THE USE OF THE OPTATIVE IN LUKE-ACTS:
GRAMMATICAL CLASSIFICATION AND
IMPLICATIONS FOR TRANSLATION

Gerhard P V du Plooy
University of Stellenbosch
Stellenbosch

Abstract

In view of the restricted use of the optative
since the time of Homer and especially in the
New Testament (68 occurrences in all), the
article addresses the question: What is the
central, most elementary feature or qualifica-
tion by which the optative can be character-
ised? After discussing the various issues re-
lated to this question, a short classification of
the optative in the New Testament as a whole
is offered. It appears that it is impossible to
give one definition of the optative that would
work in every instance. Each example should,
therefore, be considered on its own merit and
in its own context. As a general rule, how-
ever, it can be said that the optative is more
concerned with qualitative time (type of ac-
tion) than quantitative time. The latter can
only be determined by the context and in con-
junction with another verb. In terms of these
guidelines, every example of the optative in
Luke-Acts is subsequently analysed in more
detail and the implications for the translation
of the various sections are pointed out.

The optative in classical times and in the New Testament

Since the time of Homer, the use of the optative in Greek
increasingly became a limited phenomenon. In the New Testa-

ment it seldom occurs and is found only in Luke-Acts
(twenty-eight times), Paul (thirty-one times), 1 and 2 Peter
(four times), Jude (twice), Mark twice), and Hebrews (once)
(Turner 1963:119).

This restriction is one important reason why the optative in
Greek has remained an interesting subject for many gramma-
rians. Up to this day a question remains that has not yet
been sufficiently answered, namely: what is the central, most
elementary feature or qualification by which the optative can
be characterized?

It has always been and still is important, as far as possible,
to have a decision at this point, because it affects at least
the following issues: the socio-cultural and psychological needs
of people which had to find expression in language by means
of this mood, the earliest and simplest form of the optative
that could have provided the basis for a more varied use of
the mood, the relation of the optative to the other moods
and specifically to the subjunctive, and the reasons why the
use of the optative became increasingly rare towards the
Hellenistic period and thereafter.

In Luke-Acts we have six variations of the optative. This is
mainly a renewed use of the classic Attic idiom. According
to Zerwick the moods are ways in which acts are visualized
in relation to reality: '... an action may be represented simp-
ly as realized (the indicative) or as an eventuality (subjunc-
tive) or possibility (optative) or as to be realized by another
(imperative)' (Zerwick 1963:100).

Here he makes an encompassing choice with regard to both
the optative ('possibility') and related to it, the subjunctive
('eventuality'). Of course Zerwick's classification will be valid
in most cases. It is noteworthy, however, that someone like
Gonda conversely calls the optative the 'mode of eventuality'
(Gonda 1956:52), and in similar fashion Mussies ('modus
eventualis') (Mussies 1971: 242). We may say that although
Zerwick, Gonda and Mussies characterize the optative by
different terms, they agree as far as the basic thrust of this
mood is concerned. The intersecting point is that a certain
degree of vagueness together with or without probability, is
ascribed to the optative. Gonda (1956:51f) qualifies his
viewpoint on the basis of the Indo-European languages and
concludes that the optative indicates that something '... is
possible, or it is wished for, or desirable, or generally
advisable, or generally recommended and therefore individually
problematic; it may be probable, supposed, hypothetical, or

even imaginary, its realization is dependent on a condition or on some event that may or may not happen.

This condition or other event may be expressed, be implicit, or even be vaguely or generally inherent in the situation.' A citation like this should point out that it is by no means a simple task to express exactly what the optative stands for.

Whereas Gonda is interested in the occurrence of this mood in main as well as subordinate sentences, Lightfoot (1975:130) analyses it in subordinate clauses and in particular in relation to the subjunctive mood. He rightly rejects Kahn's contention that the subjunctive and optative are 'futures and nothing else.' In summary Lightfoot makes the following valid statements:

a)   the subjunctive and optative express something hypo-
       thetical and as such also relate to the future, but in
       a different way than the futurum indicative,

b)   in most cases the situation that is expressed has no
       existential basis, and

c)   the use of the subjunctive and optative is related to
       abstract verbs. (Lightfoot 1975:142).

These are stimulating observations, but a further conclusion from Lightfoot (1975:135) should be questioned: '... that the optative is simply a past tense variant of the subjunctive.'

This is only partly true where the optative expresses purpose or generalization after a verb in a secondary tense: the action is then focused on an act in the past. Otherwise the optative is orientated towards the future (although indeed not so on the basis of the mood itself, but as a consequence of the aspect of the verb), for example:

a)   in main clauses and

b)   in the protasis and apodosis of conditional clauses
       which have in view events in the distant future
       (Kruger 1981:7; see further Lightfoot 1975:131-132;
       Goodwin 1897:389).

Although there are differences amongst grammarians, most of them agree with Goodwin's conclusion (1897:4): 'The optative is commonly a less distinct and direct form of expression than the subjunctive, imperative, or indicative, in

constructions of the same general character as those in
which these moods are used.' In Attic Greek the optative
was used in many different ways. Because of this we must
concur with Goodwin (1897:371) that it is impossible to incor-
porate all the uses of a specific mood into one concept.
Moulton (1978:164) also agrees: 'It is not possible for us to
determine with any certainty the primitive root-idea of each
mood.' Consequently it is incorrect to call the subjunctive
the mood of 'will' and the optative the mood of 'wish' as
Gonda (1956:51; see also Goodwin 1897:375) correctly
observes. Even in Hellenistic and New Testament Greek with
their sporadic use of the optative, this is simply not true.

In Hellenistic and New Testament Greek it is found that
many subtle grammatical distinctions employed by classic
writers, are no longer in use (Kruger 1975:99). New
Testament times knew the optative only by means of excep-
tions and in the New Testament itself the optative occurs
only in sixty-eight instances, of which a quarter is the
formula **mē genoito** (Mussies 1971:239). The subjunctive
replaced the optative more and more frequently. In the New
Testament the subjunctive is found even in subordinate
clauses after a secondary verb.

What we have established thus far, is that it is impossible to
give one definition of the optative that would work in every
instance. It seems best to agree with the remarks of Good-
win and Moulton concerning the general thrust of the mood.
As a result, we shall have to treat each instance of the
optative on its own merit within the context surrounding it.

We now give a short classification of the optative in the
New Testament as a whole, to be able to do this in more
detail with respect to Luke-Acts:

1.   The optative in main clauses

The gradual disappearance of the optative occurred more
slowly here than in subordinate clauses (Turner 1963:120).

1.1   Cupitative
An attainable wish is expressed (Blass e a 1961:194). The
older construction of **eithe** and optative was later replaced
by **ēthelon/eboulomēn** and infinitive (Mussies 1971:240). The
negative is **me** and **an** does not occur. This optative is
encountered thirty-eight times ..n the New Testament, of
which fifteen are the formula **mē genoito** (Blass e a 1961:
194). A wish can also be expressed by a circumscription with

boulomai, thelō or **ophelon,** by a futurum, and by an imperative (Zerwick 1963:123).

1.2   Potential
The negative is **ou,** and **an**   accompanies it. It is used in a literary manner, although not merely artificially (Moulton 1978:197, see also Blass e a 1961:194), and can be replaced by the futurum indicative or by the imperative (Zerwick 1963: 123). Sometimes **an** was elided in indicative sentences that expressed potentiality. Accordingly this particle was weakened, and by analogy this could also have caused **an** to fall away in some cases of the optative (Moulton 1978:198).

2.   The optative in subordinate clauses

2.1   Conditional with respect to the future
Fulfilment of the condition is less probable than in the case of **ean** and subjunctive (De Witt Burton 1894:106). The protasis is expressed by ei and optative, the apodosis by the optative and **an.** In the New Testament the last-named formula does not occur in its entirety: either the protasis only or the apodosis only is found (De Witt Burton 1894:107).

2.2   Indirect discourse

(a)   Indirect statement
Although De Witt Burton (1894:133) cites Acts 25:16 as an example, we rather agree with Blass et al (1961:195), that Acts 25:16 contains an optative in a temporal clause after **prin.**

(b)   Indirect question/demand
This is restricted to Luke-Acts and, with exception of eight instances, entails all of Luke's optatives in indirect discourse.

2.3   Temporal clause
This type of optative is found in only one instance, namely Acts 25:16, after a verb in a secondary tense (Blass e a 1961: 195).

2.4   Indirect-potential
The present heading is found in no published Greek grammar. Nevertheless, it is now introduced because it appears as a distinction which is asked for by the subject-matter in Luke-Acts. Normally the potential optative is used only in main clauses with **an.** However, in the present instances the optative is identified with **an** in subordinate clauses which are structured in accordance with principles of indirect state-

ments. The finding is that the optatives with **an** under the
present heading retain a potential force despite the fact that
they do not occur in main clauses.[1]

3.   The optative and 'Aktionsart'[2]

The tempus-stem is the only constant element in each
distinctive tempus-form in all its moods (Kruger 1981:17), and
since the primary Aktionsarten are based on the tempus-stem,
it follows that the moods and in particular the optative, will
have something to do with Aktionsart.

With the tempus-stem in mind, it can be said that the opta-
tive is able to visualize an act in the following ways: prae-
sens as durative, aoristus and futurum as punctiliar, and
perfectum as a durative state of affairs after an act which
has been completed. This means that the optative is able to
give an indication of the type of action, therefore also of
duration and time-alteration (Kruger 1981:23f). As far as the
type of action is concerned, there appears to be an analo-
gous relation between optatives and indicatives. As back-
ground to the last statement one can compare the fact that
the original function of the so-called tempus-stem of Indo-
European languages is not to denote levels of time, but
Aktionsarten (Blass e a 1961:166).

Together with Aktionsart, it is necessary to depict the force
of the verb in terms of the present, the past and the fu-
ture. The Greek verb in this instance relates to a quantita-
tive view of time which should be translated no less than
the type of action (qualitative time).

When one takes a close look at the optative, however, it is
evident that it gives no indication of quantitative time. Only
in the indicative, and as an exception in the futurum of all
the moods, placement in terms of time is found. Outside the
indicative and particularly in the optative, time is a relative
concept. Therefore the rule must remain that tempus and
mood should be kept apart (Kruger 1981:7).

Quantitative time, or action-time in Greek, is directly related
to the elision or inclusion of augmentation.

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1   See section 3.2(b) for an exposition.

2   I retain the word 'Aktionsart' because grammarians
     sometimes mean something other than Aktionsart when
     they use the term 'aspect.'

Since the optative has no relation to augmentation, it is understandable that it only entails type of action, whereas time of action is irrelevant in the narrow sense of the word. The futurum remains the only exception, because in all the moods it is able to express something concerning the future (Goodwin 1897:43).

To summarise, outside the futurum the optative gives an indication only of qualitative time (type of action). However, this does not mean that quantitative time should be totally set aside. It can find expression by means of the context and specifically by means of another verb in the sentence which is related to the optative.3

4.   The optative in the Luke-Acts: grammatical classification

Our present classification is executed under the headings of the optative in main clauses (potential and cupitative) and in subordinate clauses (indirect statement, indirect-potential, conditional, and temporal). Another structuring of material can be chosen as well, like that of Jeremias (1980:48): optativus obliquus, praesens optative, and optative and an.

If we do not consider passages that are of questionable value according to textual criticism (for example Acts 2:22 and 17:20), the optative is employed twenty-eight times in Luke-Acts, that is eleven in Luke and seventeen in Acts. I shall briefly consider each form, and thereafter give the translation.

4.1   The optative in main clauses

(a)   Potential

Acts 8:31
ho de eipen, Pōs gar an dunaimēn ean mē hodēgēsei me; an dumaimēn is regarded as an optative in a conditional clause by Zerwick (1963:112) and Moulton (1978:198), although the last named rather strangely places it under the heading of the potential optative. It is better to agree with others who

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3   We do not here venture to express ideas concerning an important related issue such as the relation between the aorist subjunctive and the futurum indicative, and the possible consequences of this relationship for the interpretation of the optative in the New Testament.

choose for a potential optative (Mussies 1971:240; De Witt
Burton 1894:80) in a direct rhetorical question (Blass e a
1961: 194). It is noteworthy that this is the only instance in
Luke where the protasis is explicitly stated (Moulton
1978:198).

Translation: '... how could I be able ...?'

Acts 17:18
Kai tines elegon, Ti an theloi ho spermologos houtos legein.

There is wide consensus that **an theloi** is a potential optative
in a direct question, with the protasis elided (Burton 1894:80;
Blass e a 1961:195; Jeremias 1980:48; Mussies 1971:240; Moul-
ton 1978:198; Turner 1963:123; Moule 1960:151).

Translation: '... what could this babbler possibly say?'

Acts 26:29
**ho de Paulos, Euxaimēn an tō theō ... pantas ... ginesthai
hopoios kai egō eimi ...**

euxaimēn an is the only example of the classic potential op-
tative in the New Testament (Blass e a 1961:194; Mussies
1971:240; De Witt Burton 1894:80; Turner 1963:123). One can
also partly agree with grammarians who call it a 'softened/
modest assertion.' But the force of the present optative
seems more than this, and also more than Jeremias' (1980:
48) 'zur Bezeichnung des lediglich Gedachten.' The utterance
retains more of its potential content than most people think.
The content could be summarized as potentiality combined
with wishful modesty (see also Rienecker 1977:309).

Translation: '... I could (eagerly) pray to God ....'

(b)   Cupitative

Luke 1:38
**eipen de Mariam, Idou hē doulē kuriou genoito moi kata to
rēma sou.**

This is the first optative in Luke-Acts that contains a wish
(Moule 1960:23; Turner 1963:121).

De Witt Burton (1894:79) comments that the first person
singular is the normal use and that it often has some ele-
ment of prayer. Moulton (1978:195) calls it an 'optative
proper,' but refers to the same content as the others.

We agree that **genoito** is a cupitative optative which express-
es Mary's believing (even praying) wish.

Translation: 'May it be with me ...'

Luke 20:16
**eleusetai kai apolesei tous geōrgous toutous, kai dōsei ton
ampelōna allois. akousantes de eipan, Mē genoito.**

Without exception **mē genoito** is designated as a cupitative
optative. Nevertheless, the phrase is difficult to translate
into English because it is a formular idiomatic expression in
Greek.

Translation: 'May this never happen!'

Acts 8:20
**Petros de eipen pros auton To argurion sou sun soi eiē eis
apōleian ...**

eiē is an optative expressing an attainable wish (Mussies
1971:240; Moule 1960:23, Blass e a 1961:195; Jeremias 1980:
48). Normally the cupitative optative in Luke-Acts contains
an element of prayer, but here it is more of a damnation,
as De Witt Burton (1894:79) also reminds us.

Translation: 'May your silver go with you to destruction!'

This rendering tries to incorporate something of a wish too.

4.2   The optative in subordinate clauses

(a)   Indirect question

Luke 1:29
**hē de epi tō logō dietarachthē kai dielogizeto potapos eiē ho
aspasmos houtos.**

The protasis is lacking in this sentence with **eiē**, but can be
inferred from the context. Zerwick (1963:116) identifies the
sentence as a conditional clause with no reference to ful-
filment or not, expressing Mary's wondering as to what this
greeting might possibly mean.

The other grammarians in some or other way see **eiē** as an
optative in an indirect question after a verb in a secondary
tense (**die tarachthē**), which represents the praesens indicative
in direct discourse (De Witt Burton 1894:52; Jeremias

1980:48; Blass e a 1961:195); Turner (1963:123) seems incorrect when he conjectures that the original probably was a potential optative because of a variant reading which has **an** with **eiē**.

The praesens in **eiē** aktionsartlich points to a linear visualization of the action. In other words, Mary expects that the greeting must have an on-going influence on her.

Translation: If one merely translates the phrase according to the indirect question ('... she was wondering what kind of greeting this **was**'), one misses much of the optative's impact.

Consequently, we agree with Zerwick (Mary's wondering) and also detect an element of prayer in her utterance, although formally the sentence is an indirect question.

Our translation: '... what kind of greeting this might be.'

Luke 3:15
Prosdokōntos de tou laou dialogizomenōn pantōn en tais kardiais autōn peri tou Ioannou, mēpote autos eiē ho Christos ....

There is no disagreement that **eiē** is an indirect question, standing for the praesens indicative in direct discourse. Moulton (1978:199) remarks that the optative gives a 'tone of remoteness and uncertainty' to the whole. We agree, seeing that **mepote** carries a note of 'perhaps' into the sentence.

Translation: '... whether he might perhaps be the Christ.'

Luke 8:9
Epērōtōn de auton hoi mathētai autou tis hautē eiē he parabolē.

As in Luke 3:15, there is consensus in this case. **eiē** is an 'ordinary' indirect question optative after the secondary verb '**epērōtōn.**'

Translation: '... what this parable meant.'

Luke 18:36
akousas de ochlou diaporeuomenou epunthaneto ti eiē touto

eiē is regarded as a potential optative by many (Blass e a 1961:195; Moulton 1978:198; Turner 1963:123; and De Witt Burton 1894:80), despite the fact that **an** is omitted by the

most important textual witnesses (for example ℵ, A, and B).
On accord of the absence of **an** we rather agree with J
Jeremias (1980:48) that **eiē** is an optative in indirect
discourse after **epunthaneto.**

Translation: '... he began to enquire what this was.'

Luke 23:23
**kai autoi ērxato suzētein pros heautous to tis ara eiē ex
autōn ho touto mellōn prassein**

This instance has more of a potential force than the previous
optative, especially in view of **'ara.'** Moulton (1978: 199) also
adds to this 'a tone of remoteness and uncertainty,' but
formally it is an indirect question.

Translation: '... which of them it might be who....'

Acts 17:11
Here we have another clear example of the present heading.

Translation: '... if these things were like this.'

Acts 21:23
The same opinion as the previous one goes with this
optative.

Translation: '... asked who he was ....'

Acts 25:20
This indirect question contains an optative which bears some
futuristic, hypothetic connotation.

Translation: '... asked him whether he would be willing.'

(b) Indirect-potential optative

The structures of the sentences in which the following six
optatives in Luke-Acts appear, are those of indirect
questions. However, these optatives differ from the ones
under the previous heading in that **an** accompanies then.
Naming is our first problem, and secondly how to translate
the optatives.

an with optative is in itself nothing awkward. In main
clauses everyone describes it as 'potential optative.' The
optatives of the present heading are also accompanied by **an**

but this in subordinate clauses, and more specifically in the form of indirect questions.

Zerwick (1963:119) represents a well-known and accepted opinion when he designates **an** and optative as 'always potential.' (We would rather state 'virtually always'). Then he adds that **an** and optative never occurs in indirect discourse. At this point we must disagree with Zerwick, since in view of the examples that follow, it seems legitimate to say that some optatives without **an**, also in indirect discourse, retain a distinct relationship with the potential optative in direct discourse.

The exegetical problem that we encounter, is the following: is **an** and optative in indirect discourse able to carry a potential connotation? One important issue to consider in this respect is what the original direct forms of these indirect questions are.

The original utterances could have been:

1   **an** and optative: potential (Blass e a 1961:195). This form, as it is, could, according to the principles for indirect discourse in Greek, have been transmitted to an indirect question (De Witt Burton 1894:52, 133).

2   **an** and optative: potential. It is carried over to direct discourse in a 'pro forma' manner, and the potential force falls away.

3   The same as 2, but the potential force is also transmitted to indirect discourse (Moulton 1978:199; Blass e a 1961:195).

4   The same as 2, but with **an** virtually without sense at all. This could happen on the analogy that **an** and indicative in many instances came to be the same as indicative without **an** (Moulton 1978:198). **an** and optative is accordingly not potential in indirect discourse.

5   **an** and indicative: potential (Goodwin 1897:81; De Witt Burton 1894:52). The indirect question could then 'pro forma' retain **an**, while the indicative becomes optative, without potential value.

6   The same as 5, but the potential value remains.

7   **an** and subjunctive only in a very exceptional irregular
        way become **an** and optative in direct discourse
        (Goodwin: 1897:277).

8   **an** and optative, where the optative expresses 'less
        probability' with regard to the future (De Witt Burton
        1894:197).

The following **grammatical principles** are relevant:

1   If **an** occurs in direct discourse, it is always retained
        in the corresponding indirect form (Goodwin 1897:257).

2   If **an** does not occur in direct discourse, it is never
        added to the corresponding indirect discourse.

3   The tempus as well as the mood of direct discourse is
        transmitted to the corresponding indirect instance.
        Only in the historic tenses the mood sometimes chan-
        ges, for example subjunctive or indicative to optative
        (See De Witt Burton 1894:132; Zerwick 1963:120).

Bearing the abovementioned possibilities and principles in
mind, we searched the optatives of the present heading.
Possibilities 4, 7 and 8 we regard least probable. This brings
us to the contention that the direct discourse of the
optatives with **an** that we are now discussing, was either **an**
and optative, or **an** and indicative, where the optative and
indicative originally had potential meaning. In addition to
this, we conclude that the original **an** and optative or
indicative was transmitted to indirect discourse, not in a 'pro
forma' way, but with retention of potential value. Our last
conclusion rests on the fact that within their distinctive
contexts, these six optatives with **an** make good sense when
they are translated as potential forms. Blass et al (1961:195),
citing Krüger, reminds us: 'Classic Greek can retain every
form of the direct question in the indirect, consequently the
potential optative also.' An English example, of course, has
nothing near formal particles like **an** to offer, but, in order
to illustrate our ratio, we can consider the following:

Direct discourse: 'Would I **be able** to do it?' (potential).
Indirect discourse: 'He asked whether he **would be able to do
it**' (potential force retained).

Luke 1:62
eneuon de tō patri autou to ti an theloi kaleisthai auto.

An theloi is labelled by some as an optative in an indirect question (Blass e a 1961:80;195; Mussies 1971:241 and Turner 1963:130). Turner (1963:130) tries to explain the phrase by suggesting a corresponding deliberative question in direct discourse. Moulton (1978:198) sees a potential element, although he strangely observes that **an** does not have any direct relationship with it. Zerwick (1963:119) also appears inconsistent when he remarks that **an** and optative always is potential, but that the optativus obliquus is never accompanied by **an.** We choose to call **an theloi** an 'indirect-potential optative in indirect discourse.'

Translation: '... what he would possibly wish the child to be named.'

Luke 6:11
autoi de eplēsthēsan anoias, kai dielaloun pros allelous ti an poiēsaien to Iēsou

According to F Blass et al (1961:195), **an poiēsaien** (optativus obliquus) corresponds to a potential optative in direct dis-course, whereas Moulton (1978:198) calls it a 'hesitating substitute for the direct **ti poiēsōmen**' and De Witt Burton (1894:133) a potential optative with elided protasis. A combi-nation of Blass et al and De Witt Burton appears to be the best solution: indirect-potential optative, corresponding to a potential optative in direct discourse.

Translation: '... what they might possibly do to Jesus.'

Luke 9:46
Eiselthen de dialogismos en autois to tis an eiē meizōn autōn

The most probable explanation of **an eiē** is that it is a potential optative (Moulton 1978:198; Turner 1963:123) in an indirect question (Blass e a 1961:195) corresponding to a potential optative in direct discourse (De Witt Burton 1894:80; Jeremias 1980:48).

Translation: '... which one of them could be the greatest.'

Luke 15:26
kai proskalesamenos hena tōn paidōn epunthane to ti an eiē tauta.

an eiē is a potential optative in indirect discourse with protasis elided (Jeremias 1980:253; De Witt Burton 1894:80) in indirect discourse with protasis elided (Moulton 1978:133),

corresponding to a potential optative in direct discourse (Blass e a 1961:195).

Translation: '... what this could possibly be.'

Acts 5:24
hōs de ēkousan tous logous toutous ho te strategos tou hierou kai hoi archyiereis, diēporoun peri auton ti an genoito touto.

an genoito is a potential optative (Moulton 1978:198; Jeremias 1980:48) in indirect discourse (Turner 1963:130) which existed in this identical form in the corresponding direct statement.

Translation: To translate **an genoito** as mere indirect discourse ('they wondered what happened to the apostles') would miss the force of the form in the present context. Something more about the dilemma which the prison-authorities faced, must be brought to the fore in translation. Accordingly, it is better to render the optative by '... they wondered what could come of this.'

Acts 10:17
Hōs de heautō diēporei ho Petros ti an eiē to horama ho eiden, idou hoi andres ... epestēsan epi ton pulōna ....

This is again an oblique (potential) optative (Blass e a 1961:195; De Witt Burton 1894:80) corresponding to a direct potential optative (Blass e a 1961:195), with implied protasis (Moule 1960:151).

Translation: '... wondered what could possibly be the meaning of the vision....'

(c) Conditional clauses

epoiēsen ... zētein ton theon ei ara ge psēlaphēseian auton ...

Acts 17:27a
psēlaphēseian is called an optative in indirect discourse after **ei** by Jeremias (1980:48) and Blass et al (1961: 195). However, we agree with De Witt Burton (1894:106) who typifies it as an optative in a 'more probable' conditional clause pertaining to the future. The apodosis is implicitly given in the protasis (De Witt Burton 1894:111).

Translation: **ei era ge** is exerting a strong influence here. We
then translate: '... even though they might feel after
Him ....'

Acts 17:27b
**epoiēsen ... zētein ton theon ei era ge psēlaphēseian auton
kai heuroien ....**

Grammarians do not treat this optative separately from the
previous one, probably indicating that the two mean the same
thing, and that **ei** should be reiterated before **heuroien.**
Although in terms of the context **kai heuroien** would seem
to express consequence, it is better on account of sound
grammar and syntax to regard it as a 'more probable' condi-
tion with respect to the future. **Kai,** then, is translated more
in a copulative and co-ordinating fashion than in a
consecutive one.

Translation: '... even though they might feel after Him and
thus find Him.'

Acts 20:16
**espeuden gar ei dunaton eiē autō tēn hēmeran tēs pente-
kostēs genesthai eis Hierosolyma.**

Here we have two possibilities. **eiē** as an optative in a
conditional clause after a secondary verb (Mussies 1971:240)
representing **ean** and subjunctive in the original utterance (De
Witt Burton 1894:106). In this case the optative expresses a
'more probable' condition referring to the future. The other
suggestion is that **eiē** is an indirect statement after **ei**
(Jeremias 1980:48). We abide by this last opinion because the
combination of **ei** and **eiē** points to a condition.

Translation: '... for he was hurrying, if it were possible for
him, to be in Jerusalem....'

Acts 24:19
**tines hous edei epi sou pareinai kai katēgorein ei ti echoien
pros eme....**

Attempts to explain **echoien** are, for example, as follows: an
unfulfilled past condition (Moulton 1978:196; Mussies 1971:240;
De Witt Burton 1894:106), or an indirect statement after **ei**
(Jeremias 1980:48). Blass et al (1961:195) state that **ei/ ean
ti echousin** (indicative) would have been better Greek, while
Turner (1963:126) regards **echoien** as the only real example in
Luke's work of an optative in a conditional clause.

Translation: '... if they had anything against me.'

Acts 27:12
hoi pleiones ethento boulēn anachthēnai ekeithen ei pos dunainto katastēsantes eis Phoinika paracheimasai ....

dunainto is explained in amazingly divergent terms: future supposition with probability with apodosis elided (De Witt Burton 1894:106,112; Turner 1963:127), potential optative'[4] and optativus obliquus (Jeremias 1980:48). Especially on account of the absence of an the solution of De Witt Burton should be preferred (future supposition with probability).

Translation: '... the majority of them preferred to depart from there, if it would be possible, so that ....'

Acts 27:39
kolpon de tina katenoon echonta aigialon eis hon ebouleuonta ei dunainto exōsai to ploion.

The explanation of the previous optative is also applicable to the present instance (De Witt Burton 1894:106).

Translation: '... planned, if it would be possible, to drive the ship ashore.'

(d)   Temporal clause

Acts 25:16a
apekrithēn hoti ouk estin ethos Romaiois charizesthai tina anthrōpon prin ē ho katēgoroumenos kata prosōpon echoi tous katēgorous topon te apologias laboi peri tou engklēmatos.

The majority of the grammars consulted merely depict **echoi** as an optative in an indirect statement (Zerwick 1963:119; Mussies 1971:243; De Witt Burton 1894:52,133; Turner 1963:127). However, Blass et al (1961:195) have a better solution: **echoi** is an optative in a temporal clause after **prin ē** and the whole of this is embedded in an indirect statement after **apekrithēn.**

Translation: '... I answered them ... before the accused had the opportunity ....'

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4   Blass et al, op cit, 195, mentions it under this heading, but gives no final answer.

Acts 25:16b
prin ē ... topon te apologias laboi ....

laboi functions in the same construction and in a similar way as **echoi.** The two optatives are linked by the copulative **te.** Therefore they fall into the same grammatical category.

Translation: '... to defend himself against their accusations.'

In terms of Aktionsart it can be stated that **echoi** (praesens) represents a linear, continuing action which visualizes the proceedings in which somebody defends himself, while **laboi** (aoristus) almost parenthetically, by the statement of a mere punctiliar fact, indicates that permission to speak has been granted.

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