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Considering the Constraints of Context in the Exegetical Process

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Abstract: Context has often been understood primarily in a literary sense, referring to the text appearing immediately before and immediately following the unit under investigation. Some use the term to refer to the historical setting or situatedness of a text, including such features as the significant people, places, things, and events leading up to and/or existing during the time in which the author lived and wrote. Yet neither of these notions of context is sufficient, and even taken together they do not offer a complete picture. The present article proposes a more complex (yet still workable) and delicate model of context that is rooted in sociolinguistic and cultural anthropological theory. (Article)

Keywords: context, context of culture, context of situation, sociolinguistics, Systemic Functional Linguistics, cultural anthropology, social-scientific criticism

1. *Introduction*

Over the years, I have taught both undergraduate and graduate levels of biblical exegesis.[1] Despite the fact that many students would come to my course with some knowledge of the basic principles of biblical interpretation—and, not uncommonly, at

1. This paper, along with the two that precede in this volume, was first delivered in the session on "What Is Lacking in Exegesis?" of the New Testament Greek Language and Exegesis section of the Evangelical Theological Society Annual Meeting in San Antonio, TX, on 14–16 November 2023.

least one year of Greek—I was often struck by how often students would rely seemingly exclusively upon their own intuition to interpret biblical texts. It is not my intention to argue that there is absolutely no place for intuition in exegesis, for a "hunch" can sometimes lead to an important research question to which an answer ought to be attempted. However, since, by definition, intuition derives from one's instinctive feelings rather than conscious reasoning, it should always be checked against and subject to principled exegetical methodology that is built upon a principled theoretical base. This is because unchecked intuition tends to result in *eis*egesis rather than *ex*egesis.[2]

Perhaps the most common area of exegesis where intuition and the assumptions interwoven therewith may set an exegete on a trajectory towards eisegesis is that of context. There are a few reasons for this. One has to do with the lack of a clear definition of what constitutes "context." The term has often been understood primarily in a literary sense, referring to the text appearing immediately before and immediately following the unit under investigation. Others take the term to refer to the historical setting or situatedness of the text, to include such features as the significant people, places, things, and events leading up to and/or existing during the time in which the author lived and wrote. Neither of these notions of context is sufficient by itself, and even taken together they, arguably, do not offer a complete picture.

Another manifest issue—one that I think is very serious—is the apparent lack of critical thinking as it pertains to the function of context in the interpretive enterprise. The notion *that* context constrains the possible meaning(s) of a given text seems to have been lost on many novice exegetes. Perhaps this is because they have been socialized in highly pragmatic social environments, so that the impelling question for the interpretation of anything—be

2. I am often asked if, by restricting intuition in this way, I am somehow bracketing out the work of the Holy Spirit in the exegetical task. I do not address this question in this paper; however, by way of a brief response, I think that such a question unfairly assumes that the Holy Spirit cannot or does not work in and/or through the application of principled methodology.

it the Bible or a tweet—has to a large extent become, “What does this mean *to/for me*?” or put slightly differently, “How does this text *apply* to *me*?”—a question that seems to betray the conflation or even equation of “what a text (likely) meant” with its possible “application(s).”[3] Yet, even those who have a firmer grasp of the significance of context still struggle to articulate the relationship between context and text and *how* it is that context exercises a constraining influence upon textual meaning.

In this article, I argue that exegetes are more likely to avoid egregious eisegesis if they take account of the relevant features of the context of culture and the context of situation in which, and in light of which, the text under investigation was produced. One must also account for the surrounding co-text, since it is the case “that any sentence other than the first in a fragment of discourse, will have the whole of its interpretation forcibly constrained by the preceding text.”[4] I will attempt to define context, describe the relationship between context and text, and offer an explanation of the constraining influence of context on the meaning(s) of text based on M. A. K. Halliday’s systemic-functional sociolinguistic theory of language and context along with insights from cultural anthropology.[5]

3. That is, it conflates/equates “what a text (likely) *meant*” with “what that text can *mean*,” where the latter category has to do with the text’s *significance*, the application to some situation the understanding that is derived from a text. See Hirsch, *Validity in Interpretation*, 8; Stendahl, “Biblical Theology, Contemporary,” 1:418–32. However, see Porter’s caution about citing Hirsch on this topic (*New Testament Theology*, 144–45).

4. Brown and Yule, *Discourse Analysis*, 46.

5. On SFL and context, see Halliday, *Language as Social Semiotic*; Halliday, *Explorations*; Halliday and Hasan, *Language, Context, and Text*; Martin, *English Text*; Eggins and Martin, “Genres and Registers”; Leckie-Tarry, *Language and Context*. When considering context of culture, I will, where appropriate, draw on the work of social-scientific criticism, esp. cultural anthropology. On these two disciplines, see Elliott, *What is Social-Scientific Criticism*; Malina, *Christian Origins*; and the essays in Neufeld and DeMaris, eds., *Social World of the New Testament*.

2. *Context as Constraint upon Meaning*

2.1 *Introducing the Importance of Context*

As a launching point into a discussion of context and meaning in my exegesis courses, I would project to the screen a text from the Greek New Testament with no book name or chapter or verse references,[6] and I would simply ask my students, "What does this mean?"[7] For example, I might display the following text:

> καὶ γενομένου σαββάτου ἤρξατο διδάσκειν ἐν τῇ συναγωγῇ, καὶ πολλοὶ ἀκούοντες ἐξεπλήσσοντο λέγοντες· πόθεν τούτῳ ταῦτα, καὶ τίς ἡ σοφία ἡ δοθεῖσα τούτῳ, καὶ αἱ δυνάμεις τοιαῦται διὰ τῶν χειρῶν αὐτοῦ γινόμεναι; οὐχ οὗτός ἐστιν ὁ τέκτων, ὁ υἱὸς τῆς Μαρίας καὶ ἀδελφὸς Ἰακώβου καὶ Ἰωσῆτος καὶ Ἰούδα καὶ Σίμωνος; καὶ οὐκ εἰσὶν αἱ ἀδελφαὶ αὐτοῦ ὧδε πρὸς ἡμᾶς; καὶ ἐσκανδαλίζοντο ἐν αὐτῷ. καὶ ἔλεγεν αὐτοῖς ὁ Ἰησοῦς ὅτι οὐκ ἔστιν προφήτης ἄτιμος εἰ μὴ ἐν τῇ πατρίδι αὐτοῦ καὶ ἐν τοῖς συγγενεῦσιν αὐτοῦ καὶ ἐν τῇ οἰκίᾳ αὐτοῦ. καὶ οὐκ ἐδύνατο ἐκεῖ ποιῆσαι οὐδεμίαν δύναμιν, εἰ μὴ ὀλίγοις ἀρρώστοις ἐπιθεὶς τὰς χεῖρας ἐθεράπευσεν. καὶ ἐθαύμαζεν διὰ τὴν ἀπιστίαν αὐτῶν. Καὶ περιῆγεν τὰς κώμας κύκλῳ διδάσκων.

Typically, students who had previously studied Greek could identify a few words from the text, and those who had not studied Greek could usually still recognize some of the letters. After allowing the students some time to fumble around with the Greek text, I would display the same text but in transliterated form (*kai genomenou sabbatou* . . .). Despite being better able to recognize the letters, the students still struggled to identify individual words, phrases, and clauses. After a few more minutes, I would display an English translation of the text on the screen (*And when the Sabbath came* . . .), and the students would proclaim, usually with a great sense of relief, that they were finally able to recognize the text—at which point I would say, "Great! Now, who can tell me the *meaning* of this text."

6. Sometimes in the graduate exegesis course, I would begin by displaying a high-resolution photo of a text from a digitized Greek manuscript such as Codex Sinaiticus or, if available, a digitized papyrus fragment.

7. The inspiration for this exercise came from Malina, "Reading Theory Perspective," 3–6.

While a few students might have attempted an explanation of the text, most were savvy enough to understand that I had been attempting to lead them to a "teachable moment." Here, I would segue into a series of questions about the text that are intended to motivate students to start thinking about matters of context. In relation to the text from Mark 6:1–6 above, I might ask the following kinds of questions (by no means an exhaustive list):

- Who are the participants involved in the story? What relationship(s) are described as existing among them?
- What is the Sabbath day and what was its significance to Judeans living during the so-called Second Temple period (roughly 515 BCE to 70 CE)?
- What do we know about synagogue worship in that timeframe? Who was allowed to teach in a synagogue on the Sabbath?
- The NIV says the audience was "amazed" by Jesus' teaching, but the NRSV has "astounded," and the NET Bible has "astonished." How should such terms be interpreted? Should *ἐξεπλήσσοντο* be read positively or negatively, and how does one decide?
- What's with the audience's line of questioning involving Jesus' family, and how do their questions lead them to the point of, as Mark narrates, being "scandalized" by Jesus?
- What does Mark even mean in reporting that "they were scandalized by him" (*ἐσκανδαλίζοντο ἐν αὐτῷ*)—i.e., what would be typical causes of "offence" in the sociocultural milieu of the first-century circum-Mediterranean world, and what might be at issue in this text? How do we know?
- How would the ancients have understood the values of the institution of kinship ("family") and how would that have affected their notion of the identity and social status of Jesus?

Through questions like these, several important points begin to take shape: (1) simply glossing the words of a text from one language to another does not answer the question of meaning; (2) a text "means" only within some sort of context; (3) if exegetes do not do the hard work of discovering, as best they can, the context of the text under investigation, they will often simply fill in their own context to make sense of the text, which typically

leads to anachronistic and ethnocentric readings of the text.[8] Somewhat ironically, these points are, themselves, still largely based on intuition. This is where a clearer definition and a solid, theoretically based model of context are required.[9]

2.2 *Describing and Modeling Context*

Context has been described in different ways in many common works on exegesis. For example, in his well-known book on exegesis, Fee says that the questions of context are of two kinds: historical and literary. For him, historical context includes the "general historical-sociological-cultural *setting* of a document (e.g., the city of Corinth, its geography, people, religions, social environment, economy)" and the "*specific occasion* of the document (i.e., why it was written)."[10] Literary context, he says, "has to do with why a given thing was said at a given point in the argument or narrative."[11] Interestingly, other than telling his readers that "before the investigation of any sentence, paragraph, or other subsection of a document, one always needs a good sense about the entire document"—i.e., about its author, recipients, where the recipients live, their present circumstances, the historical situation that prompted the writing of the document, the author's purpose, overall theme, and outline of the text—Fee does not explain, at least not explicitly, why these things are important or how they inform or constrain interpretation.[12]

Gorman also divides context in two, with "historical" (inclusive of sociopolitical and cultural features) on the one hand and "literary and rhetorical" on the other.[13] Gorman is, perhaps, slightly better at explaining why studying context is vital for

8. See Rohrbaugh, *New Testament in Cross-Cultural Perspective*, 1–17.

9. On methodology and the use of models, see Elliott, *What is Social-Scientific Criticism*, 41–49; Dvorak, "Elliott's Social-Scientific Criticism," 260–62; Malina, "Social Sciences and Biblical Interpretation," 229–42; Dawson, "Malina and Models," 361–70.

10. Fee, *New Testament Exegesis*, 5 (italics original).

11. Fee, *New Testament Exegesis*, 5.

12. Fee, *New Testament Exegesis*, 8.

13. Gorman, *Elements*, 78, 81–82.

exegesis, noting at one point that "context is so crucial to interpretation that it is no exaggeration whatsoever to say that if you alter the *context* of a word or sentence or paragraph, you also alter the *content* [i.e., "meaning"] of that text."[14] Blomberg and Markley also maintain the categories of historical (including cultural) and literary, but their coverage is much more extensive as they devote a chapter to each of these in their handbook on exegesis.[15] Although, generally speaking, I accept "historical" (including sociocultural) and "literary" as appropriate categories, they seem to me to be rather blunt, lacking in elegance and delicacy. I think it is vital that students be exposed to a more delicate model that will give them a firmer grasp both of *what* contextual features significantly constrain the meaning(s) of a text and *how* these features actually do constrain textual meaning(s). In what follows, I attempt to describe such a model. The discussion could proceed from either a bottom-up perspective, beginning with context of situation, or from the top-down, beginning with context of culture. I have opted for the latter in this presentation.

2.2.1 *Context of Culture*. According to the cultural anthropologist Geertz, "culture" may be described as "an historically transmitted pattern of meanings embodied in symbols, a system of inherited conceptions expressed in symbolic forms by means of which [humans] communicate, perpetuate, and develop their knowledge about and attitudes toward life."[16] Similarly, Elliott defines culture as "the total, generally organized way of life, including language, knowledge, beliefs, values, norms, sanctions, institutions, art, customs, traditions, interests and ideologies, and artifacts that is proper to a given people and that is passed on from generation to generation."[17] These definitions

14. Gorman, *Elements*, 78.

15. Blomberg and Markley, *Handbook of New Testament Exegesis*, 63–115. See also Klein et al., *Introduction to Biblical Interpretation*, 213–72.

16. Geertz, *Interpretation of Cultures*, 95.

17. Elliott, *What is Social-Scientific Criticism*, 128. See also Hudson, *Sociolinguistics*, 73–75.

emphasize that culture comprises meaning (or knowledge) *plus* attitude. That meaning is patterned and symbolled, is the organizing principle for life in a society, and includes in its makeup beliefs, shared values, and norms implies a socially motivated process of interpretation by which people, places, things, ideas, etc., are endowed with certain statuses and functions and are situated within boundaries of time and space. That is, they are imbued with social value. Such valuing transforms *meaning* into the *meaningful*—as Malina puts it, "Meaning freighted with feeling results in the meaningful."[18] Culture, then, is not merely a system of shared meaning or knowledge, but a system of shared *values*, of shared *meaningfulness*.[19] This system of meaning(fulness) or set of tacitly accepted social values is what, according to Halliday, forms the behaviour potential (including linguistic behaviour potential) in a given social system or culture.[20] Actual meaningful behaviour/action/activity results when members of a society instantiate the social system in particular contexts of situation. As facile as this sounds, the situation is much more complex than this, and it is in the complexity where one may catch a glimpse of how culture constrains semiosis.

Societies consist of a diverse array of groups, and each group has its own system of shared values—i.e., "subculture"— by

18. Malina, *Christian Origins*, 9.

19. Pilch and Malina ("Introduction," xix): "The word 'value' describes some general quality and direction of life that human beings are expected to embody in their behavior. A value is a general, normative orientation of action in a social system. It is an emotionally anchored commitment to pursue and support certain directions or types of actions."

20. Halliday, *Explorations*, 49. When Halliday uses the term *social* (as in *social semiotic*), he intends to suggest two senses of the term simultaneously. In one sense he uses the term "to indicate that we are concerned particularly with the relationships between language and social structure, considering social structure as one aspect of the social system"; in another sense, he takes the term "to be synonymous with the culture" (Halliday and Hasan, *Language, Context, and Text*, 4). See also Malina, *Christian Origins*, 1: ". . . where do meanings come from? The answer is the social system" (a statement based on Douglas, "Do Dogs Laugh?" 389). Compare Leckie-Tarry, *Language and Context*, 20–23.

which it is governed. While some subcultural values align with those of the encompassing culture, inevitably others do not, which results in the introduction of a certain degree of tension and conflict into the cultural system.[21] Societies perdure in the face of such internal contradiction and conflict by following socially generated and commonly understood "rules" of behaviour (again, including linguistic behaviour) that comprise what social semioticians call the "logonomic system."[22] These rules constrain which participants are allowed to behave in certain ways in relation to other participants (which are not always human), when, where, how, and why—and which behaviours are appropriate or not.[23] The logonomic system is part of the socialization process, and its rules are taught and policed by such social agents as parents, teachers, employers, public figures, and peers.[24] This is the mechanism through which the context of culture constrains meaning.

One way that the logonomic system gets realized is through the staging of social processes. Members of a culture develop consistent, patterned ways of achieving the goals of the many assorted social processes that people want or need to accomplish

21. See Hodge and Kress, *Social Semiotics*, 2–5, on ideological complexes. See also Mary Douglas's model of grid and group in her *Natural Symbols*, 57–71, as well as Malina's adaptation of Douglas's model in *Christian Origins*, 28–67. Also helpful is Malina's "Social Sciences and Biblical Interpretation," 229–42, which discusses three abstract models—structural-functional, conflict, and symbolic—that are typically used to think about social interaction and societies.

22. Hodge and Kress, *Social Semiotics*, 4–5; cf. Halliday's use of Bernstein's "code" in *Language as Social Semiotic*, 111. See also Rohrbaugh, *New Testament in Cross-Cultural Perspective*, 45–46. Importantly, Rohrbaugh points out that "because these rules are part of an ongoing and continuously negotiated social contract, they are always part of an ideological complex that both expresses and reflects social relations" (46).

23. Note my use of "constrain" as opposed to "determine." Logonomic "rules" are not deterministic but are, instead, probabilistic. While many if not most members of a society "go with the flow" of culture, the option to flout the logonomic "rules" always exists.

24. Rohrbaugh, *New Testament in Cross-Cultural Perspective*, 46; Hodge and Kress, *Social Semiotics*, 4.

in a given situation within that culture. These become the observable norms or "rules" noted above. These patterns or genres develop over time through a process that Berger and Luckmann call "habitualization":

> Any action that is repeated frequently becomes cast into a pattern, which can then be reproduced with an economy of effort and which, *ipso facto*, is apprehended by its performer *as* that pattern. Habitualization further implies that the action in question may be performed again in the future in the same manner and with the same economical effort.[25]

This same basic principle applies when language is involved, too. Bakhtin pointed out that in certain cultural spheres, language use becomes habitualized into what he called "speech genres," relatively stable, culturally constrained, predictable types of utterances.[26] He writes,

> We learn to cast our speech in generic forms and, when hearing others' speech, we guess its genre from the very first words; we predict a certain length (that is, the approximate length of the speech whole) and a certain compositional structure; we foresee the end; that is, from the very beginning we have a sense of the speech whole, which is only later differentiated during the speech process.[27]

Echoing Bakhtin, Martin and Rose suggest that in the formative years of childhood, people learn to identify and distinguish the typical genres of one's culture by attending to consistent patterns of meaning as they interact with others.[28] Often this learning process involves trial and error, correction and rebuke, which is when and how the logonomic system becomes engrained in the members of a (sub)culture. Of course, rules may be challenged and/or outright flouted, and if enough members of the (sub)culture support such flouting, the logonomic system may undergo change—but not without cost.

These (speech) genres or habitualizations are not confined to particular instances or instantiations of culture. In fact, the more

25. Berger and Luckmann, *Social Construction of Reality*, 53.
26. Bakhtin, "Problem of Speech Genres," 60.
27. Bakhtin, "Problem of Speech Genres," 79.
28. Martin and Rose, *Working with Discourse*, 8.

engrained these patterns become, the more pervasive they are in the artifacts of the culture. One example of this is intertextuality. As Lemke describes it, intertextuality is less about the use of particular words or phrases or quotations from one text in another, although that is one way that intertextuality can manifest. Rather, intertextuality has more to do with the manifestation of "common semantic patterns" or genres across the texts of a (sub)culture.[29] There is an example of this in Mark 6:4 where Jesus recites the axiomatic parable, *οὐκ ἔστιν προφήτης ἄτιμος εἰ μὴ ἐν τῇ πατρίδι αὐτοῦ καὶ ἐν τοῖς συγγενεῦσιν αὐτοῦ καὶ ἐν τῇ οἰκίᾳ αὐτοῦ* 'A prophet is not without honour except in his fatherland and among his kinfolk and in his household.' France notes that this axiom (with some variation) is known to have been applied to philosophers in the Greek world, demonstrating the broad use of the axiom to communicate something akin to the modern saying, "Familiarity breeds contempt."[30]

To bring a level of concreteness to the discussion, one may note several points regarding how accounting for context of culture constrains the meaning of Mark 6:1–6, introduced above as our sample text (NB: there are additional noteworthy items that are not covered here).[31] In this story from the public ministry of Jesus, Mark provides important details that connect his readers to the (sub)cultural context in which the events of the story take place. These bits of information constrain how the story is to be read and understood. Note first the setting for the story. Mark says that Jesus (and his disciples) entered his childhood home (*ἔρχεται εἰς τὴν πατρίδα αὐτοῦ*), and that when the Sabbath came (*γενομένου σαββάτου*), Jesus began to teach in the synagogue (*ἤρξατο διδάσκειν ἐν τῇ συναγωγῇ*). One's childhood home, the Sabbath, and the synagogue are bounded, socially valued (i.e., meaningful) spaces and times, especially in the Judean subculture. Their explicit mention does more than

29. See Lemke, "Intertextuality and Text Semantics," 85–114, esp. 85–87. See also Xue, "Analysis of James 2:14–26," 129–32.

30. France, *Mark*, 243.

31. For the text with my English gloss alongside it, see the appendix below.

provide the spatial and temporal settings of the events to be narrated; they also limit the range of probable meaning(s) that the ensuing story can make by setting certain expectations in the minds of the readers based on their symbolic value and shared meaningfulness.[32]

At the very least, knowing that the story took place in Jesus' πατρίς tells the readers something about the people who witnessed his activities. In cultural anthropological terms, Jesus was back among his blood kin and his "fictive/surrogate kin." The latter are people who, although not blood kin, nevertheless had a hand in his upbringing, in shaping his (human) identity and his social roles and duties, and who set the expectations for when, where, and how he should fulfill those roles and duties.[33] Similarly, the explicit mention of both the Sabbath and the synagogue make salient certain shared knowledge and values (meaningfulness) regarding what are appropriate goings-on during that time and in that space, and who is expected or allowed to participate in the goings-on and in what ways. For example, Chilton and Yamauchi say that "any male could be called upon to pray or to read the portions from the Torah or the Prophets" and that "any competent individual could also be called upon to give the sermon,"[34] so it may not have been out of the ordinary or unexpected that Jesus taught at synagogue in Nazareth; in fact, he may have been invited to do so. However,

32. See the discussion of "genre" ("staged, goal-oriented social processes") in Dvorak, *Interpersonal Metafunction*, 30–34; Eggins and Martin, "Genres and Registers," 235–37. See also Bakhtin, "Problem of Speech Genres," 60–102.

33. Elliott (*What is Social-Scientific Criticism*, 131) defines fictive (or surrogate) kinship as "a relationship among persons giving those involved a special claim on and responsibility for one another, and based on the fiction of constituting a primary group similar to but not identical with that created by descent and blood ties. Social identity, roles, relationship of a group based on and modeled after those of biological kinship, as in 'household of God,' 'brotherhood' (of faith)." As Rohrbaugh and Malina (*Social-Science Commentary on the Gospels*, 168) put it, "Jesus is where people know his birth status and honor rating."

34. Chilton and Yamauchi, "Synagogues," 1146.

what may seem unexpected, at least to modern exegetes, is how the audience responded to Jesus' teaching.

Mark does not narrate the content of Jesus' teaching in telling this story,[35] but instead zeroes in on the audience's response. Understanding the meaning of their response requires the exegete to consider the context of culture. Mark says that many (πολλοί) in the audience were "perplexed" or at the very least "surprised" (ἐξεπλήσσοντο) by *what* Jesus had said—or, perhaps, it was *how* he said it, or *that* he said it, or some combination of these. Regardless, Jesus' (fictive) family in attendance that day appear to have been motivated by Jesus' action relative to the paramount social values of their culture, viz. social identity, honour, and (positive) shame, and they appeared to engage in the social "game" of challenge and riposte (a [speech] genre) with Jesus,[36] as is betrayed by their line of questioning.[37] It is sometimes thought that the first sequence of questions—"Whence these things to him? And what is this given-to-him wisdom, and the deeds of power such as are occurring through his hands?"—indicates some level of positive evaluation of Jesus, but in light of sociocultural features such a reading is far from certain. For starters, as is characteristic in agonistic honour-shame cultures, it is not uncommon for questions to be asked for the purpose of challenging someone's honour or to rebuke or censure someone, as opposed simply to gain information.[38] Further, in the first two questions of the initial sequence, reference to Jesus is made using the demonstrative pronoun (οὗτος) rather than the more typical personal use of the intensive pronoun (αὐτός), which may be an indication that the audience

35. Compare Mark's and Matthew's (13:53–58) less detailed versions of this story to the quite different version narrated by Luke (4:16–30).

36. See Rohrbaugh, "Honor," 113–16.

37. On honour and positive/negative shame, see Rohrbaugh, "Honor," 109–25; Rohrbaugh, "Honor [Sourcebook]," 63–78; Roberts, "Shame," 79–92. See Crook's critique of Malina's view of honour and shame in "Honor, Shame, and Social Status Revisited," 591–611.

38. See the discussion in Neyrey, "Questions, *Chreiai*, and Challenges to Honor," 658–64. For more on the social function of questions in resocialization, see Dvorak, "Ask and Ye Shall Position the Readers," 196–245.

(as Mark portrays them) intended a negative evaluation of Jesus[39]—or perhaps it indicates that, while they were judging him, his identity was "up in the air." Still further, the second battery of questions—"Is this not the craftsman, the son of Mary and brother of James and Joses and Judas and Simon? And are not his sisters here with us?"—comprises a segmented genealogy that is designed, in effect, to "put Jesus in his place."[40] Further, the question is closed, and the use of οὐχ creates the expectation of an affirmation or positive response to the question. In terms of engagement in the system of appraisal, this communicates a concurrence or agreement among the synagogue audience; to them, Jesus is not who he claims to be by his action and/or through what he teaches.[41] Their verdict is thus rendered, which Mark makes explicit: "they were scandalized/offended by him" (καὶ ἐσκανδαλίζοντο ἐν αὐτῷ).

As cursory as these examples are, they at least demonstrate that on the basis of cultural context, several of the crucial elements of Mark 6:1–6 are easy to misinterpret if such context is not considered. Moreover, the language used by the synagogue audience, both their lexical and grammatical selections (as mediated by Mark), reified the logonomic system that was in place in the social world of Jesus' day. The same is the case for their non-linguistic behaviour (again, as Mark portrays it). Note that Mark goes on to say that Jesus "was not able to do any deeds of power there, except placing his hands upon a few sick people, he healed them" (v. 5). It is not likely that Mark intended this to

39. See Watt, "Pronouns of Shame and Disgrace," 223–34.

40. deSilva, *Honor, Patronage, Kinship, and Purity*, 162. deSilva notes (162n8) that the second sequence of questions "may contain an added barb—in referring to Jesus as the son of Mary rather than the son of Joseph in a culture in which everyone is named by his paternity, we may have an implication being made of his questionable legitimacy" (in human terms). Watt, "Pronouns of Shame and Disgrace," 228: "Vague paternity . . . has been the cause of ridicule in many societies, especially when it is the father who supplies the child's surname."

41. On appraisal and engagement, see Dvorak, *Interpersonal Metafunction*, 67–82. With regard to questions, see Dvorak, "Ask and Ye Shall Position the Readers," 211–19.

be a theological or Christological statement about Jesus' divinity; i.e., moderns should not assume that Jesus' divine power was not reduced or limited because he was rejected. Rather, because at the (sub-)cultural level shamelessness can negatively affect an entire group,[42] those who were offended by Jesus that day presumably did not want to be "disgraced by association" with him, so they left. It was only those who could not easily leave whom Jesus healed on that occasion.

2.2.2 *Context of Situation*. The context of situation refers to the specific (implied) context in which the cultural system is instantiated through the behaviour of the participants in the situation (again, including linguistic behaviour) and a meaningful social process is enacted (i.e., meaning is made).[43] Malinowski is credited with coining the term "context of situation."[44] While carrying out ethnographic fieldwork among natives in the Trobriand Islands near Papua New Guinea and translating their language to English, it became forcefully clear to Malinowski that language is meaningful only in relation to some sort of scenario or social process.[45] The significance of this

42. Cf. 1 Cor 5:1–13 for this notion as utilized by Paul when correcting a particular problem among the Corinthian Jesus-followers, about which they boasted (note esp. the axiom at 5:6, "a little leaven leavens the whole batch [of dough]").

43. Porter, *Linguistic Analysis*, 102.

44. Malinowski, "Problem of Meaning in Primitive Languages," 305, 306–9; Malinowski, "Ethnographic Theory of Language," 3–74. Weighing Malinowski's "Problem of Meaning in Primitive Languages," Porter (*Linguistic Analysis*, 121) notes, "Today Malinowski's essay seems a bit unscientific, in the sense that his conclusions seem to be based on a fairly informal and casual gathering of a few bits of evidence regarding some 'primitive' languages . . . . Nevertheless, it must be kept in mind that his work was carried out in the early part of the twentieth century, at the advent of such comparative studies. One needs to be very careful not to dismiss Malinowski too quickly."

45. In fact, as Halliday (Halliday and Hasan, *Language, Context, and Text*, 7) points out, Malinowski initially theorized that the context of situation was only necessary when studying primitive language; however, he later changed his mind. Malinowski ("Ethnographic Theory of Language," 58)

development notwithstanding, Malinowski's interpretive scope was limited primarily to specific instances of language such as the meanings of words or utterances.[46] He did not abstract a more generalized model of the context of situation; that project was taken up by Firth.

Like Malinowski, Firth believed that linguistic meaning was dependent upon and, thus, constrained by the context of situation.[47] However, Firth was not content with the way Malinowski had limited the contextual situation to the specific and accidental (i.e., words, utterances); he was in search of a suitable schematic construct for identifying and classifying typical, repetitive patterns of social behaviour with which he could associate and subsequently classify typical, repetitive types of language functions.[48] He, thus, construed context of situation as "a patterned process conceived as a complex activity with internal relations between its various factors" and he understood meaning to be "a property of the mutually relevant people, things, events in the situation."[49] In modeling the context of situation more thoroughly, Firth identified the following situational constituents as key to semiosis in any given context of situation.[50]

wrote, "I opposed civilised and scientific to primitive speech, and argued as if the theoretical uses of words in modern philosophic and scientific writing were completely detached from their pragmatic sources. This was an error, and a serious error at that. Between the savage use of words and the most abstract and theoretical one there is only a difference of degree. Ultimately, all the meaning of all words is derived from bodily experience."

46. See, e.g., Malinowski, "Problem of Meaning in Primitive Languages," 300–16.

47. Firth notes, too, that he was influenced by Wegener's *Untersuchungen über die Grundfragen des Sprachlebens* (esp. pages 21–27), despite thinking that much of Wegener's concept of the situation "has to be abandoned" (see Firth, "Ethnographic Analysis and Language," 103).

48. Firth, "Synopsis of Linguistic Theory," 8; Halliday, *Explorations*, 49. See also Firth, "Personality and Language in Society," 181–82.

49. Firth, *Tongues of Men and Speech*, 110, 111; Firth, "Synopsis of Linguistic Theory," 2–3.

50. Firth, "Synopsis of Linguistic Theory," 9; Firth, "Personality and Language in Society," 182. See also Halliday and Hasan, *Language, Context,*

The relevant features of participants: persons and personalities. These are the relevant participants (typically human) in the social process. "Relevance" is based on the degree to which these participants are central to the social process.[51] The use of both terms "persons" and "personalities" is Firth's way of referring to human participants in a holistic way. "Person" has to do with one's physical and mental capability to participate and interact in the situation ("nature"). "Personality" refers to who one has become and who one is in the social system and, more particularly, in the situation, including one's own consciousness and understanding of such, and whether and how one's social status and role affects and is affected by the interaction in the situation ("nurture").[52] There are two specific and significant sub-categories related to the participants involved in a situation:

The non-verbal action of the participants. This refers to the general social process that is going on in the situation, such as teaching and learning, buying and selling, or giving a public lecture.

The verbal action of the participants. This has to do with how language is put to use in the situation in relation to the social process. Is the use of language part of actually doing or accomplishing the social process or is it used to talk about, explain, or discuss the social action?

and Text, 8.

51. E.g., in a situation of buying and selling, the buyer and seller are the relevant personalities in the situation, even if there are others present in the situation. See Mitchell, "Language of Buying and Selling," 36.

52. See the discussion in Firth, "Semantics of Linguistic Science," 141–43; Firth, "Personality and Language in Society," 184–86; Firth, "Technique of Semantics," 28–29; Firth, *Tongues of Men and Speech*, 89–99. It should be noted that not all participants in a situation are actual flesh and blood humans. In narrative, for example, a participant may, indeed, be a fictitious character in the story who has been given personality by the storyteller or narrator. Additionally, it is sometimes the case that non-human characters in stories, such as animals or natural events, are personified (= ascribed human personality). These may also be construed as participants in a situation (cf. the storm in Mark 4:35–41 and pars.). I often tell my students that a participant in a situation is anything that can act or be acted upon, or at least portrayed as such. This description likely goes beyond what Firth had in mind.

The relevant objects. These are the objects in the situation that have a significant bearing upon the social process of the situation. For example, if the social process is teaching and the process is taking place in a classroom at an educational institution, relevant objects might include laptops, projectors, whiteboards, etc. "Relevance" is based on whether and to what degree these objects are involved in actually accomplishing the social process.

The effect of the verbal action. This feature has to do with what changes to the situation occurred as the result of the use of language by the participants in the situation. What was the outcome of the social process? Was the (social) goal of the process achieved?

Firth published only two relatively short books (*The Tongues of Men* and *Speech*) and a handful of articles. Although the above schema appeared in several of Firth's articles with the most complete treatment appearing in "Personality and Language in Society," it was, nevertheless, one of his students, T. F. Mitchell, who first put the model to work in "The Language of Buying and Selling in Cyrenaica." As the title indicates, Mitchell, using Firth's scheme, analyzed the language of buying and selling in the markets of the Bedouin of the Jebel. Mitchell's work provides a solid illustration of the model at work along with transcripts and notes from different encounters in the marketplace. In doing so, he helpfully clarifies a number of points related to Firth's model.

Even so, it was Halliday who adopted Firth's general point of view on context of situation, modified the scheme, and offered his take as a model of the semiotic structure of a situation.[53] He

53. For Halliday, semiotic structure "is a constellation of meanings deriving from the semiotic system that constitutes culture," i.e., a particular pattern of field, tenor, and mode (Halliday, *Language as Social Semiotic*, 110, 123). See discussion above regarding context of culture and the logonomic system (Halliday, *Language as Social Semiotic*, 123, draws on Bernstein's "code" in connection to what was referred to above as the logonomic system).

construes context of situation as comprising three main elements.[54]

- *Field* refers to what is happening, to the nature of the social action that is taking place, the relevant participants involved in the social action, and the circumstances under which the action takes place; it is the social process or activity that the participants are engaged in, in which language figures as an essential component.
- *Tenor* refers to the set of permanent and temporary role relationships that exist among the relevant participants in the situation, including the types of communicative roles they take on in the colloquy and the entire cluster of socially significant relationships in which they are involved.
- *Mode* refers to the role that language is expected to and does play in the situation, including the symbolic organization of the text and its channel (or mode) (i.e., spoken, written, or some combination thereof).

Halliday argues that these three sociosemiotic variables act collectively as a constraint on both the production and the meaning(s) of text as they specify its register,[55] register being "the configuration of semantic resources that the member of a culture typically associates with a situation type,"[56] which effectively constrains the scope or range of the meaning potential in the situation. The process of constraint may be thought of as field, tenor, and mode "resonating in the [linguistic] semantic system and so activating particular networks of semantic options" (and not others) such that three kinds of meanings are expressed simultaneously in the text instantiation process, viz. ideational meaning (a.k.a., presentational meaning), interpersonal meaning (a.k.a., orientational meaning), and textual

54. The following is based on Halliday and Hasan, *Language, Context, and Text*, 12. See also, Halliday, *Language as Social Semiotic*, 109–10; Leckie-Tarry, *Language and Context*, 23–25.

55. Although I do not explore it here, it is quite important to understand how Halliday thinks of text as both product (an output) and process (a form of exchange, an interact). See Halliday and Hasan, *Language, Context, and Text*, 10–12.

56. Halliday, *Language as Social Semiotic*, 111. See also Porter, *Linguistic Analysis*, 124–27; Porter, "Dialect and Register," 197–207; Porter, "Register in the Greek of the New Testament," 209–29.

meaning (a.k.a., organizational meaning).[57] In Halliday's model, through a process he calls "realization," features of field are expressed through the ideational function in the semantic system; features of tenor are expressed through the interpersonal function in the semantic system; and features of mode are expressed through the textual function in the semantic system.[58] In SFL, the process of "translating" context-constrained ideational, interpersonal, and textual meanings into written or spoken text is called "grammaticalization." For example, a mother who wishes to direct her teenage son to clean his room may select an imperative mood form from the lexicogrammar to express the semantics of directive attitude as a command: "Clean your room."

Space does not permit a full treatment of every possible realization statement for each of the functional-semantic domains that Halliday has identified (if such is even possible), but a brief description of the kinds of meanings expressed through each is in order. I will again use Mark 6:1–6 as a means of illustrating these descriptions.[59]

57. Halliday, *Language as Social Semiotic*, 123; Halliday and Hasan, *Language, Context, and Text*, 16–28. The alternative labels (presentational, orientational, and organizational) are from Lemke, *Textual Politics*, 34. Rather than use "field," "tenor," and "mode," Leckie-Tarry (*Language and Context*, 23–24) prefers to use the metafunctional/semantic terms to define the categories of context: "ideational knowledge," "interpersonal knowledge," and "textual knowledge." Using the metafunctional labels to describe the contextual elements could be confusing; the use of "knowledge" in each label is her attempt to maintain the distinction between the features of the situation and the linguistic functional/semantic categories.

58. Halliday and Hasan, *Language, Context, and Text*, 25, 26. They depict the process of realization using the following figure (p. 26):

SITUATION: Feature of the context	(realized by)	TEXT: Functional component of the semantic system
Field of discourse (what is going on)	↘	Ideational (experiential) meanings (transitivity, naming, etc.)
Tenor of discourse (who are taking part)		Interpersonal meanings (mood, modality, person, etc.)
Mode of discourse (role assigned to language)		Textual meaning (theme, information, cohesive relations)

59. It is important to note that when a discourse analyst analyzes written or spoken texts that were produced in situations (and cultures) of which the

Ideational resources allow for meaningful specification of what overarching social process is going on, including the process types of each relevant process or relation that is bound up in the overall activity (material, relational, mental, etc.). Additionally, resources in this semantic domain allow the identification of the participants involved as well as the circumstances in which the social activity is occurring.[60] The resources in the interpersonal semantic domain enable the enactment of various kinds of relationships amongst the (relevant) participants in the situation. These relationships are enacted in text through various lexicogrammatical selections such as the grammar of mood and modality (e.g., indicative mood form [assertion], imperative mood form [direction], subjunctive mood form [projection]); selections of reference (e.g., pronominal reference); or nominalization, as when specifying culturally-bounded relationships (e.g., mother, brother, sister).[61] Further, interpersonal resources enable participants to take up stances or attitudes toward themselves, other participants, and various relevant ideational elements by drawing on the subsystem of appraisal.[62] Resources in the textual semantic domain provide the ability to organize lexicogrammatical selections into a cohesive stretch of text by means of various kinds of cohesive ties (organic and componential), semantic chains, identity chains, embedded dialogue, and so forth.[63] Textual resources also enable adjustments to the flow and relative prominence of information within clauses or beyond the clause (Prime and Subsequent; Theme and Rheme; Topic and Comment). As regards Mark 6:1–

analyst was not an observer or participant or was unaware of, such as Mark 6:1–6, the task of analysis becomes much more complex and somewhat circular: one looks for clues in a text to discover a context, which, in turn, is used to interpret the text. To see an example of using context of situation (and culture) for moving from text to context, see Dyer, *Suffering in the Face of Death*, 47–75.

60. Lemke, *Textual Politics*, 40.
61. Lemke, *Textual Politics*, 40.
62. See Dvorak, *Interpersonal Metafunction*.
63. See Reed, “Discourse Analysis,” 205–12.

6, several situational factors are pointed out here (not intended to be an exhaustive list) that ought to be weighed by any exegete investigating this text. I begin with features of mode as expressed through selections in the textual semantic component.

2.2.3 *Mode of Situation Realized by Textual Semantic Component*. To begin with, in terms of channel, Porter notes that the Gospel of Mark generally, of which this unit is a part, was produced and preserved as a written text, although it may have been intended to be read aloud.[64] Following a pattern that is common with most subunits in Mark's Gospel and, thus, showing cohesion with the encompassing text, this unit begins with an orientation to establish the location (Jesus' hometown, in the synagogue), time (on the Sabbath), and characters (Jesus, the synagogue attendees, and other ancillary characters).

In terms of structure, following the orientation in the story, there is a distinct temporal shift (by means of a genitive construction [v. 2]) that leads to an event that includes a negative reaction (evaluation) of Jesus by the hometown crowd. Their evaluation (provided in a very clear statement by Mark) is followed by Jesus' own evaluative reaction—likely a riposte to their denial of honour to him—in the form of what was probably a well-known axiom. There is, thus, cohesion in this text based on evaluative semantics.

The text also exhibits cohesion through its syntax. If the text ends with the second clause in v. 6 and not the first, there are nineteen ranking clauses in the unit. Of these nineteen, only three are ranking secondary clauses.[65] Aside from those three ranking secondary clauses, the discourse moves forward primarily through extension: Addition: positive, as the use of *καί* as a clause conjoiner realizes.[66]

64. Porter, "Register in the Greek of the New Testament," 216. Porter cites Achtemeier, "*Omne Verbum Sonat*," 3–27 in support of the possibility that Mark was possibly intended to be read aloud.

65. See the OpenText.org annotation in the appendix.

66. See Reed, "Discourse Analysis," 206–7.

A final cohesive feature I will mention here, although there are others that could be mentioned, is the identity chains formed around the character of Jesus (the dominant chain) and the audience that was present when Jesus taught. The two chains interact throughout the length of the unit. I attempt to visualize these two chains in the following Greek text. The Jesus chain is highlighed with single underline and the audience chain with double underline:

> Καὶ ἐξῆλθεν ἐκεῖθεν καὶ ἔρχεται εἰς τὴν πατρίδα αὐτοῦ, καὶ ἀκολουθοῦσιν αὐτῷ οἱ μαθηταὶ αὐτοῦ. καὶ γενομένου σαββάτου ἤρξατο διδάσκειν ἐν τῇ συναγωγῇ, καὶ πολλοὶ ἀκούοντες ἐξεπλήσσοντο λέγοντες· πόθεν τούτῳ ταῦτα, καὶ τίς ἡ σοφία ἡ δοθεῖσα τούτῳ, καὶ αἱ δυνάμεις τοιαῦται διὰ τῶν χειρῶν αὐτοῦ γινόμεναι; οὐχ οὗτός ἐστιν ὁ τέκτων, ὁ υἱὸς τῆς Μαρίας καὶ ἀδελφὸς Ἰακώβου καὶ Ἰωσῆτος καὶ Ἰούδα καὶ Σίμωνος; καὶ οὐκ εἰσὶν αἱ ἀδελφαὶ αὐτοῦ ὧδε πρὸς ἡμᾶς; καὶ ἐσκανδαλίζοντο ἐν αὐτῷ. καὶ ἔλεγεν αὐτοῖς ὁ Ἰησοῦς ὅτι οὐκ ἔστιν προφήτης ἄτιμος εἰ μὴ ἐν τῇ πατρίδι αὐτοῦ καὶ ἐν τοῖς συγγενεῦσιν αὐτοῦ καὶ ἐν τῇ οἰκίᾳ αὐτοῦ. καὶ οὐκ ἐδύνατο ἐκεῖ ποιῆσαι οὐδεμίαν δύναμιν, εἰ μὴ ὀλίγοις ἀρρώστοις ἐπιθεὶς τὰς χεῖρας ἐθεράπευσεν. καὶ ἐθαύμαζεν διὰ τὴν ἀπιστίαν αὐτῶν. Καὶ περιῆγεν τὰς κώμας κύκλῳ διδάσκων.

2.2.4 *Field of Situation Realized by Ideational Semantic Component*. Specifying what is the primary social activity in this unit is somewhat challenging because there are two levels of social action to consider: that within the story and that within the Gospel of Mark. It is best to start with the story level, since a determination at this level is likely to inform what it might be doing at level of the Gospel.

Although Mark identifies many ancillary characters in the story, only Jesus (despite the lack of full personal reference until v. 4) and the "many" (*πολλοί*) who were present in the synagogue that day (v. 2) are the "relevant" persons in the main social process that Mark recounts. The main activity takes place on the Sabbath in the synagogue in Jesus' hometown. Jesus began to teach in the synagogue, which appears to have prompted the people to respond with a series of questions that pertain to Jesus' identity and status. Subsequently, Jesus responds to them verbally, quoting and, apparently, applying to them an axiom to sum up the situation. Not only was Jesus' teaching ministry

limited that day, so was his healing ministry. Jesus then leaves his hometown and continues teaching in surrounding villages. It seems the social interaction within the story centres around Jesus' claim to honour through his teaching in the synagogue and his own (fictive) kin rejecting his claim and denying him honour. In a sense, then, the story depicts identity and honour status management, and the result is negative for Jesus.

In considering the social action of the text at the level of the Gospel of Mark, one may gain some insight from three points in the storyline where Mark as narrator provides significant information to the readers, in particular, the expressions of the thoughts and emotions of the characters.[67] The first appears at v. 2, where Mark ascribes the emotional action of being perplexed to those who heard Jesus speak in the synagogue (ἐκπλήσσοντο 'they were astounded/perplexed'). Without getting too far into interpersonal semantics here, it is worth noting that this interpolation creates the expectation that Jesus is about to be tried by a court of public opinion made up of his own (fictive) family. The second significant interpolation occurs at the end of v. 3 where Mark again attributes another psychological/emotional action to the synagogue attendees, and this time it is their final verdict regarding Jesus' claim to honour (ἐσκανδαλίζοντο ἐν αὐτῷ 'they were scandalized/offended by him'). Finally, at v. 6, Mark again attributes an emotional action to a character, but this time it is to Jesus (ἐθαύμαζεν διὰ τὴν ἀπιστίαν αὐτῶν 'he was appalled because of their faithlessness'). These Markan interpolations certainly bring specificity to the immediate story, but they also connect to a broader (ironic) theme that runs through the Gospel of Mark, namely that those whom one would expect to recognize Jesus for who he is (son of God [Mark 1:1], prophet of God) and to honour him as such do not do so, largely because they are too ensconced in conventional human values, including traditional Judean religious expectations (e.g., religious leaders [Mark 3], his disciples [Mark 4], and even his family [Mark 6]). On the other hand, those whom one would not

67. On this topic, see Yamasaki, *Perspective Criticism*, 35–53; Yamasaki, "Perspective Criticism," 39–41.

expect to recognize Jesus as son or prophet of God tend to do so, even if they do not become his disciples (e.g., demons [Mark 5], non-Judeans such as the Syro-Phoenician woman [Mark 7], and the Roman centurion [Mark 15]). Thus, for Mark, this story is part of his larger social enterprise of portraying Jesus as son (and prophet) of God and, as such, worthy of honour, despite the fact that not everyone chooses to believe and accept that Jesus, indeed, embodies this identity.

2.2.5 *Tenor of Situation Realized by Interpersonal Semantic Component*. Key among the semantic resources of interpersonal meaning are mood and modality and appraisal/evaluation. In the Greek of the New Testament, mood refers to "the morphologically signaled grammaticalization of a language user's subjective perspective on or attitude toward the relation of the verbal action to reality, where 'reality' refers to the language user's *values-shaped and values-constrained perception of how things are (or are not) or how things ought to be (or ought not be*)."[68] Modality is a more specific label for the semantics of the language user's subjective perspective or attitude relative to "reality."[69] In terms of mood, all fourteen of the finite verbs that occur in Mark 6:1–6 are indicative mood forms realizing assertive attitude (epistemic modality).[70] Perhaps this is not all that surprising, since assertion is the basis of most narrative,[71] but mood and attitude are interrelated with appraisal/evaluation, particularly in regards to engagement. Assertive attitude

68. Dvorak, "Ask and Ye Shall Position the Readers," 215 (italics original).

69. Mathewson, *Voice and Mood*, 90.

70. Linguists typically identify two broad categories of modality: epistemic and deontic. Epistemic modality refers to a language user's level of commitment to or confidence in the assertions or propositions they make with respect to what they perceive to be reality, while deontic modality has to do with a language user's commitment to the realization of some action or event. See Mathewson, *Voice and Mood*, 90–91; Porter, *Verbal Aspect*, 165–66. Mathewson (p. 91) notes that some add a third category, "dynamic," to express the semantics of willingness and ability.

71. Porter, "Register in the Greek of the New Testament," 225.

(indicative mood) is one of the main ways that a language user can expand or contract dialogue (in a Bakhtinian sense) in text. For example, the verbs that Mark employs to describe both the feelings/evaluations of the synagogue attendees (ἐξεπλήσσοντο 'they were perplexed' and ἐσκανδαλίζοντο 'they were offended') and of Jesus (ἐθαύμαζεν 'he was appalled') all realize assertive attitude. In these instances, there is a correlation with proclaim: pronounce in the engagement system of appraisal. The assertive attitude in these instances, at least as far as the textual "reality" goes, contract semiotic space for any other alternative point of view on the matter.[72] Mark does not select the subjunctive mood and so realize projective attitude. To suggest that Mark meant that the synagogue attendees *might* or *could* have been perplexed/offended or that Jesus *might* or *could* have been appalled is not possible in this text because of Mark's selection of the indicative mood.

Appraisals or evaluations are interpersonally weighty because, in a manner of speaking, they reverberate and typically have some sort of effect on others. In some cases, attitudinal reverberations will resonate with others who share similar values upon which the evaluation was based, creating consonance and community. In other cases, attitudinal reverberations will clash with the values of others, creating dissonance and discord. I have already mentioned previously the attitudinal verbs ἐξεπλήσσοντο, ἐσκανδαλίζοντο, and ἐθαύμαζεν. I would just add here that while they describe attitudes of participants within the anecdotal story, they reverberate to the level of the Gospel with the result that the ostensible readers of the Gospel could be impacted by them. They will either align with the the synagogue audience and be scandalized by Jesus or they will align with Jesus and feel quite upset that anyone has rejected Jesus as prophet, teacher, and ultimately son of God.

One final comment is worth making in regards to tenor/ interpersonal meaning. Note as an example the synagogue audience's line of questioning about Jesus. It is ideationally heavy. Nevertheless, in part because Mark divulges the attitude

72. See Dvorak, *Interpersonal Metafunction*, 72–73.

of the synagogue audience before reporting their questions, it becomes clear that the questions are not asked merely to gain information. They are asked for the social purpose of judging Jesus. This is an instance where each part of the questions betokens a negative attitude toward Jesus. It is difficult to tell, based on co-text, whether the judgment is one of social esteem (normality) or one of social sanction (veracity or propriety); that is, it is difficult to know if they judge him negatively for something he said while teaching or for the very fact *that* he taught in the synagogue.[73]

3. *Conclusion*

What I hope to have shown in this article is that the matter of considering context in the exegetical process is vital for determining the meaning(s) of a text. In more recent textbooks and handbooks on exegesis, context is presented as a required element in exegesis, but often in a way that lacks depth and detail, elegance and delicacy. Thinking of context simply in terms of "historical" and "literary," as is common in many books on exegesis, often does not lead the exegete to consider which features of context actually constrain the meaning(s) of texts or how they may do so. However, a model of contextual analysis that leads an exegete to consider the text in light of the context of culture and the context of situation in which the text was produced, and how the features of context at each of these levels probabilistically (not deterministically) limit what the text could mean is better able to keep exegetes from glaring (or even flagrant) *eis*egesis.

Regarding context of culture, exegetes ought to determine as best as possible what were the significant social values and ideologies that were in play in the culture and subcultures at the time of the production of the text under investigation. That investigation is not a simple task as it involves more than looking them up in textbooks. It involves investigating both

73. On appraisal: attitude: judgment, see Dvorak, *Interpersonal Metafunction*, 59–61.

biblical and extrabiblical texts (in original languages, if possible) to see what sorts of thinking, doing, feeling, and believing are promoted and/or demoted and, most importantly, *why*. One must become able to recognize patterns of behaviour (including linguistic behaviour) and how those patterns are evaluated in order to piece together the logonomic rules of the day. What are the genres—the staged, goal-oriented social actions—that are observable and typical? Recognizing these patterns can help curtail anachronistic and ethnocentric interpretations of texts.

In terms of context of situation, one must analyze the features of field, tenor, and mode. Field analysis asks questions such as, What is the social action that is going on? Who are the relevant participants in the action? Where and under what circumstances is the action taking place? Is the social action specific or non-specific? Is the social action structured or non-structured? Tenor analysis asks questions such as, What are the relationships among the participants in the situation, both socioculturally (parent, child; teacher, learner; etc.) and how are those relationships enacted in the text (e.g., in the grammar of mood)? Do the relationships enacted in the lexicogrammar match the expectations that exist socioculturally? Are the relationships equal or unequal? Are they close or distant? Mode analysis asks about how language is used in the situation. Is dialogue part of the social action or is it more monologic? Does the language use accompany field and tenor, or does it constitute field and tenor?

Clearly, there are many facets of context that have not been covered in detail in this article. However, I am confident that what I have covered will help exegetes, especially novice exegetes, to get started off with good footing.

4. *Appendixes*

Appendix 1: Mark 6:1–6 Text and Translation

[1] Καὶ ἐξῆλθεν ἐκεῖθεν καὶ ἔρχεται εἰς τὴν πατρίδα αὐτοῦ, καὶ ἀκολουθοῦσιν αὐτῷ οἱ μαθηταὶ αὐτοῦ. [2] καὶ γενομένου σαββάτου ἤρξατο διδάσκειν ἐν τῇ συναγωγῇ, καὶ πολλοὶ ἀκούοντες ἐξεπλήσσοντο λέγοντες· πόθεν τούτῳ ταῦτα, καὶ τίς ἡ σοφία ἡ δοθεῖσα τούτῳ, καὶ αἱ δυνάμεις τοιαῦται διὰ τῶν χειρῶν αὐτοῦ γινόμεναι; [3] οὐχ οὗτός ἐστιν ὁ τέκτων, ὁ υἱὸς τῆς Μαρίας καὶ ἀδελφὸς Ἰακώβου καὶ Ἰωσῆτος καὶ Ἰούδα καὶ Σίμωνος; καὶ οὐκ εἰσὶν αἱ ἀδελφαὶ αὐτοῦ ὧδε πρὸς ἡμᾶς; καὶ ἐσκανδαλίζοντο ἐν αὐτῷ. [4] καὶ ἔλεγεν αὐτοῖς ὁ Ἰησοῦς ὅτι οὐκ ἔστιν προφήτης ἄτιμος εἰ μὴ ἐν τῇ πατρίδι αὐτοῦ καὶ ἐν τοῖς συγγενεῦσιν αὐτοῦ καὶ ἐν τῇ οἰκίᾳ αὐτοῦ. [5] καὶ οὐκ ἐδύνατο ἐκεῖ ποιῆσαι οὐδεμίαν δύναμιν, εἰ μὴ ὀλίγοις ἀρρώστοις ἐπιθεὶς τὰς χεῖρας ἐθεράπευσεν. [6] καὶ ἐθαύμαζεν διὰ τὴν ἀπιστίαν αὐτῶν. Καὶ περιῆγεν τὰς κώμας κύκλῳ διδάσκων.	[1] And he left there, and he entered his fatherland, and his disciples followed him. [2] And when the Sabbath came, he began to teach in the synagogue, and many, upon hearing [him], were perplexed saying, "Whence these things to this person, and what is the wisdom that has been given to this person and deeds of power such as are happening through his hands? [3] Is this not the craftsman, the son of Mary and brother of James and Joses and Judas and Simon? And aren't his sisters here with us?" And they were scandalized by him. [4] And Jesus said to them, "A prophet is not without honour except in his fatherland and among his kinfolk and in his household." [5] And he was not able to do any deeds of power there, except placing his hands upon a few sick people, he healed them. [6] And he was appalled because of their faithlessness. And he went around the villages in a circle teaching.

Appendix 2: Mark 6:1–6 OpenText.org Analysis

6_1 ||cj Καὶ |P ἐξῆλθεν |A ἐκεῖθεν ||

6_2[↖6_1] ||cj καὶ |P ἔρχεται |A εἰς τὴν πατρίδα αὐτοῦ ||

6_3[↖6_2] ||cj καὶ |P ἀκολουθοῦσιν |C αὐτῷ |S οἱ μαθηταὶ αὐτοῦ ||

6_4[↙6_5] ||cj καὶ |P γενομένου |A σαββάτου ||

6_5[↖6_3] ||P ἤρξατο |C [[P διδάσκειν |A ἐν τῇ συναγωγῇ]] ||

6_7[↖6_5] || καὶ πολλοὶ |A [[P ἀκούοντες]] |P ἐξεπλήσσοντο |A [[P λέγοντες]] ||

6_10[↖6_7] ||A πόθεν |C τούτῳ |S ταῦτα ||

6_11[↖6_10] ||cj καὶ |C τίς |S ἡ σοφία [[P ἡ δοθεῖσα |C τούτῳ]] ||

6_13[↖6_11] ||cj καὶ |S αἱ δυνάμεις τοιαῦται |C [[A διὰ τῶν χειρῶν αὐτοῦ |P γινόμεναι]] ||

6_15[↖6_13] ||A οὐχ |S οὗτός |P ἐστιν |S ὁ τέκτων ὁ υἱὸς τῆς Μαρίας καὶ ἀδελφὸς Ἰακώβου καὶ Ἰωσῆτος καὶ Ἰούδα καὶ Σίμωνος ||

6_16[↖6_15] ||cj καὶ |A οὐκ |P εἰσὶν |S αἱ ἀδελφαὶ αὐτοῦ |A ὧδε |A πρὸς ἡμᾶς ||

6_17[↖6_16] ||cj καὶ |P ἐσκανδαλίζοντο |A ἐν αὐτῷ ||

6_18[↖6_17] ||cj καὶ |P ἔλεγεν |C αὐτοῖς |S ὁ Ἰησοῦς ||

6_19[↖6_18] ||cj ὅτι |A οὐκ |P ἔστιν |S προφήτης |C ἄτιμος ||

6_20[↖6_19] ||cj εἰ |A μὴ |A ἐν τῇ πατρίδι αὐτοῦ καὶ ἐν τοῖς συγγενεῦσιν αὐτοῦ καὶ ἐν τῇ οἰκίᾳ αὐτοῦ ||

6_21[↖6_18] ||cj καὶ |A οὐκ |P ἐδύνατο |C [[A ἐκεῖ |P ποιῆσαι |C οὐδεμίαν δύναμιν]] ||

6_23[↖6_21] ||cj εἰ |A μὴ |A [[C ὀλίγοις ἀρρώστοις |P ἐπιθεὶς |C τὰς χεῖρας]] |P ἐθεράπευσεν ||

6_25[↖6_21] ||cj καὶ |P ἐθαύμαζεν |A διὰ τὴν ἀπιστίαν αὐτῶν ||

6_26[↖6_25] ||cj Καὶ |P περιῆγεν |C τὰς κώμας |A κύκλῳ |A [[P διδάσκων]] ||

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