DIRECTIVES IN THE NEW TESTAMENT:
A CASE STUDY OF JOHN 1:38

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I. INTRODUCTION

Human discourse is complex and often difficult to understand. Consider the following example. One morning at breakfast, after pouring syrup on my pancakes, I set the bottle down next to my plate. Then I heard my wife say these words: "Are you finished with the syrup?" I was forced to decide what my wife was intending to communicate to me. Was she requesting from me *information*; that is, whether I was finished using the syrup? Or was she attempting to cause me to *do* something? Because I knew the full context of my wife's words, I concluded correctly that she was asking me to pass her the syrup. In other words, by her question my wife was not asking me for information, but was, in an indirect manner, requesting me to do something.

Communication between my wife and me is even more complex, because we come from two different cultures. In my culture communication is mostly direct. In the culture in which my wife was raised, communication is more indirect. Because of this cultural difference in communication style, we too often misunderstand the intended meaning of each other's statements.

When considering a record of human discourse, to interpret what the speaker is attempting to communicate a number of factors must be addressed, including the words spoken, nonverbal communication clues;[1] the relationship between the speaker and the hearer(s);[2] and the historical and cultural setting.[3] Missiologists have long recognized the role of these factors in

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[1] David J. Hesselgrave, *Communicating Christ Cross-Culturally* (2d. ed.; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1991) 389–401.

[2] Hesselgrave distinguishes between two levels of communication: the content information level and the relationship level: "The former has to do with facts, events, feelings, and ideas. . . . The latter has to do with the relationship between source and respondent and is usually conveyed nonverbally" (p. 391).

[3] E.g. Joseph E. Grimes argues that in the study of discourse, factors which need to be looked at, among others, are: (1) the spatial setting (where the event took place); (2) the temporal setting (when the event took place); (3) the psychological atmosphere of the event; and (4) secondary information (including premises that the speaker feels are generally accepted and therefore can be left unsaid) (*The Thread of Discourse* [Berlin: Mouton Publishers, 1975] 51–60).

understanding cross-cultural communication.[4] In the field of biblical inter-
pretation, these factors must also be considered in determining the meaning
of biblical texts where human discourse is recorded.

The NT contains many instances of indirect speech, that is, where the
intended meaning of a statement differs from its direct meaning. For bib-
lical interpreters from cultures where the style of communication is mostly
direct, it is too easy to miss this indirect meaning and to instead interpret
the statement in a direct manner.

A case in point is the discourse between Jesus and two disciples of John
the Baptist recorded in John 1:35–41. In the preceding section of John's
Gospel, 1:19–34, John the Baptist witnesses to the coming Christ. In response
to the examination of the priests and Levites, John denies that he is the
Christ and points them to the one who was coming after him, whom he tes-
tifies is the Son of God. In 1:35–41, John identifies that one as Jesus, and
two of John's disciples respond by leaving him and taking the first steps to
becoming disciples of Jesus.[5]

In this passage, the response of the two disciples—ῥαββί, ὃ λέγεται μεθερ-
μηνευόμενον διδάσκαλε, ποῦ μένεις; ("Rabbi, which means teacher, where are
you staying?")—to Jesus' question "has puzzled so many who have pondered
it."[6] What do the two disciples mean by their question? Are they requesting
from Jesus information—i.e. the location where he is staying, or are they
attempting, indirectly, to communicate to Jesus something else?

Applying existing hermeneutical principles, biblical exegetes have reached
different conclusions as to the meaning of the two disciples' question. In this
article I will arrive at an understanding of the intended meaning of this
question through the application of a new hermeneutical principle, which
will be developed from a linguistic analysis of directive discourse. This
application will demonstrate that the intended meaning of the disciples'
question differs from its direct meaning, that is, that by their question the
two disciples are not asking Jesus for information about where he is staying,
but are instead requesting Jesus to do something: to allow them to spend
time with him as a first step in becoming his disciples. This article will also
discuss the broader application of this hermeneutical principle to all instances
of directive discourse in the NT.

II. DIRECTIVE DISCOURSE

In their attempt to understand human speech, linguists have identified
different types of discourse. Foundational to this attempt is the recognition
that discourse consists of speech acts and that every speech act has three
components: (1) the utterance itself (the "locution"); (2) the act the speaker

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[4] E.g. Hesselgrave, *Communicating Christ* 55–113; Sherwood G. Lingenfelter, *Ministering
Cross-Culturally* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2003) 18–19.

[5] "The forerunner steps aside and invites his disciples to follow the one whose way he had been
preparing." Gustavo Gutierrez, "Encounter with the Lord," *The Other Side* 21/9 (1985) 31.

[6] Arthur W. Pink, *Exposition of the Gospel of John*, vol. 1 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1945) 69.

is performing by the utterance (the "illocution"); and (3) the effect of the utterance on the hearer(s) (the "perlocution").[7]

To distinguish among the different types of speech acts, linguists have offered different classifications. Especially helpful is the classification made by Finegan and Besnier, who found six types of speech acts: (1) representatives (speech acts that represent a state of affairs, including assertions, statements, claims, hypotheses, descriptions, and suggestions); (2) commissives (speech acts that commit a speaker to a course of action, including promises, pledges, threats, and vows); (3) directives (speech acts that are intended to get the hearer to carry out an action; including commands, requests, challenges, invitations, entreaties, and dares); (4) declarations (speech acts that bring about the state of affairs they name, including blessings, firings, baptisms, arrests, marrying, and declaring a mistrial); (5) expressives (speech acts that indicate the speaker's psychological state or attitude, including greetings, apologies, congratulations, condolences, and thanksgivings); and (6) verdictives (speech acts that make assessments or judgments, including ranking, assessing, appraising, and condoning).[8]

The human discourse recorded in the NT includes examples of each of these different types of speech acts.[9] One of the most common types of speech act in the NT is the directive.

The work of Ervin-Tripp provides an aid in properly interpreting what the speaker is intending to communicate in the many directives in the NT. In her analysis of American English directives, Ervin-Tripp recognizes that "people do not often literally say what they mean. We can accomplish the same ends by various means, many of them indirect."[10] For example, to request to talk with Sybil, a person may do so in different ways: "May I please speak with Sybil?" "Is Sybil there?" "Sybil, please."[11]

Ervin-Tripp found six different types of directives: (1) need statements, such as "I need a match"; (2) imperatives, such as "Gimme a match" and elliptical forms like "a match"; (3) imbedded imperatives, such as, "Could you gimme a match" (where the agent, action, object, and often beneficiary are as explicit as in direct imperatives but are imbedded in a frame with other syntactic and semantic properties); (4) permission directives, such as

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[7] Edward Finegan and Niko Besnier, *Language: Its Structure and Use* (San Diego: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich: 1989) 329; Gillian Brown and George Yule, *Discourse Analysis* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983) 231–33. See also J. L. Austin, *How to Do Things with Words* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1962); John R. Searle, *Speech Acts: An Essay in the Philosophy of Language* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969); idem, *Expression and Meaning: Studies in the Theory of Speech Acts* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979).

[8] Finegan and Besnier, *Language* 329. Cf. David Crystal, *A Dictionary of Linguistics and Phonetics* (2d ed.; New York/Basil Blackwell, 1985) 285. Another classification of speech acts is made by R. E. Longacre: (1) narratives; (2) drama; (3) procedural; (4) expository; and (5) hortatory (*An Anatomy of Speech Notions* [Lisse: The Peter De Ridder Press, 1976] 202).

[9] E.g. (1) representatives: John 1:47; (2) commissives: John 2:19; (3) directives: John 1:39; (4) declarations: John 1:42; (5) expressives: John 11:41; and (6) verdictives: John 1:49.

[10] Susan Ervin-Tripp, "Is Sybil There? The Structure of Some American English Directives," *Language in Society* 5 (1976) 25–26.

[11] Ibid. 25.

"May I have a match?" (where bringing about the condition stated requires an action by the hearer other than merely granting permission); (5) question directives, such as "Gotta match?" (which do not specify the desired act); and (6) hints, such as "The matches are all gone."[12]

Ervin-Tripp also found that the relationship between the speaker and the hearer(s) affects the type of directive employed. The normal form of directive between speakers and hearers who have the same rank and age is the imperative, while the normal form between those who differ in rank and age is the hint, question directive, or imbedded directive.[13] In other words, "the presence of a high-ranking person in the office diminished the number of directives and converted the audible ones to a form appropriate to higher-ranked hearers."[14] Ervin-Tripp concludes that it is possible to predict the form of directive from a knowledge of the social features of its context, including the relationship of the speaker and the hearer.[15]

In his study of cross-cultural communication, Hesselgrave makes a similar finding.[16] Especially helpful is his classification of communication in terms of the relative social ranking of the speaker and the hearer(s), as "upward," "downward," or "across."[17]

That the form of directive may be predicted from the social features of its context is a general rule that applies to most, but not all, instances of human discourse. According to Myers-Scotton, speakers sometimes choose to alter the rules of communication in their social context, because of either the relationship with others they want to have or the image of themselves they want to project.[18] Therefore caution should be exercised in applying this conclusion to all instances of directive discourse.

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[12] Ibid. 29. Ervin-Tripp provides additional examples of each of these types of directives: (1) need statements: "I want you to check the requirement for stairs"; "I could use some furniture polish"; "I'm really hungry this evening"; (2) imperatives: [customer to waitress:] "Coffee, black (where the necessary action is obvious, it is common to specify only the new information—the direct or indirect object)"; "You should turn right here, then you go straight"; "Bring me the file, would you, Rose?" (3) imbedded imperatives: "Why don't you open the window?" "Would you mind opening the window?" "Could I trouble you to open the window?" "Can you open the window?" "Will you open the window?" (4) permission directives: "Can I have my records back?" (5) question directives: "Are we out of coffee? (Give me some coffee)"; "What are you laughing at? (Stop laughing)"; "Is John there? (Bring John to the phone)"; "Do you have a room for 20 on Monday nights? (Reserve a room)"; (6) hint directives: "I think Sarah opened the Xerox room Joan (i.e. make copies . . .)"; "[Professor to office worker]: Mrs. Terry, it's quite noisy in here"; "We can hear you out here, Beth. (i.e. pipe down)" (ibid. 29–43).

[13] Ibid. 37.

[14] Ibid. 36, citing the data in Gardner's study of directives in a university office. See C. Gardner, "A Scale of Politeness of Request Forms in English." Unpublished term paper, 1968.

[15] Ibid. 26, 58–59.

[16] "[I]t is society that in large measure determines who will speak to whom, in what way, at what time, and with what effect." Hesselgrave, *Communicating Christ* 458.

[17] Ibid.

[18] Personal communication with Carol Myers-Scotton, emerita Carolina distinguished professor of English and linguists, University of South Carolina. According to Myers-Scotton:

Ervin-Tripp's article is largely in the tradition of taxonomies—and the tradition of claiming that "if a person has X social features (sex, education, job, etc.) and is speaking in Y situation (office, home, bar, etc.), then A type of directive will be used." She is correct to an extent. In my terms, she is talking about what I call "the directive that is the unmarked

Based on these observations, we are now better prepared to answer the question posed by Finegan and Besnier: "[G]iven that a locution can serve many functions, how do we know the illocutionary force of a particular utterance?"[19] In other words, all directives have the same illocutionary force (an intent to get the hearer[s] to carry out an action), but different locutionary forms (grammatical structures). The answer given by Finegan and Besnier is: "[O]f course . . . context."[20] One of the primary aspects of context for directives is the relationship between the speaker and the hearer(s), and one of the main differences in locutionary form of directives is their degree of directness/indirectness. Where the speaker and the hearer(s) are of the same or similar social rank, the directive is generally more direct. Where the speaker is of an inferior social rank to the hearer(s), the directive is generally more indirect.[21] We are now ready to discuss relevant principles for interpreting directives in the NT.

III. PRINCIPLES FOR INTERPRETING NEW TESTAMENT DIRECTIVES

To interpret a biblical text that includes human discourse, the following steps should be followed. First, the steps applicable to the interpretation of all biblical texts should be followed. To be identified and studied are the text's "historical and logical context, grammar, semantics, syntax, historical and cultural backgrounds, and genre."[22]

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choice," given the interaction type and the social identities of the participants. But speakers also can make marked choices. That is, they can, in effect, say "I am denying that I am X type of person and you are Y type of person and this is A type of situation." That is, they can try to negotiate a change in the rights and obligations set. . . . Most of the time, speakers and writers do choose the unmarked choice (Ervin-Tripp's directives) because it is the safest course.

Similarly, Carol Myers-Scotton and Agnes Bolonyai argue that although most linguistic choices reflect some societal pattern, speakers also make linguistic choices as individuals. Societal features define the linguistic options available to a speaker, but the speaker makes a rational choice among those options based on his or her desires, values, and goals, to present a specific persona that will give the best return in his or her interactions with others ("Calculating Speakers: Codeswitching in a Rational Choice Model," *Language in Society* 30 [2001] 1–28).

[19] Finegan and Besnier, *Language* 330.

[20] Ibid.

[21] Finegan and Besnier, *Language* 332–35, identify four characteristics of indirect speech acts: (1) Indirect speech acts violate at least one of the four maxims of the cooperative principle, which are (a) speakers are expected to give as much information as is necessary for their interlocutors to understand their utterances but to give no more information than necessary; (b) speakers organize their utterances in such a way that they are relevant to the ongoing context; (c) speakers avoid ambiguity and obscurity and seek to be orderly in their utterances; and (d) speakers are expected to say only what they believe to be true and to have evidence for what they say. (2) The literal meaning of the locution of an indirect speech act differs from its intended meaning. (3) Hearers and readers identify indirect speech acts by noticing that an utterance has characteristic 1 and by assuming that the interlocutor is following the cooperative principle. (4) As soon as they have identified an indirect speech act, hearers and readers identify its intended meaning with the help of knowledge of the context and of the world around them.

[22] See, e.g., Grant R. Osborne, *The Hermeneutical Spiral* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1991) 5–151.

Second, the type of speech act involved should be identified. Is the discourse a representative, a commissive, a directive, a declaration, an expressive, or a verdictive? Specific hermeneutical rules will govern the interpretation of each of these types of speech acts. If the discourse in question is identified as a directive, then the following additional questions should be asked.

First, what is the relationship between the speaker and the hearer(s) in terms of social rank? There are three possibilities: (1) they are of equal rank; i.e. they are peers; (2) the speaker is superior to the hearer(s); or (3) the speaker is inferior to the hearer(s). Second, what are the cultural norms and expectations at the time and place of the discourse regarding the manner of communication between people of those social ranks? For example, what degree of directness/indirectness is expected for that communication? Third, what is the type of directive? Is it a need statement, an imperative, an imbedded imperative, a permission directive, a question directive, or a hint? As explained below, the answer to these first two questions will help determine the answer to this third question.

IV. APPLICATION OF THESE PRINCIPLES TO JOHN 1:38

This hermeneutical principle for interpreting directives in the NT will now be applied to arrive at an understanding of the meaning of the two disciples' question in John 1:38.[23] Specifically, the three questions applicable to directives identified above will be answered for this question.

First, what is the relationship between these two disciples of John and Jesus in terms of social rank? The key to answering this question is to note how the disciples addressed Jesus: as ῥαββι. To answer this question, both biblically external and internal evidence may be examined. External evidence demonstrates that "[t]he Semitic term "rabbi" [lit., 'my great one'] was a common term of honor used by disciples to address their teacher"; at the time of Jesus "the term is used . . . to refer to a respected Jewish religious teacher."[24]

The biblical text includes twelve instances where Jesus is addressed as ῥαββί,[25] and two as ῥαββουνί,[26] a term that does not differ significantly from

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[23] At this point in this article, I am assuming, in the same way that a scientific experiment begins with a working hypothesis, that the two disciples' question in John 1:38 is a directive rather than another type of speech act (e.g. a request for information). This beginning assumption is confirmed in the succeeding discussion, especially by the four observations from the context of the disciples' question that support the conclusion that they are requesting from Jesus more than information.

[24] Andreas J. Köstenberger, "John," in *Zondervan Illustrated Bible Backgrounds Commentary,* vol. 2 (ed. Clinton E. Arnold; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2002) 18. See also J. D. Douglas, N. Hillyer, and D. R. W. Wood, eds., *New Bible Dictionary*, 3d ed. (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1996) 996; J. D. Douglas, ed., *The Illustrated Bible Dictionary,* part 3 (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1980) 1314. B. Witherington, III argues that Jesus was not only called "rabbi" or "rabbouni" during his ministry but was also addressed by the term of respect "mare," "which would have connoted that Jesus was a great teacher who exercised authority over his disciples" ("Lord," *DJG* 487).

[25] Matt 26:25, 49; Mark 9:5; 11:21; 14:45; John 1:38, 49; 3:2; 4:31; 6:25; 9:2; 11:8.

[26] Mark 10:51; John 20:16.

ῥαββι.[27] The respectful title ῥαββι placed Jesus on the same level as other respected religious teachers of his day, but he claimed even greater authority, both as a prophet and as the Messiah.[28] The biblical text also gives additional evidence of the respect afforded to Jesus by his disciples and others: (1) the disciples obeyed Jesus' commands;[29] (2) the Jewish people recognized Jesus as one who had authority, greater than their scribes;[30] and (3) many people showed respect to Jesus by kneeling or bowing down before him.[31]

In John 1:38 the two disciples of John showed respect to Jesus by addressing him as ῥαββι. Based on John the Baptist's declaration to them that Jesus is the Lamb of God and their immediate response of following Jesus, the two disciples most likely believed that Jesus was the long-awaited Messiah. Therefore, based on both external and internal evidence, we can conclude that the relationship of these two disciples to Jesus, from their perspective, was one of inferior to superior (the third of the above options).

The next question that must be addressed is, what are the cultural norms and expectations at the time and place of this encounter regarding the manner of communication between people of those social ranks, that is, between the Jewish people and a rabbi and possible prophet and/or Messiah? To answer this question, the author analyzed all instances of directive discourse in the Gospel of John.[32] Seventy-three occurrences were identified.[33] For each occurrence, the directive was rated on two dimensions. First, the directive was rated in terms of the relationship between the speaker and the hearer(s), as either (1) downward (superior speaking to inferior); (2) across (speaker and hearer[s] are peers); or (3) upward (inferior speaking to superior). Second, the directive was classified according to its type, according to the Ervin-Tripp typology. The following table displays the results of this analysis by listing the frequency of each type of directive for each type of relationship between the speaker and the hearer(s). In this table, the types of directives are presented, from left to right, in their order from the most direct (the imperative) to the most indirect (the hint).[34]

Although this analysis of directives in the Gospel of John is not a quantitative, scientific study, its findings confirm what one would expect if the

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[27] *TDNT* 6.964.

[28] R. Riesner, "Teacher," *DJG* 808.

[29] E.g. Mark 1:17–20; 2:14.

[30] Matt 7:28–29; Mark 1:22, 27; Luke 4:32.

[31] Matt 8:2; 9:18; 15:25; 17:14; Mark 5:6, 22, 33; 7:25; 10:17; Luke 5:8, 12; 8:28, 41, 47; John 11:32.

[32] Only directive discourse between people is included in this analysis. Therefore directive discourse between angels and people (e.g. John 20:13) and between Jesus and the Father (e.g. John 12:28) is not included. Also, this analysis also does not include teachings given by Jesus; although those teachings include a few directives (e.g. John 15:4), they primarily consist of representatives. Because of time and space limitations, the author analyzed only the Gospel of John. However, a similar analysis of directives in the Gospel of Matthew yielded similar results.

[33] Most of these records of discourse were easily identified as directives. With others, a subjective judgment was made to identify them as directives rather than as another type of speech act, based on the most likely meaning of the discourse in its context.

[34] Michael B. Montgomery, distinguished professor emeritus of English and linguistics, University of South Carolina, concurs with this ordering (personal communication with the author).

Table 1.   Frequency of Directives in the Gospel of John

	Imperative	Imbedded Imperative	Permission Directive	Question Directive	Need Statement	Hint
Downward	38	4			2	1
Across	8	4		1	1	2
Upward		8		2		2

findings of Ervin-Tripp, discussed above, are universal rules, rather than rules that apply only to contemporary America. In other words, this analysis provides evidence that the cultural patterns of discourse in first-century Palestine, in terms of the correlation between social rank and degree of direct-ness, are similar to those described by Ervin-Tripp. In the Gospel of John, directives where the speaker is in a superior social rank to the hearer(s), labeled as "downward" in the table, are the most direct, with thirty-eight of their forty-five occurrences being imperatives, the most direct form of direc-tive. Directives where the speaker and the hearer(s) are of the same social rank, labeled as "across" in the table, are less direct/more indirect, with almost half of their occurrences being less direct than imperatives. Direc-tives where the speaker is in an inferior social rank to the hearer(s), labeled "upward" in the table, are even less direct/more indirect, with all twelve of their occurrences being imbedded imperatives, question directives or hints. A list of the directives identified in the Gospel of John is provided at this point in the article to provide the overall framework for our discussion.

Table 2.   Directives in the Gospel of John

Key: "D" = downward; "A" = across; "U" = upward; "I" = imperative; "I I" = imbedded imperative;
"P D" = permission directive; "Q D" = question directive; "N S" = need statement; "H" = hint

Text	Speaker(s)	Listener(s)	Relationship	Type of Directive
1:36	John the Baptist	Two of his disciples	D	H
1:38	Two disciples of John the Baptist	Jesus	U	Q D
1:39	Jesus	Two disciples of John the Baptist	D	I
1:43	Jesus	Philip	D	I
1:46	Philip	Nathanael	A	I
2:3	Mary, mother of Jesus	Jesus	A	H
2:5	Mary, mother of Jesus	Servants at a wedding	D	I
2:7	Jesus	Servants at a wedding	D	I
2:8	Jesus	Servants at a wedding	D	I
2:16	Jesus	Sellers and money changers in the temple	D	I

2:18	Jews	Jesus	D	I I
4:7	Jesus	Woman of Samaria	D	I I
4:15	Woman of Samaria	Jesus	U	I I
4:16	Jesus	Woman of Samaria	D	I
4:29	Woman of Samaria	People in the city of Sychar	A	I
4:31	Disciples	Jesus	U	I I
4:49	Royal official in Cana of Galilee	Jesus	A	I I
5:8	Jesus	Invalid at the pool of Bethesda	D	I
5:10	Jews	Invalid at the pool of Bethesda	A	H
5:14	Jesus	Invalid at the pool of Bethesda	D	I
6:10	Jesus	Andrew, Philip, and/or the other disciples	D	I
6:12	Jesus	Disciples	D	I
6:20	Jesus	Disciples	D	I
6:30	Crowd	Jesus	U	I I
6:34	Crowd	Jesus	U	I I
6:43	Jesus	Jews	D	I
7:3	Jesus' brothers	Jesus	A	I
7:4	Jesus' brothers	Jesus	A	I
7:8	Jesus	Jesus' brothers	D	I
8:11	Jesus	Woman caught in adultery	D	I
9:7	Jesus	Man born blind	D	I
10:20	Jews	Other Jews	A	Q D
10:24	Jews	Jesus	A	I I
11:3	Mary and Martha	Jesus	D	N S
11:7	Jesus	Disciples	D	I I
11:8	Disciples	Jesus	U	Q D
11:15	Jesus	Disciples	D	I I
11:16	Thomas	Other disciples	A	I I
11:22	Martha	Jesus	U	H
11:34	Jews and Mary	Jesus	U	I I
11:39	Jesus	Mary, Martha, and/or the Jews with them	D	I
11:43	Jesus	Dead Lazarus	D	I
11:44	Jesus	Mary, Martha, and/or the Jews with them	D	I

Table 2, *cont*.

12:7	Jesus	Judas Iscariot	D	I
12:21	Some Greeks	Philip	A	N S
13:8	Peter	Jesus	U	I I
13:9	Peter	Jesus	U	I I
13:27	Jesus	Judas Iscariot	D	I
14:8	Philip	Jesus	U	I I
18:8	Jesus	Roman cohort and officers	D	I
18:11	Jesus	Peter	D	I
18:21	Jesus	High priest	D	I
18:23	Jesus	Official of the high priest and/or the high priest	D	I
18:31a	Pilate	Caiaphas and/or the Jewish leaders	D	I
18:31b	Caiaphas and/or the Jewish leaders	Pilate	U	H
18:40	Jews	Pilate	A	I
19:6a	Chief priests, their officials, and/or Jews	Pilate	A	I
19:6b	Pilate	Chief priests, their officials, and/or Jews	D	I
19:15	Jews	Pilate	A	I
19:21	Chief priests	Pilate	A	I
19:24	Soldiers at the cross	Each other	A	I I
19:28	Jesus	Soldiers at the cross	D	N S
20:17	Jesus	Mary Magdalene	D	I
20:22	Jesus	Disciples	D	I
20:27	Jesus	Thomas	D	I
21:6	Jesus	Peter and six other disciples	D	I
21:10	Jesus	Peter and six other disciples	D	I
21:12	Jesus	Peter and six other disciples	D	I
21:15b	Jesus	Peter	D	I
21:16b	Jesus	Peter	D	I
21:17b	Jesus	Peter	D	I
21:19	Jesus	Peter	D	I
21:22	Jesus	Peter	D	I

The third, and final, question which must be asked in applying this hermeneutical principle to the two disciples' statement in John 1:38 is: What is the type of directive? Into which of the six categories identified by Ervin-Tripp does the statement fit? The answer to this question may be predicted by the answers to the previous two questions.

From the previous two questions, we learned that the relationship to Jesus of these two disciples of John, in terms of their perceived relative social rank, is one of inferior to superior. Based on the author's analysis of directives in the Gospel of John, we should expect these two future disciples of Jesus to address him somewhat indirectly. In other words, in interpreting the disciples' question to Jesus, we should not expect a direct meaning—that they are asking Jesus for information about where he is staying—but instead a somewhat indirect meaning. One characteristic of that indirect meaning would be that the intended meaning of the locution differs from its literal meaning (here, a request for information).[35]

This conclusion is supported by the form of directive represented by the disciples' question: a question directive.[36] A question directive is a question that does not specify the desired act; rather, the intent of the speaker must be inferred from the context.[37] Four observations from the context of the disciples' question support the conclusion that they are requesting from Jesus more than information.

First, when the two disciples heard John the Baptist declare Jesus to be the Lamb of God, they "followed Jesus" (ἠκολούθησαν τῷ Ἰησοῦ; John 1:37). As pointed out by numerous commentators, this fact appears to have a double meaning.[38] It has a neutral meaning, as a physical description of the two disciples' action. It also has the meaning of "to follow as a disciple."[39] The two disciples were aware that in their day disciples literally walked behind the one they had chosen as their teacher.[40] Therefore, the disciples' action of following Jesus is their first step toward their new status as his disciples; it is a non-verbal communication to Jesus of their desire to follow him as a disciple.

[35] See n. 21.

[36] This conclusion is supported by the fact that, in the above analysis of directives in the Gospel of John, question directives are given a value of 4.0, which is close to the average value of 3.36 found for directives made by a person of a lower social rank to a person of a higher social rank.

[37] Ervin-Tripp, "Is Sibyl There?" 29.

[38] E.g. George R. Beasley-Murray, *John* (WBC 36; 2d ed.; Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1999) 26; Leon Morris, *The Gospel According to John* (rev. ed.; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995) 137; D. A. Carson, *The Gospel According to John* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991) 154; Gutierrez, "Encounter with the Lord" 31; C. K. Barrett, *The Gospel According to St. John* (London: S.P.C.K., 1955) 150. E.g. Morris, *The Gospel According to John* 137:

> The verb "followed" is in the tense appropriate to once-for-all action, which may be meant to indicate that they cast in their lot with Jesus. They did not mean to make a tentative inquiry but to give themselves to Him. We should also notice that the verb has both a general sense of "follow," and a more specific sense of "follow as a disciple." In this place it may be used in both senses. They walked down the path after Jesus and thus followed. But they also symbolically committed themselves to Him.

[39] Morris, *The Gospel According to John* 137; Carson, *The Gospel According to John* 154.

[40] Köstenberger, "John," in *ZIBBC* 2.18.

Second, in his response to the two disciples' question, Jesus shows that he interprets their question as seeking more than information. Jesus does not tell the disciples where he is staying, but instead invites them to come and see where he is staying. Third, the text tells us that after their visit with Jesus, the two disciples believed Jesus to be the Messiah (John 1:41), and they became his disciples.[41]

Fourth, in his choice of words to describe the events in 1:35–41, the Gospel writer clearly has discipleship in focus. Several verbs in the text are significant. The first is ἀκολουθέω ("follow"), which is used three times (1:37, 38, 40), climaxing in Jesus' call to Philip to "Follow me" in 1:43. Following (using ἀκολουθέω) Jesus is consistently presented by the writer of John as a necessary condition of being his disciple.[42] Jesus responds to the disciples' question by asking: τί ζητεῖτε; ("What do you seek?") (1:38). The verb "seek" (ζητέω) in John's Gospel has theological implications; it sometimes refers to an encounter with Christ as a disciple or a potential disciple.[43] The next significant verb is μένω, which is used three times (1:38, 39, 39); to abide (μένω) in Jesus is a primary description of being a disciple of Jesus in the Gospel.[44] Finally, also significant is Jesus' invitation to the two disciples: ἔρχεσθε καὶ ὄψεσθε ("Come and you will see"; 1:39). The same phrase is used as a call to become a disciple of Jesus by Philip to Nathanael (1:46) and by the Samaritan woman to the citizens of Samaria (4:29). John's Gospel elsewhere reports Jesus' invitation to others to "come" (ἔρχομαι) to him as his disciple.[45] "See" (ὁράω) in John is a salvific term,[46] connected with belief.[47]

Based on these observations, we can conclude that by their initial action in following Jesus (1:37) and their initial question—ῥαββί . . . ποῦ μένεις;— the two disciples of John are communicating to Jesus, in an indirect manner, their request to spend time with him as a first step in becoming his disciples.

Other commentators, applying existing hermeneutical principles, arrive at a similar conclusion, but by attributing differing reasons to the two disciples' indirectness. Carson believes that the disciples felt it would be presumptuous to immediately present their theological concerns to Jesus;

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[41] One of the two disciples was Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, who later became one of Jesus' twelve disciples (Matt 10:2; John 1:40). The other disciple is not named, but many scholars believe that he was John, the author of the Gospel. E.g. Carson, *The Gospel According to John* 154.

[42] John 1:43; 10:27; 12:26; 21:19, 22. Cf. John 6:2; 10:4, 5; 13:36, 37; 18:15. E. Richard cites this fourfold use of ἀκολουθέω in 1:37, 38, 40, 43 as an example of the numerous expressions of double meaning in the Gospel of John ("Expressions of Double Meaning and the Function in the Gospel of John," NTS 31 [1985] 100).

[43] John 6:24, 26; 7:34, 36; 11:56. Cf. John 4:23.

[44] John 6:56; 15:4, 5, 6, 7, 7, 9, 10. Cf. John 5:38; 8:31; 14:10, 17, 25; 15:10, 11. A few commentators identify this deeper meaning of the three uses of μένω in 1:38–39. See, e.g., Carson, *The Gospel According to John* 155; Robert H. Smith, "'Seeking Jesus' in the Gospel of John," *CurTM* 15/1 (1988) 53; S. O. Abogunrin, "The Three Variant Accounts of Peter's Call: A Critical and Theological Examination of the Texts," *NTS* 31 (1985) 595–96. Beasley-Murray doubts a secondary significance of this verb in these verses (John 26).

[45] John 5:40; 6:35, 37, 44, 45, 65. Cf. John 1:46; 3:21; 14:6.

[46] John 3:3, 36; 11:40; 12:40, 41; 14:7, 9.

[47] John 6:30, 36, 46, 47; 11:40; 12:39, 40; 20:8, 25, 29.

therefore they instead asked a question, the answer to which would enable them to seek him out in private and at greater leisure.[48] Morris concludes that the two disciples felt shy and understood that what they wanted from Jesus would require a long talk with him.[49] Tenney correctly concludes that the disciples' question was not merely an inquiry for his address and identifies the motive behind their indirectness as a desire to be courteous.[50] Keener comes closest to the conclusion in this article, by designating the two disciples' question as "indirect" and attributing the reason for that indirectness as "ancient politeness and hospitality."[51]

Although all four of these commentators arrive at conclusions similar to that in this article, none of them explicitly identifies the reasons for the indirectness of the two disciples' question which have been demonstrated in this article: (1) the different social ranks of the two disciples and Jesus; and (2) the cultural pattern of communicating indirectly where a person of an inferior social rank speaks to a person of superior social rank. Still other commentators, applying existing hermeneutical principles, fail to identify the non-explicit meaning of the two disciples' question.[52]

V. CONCLUSION

An understanding of the meaning of the directive recorded in John 1:38 has been achieved through the application of a new hermeneutical principle derived from a linguistic analysis of directive discourse. This example illustrates the usefulness of this principle as an additional hermeneutical tool in interpreting all instances of directive discourse in the NT.

This hermeneutical principle would be strengthened by additional research into the cultural patterns of communication between people of differing social ranks in the ancient Mediterranean world. This would provide external evidence of those patterns to supplement the internal evidence presented in this article through the analysis of directives in the Gospel of John.

In recent years more emphasis has been given to understanding the cultural context of the NT.[53] Work needs to be done on identifying the patterns of communication in ancient Mediterranean cultures. That work should

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[48] Carson, *The Gospel According to John* 155.

[49] Morris, *The Gospel According to John* 156–57.

[50] Merrill C. Tenney, *The Gospel of John* (EBC 9; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1981) 40.

[51] "Asking such indirect questions (they want to come home with him) was characteristic of ancient politeness and hospitality." Craig S. Keener, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary, New Testament* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1993) 266.

[52] E.g. Beasley-Murray, *John* 26–27; Raymond E. Brown, *The Gospel According to John*, vol. 1 (Garden City, NJ: Doubleday, 1966) 74–75; Barrett, *The Gospel According to St. John* 150–51; John Calvin, *Commentary on the Gospel According to John*, vol. 1 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1949) 70–71.

[53] E.g. David A. deSilva's work in describing the principles of honor, shame, patronage, kinship and purity in ancient Mediterranean cultures provides cultural clues to unlock the meaning of significant portions of the NT text (*Honor, Patronage, Kinship & Purity: Unlocking New Testament Culture* [Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2000]; *The Hope of Glory: Honor Discourse and New Testament Interpretation* [Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1999]).

include an analysis of the social structures and the relationship between members of differing social classes[54] and should be assisted by relevant principles from the science of linguistics.[55]

Until this further work is done, based on the results of the analysis of directives in the Gospel of John presented in this article, caution should be exercised in interpreting records of directive discourse in the NT. The relative social ranks of the parties in the discourse must be considered, in addition to the other contextual clues provided both within and outside the biblical text. Such an analysis will often produce an understanding of the discourse where the intended meaning differs from the literal meaning.

It is the hope of the author that the hermeneutical principle developed in this article will be a further aid to biblical exegetes in our task of discovering and applying the true meaning of the biblical text.

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[54] E.g. David A. Fiensy identifies nine different social classes in Palestine in the Herodian period: king (procurator, tetrarch), Herodians, high priests, lay aristocrats, retainers, urban, rural, unclean and degraded, and expendables (*The Social History of Palestine in the Herodian Period* (Studies in the Bible and Early Christianity 20; Lewiston: Edwin Mellen, 1991] 155–70).

[55] E.g. Peter Cotterell and Max Turner identify ten universals of language. Some of these universals are applicable to this quest; e.g. universal 4:

> In all languages there are ways of asking questions, giving commands, making statements. The actual way in which this is effected will differ from language to language. Some languages use interrogatives, words that signal questions. Some do the same thing by using intonation. . . . Questions are used so as to obtain information. But something like seventy percent of the 'questions' which appear in the New Testament are rhetorical: they are not in fact intended to obtain information, but to convey information.

(*Linguistics & Biblical Interpretation* [Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1989] 19–25). The authors also cite John 1:38 as an example of implicature in the NT, where what is implied in language is as informative as what is said: "[T]here is an implicature in the words of the disciples. They did not want the address of the house in which Jesus was staying and so Jesus did not give it to them. Their utterance might be glossed: '*Rabbi, we would like to know more about you. May we spend time with you?* Where do you live? *If you tell us then perhaps we might come to talk with you?*'" (ibid. 48).