, or if they appear in a discursive text surrounded by imperfective aspect verbs, they maintain that mainline. On the other hand, if they appear in a narrative text surrounded by imperfective-aspect verbs, or in a discursive text surrounded by perfective-aspect verbs, they maintain supporting material.

3.2. Paradigmatic Choice: Attitude (Mood-Form)

Another grammatical category in which prominence is conveyed in Greek is in the writer's choice of attitude through mood-forms. Porter contends that next to verbal aspect attitude may be the most important semantic choice that a Greek writer makes.[31] In fact, just as verbal aspect has both ideational and textual meanings, verbal attitude has both interpersonal and textual meanings, as the writer's choice of mood-forms not only conveys the speech function in that discourse but also prominence.

Verbal attitude, traditionally called mood, is conveyed through "the mood-forms [which] are used to grammaticalize the language user's

[30] Cf. Stanley E. Porter and N. J. C. Gotteri, "Ambiguity, Vagueness and the Working Systemic Linguist," *SWPLL* 2 (1985): 105–18.

[31] Porter, *Idioms*, 50.

perspective on the relation of the verbal action to reality."[32] There are four mood-forms in Hellenistic Greek: indicative, subjunctive, optative, and imperative, but it may be helpful to view these categorized as binary oppositions between indicative and non-indicative moods, where the indicative mood conveys the writer/speaker's "assertion about what is put forward as the condition of reality," and the non-indicative moods convey the writer/speaker's "volition" towards reality, with varying degrees of projection available.[33] Porter writes:

> Thus, the Indicative is used to grammaticalize assertive or declarative statements, while the non-Indicative moods grammaticalize a variety of related attitudes, having in common that they make no assertion about reality but grammaticalize the volition of the speaker, and are therefore deontic.[34]

The indicative is the most common mood-form throughout the New Testament corpus and is unmarked, and thus it grounds the other moods. Westfall notes that on the scale of markedness from least to greatest, the imperative would come after the indicative, then the subjunctive, with the optative being the most heavily marked mood.[35] In grounding terms, in light of the cline of markedness just presented, I suggest that the indicative be considered as background, the imperative and subjunctive as foreground, and the optative as frontground.

3.3. Paradigmatic Choice: Causality (Voice-Form)

Voice, or causality, is defined as "a form-based semantic category used to describe the role that the grammatical subject of a clause plays in relation to an action."[36] Another definition is: "Voice is that property of the verb that indicates how the subject is related to the action (or state) expressed by the verb."[37] The Greek verbal system contains three voice-forms: active, middle, and passive. As with the previous categories, voice-forms can be viewed in binary oppositions: active and non-active as the first set, and then middle and passive as the options for non-active forms. The active and passive roughly correspond to the voices in English

[32] Porter, *Idioms*, 50.

[33] Porter, *Idioms*, 51–52.

[34] Porter, *Verbal Aspect*, 322.

[35] Cynthia Long Westfall, "A Method for the Analysis of Prominence in Hellenistic Greek," in *The Linguist as Pedagogue: Trends in the Teaching and Linguistic Analysis of the Greek New Testament*, ed. Stanley E. Porter and Matthew Brook O'Donnell, NTM 11 (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix, 2009), 80 (75–94).

[36] Porter, *Idioms*, 62.

[37] Daniel B. Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics: An Exegetical Syntax of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 408.

and are relatively easy to understand, but the middle is more challenging to grasp, especially for those who do not have the middle voice in their own language. This is not the place for a comprehensive study on the significance of the middle voice, but a brief overview is appropriate.

Traditionally, Greek grammarians have had slightly different descriptions of the middle voice. Wallace states that the middle voice describes when the subject of the verb is both "doing and receiving (at least the results of) the action."[38] Dana and Mantey define the middle as "that use of the verb which describes the subject as *participating in the results of the action*" (italics original).[39] BDF state two functions of the middle, (1) replacement of the active, and (2) in the sense of "to let oneself be," without explicitly defining the middle.[40] Porter identifies three common approaches to describing the function of the middle voice: reflexive, self-involvement, and causality.[41] After surveying the various options and grammars, he concludes:

> The Greek voice-form system grammaticalizes the causality system in Greek, that is, the semantic relationship between actions and their causes, and whether and how these causes are linked to the subjects as agents and patients in these processes. The middle voice seems to grammaticalize the feature of internal causality, in which the cause of the action arises from the process, rather than relying upon another agent.[42]

Drawing upon Porter's description above, as well as others', a recent study by David Mathewson agrees that "voice can be seen to indicate causality and how the grammatical subject (expressed or implied) of a clause is connected to the cause of the action, whether as the agent or medium."[43] Understanding the semantics of the voice-form as grammaticalizing causality seems to be the most compelling description of the voice system for Greek.

[38] Wallace, *Greek Grammar*, 408.

[39] H. E. Dana and J. R. Mantey, *A Manual Grammar of the Greek New Testament*, reprint (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1957), 157.

[40] BDF §316.

[41] Stanley E. Porter, "Did Paul Baptize Himself? A Problem of the Greek Voice System," in *Dimensions of Baptism: Biblical and Theological Studies*, ed. Stanley E. Porter and Anthony R. Cross, JSNTSup 234 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 2002), 100 (91–109).

[42] Porter, "Did Paul Baptize Himself," 109. Cf. Jonathan T. Pennington, "Setting Aside 'Deponency': Rediscovering the Greek Middle Voice in New Testament Studies," in *The Linguist as Pedagogue: Trends in the Teaching and Linguistic Analysis of the Greek New Testament*, ed. Stanley E. Porter and Matthew Brook O'Donnell, NTM 11 (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix, 2009), 182–85 (181–203).

[43] David L. Mathewson, *Voice and Mood: A Linguistic Approach*, Essentials of Biblical Greek Grammar (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2021), 33–34.

For the purposes of determining prominence, the active voice would be the most commonly occurring and hence least marked voice-form (background). Consequently, the passive is more marked than the active (foreground), and the middle is the most heavily marked voice-form in this system (frontground) and the most prominent in a discourse.[44] The function of the passive is relatively easy to grasp, since there is a parallel in English: "attention regarding the action is placed upon the grammatical subject (recipient) rather than the agent."[45] In Hallidayan terms, the Goal is the subject of the verb, rather than the Actor. So while the passive voice-form may convey prominence, it also emphasizes the grammatical object (Goal) of the verb, rather than the grammatical subject (Actor).[46] The function of the active voice-form is even easier to grasp, as mentioned above. With regard to the middle voice, if it is the most heavily marked voice-form, this brings up the problem of deponency, where in Greek certain verbs have a middle form but not an active form, but the middle form appears to have an active meaning.[47] Again, this is not the place for a detailed study on this issue, but it seems that, given the definition of the middle as internal causality or agent involvement, the so-called deponent verb can be considered to have the full force of the middle voice.[48]

3.4. Syntagmatic Choice: Clause Structure

While verbal aspect, attitude, and causality reflect criteria for prominence through paradigmatic choice, clause structure and clause-complex structure reflect criteria for prominence through syntagmatic choice.[49] While word order (or more properly, word-group order) is an element of syntax, along with clause structure and clause complex structure, I do not include it as a criterion for analysis of prominence since it deals with prominence at the word group level and this study is interested in prominence at higher ranks (such as clause, clause complex, and discourse [or paragraph] levels).

In contrast with Greek, English is a configurational language, having a conventional clause structure (such as subject-verb-object) as well as con-

[44] Cf. Westfall, "Analysis of Prominence," 80–81.

[45] Porter, *Idioms*, 64.

[46] Westfall, "Analysis of Prominence," 80–81.

[47] In the broader linguistic field, *deponency* refers to a perceived "mismatch" between form and function (see Matthew Baerman et al., eds., *Deponency and Morphological Mismatches*, Proceedings of the British Academy 145 [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007]). The Greek deponent verb is one of many categories of deponency.

[48] Pennington sufficiently explains how deponent verbs arose, and why we should "set them aside." Cf. Pennington, "Setting Aside 'Deponency'," 181–203.

[49] For a more detailed description of Greek syntax, see David I. Yoon, "Greek Syntax," in *The Cambridge Companion to the Bible and Linguistics*, ed. Stanley E. Porter (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, forthcoming).

ventional word order (such as adjectives always appearing before nouns). Greek, however, is much more flexible in its clause structure, being an inflectional language. But even though Greek is a non-configurational language, there are still *some* conventions regarding word order and clause structure, even if they are not as rigid as in English (except a few, such as the article always preceding the noun it modifies or postpositives appearing as the second or third element [rarely fourth] of the clause, among others).[50] While there may be a general consensus among grammarians that the conventional clause structure in Koine Greek is verb-subject-object,[51] Porter observes that the means by which this is determined may be faulty and that many Greek clauses do not contain an explicit subject, let alone a finite verb. Preferring not to use typological language, and instead using the terms *subject*, *predicate*, and *complement*, he concludes that the most common clause structures in the New Testament are (1) predicate and (2) predicate-complement. These are followed by (1) complement-predicate and (2) subject-predicate clause structures.[52] Thus, the first pair of structures are considered conventional, thus conveying the so-called default, while the latter pair of structures are less conventional, thus resulting in the first element conveying a marked structure, hence prominence. Another way to view this, then, is that whenever an element (subject or complement, but not a function word) appears before the predicate in a clause, that element is foregrounded;[53] this would include adjuncts as well. In the verbless clause, the first element of the clause (usually the subject) is foregrounded, since there is no predicate to identify. According to this paradigm, then, it may be observed that predicates in themselves are never considered prominent within a clause structure, but they convey prominence through choice of aspect (see above), although they convey prominence not at the clause level but at the clause complex and discourse levels, since a clause typically contains one main predicate.

In this sense, prominence through clause structure has some overlap with thematization (at least at the clause level) in terms of the element that is fronted. In other words, when certain elements are fronted in a

[50] See the surveys in Ivan Shing Chung Kwong, *The Word Order in the Gospel of Luke: Its Foregrounded Messages*, LNTS 298 (New York: Bloomsbury, 2005), 2–29; and Stanley E. Porter, *Linguistic Analysis of the Greek New Testament: Studies in Tools, Methods, and Practice* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2015), 347–62. See also Porter, "Word Order and Clause Structure in New Testament Greek: An Unexplored Area of Greek Linguistics Using Philippians as a Test Case," *FilNeot* 12 (1993): 177–206; Porter, *Idioms*, 286–97.

[51] See Porter, *Idioms*, 293, although Porter's survey elsewhere shows there is much disagreement on "conventional" word order in Greek (Porter, *Linguistic Analysis*, 348–53).

[52] Porter, *Idioms*, 293–94. His conclusions elsewhere are more specific to clause types (Porter, "Word Order and Clause Structure," 192–93).

[53] Cf. Porter, "Word Order and Clause Structure," 200–203.

clause, especially when it diverts from the typical clause structure, there can be both prominent and thematic meanings involved.

3.5. Syntagmatic Choice: Clause Complex Structure

Syntagmatic choice for prominence refers to the order of clauses within a clause complex. There are three types of clauses identified in Koine Greek: primary (usually consisting of a finite verb and is independent), secondary (including dependent, relative, and conditional clauses, through the use of participles, infinitives, and subordinating conjunctions), and embedded (a subset of secondary clauses in which a clause, whether it is primary or secondary on its own, is rank-shifted to a lower level to modify the clause in which it is embedded). A clause complex defined here consists of a primary clause and any secondary or embedded clauses that are connected to it. In a vast majority of cases (93% in Paul), Porter finds that relative clauses appear after their referents, and the same pattern holds true for other secondary clauses with the exception of conditional constructions, where the protasis (the "if" clause) usually precedes the apodosis (the result clause).[54] Thus, in cases where this typical, or default, order is reversed, where the secondary clause precedes the primary clause or the apodosis precedes the protasis, the secondary clause or protasis is considered prominent in the clause complex structure.[55]

3.6. Other Markers of Prominence

There are many other categories of prominence that linguistically informed scholars have identified. Westfall notes a number of these categories for the Greek language: case; person and number; conjunctions and particles; markers of attention; temporal, spatial, and conceptual deixis; interrogatives; contrast and comparison; semantic emphasis; elaboration and comment; concentration of participants; summaries, conclusions, and central sentences; choice of lexis and representation; patterns and repetition.[56] I would state, however, that these categories relate more to markedness, at the lexicogrammar stratum. The five criteria mentioned above—aspect, attitude, causality, clause structure, and clause complex structure—reflect linguistic highlighting at the semantic stratum and will be my focuses for analyzing prominence in Galatians.

[54] Porter, *Idioms*, 292.

[55] See Porter, "Prominence," 69–71. Embedded clauses, by nature of being embedded, do not convey prominence syntagmatically, although for paradigmatic choice, an element in an embedded clause may be considered prominent.

[56] Westfall, "Analysis of Prominence," 79–94.

Table 1: Criteria and Levels of Prominence. This table is based on Porter's categories of thematization and is provided as a helpful summary.[57]

Type	Criterion	Levels of Prominence
Paradigmatic Choice	Aspect	Perfective (background); imperfective (foreground); stative (frontground)
	Attitude	Indicative (background); subjunctive and imperative (foreground); optative (frontground)
	Causality	Active (background); passive (foreground); middle (frontground)
Syntagmatic Choice	Clause Structure	Predicate and predicate-complement (background); complement-predicate and subject-predicate (foreground)
	Clause Complex Structure	Primary clause followed by secondary (background); secondary clause followed by primary (foreground); protasis-apodosis (background); apodosis-protasis (foreground)

4. Analysis of the Prominence of Galatians 3:15-25[58]

In Gal 3:15–25, Paul continues the body of the letter by giving a human example of a validated covenant, where no one is able to invalidate or add to it. While giving this example, he foregrounds κατὰ ἄνθρωπον in the primary clause (κατὰ ἄνθρωπον λέγω) through clause structure (3:15). Then he frontgrounds the participle κεκυρωμένην, which modifies the substantive διαθήκην through the use of the stative aspect. Not only is the covenant in a state of ratification (its ideational meaning as a stative aspect verb), but Paul wants to highlight the fact that this ratified covenant is frontgrounded (its textual meaning as frontground material).

Paul explains that the promises were spoken to Abraham and to his descendant (background), explaining that it refers to a singular descendant, Christ, not plural descendants (foreground/mainline; 3:16). He continues the mainline by further explaining that the law, which came 430 years after the promise, does not nullify the previously ratified promise (3:17). But again, Paul frontgrounds προκεκυρωμένην (the same root

[57] Porter, "Prominence," 74; Yoon, *Discourse Analysis*, 133. See also a more recent, fuller description of the categories of prominence in Porter and O'Donnell, *Discourse Analysis*, 151–88.

[58] This section is taken from Yoon, *Discourse Analysis*, 180–81.

as the previous frontgrounded word but with the prefix προ-), which again modifies διαθήκην. He continues by stating that if the inheritance is from obedience to the law, then it is no longer from the promise, but God granted (κεχάρισται; stative aspect) it to Abraham through a promise (3:18). God's act of graciously granting this promise to Abraham is frontgrounded through the stative aspect. Paul then explains the role of the law: it was added because of transgressions, until the descendant to whom *it was promised* would come (3:19). Paul again uses the stative aspect, but this time to frontground ἐπήγγελται (perfect passive indicative). He then asks if the law is opposed to the promise (3:21); he emphatically answers in the negative (μὴ γένοιτο; frontground using the optative mood-form) and states (through a conditional construction) that the law is not able to give life since it does not produce righteousness. Paul moves to background when he states that Scripture has imprisoned everyone under sin so that the promise would be given to those who believe in Christ (3:22). But before faith came, they were guarded (ἐφρουρούμεθα; imperfective aspect, but with remoteness using the imperfect tense-form) under the law, imprisoned to the faith which was to be revealed (3:23). The law, Paul explains, is in a state of being (γέγονεν; stative aspect) their instructor, leading them to Christ (3:24); the law being their instructor is frontgrounded. Clause structure also reveals that ὁ νόμος and παιδαγωγὸς ἡμῶν are foregrounded, being fronted in the clause. This whole clause, then, is prominent in this section, by combining the frontground of γέγονεν and foreground of ὁ νόμος and παιδαγωγὸς ἡμῶν. He concludes this section by stating that since faith has come, they are no longer under this instructor (3:25).

In this section, then, Paul foregrounds several elements, but there are six frontgrounded elements that stand out. First and second, the lexemes κυρόω/προκυρόω communicate the state of (previous) ratification that the covenant to Abraham is in. Third is God's gracious granting of this promise to Abraham. Fourth is the promise to Abraham's descendant, Christ. Fifth is the emphatic denial that the law is opposed to the promise. And sixth is the law being their instructor. Paul wants to emphasize, in this section on the promise and the role of the law, that the covenant to Abraham was (previously) ratified, that the promise was graciously given by God to Abraham's descendant, Christ, that the law is certainly not opposed to the promise, and that the role of the law was as an instructor. The abundance of frontgrounded material in this section renders it as the most prominent section of Paul's letter to the Galatians, or the peak of discourse. This does not mean that this is Paul's main thesis or main argument in Galatians but that this is the part of the letter that Paul emphasizes the most among the other parts.

5. Conclusion

This theory of prominence for application in Hellenistic Greek is profitable for analyzing discourses and books of the New Testament. Realizing that certain parts of a discourse stand out through linguistic highlighting, it is useful as an interpreter to note what parts stand out in light of the rest of the discourse. There seems to be one particular part of a discourse that stands out via a cluster of prominent items, what can be called the peak of discourse. This study outlined a heuristically viable theory of prominence, which when applied found Gal 3:15–25 to be the peak of Paul's letter to the Galatians. This provides some tangible criteria for determining the peak of a discourse, to avoid any subjective decisions for a peak or climax. Further descriptions of markedness in the Greek language system, including the verbal system but other systems such as nominal, can elucidate further components of prominence.

Appendix: Galatians 3:15–25 in Greek (UBS6)[59]

15Ἀδελφοί, κατὰ ἄνθρωπον λέγω· ὅμως ἀνθρώπου **κεκυρωμένην** διαθήκην οὐδεὶς ἀθετεῖ ἢ ἐπιδιατάσσεται. 16 τῷ δὲ Ἀβραὰμ ἐρρέθησαν αἱ ἐπαγγελίαι καὶ τῷ σπέρματι αὐτοῦ. οὐ λέγει, Καὶ τοῖς σπέρμασιν, ὡς ἐπὶ πολλῶν ἀλλ᾽ ὡς ἐφ᾽ ἑνός, Καὶ τῷ σπέρματί σου, ὅς ἐστιν Χριστός. 17τοῦτο δὲ λέγω· διαθήκην **προκεκυρωμένην** ὑπὸ τοῦ θεοῦ ὁ μετὰ τετρακόσια καὶ τριάκοντα ἔτη γεγονὼς νόμος οὐκ ἀκυροῖ εἰς τὸ καταργῆσαι τὴν ἐπαγγελίαν. 18εἰ γὰρ ἐκ νόμου ἡ κληρονομία, οὐκέτι ἐξ ἐπαγγελίας· τῷ δὲ Ἀβραὰμ δι᾽ ἐπαγγελίας **κεχάρισται** ὁ θεός. 19Τί οὖν ὁ νόμος; τῶν παραβάσεων χάριν προσετέθη, ἄχρις οὗ ἔλθῃ τὸ σπέρμα ᾧ **ἐπήγγελται**, διαταγεὶς δι᾽ ἀγγέλων ἐν χειρὶ μεσίτου. 20ὁ δὲ μεσίτης ἑνὸς οὐκ ἔστιν, ὁ δὲ θεὸς εἷς ἐστιν.

21Ὁ οὖν νόμος κατὰ τῶν ἐπαγγελιῶν [τοῦ θεοῦ]; **μὴ γένοιτο**. εἰ γὰρ ἐδόθη νόμος ὁ δυνάμενος ζῳοποιῆσαι, ὄντως ἐκ νόμου ἂν ἦν ἡ δικαιοσύνη· 22ἀλλὰ συνέκλεισεν ἡ γραφὴ τὰ πάντα ὑπὸ ἁμαρτίαν, ἵνα ἡ ἐπαγγελία ἐκ πίστεως Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ δοθῇ τοῖς πιστεύουσιν.

23Πρὸ τοῦ δὲ ἐλθεῖν τὴν πίστιν ὑπὸ νόμον ἐφρουρούμεθα συγκλειόμενοι εἰς τὴν μέλλουσαν πίστιν ἀποκαλυφθῆναι, 24ὥστε ὁ νόμος παιδαγωγὸς ἡμῶν **γέγονεν** εἰς Χριστόν, ἵνα ἐκ πίστεως δικαιωθῶμεν· 25ἐλθούσης δὲ τῆς πίστεως οὐκέτι ὑπὸ παιδαγωγόν ἐσμεν.

[59] *Greek New Testament GNT6: Standardausgabe*, ed. Holger Strutwolf, Klaus Wachtel, Hugh Houghton, David Trobisch, Stephen Pisano, Christos Karakolis, and David Parker (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 2025).

- Background material – regular
- Foreground material – underline
- Frontground material – bold

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