Language and Reality:
A Study of a Case of Frustrated Expectations

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Our everyday understanding of the relationship between language and reality is that there is a real world which language most of the time simply "names" or designates; the only exceptions we are prepared to admit without much hesitation are instances in which language is employed as a means for the production of creative artefacts. In these cases we grant a "poetic licence" to the individual concerned, so as to allow him to engage in the description of a fictional world. Disturbingly, sometimes we find language that "does not" describe the reality we know in texts that "do not" belong to the categories we would ordinarily grant with a "poetic licence". Such a category is historiography, and such a historian is Thucydides, whose use of language has attracted attention all the way from antiquity down to the present time. This paper attempts to explain this paradox with reference to the theory of language proposed by systemic functional linguistics. According to this theory, language is a semiological system that produces meaning under the constraints imposed by other wider and socially determined semiological systems (the Context of Situation, the Context of Culture, and Ideology). The paper examines how an understanding of these additional strata of meaning can help us explain not only the choices that Thucydides makes in his text, but also the reasons influencing his choices, as well as the motivations behind the differing interpretations of ancient and modern scholars to his work.

Key words: semiotics, systemic functional linguistics, historiography, Thucydides

As Sauerberg (2006:177-178) very perceptively notes:

To sense the world we can do without language, but without language we cannot make sense of it. To make sense of the world, we have, quite literally, to come to terms with it. We have to find the terms that will serve as verbal symbols with meanings that we agree on. Even in the cases for which we need to find unusual terms in order to describe out-of-the-ordinary phenomena, we still need to have a stable stock of verbal symbols from which we can draw. … The difference between a historiographical and a literary text is traditionally assumed to be a difference along exactly these lines: in the historiographical text we expect language to come to terms with the world and not with its own configuration as historiography, but in the literary text we expect language to serve dual loyalties, one by coming to terms with the world and one by coming to terms with the work as a configuration of verbal symbols parallel with or alternative to those we use to describe our own world, always drawing attention to the configuration of the work and, hence, to the verbal symbols without which it cannot exist.

Occasionally some historiographers come along who depart in such a radical way from the traditional expectations described by Sauerberg, that as a result we are forced to reconsider the wisdom and correctness of our assumptions, and start wondering whether language in any of its uses does ever "come to terms with the world", or whether language engages with the world in a relationship of mutual construal: each one both construing and being construed by the other; and, if that is the case, whether there is any instance of   language that ever refrains from serving "dual loyalties". The answer to these questions will have profound consequences for our "coming to terms" with our own scholarly world: the way we define it, the way we prescribe it, the way we classify it, the way we analyze it, and the way we become aware of it, as well as the way we lead others into an awareness of it (or indeed the way we hinder them from becoming aware of it).

The historiographer whose practices raised these questions for me is Thucydides. During the last hundred years or so of Thucydidean scholarship one of the most persistent assertions about his work is that he was so successful in constructing an image of objectivity and detachment for his text that he anticipated the rhetoric of later European scientists and scholars to such an extent as to become "the prototype of the academic monograph" (Crane 1996:26).[1] The respect that Thucydides enjoys among modern academics is so great that even when acknowledging certain shortcomings to his work, they always find ways to explain them as marks of his greatness, as Macleod (1983:52) discusses the historian's style:

> Thucydides' style has been to many ancient and modern readers a stumbling block, if not foolishness. Yet a great writer must write greatly; and even if the historian's style is not ideal, it is surely organic, the proper vehicle of his thought. So we need to consider the wording of the passage not merely as a tangle of textual, grammatical and exegetical problems, but as the shape or expression of its meaning.

An ancient reader that Macleod has in mind is Dionysios of Halikarnassos,[2] who prefaces a quotation from Thucydides (which Macleod analyzed) as follows:

> Now I shall quote the things he goes on to say, things tortuous and difficult to follow and containing combinations of figures that appear solecistic, and which

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[1] Three views covering the whole of the twentieth century, separated by more than three decades from each other, and originating in three different countries (Britain, France and the US) are cited in the Appendix (texts 1-3) as an illustration of the persistence of this assertion.

[2] Dionysios lived in the first century AD (i.e. five centuries after Thucydides). He spent most of his adult life in Rome as a teacher of rhetoric.

neither by his own generation were fashioned nor by the succeeding generations. (Dionysios of Halikarnassos, *On Thucydides* 29, trans. by Usher 1974)

A few paragraphs earlier Dionysios concluded the analysis of another Thucydidean passage with equally damning words:

The majority of the people will be unable to deal with this burdensome and twisted and difficult to follow character of his style... (Dionysios of Halikarnassos, *On Thucydides* 27, trans. by Usher 1974)

This discrepancy between modern evaluations of Thucydides, and the evaluation by Dionysios raises a number of problems. Why does Dionysios not see (as moderns so persistently see) the scientific historian in Thucydides? After all, the five centuries intervening between the two of them saw the publication of the works of Aristotle who carried over his scientific-biological way of working into the realms of the study of literature, the publication of the work of Eudemos of Rhodes and his extremely influential histories of sciences, the publication of the work of people like Euclid and Archimedes who are still down to the present day part of the school-curriculum. Scientific discourse, discourse on scientific discourse, and liberal arts discourse influenced by scientific discourse were all already available, widely circulated, extremely influential and certainly known by Dionysios; and yet Dionysios would not speak of a scientific historian. Similarly, while modern scholars will bend over backwards in diffidence to the greatness of Thucydides, Dionysios without hesitation would castigate the unnatural and difficult style of Thucydides. Why? Finally, why would Thucydides construct a historiographical discourse that so obviously draws "attention to its own configuration" contrary to our own commonsensical expectations?

1. Preliminaries

There are certain ways of approaching these questions that would yield no answers, because their motivation, the grounds on which they are based and the methodology used to draw and justify conclusions are not explicit. So, for example, asking of Cochrane or of de Romilly[3] why they have reached these conclusions, on what evidence they found their assertions, one is only provided with discussions of quotations from Thucydides, which usually carry the label "textual analysis", while in reality they are nothing more than a running commentary, a private exercise within

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[3] Texts 1 and 2 respectively in the Appendix.

which any explanation is as good or as bad as any other. Furthermore it is vouched upon nothing more than the reputation of the commentator, rather than argumentation and persuasion on the basis of evidence; as such it remains necessarily incommunicable, unteachable, and authoritarian. Crane,[4] on the other hand, is much more sensitive to the need of justifying his assertions and to the fact that meanings are created and communicated by language. So, for example, his argument that

> Thucydides was a profoundly reductive thinker who shaped his narrative by selecting a narrow range of themes. (Crane 1996:76)

is supported with statistics that show that words related to family occur in Thucydides ten times less often than they do in Herodotos (conclusion: Thucydides excludes family from the scope of his History), or again that words related to religious roles and institutions appear in Thucydides twelve times less often than they do in Herodotos (conclusion: Thucydides excludes religion from the scope of his History). However, while Crane is correct (Thucydidean discourse does indeed select a narrow range of topics), his argumentation does not prove that Thucydides is scientific, just as the inclusion of a great number of references to religious roles and objects would not make a sociological study of religion "unscientific", and a recipe for a vegetarian dish would not be botany, despite the fact that its vocabulary excludes animals.

Even though I disagree with Crane's argumentation, it goes without saying that I agree with the thinking that underlies it, namely that if one wants to analyze the meanings created by a text, then one has to pay close attention to the language used in that text; but to pay close attention to the language used in a text means to pay attention to more things than just its vocabulary, and to do so in a principled and systematic way one must be equipped with a grammar, since, as Halliday (1994:xvii) points out:

> A text is a semantic unit, not a grammatical one. But meanings are realized through wordings; and without a theory of wordings—that is, a grammar—there is no way of making explicit one's interpretation of the meaning of a text.[5]

However, the fact that Crane does not resort to a grammar for explaining his point is not surprising. The grammars used by Classicists are extremely good in dealing with the morphology of classical Greek, and excellent in classifying different types of

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[4] Text 3 in the Appendix.

[5] From now on in this paper the word "grammar", and its derivatives, will be used with this meaning, i.e. 'a theory of wordings and their corresponding meanings'.

constructions, but when it comes to dealing with meanings they are led astray into "translationalism" rather than semantics. Here is an example of this tendency:

> The range of tone represented by the potential optative extends from surmise to moral certainty, and this allows and demands a wide range of translations. At the one extreme, that of faint presumption, *might* is near the mark, but towards the other, that of strong assurance, *must* can seem a little weak. The stronger end of the range shows a proclivity for the negative. *May be* is right sometimes for positive sentences, *can't* is often called for where there is a negative. In declarative intention the potential optative is often a more assertive form than the future indicative, so that *shall* and *will* are serviceable. (Cooper 1998:684)

Various translations of potential optative are offered and indications of the range of "English" meanings to which a Greek optative could correspond are discussed; but the meaning of the Greek optative "in Greek" and its relation with other related Greek meanings is not discussed. This kind of grammar does not provide one with a 'theory of wordings'; as a result one is often forced to "explain" different wordings as 'mere stylistic variants, which convey no difference of meaning', while at the same time one fails to bring out the difference in meaning between Greek and English.
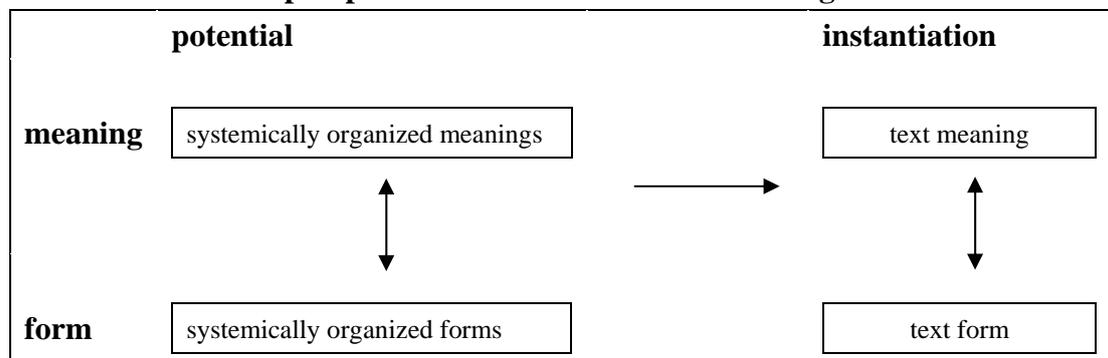
The view of grammar I prefer to use to study questions like those posed by the perception and interpretation of Thucydides' work, is that offered by systemic functional linguistics (SFL).[6] According to SFL, grammar is a paradigmatically organized collection of signs (couples of forms-meanings). From this collection any particular language producer selects the material appropriate for the text being produced. However, it is part of the naturalization of the particular text that the background of possible choices is usually hidden. This stance of SFL theorists towards grammar could probably best be described as a modification and elaboration of three principles introduced in linguistics by Saussure. First of all, there is his concept of the "langue", the language system, as an ensemble of signs consisting of a signifier and a signified bound together in a relationship of mutual construal, which SFL renames as "form" and "meaning" respectively. Saussure concentrated most of his attention on the language system itself, the "langue" (i.e. the totality of the lexicogrammar and meanings recognized in a particular language), which he saw as being something quite distinct from actual texts that can be made by reference to this system, the "parole". SFL reinterprets this distinction as one between "potential" and "instantiation". The relationship between these two groups of concept (form/meaning

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[6] More accurately SFL theorists would not term it grammar but "lexicogrammar", since the lexicon of a language is viewed as an extension of the grammar itself in the scale of delicacy.

and potential/instantiation) is brought together in Table 1, which also sketches roughly the view of language that will be taken in the remainder of this paper.

Table 1. Relationship of potential/instantiation and meaning/form[7]

	potential		instantiation
meaning	systemically organized meanings	→	text meaning
	↕		↕
form	systemically organized forms		text form

The third Saussurean distinction re-interpreted by SFL is that between "paradigmatic" and "syntagmatic" relations, a re-interpretation that mainly consists in privileging paradigmatic relations:

> Paradigmatic relations are relations of contrast. There are two key points that must be made about them. Firstly, paradigmatic relations are unlike syntagmatic relations in that they exist only in the potential and never in the [instantiation]. From the viewpoint of the text analyst, they express a contrast between (1) the meaning (and so the form) that was chosen for use in the text and (2) one or more meanings (and so forms) that might have been chosen (but were not). (Fawcett 2000:42)

This view of grammar is illustrated in Table 2 with reference to the "language" of traffic lights.

2. Thucydides and his choices

Equipped with this understanding of language we can look at a passage from Thucydides that illustrates the kind of "stumbling block" that his reader typically encounters. It comes from the account of events that occurred in the seventh year of the Peloponnesian War (i.e. the war of Sparta and its allies against Athens and its allies that dominated and influenced all events in the Greek world during the fifth century B.C.), and it concerns the description of military operations by the Athenians in Pylos, in territory near Sparta. While there are several excellent translations of this passage in English, unfortunately the translators have already ironed out many of

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[7] Adapted and simplified from Fawcett (2000:36).

Table 2. The grammar of the "language" of traffic lights[8]

	potential		instantiation
meaning	((directive to traffic))	go / prepare to stop / stop	[((directive to traffic)), go/prepare to stop/ stop]
	↕		↕
form	((LIGHT))	GREEN / AMBER / RED	[((LIGHT)) GREEN/AMBER/ RED]

the difficulties that a reader might otherwise come across and as a result they are unsuitable for the purposes of this paper.[9] Instead, it will be necessary to examine the original Greek text, however as an aid for the reader without knowledge of Greek I am providing an interlinear translation of the text that keeps as close as possible to the choices made in the original text; of course, this translation has no literary pretenses.

1	ἐν δὲ τῇ Πύλῳ	ἔτι	ἐπολιόρκουν	τοὺς ἐν τῇ νήσῳ Λακεδαιμονίους		οἱ Ἀθηναῖοι,
	in Pylos	still	were besieging	the on the island Lacedaemonians		the Athenians
2	καὶ	τὸ ἐν τῇ ἠπείρῳ στρατόπεδον τῶν Πελοποννησίων			κατὰ χώραν	ἔμενεν.
	and	the on the mainland encampment of the Peloponnesians			at place	was remaining
3	ἐπίπονος δ'	ἦν	τοῖς Ἀθηναίοις	ἡ φυλακὴ	σίτου τε ἀπορίᾳ καὶ ὕδατος·	
	toilsome	was	for the Athenians	the guarding	because of lack of food and water	
4	οὐ	γὰρ	ἦν	κρήνη	ὅτι μὴ	μία	ἐν αὐτῇ τῇ ἀκροπόλει τῆς Πύλου	καὶ αὕτη	οὐ μεγάλη,
	no	since	was	spring	except	one	in the very acropolis of Pylos	and that	no big
5	ἀλλὰ	διαμώμενοι τὸν κάχληκα	οἱ πλεῖστοι	ἐπὶ τῇ θαλάσσῃ	ἔπινον	οἷον εἰκὸς ὕδωρ.
	but	scraping the shingle	most of them	on the beach	were drinking	of expected quality water
6	στενοχωρία	τε	ἐν ὀλίγῳ στρατοπεδευομένοις		ἐγίγνετο,
	narrow-space-ness	also	to them who in small place encamped		was occurring

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[8] Simplified version of Thimbault (1997:219) who adapts it from Fawcett (1982:92).
[9] Nevertheless, the two most widely used translations are quoted in the Appendix as texts 4 and 5 respectively.

7	καὶ τῶν νεῶν οὐκ ἐχουσῶν ὅρμον	αἱ μὲν	σῖτον	ἐν τῇ γῇ	ᾑροῦντο	κατὰ μέρος,
	and the ships not having port	some of them	food	on land	were eating	in turn

8	αἱ δὲ	μετέωροι ὥρμουν.
	and the rest of them	suspended on anchor were.

9	ἀθυμίαν τε πλείστην	ὁ χρόνος	παρεῖχε	παρὰ λόγον ἐπιγιγνόμενος,
	discouragement also great	the time	was providing	being unexpectedly extended

10	οὓς	ᾤοντο	ἡμερῶν ὀλίγων	ἐκπολιορκήσειν	ἐν νήσῳ τε ἐρήμῃ	καὶ ὕδατι ἁλμυρῷ χρωμένους.
	them whom	they thought	within a few days	would siege out	(being) in a desert island	and water brackish using

11	αἴτιον δὲ	ἦν	οἱ Λακεδαιμόνιοι ...
	reason	was	the Lacedaemonians ...

The most striking feature of this text is what comes across as an attempt to de-personify it: to remove people as conscious, active participants in the events presented. The most striking instance is probably clause 7, which presents the ships themselves rather than their crew as having lunch. Clause 9 similarly removes persons from position of responsibility for the event occurring: it is time that hands out discouragement, rather than the Athenians feeling discouraged. Similarly in clause 6 it is not the infantry who feel crowded but "crowdedness" occurs to them. Perhaps the most opaque case of all is that of clause 3 where the word φυλακή 'guarding' does not seem remarkable (especially in the translations quoted in the appendix where it is translated by the thoroughly unobjectionable and natural in modern English 'blockade'), but in reality in Greek it is a novel usage of a word which at Thucydides' time is quite common with the meaning 'garrison', i.e. a group of soldiers assigned to guard a place,[10] a coinage arising from the nominalization of the verb (φυλάττω 'to guard') that is hidden from the view of the reader; and alongside the verb, (and, to judge from the semantic drift of the passage, this is what is important to Thucydides) the people performing the action are also moved away from a central position in the clause (that of doers of the action) to a peripheral one (that of recipients of the effects

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[10] For example: ἦσαν δὲ ταῦτα δύο τείχη, καὶ τὸ μὲν ἔσωθεν <τὸ> πρὸ τῆς Κιλικίας Συέννεσις εἶχε καὶ Κιλίκων *φυλακή*, τὸ δὲ ἔξω τὸ πρὸ τῆς Συρίας βασιλέως ἐλέγετο *φυλακὴ* φυλάττειν. These consisted of two walls; the one on the inside, the Cilician side, was held by Syennesis and "a garrison" of Cilicians, while the one on the outside, the Syrian side, was reported to be guarded by "a garrison" of the King's troops. (Xenophon, *Anabasis* 1.4.4)

of an event occurring apparently independently of them and without their involvement).
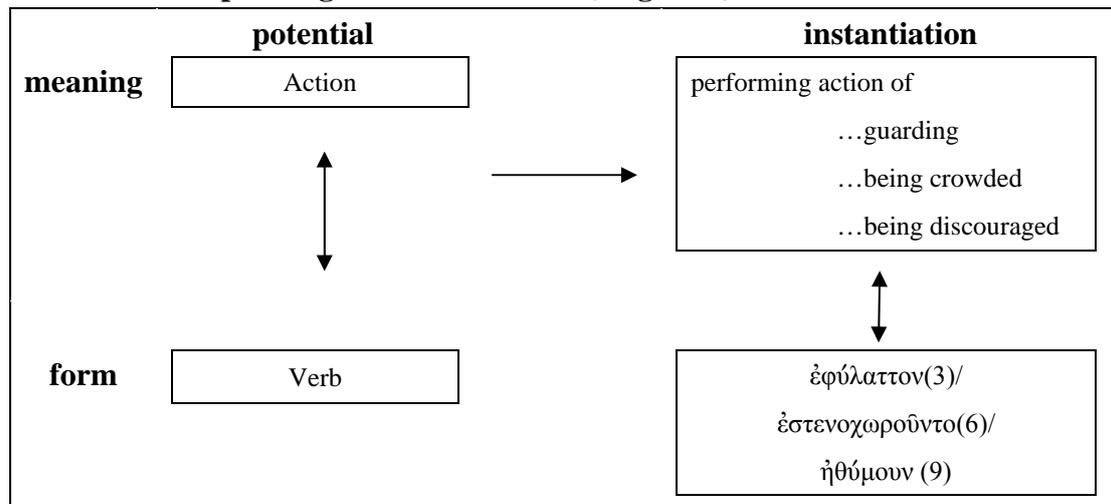
To fully appreciate, as well as to analyze further, what Thucydides does in this passage, it will be necessary to bring out in full view and awareness alternative "wordings" for this passage. Of course, it would be impossible within the constraints of an article to bring out all possible alternative versions; however, it is both possible and very instructive to show what would be a more expected, more natural, less marked one (presented in the shaded boxes below), and to juxtapose it with the original Thucydidean choices:[11]

3	ἐπίπονος δ'	ἦν	τοῖς Ἀθηναίοις	ἡ φυλακὴ	σίτου τε ἀπορίᾳ καὶ ὕδατος·
	toilsome	was	for the Athenians	the guarding	because of lack of food and water
	ἐπιπόνως δ'		οἱ Ἀθηναῖοι	ἐφύλαττον	σίτου τε ἀπορίᾳ καὶ ὕδατος·
	toilsomely		the Athenians	were guarding	because of lack of food and water

6	στενοχωρία	τε	ἐν ὀλίγῳ στρατοπεδευομένοις	ἐγίγνετο,
	narrow-space-ness	also	to them who in small place encamped	was occurring
	ἐστενοχωροῦντο	τε	ἐν ὀλίγῳ στρατοπεδευόμενοι	
	they were crowded	also	being in small place encamped	

7	καὶ τῶν νεῶν οὐκ ἐχουσῶν ὅρμον	αἱ μὲν	σῖτον	ἐν τῇ γῇ	ᾑροῦντο	κατὰ μέρος,
	and the ships not having port	some of them	food	on land	were eating	in turn
	καὶ ἐπεὶ αἱ ναῦς οὐκ εἶχον ὅρμον	οἱ τῶν μὲν ναῦται	σῖτον	ἐν τῇ γῇ	ᾑροῦντο	κατὰ μέρος,
	and since the ships not had port	the sailors of the one part	food	on land	were eating	in turn

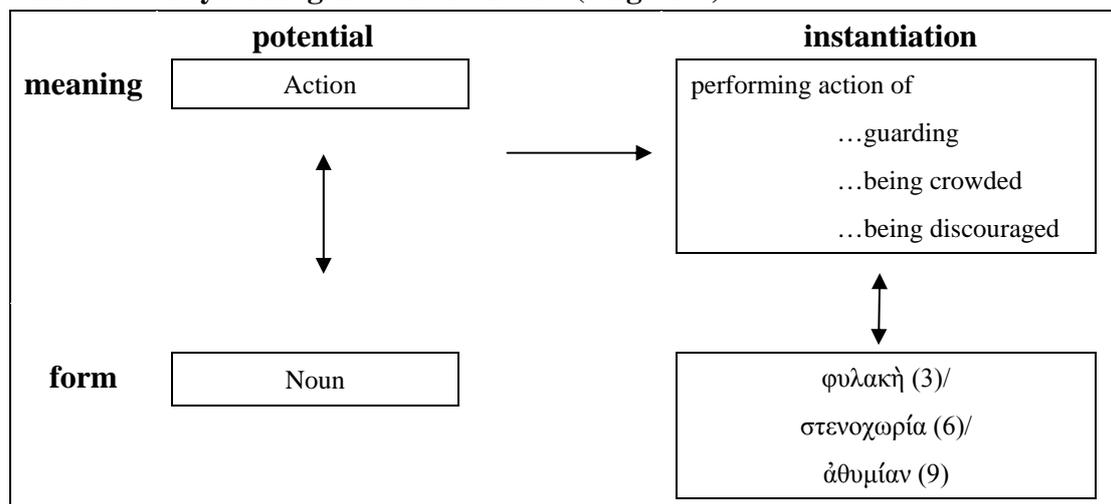| 9	ἀθυμίαν τε πλείστην	ὁ χρόνος	παρεῖχε	παρὰ λόγον ἐπιγιγνόμενος,
	discouragement also great	the time	was providing	being unexpectedly extended
	ἠθύμουν τε πλείστως	ὅτι ὁ χρόνος		παρὰ λόγον ἐπεγίγνετο
	they were discouraged greatly	because the time		was unexpectedly extended

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[11] I expect that had Thucydides chosen the more natural version, he would also have chosen a different word order. However, given that word order in Greek is used to regulate information flow, and given that my concern here is with the representation of the world (i.e. who does what to whom under what circumstances), I prefer not to complicate the picture by adding parameters that are affected only indirectly, and thus are only secondarily relevant to my purposes.

   As this juxtaposition shows, with the exception of clause 7 (where Thucydides employs metonymy as a means of departing from the more expected wording), the difference between the Thucydidean and the unmarked wording lies in the use of a "different" grammar. The difference between these two "different" grammars is shown in Tables 3 and 4. It is a difference that consists in de-coupling the two parts of the sign and re-coupling the form with another meaning. It is this property of Thucydidean discourse that stirred Dionysios to such strong disapproval, and which has become a stumbling block for both modern and ancient readers alike.

Table 3. The expected grammar of Greek (fragment)[12]

	potential	instantiation
meaning	Action	performing action of …guarding …being crowded …being discouraged
form	Verb	ἐφύλαττον(3)/ ἐστενοχωροῦντο(6)/ ἠθύμουν (9)

Table 4. Thucydides' grammar of Greek (fragment)

	potential	instantiation
meaning	Action	performing action of …guarding …being crowded …being discouraged
form	Noun	φυλακὴ (3)/ στενοχωρία (6)/ ἀθυμίαν (9)

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[12] The word fragment in the title of this and the following table is used to indicate that the tables only refer to a limited area of the grammar of Greek.

3. Preparing to explain the reactions

While the argument has reached the point where we are in a position to explain the intensity of Dionysios' reaction, we are not yet in a position where we can explain his reaction to Thucydides (after all, why should Dionysios not accept this alternative grammar as preferable to the expected one?), or the reaction of modern scholarship to Thucydides' choices (why should one conclude that Thucydides is scientific?), or indeed why Thucydides should choose to get into this exercise of re-fashioning the grammar of Greek. To answer these questions, we need to explain both the reasons that make this de-coupling and re-coupling possible13 and what gives to the expected grammar its expectedness.

As Thimbault (1997:220) points out the simple answer to the first question is that while there is a typical cross-coupling between the two "functives" (in Hjelmslev's terminology) of the sign, the relationship to each other is not fixed and determined. It is also possible to de-couple the two orders of difference and re-couple them to create new combinatorial possibilities. As an example, Thimbault uses the amber light, which some drivers reconstrue as 'accelerate to avoid the red light'. The "orthodox" meaning of the traffic lights depends upon a higher order contextualizing relation:

> ...which assigns a sign its signification in relation to a system of interpretative rules or conventions. In the case of the traffic light system, these are the conventions and practices that pertain to the rules of the road, their correct observance, their violation and the system of legal sanctions that pertain to this. (Thimbault 1997:220)

As a consequence, since texts are embedded within a context and the meanings they make depend upon the properties of this context, then descriptions of a language and the meanings it makes require more than just a description of the semantic system of a language, that is, they require a set of context-specific semantic descriptions, each one of which characterizes the meaning potential that is associated with a given situation. This in its turn means that we need to approach a situation not as an inventory of ongoing sights and sounds, but as a semiotic structure. To meet this need systemicists analyze a situation according to the variables of Register, consisting of Field (the social action), Tenor (the role structure) and Mode (the symbolic organization).[14] A brief example will probably make both the distinctions and their relevance to text analysis clear. The situation of writing a letter (Mode) describing the final of the

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[13] Were it impossible, then Thucydides' style would not be just a stumbling block, but the reason for the complete incomprehensibility of his text.

[14] Halliday's (1989) definitions of these variables are quoted in the Appendix as text 6.

World Cup (Field) to a close friend (Tenor) will have a different meaning potential than the situation of describing the same game to the same friend over a phone conversation (change of Mode), or that of writing an article about the same game for a newspaper (change of Tenor), or that of writing a letter to the same friend about a visit to a museum (change of Field).

Finally the Register itself (i.e. the socio-semiological analysis of the Context of Situation) is further restricted by genre (i.e. socio-semiological analysis of the Context of Culture), within which it operates, so that there are culturally dictated constraints on the possible combinations of Field, Tenor and Mode. So, for example formality (Tenor) and public speaking (Mode) would, in the cultures within which we operate, readily combine with semiotics (Field) and provide a description of the Register of the language occasion we are currently engaged in. However, those values of Tenor and Mode would not combine with "cooking beef noodles'' as Field, (notice that TV cooking programs are informal). There is no particular reason why not. We simply do not give lectures in this topic: it is just a cultural black hole. In some cases these black holes are legally enforced, as in the case of Tenor: power, Mode: informal, Field: sex, a Register specification that can lead to conviction for sexual harassment. In other words,

> the register values Field, Tenor and Mode can…be interpreted as working together to achieve a text's goals, where goals are defined in terms of systems of social processes at the level of Genre. (Martin 1992:502-503)[15]

It is this order of contextualizing relations, genre, that will help us explain the reaction of both Dionysios and of modern scholars to the work of Thucydides.

4. Explaining the reactions

Dionysios makes clear that his criticism of Thucydidean style is going to be conducted on the level of genre, and in particular the fit between style and genre, by starting his discussion with an overview "of the state in which Thucydides inherited the genre from his predecessors" (*On Thucydides* 21), and when focusing on the historians before the Peloponnesian War he states:

> All these historians cultivated a direct rather than a figurative style of writing, though they occasionally used the latter to add seasoning, as it were. All

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[15] Unfortunately, considerations of space will not allow me to expand on the relationship between culture and genre. However, one can now consult Martin (2006) for a thorough discussion of the topic.

constructed their sentences in a similar manner, simply and without artifice, and even when they used figurative language they did not deviate from the well-worn, universally familiar, language of normal speech. (Dionysios of Halikarnassos, *On Thucydides* 23, trans. by Usher 1974)

In Dionysios' opinion this kind of style had all the virtues that criticism of his time considered "essential" (namely: purity, clarity and brevity); but it did not exhibit either fully or in a fully developed form the "ancillary virtues" (i.e. sublimity, eloquence, dignity and grandeur); nor did it exhibit the marks of genius (intensity, gravity, mind-arousing emotion, robust and combative spirit). A sole exception is Herodotus:

This historian was far superior to the rest in his choice of words, his composition and his varied use of figures of speech; and he made his prose style resemble the finest poetry by its persuasiveness, its charm, and its utterly delightful effect. (Dionysios of Halikarnassos, *On Thucydides* 23, trans. by Usher 1974)

In contrast to earlier historians Thucydides resolved to introduce into historiography an individual style which had been overlooked by his predecessors. In his choice of words he preferred those which were metaphorical, obscure, archaic and outlandish to those which were common and familiar to his contemporaries… To figures of speech, in which he was especially eager to outstrip his predecessors… Sometimes he makes a nominal phrase from a noun, and sometimes he condenses a phrase into a noun. Sometimes he expresses a verbal idea in a nominal form, and sometimes he changes a noun into a verb… When his purpose coincides with his special talent, he is completely and marvellously successful; but when his power is not being employed to its full capacity…the speed with which the ideas are presented renders the passage obscure, and brings in its train certain other unattractive faults. These include a failure to observe throughout the whole of his history in what way strange and artificial language should be used, and how far we should go before stopping, although these are worthy, indeed necessary subjects for all literary artists to study. (Dionysios of Halikarnassos, *On Thucydides* 24, trans. by Usher 1974)
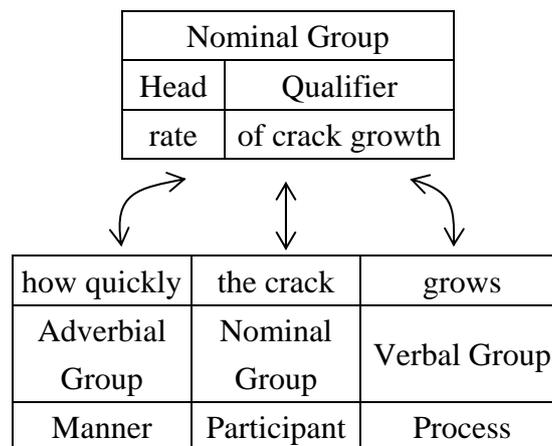
So, to summarize and to re-phrase Dionysios in the terms that the present study employs, the genre of historiography, requires that in terms of Field the situations described are intelligible to the reader, and to ensure this effect a writer should adhere to common usage. However, to achieve greatness a historian should also be prepared

to express a certain degree of authority and superiority in relation to one's readers (Tenor) by means of judicious and intelligible departures from ordinary language, and when this is done properly, as is done by Herodotus, one can achieve greatness. However, the problem with Thucydides is that his departures are extremely exaggerated, and as a result they create incomprehension (one cannot determine what social action they refer to) in terms of Field, and alienation rather than distance between author and reader in terms of Mode. This latter effect is a fatal flaw for Dionysios, as it is the exact opposite of the effect that the highly commended Herodotus produces for his readers.

To explain the reaction of twentieth century scholarship we need to examine Thucydidean discourse in relation to modern scientific discourse. Halliday and Martin (1993) have presented a highly regarded study of the characteristics of scientific writing, where among other texts they also analyse the following text from Michalske and Bunker (1987:81):

> The rate of crack growth depends not only on the chemical environment but also on the magnitude of the applied stress. The development of a complete model for the kinetics of fracture requires an understanding of how stress accelerates the bond-rupture reaction. In the absence of stress, silica reacts very slowly with water.

The most noticeable aspect of this text is the amount of nominalization that takes place. The analysis of one of these nominalizations by Halliday and Martin (1993:31) shows that what takes place is a phenomenon of de-coupling and re-coupling between form and meaning very similar to the ones seen in the passage by Thucydides:

Nominal Group	
Head	Qualifier
rate	of crack growth

how quickly	the crack	grows
Adverbial Group	Nominal Group	Verbal Group
Manner	Participant	Process

As Halliday and Martin (1993:64) explain, this departure from the expected usage of a sign serves the following important functions in scientific writing:

(1) Nominal elements

    a. form technical taxonomies

        (a) technological categories

        (b) methodological categories

        (c) theoretical categories

    b. summarize and package representations of processes

        (a) backgrounding

        (b) foregrounding

(2) Verbal elements

    a. relate nominalized processes

        (a) externally (to each other)

        (b) internally (to our interpretation of them)

    b. present nominalized process (as happening)

Looking back on our passage it turns out that many of these functions are also served by the nominalizations Thucydides effects in his text. So, in our passage Thucydides creates a taxonomy of laboriousness:
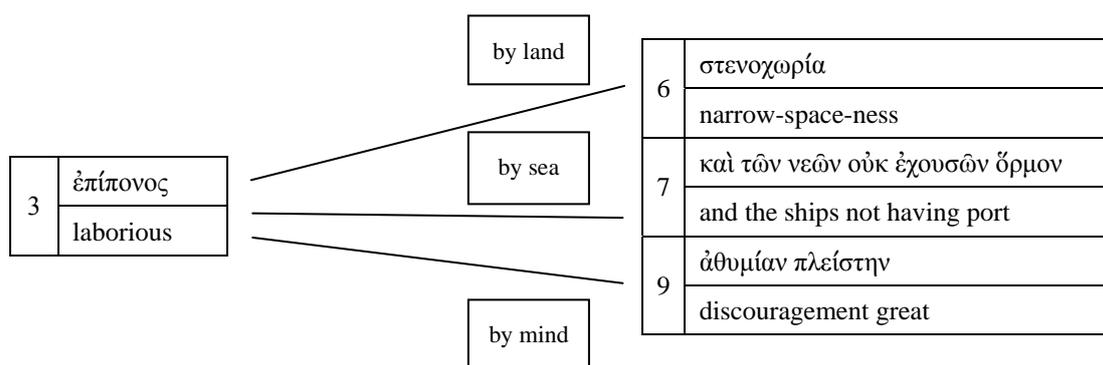
Similarly the verbal elements in this passage are doing nothing more than to present the unexpectedly nominalized processes as happening:

3	ἐπίπονος	ἦν	ἡ φυλακὴ
	toilsome	was	the guarding
4	οὐ γὰρ	ἦν	κρήνη
	since no	was	spring
6	στενοχωρία	ἐγίγνετο,	
	narrow-space-ness	was occurring	
8	μετέωροι	ὥρμουν.	
	suspended on anchor	were moored (located, being stationary at sea)	

	ἀθυμίαν τε πλείστην	ὁ χρόνος	παρεῖχε
9	discouragement also great	the time	was providing

So to a very great extent Thucydides' text shows many of the trappings that nowadays we associate with scientific writing, and this is a very strong motivating factor for modern commentators to be inclined towards considering it as a text of "scientific history".

To summarize the discussion to this point, both Dionysios' and modern scholarship's attitude towards Thucydides are to a very great extent the results of generic expectations. Dionysios reacts to the requirements of the genre of historiography as they had been set up by the practice of historians from the time before Thucydides, and from its analysis by the scholars of the time. Modern scholars, on the other hand, saw Thucydides adopting a discoursal stance similar to that of the scientists of their time. However, we have not yet fully explained either why Dionysios would not choose to see the rise of "scientific history" in Thucydides, or why "modern scholarship" would not choose to be dismayed at the rapture from the tradition, or indeed why Thucydides would choose to produce this kind of text.

5. Explaining the choices

There is a well-known joke about a taxi driver where the de-coupling and re-coupling of the two parts of the sign is very radical indeed.[16] It is important to notice that to make possible his radical recombination of signifiers and signifieds this taxi driver has completely disregarded the usual contextualizing constraints (laws and sanctions) and replaced them with a completely new set of contextualizing relations (his experience and the safety hazard posed by his brother). The joke brings into conscience the fact that semiotic codes depend for their existence and their continuity, as well as for their change, on the commitment and access of the members of the semiotic culture to these codes. To account for this phenomenon Martin (1992:573ff.) proposes an additional stratum of meaning, Ideology, which has genre as its expression plane:

…from a synoptic perspective, ideology is a system of coding orientations which

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[16] A taxi driver one day got a passenger in a hurry to get to the airport. When they got to the first set of traffic lights, with the light red, he kept on driving. "You will kill us" cried the passenger. "Sir, don't worry. I and my brother do this job twenty years and never had a single accident.'' This gets repeated a few times until finally they get upon a green light, when the driver slows down and stops. "Are you crazy,'' shouts the passenger, "you go through the reds and you stop at the green!" "What if my brother is coming the other way?"

makes meaning selectively available depending on subjects' class, gender, ethnicity and generation. Interpreted in these terms, all texts manifest, construe, renovate and symbolically realize ideology, just as they do language, register and genre…" (Martin 1992:581)

As Martin notes, the uneven distribution of meaning within any society creates a constant tension in the system, but typically

this dissonance is scarcely heard; certain habitual configurations of meaning dominate others and the disharmony goes unnoticed. At times, however, the tension among voices explodes. This happens when an **issue** brings the uneven distribution of discursive power into focus and participants in a community try to act consciously on this distribution with a view to re-allocation." (Martin 1992:582)

A limited example[17] would be the case of the word "nigger", which from as early as 1926 at the publication of van Vechten's novel *Nigger Paradise*, provoked protests from the African-American community, but it did not acquire the taboo status it has now until the Civil Rights Era, in the meanwhile the white view on its meaning (i.e. that it was not derogatory, but merely denotative of black) was naturalized.[18]

It is this stratum of meaning potential that provides the final explanation to the reactions to Thucydides' work. Dionysius spent twenty-two years in Rome engaged mainly in researching and writing his *Roman Antiquities*, a work attempting to reconcile Greeks to their Roman conquerors, and possibly under the patronage of the Princeps himself (Usher 1974:xx). So when writing about Thucydides, he primarily positions himself as a historian, engaged in writing what is essentially a propagandistic work, which attempts to prop up a military and political status quo. Being in this position, he is primarily interested in creating meanings that will be easily consumed by his readers, rather than meanings that need to fight against the inertia created by expectation, as Thucydidean discourse does.

On the other hand, late nineteenth and early twentieth century is the era of "scientism", the time of creation of the notion of social sciences and the partial incorporation of the discipline of history in the social sciences; as well as the era of modernism and the belief to objective descriptions. As so often in the history of

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[17] Martin (1992:282-285) cites several more extensive examples where the struggle over re-allocation concerns the lexicogrammar and the genre.

[18] Again considerations of space make it impossible to relate text and Ideology using the more sophisticated model proposed by Halliday and Matthiessen (1999), which accounts for the dynamic nature of Ideology by means of the concepts of ontogenesis, phylogenesis, logogenesis.

Modern Europe, the discovery of a Greek precursor would endow these new tendencies and movements with a prestigious past from which they can claim to descend and upon which they can profess to improve. Thucydides, given his style, was a convenient find.

Of course, Thucydides lived neither in first century Rome, nor in twentieth century Europe, and he belonged to an ideological system that was completely different. Thucydides lived in fifth century B.C. Athens at the time when the Athenian democracy was at the height of its power and was aggressively and enthusiastically exporting its political system throughout the Greek world. However, Thucydides himself was a dissident, and a dissident with a very special problem:

> Because democracy offered to a wide franchise the desirable condition of "not being under another", and because that condition—once revealed as possible—proved to be extraordinarily productive of institutional structures and discourse for explaining and defending itself, democracy tended to monopolize both political practice and the very language of Athenian politics. As a result, though many elite Athenians felt that they intuitively "knew" that there was something "wrong" with democracy, it was not an easy task to conceptualize or to express a sustained, reasoned antidemocratic argument. (Ober 1998:28-29)

It would lie beyond the scope of this paper to offer a review of the democratic discourse patterns, but a characteristic example is provided by the formula introducing the decisions of the Athenian assembly:

> ἔδοξε τῇ τῶν Ἀθηναίων ἐκκλησίᾳ…
> 'it seemed probable to the assembly of the Athenians...'

This formula recognizes and incorporates multiple views on the same topic by refusing to castigate one or the other view as wrong (they all have different degrees of likelihood at the time of the decision), or to promote one or the other view as right. On the contrary, it invites different views to be expressed and to engage in a continuous and open contest with each other, which never finishes since it can be renewed in the next meeting of the assembly:[19]

> For most Athenians, the shocking "postmodern" conclusion that "all knowledge is political" (i.e. implicated in relations of power) was simply a truism; neither the

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[19] An extreme example of the opposite view comes from the times of the military dictatorship in Greece (1967-1974), where the opening formula of decisions was "We decide and we order…"

possibility nor the normative desirability of genuinely apolitical forms of knowledge about society or its members ever entered the ordinary Athenian's head. (Ober 1998:34)

Thucydides, like Plato, like Xenophon, like Aristotle, like most intellectuals that lived in democratic Athens and whose works survive for us, sought to find a way out of the ideological hegemony of the democrats. This way could be nothing else than the imposition of stability of meanings. Plato, for example, expounded his theory of Forms: fixed, immemorial, unchangeable and non-negotiable they stood in opposition to the democratic probabilisation and negotiation of significations. Thucydides' proposal, historically less successful, but certainly more challenging, was to construe by means of language an alternative world. A world dominated not by opinions, but by hard facts, facts that efface the agents of decision, probabilisation and negotiation. A world created by his own lexicogrammatical choices, choices seeking to create alternative Contexts of Situation, and an alternative genre.

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Appendix

1. The scientific historian is left merely with the concept of a natural order of which man, like the environment, forms a part, and his problem is to exhibit the relationships which from time to time develop among men in contact with the environmental world. Such relationships being, *ex hypothesi*, uniform and regular, the study of them yields those generalizations about human action which constitute the usefulness of history and give to it the character of science. (Cochrane 1929:166-167)

2. Thucydides is here dealing with a whole line of political development which no longer involves any choice; it is shown as made up of good and bad elements which are indissolubly linked together by the very necessity of this development. Thucydides takes note of this development and explains it; and, in his impartial, theoretician's mind, the particular case brings out the general law. This scientific detachment, on which Thucydides' impartiality is based, enables him to understand, and consequently to justify, without prejudice and without illusions. The defense of Athenian imperialism thus rests upon a profoundly realistic attitude. And, at the same time, as the analysis rises to consider the very nature of Athenian imperialism as a particular experience given to the scientist to study, so the philosophical ideas begin to appear. Realism becomes a moral attitude, and, as the facts stand out in their eternal essence, we begin to see, beyond the individual whose acts are described, the naked principles of justice and force. (de Romilly 1988:272)

3. Thucydidean discourse struggled to develop within written prose a logic similar to that which many have ascribed to coinage. For Thucydides, writing and coinage were both abstract and depersonalized systems of representation, disembedded from any particular social relationship. (Crane 1996:253)

4. Meanwhile the Athenians at Pylos were still besieging the Lacedaemonians in the island, the Peloponnesian forces on the continent remaining where they were. The blockade was very laborious for the Athenians from want of food and water; there was no spring except one in the citadel of Pylos itself, and that not a large one, and most of them were obliged to grub up the shingle on the sea beach and drink such water as they could find. They also suffered from want of room, being encamped in a narrow space; and as there was no anchorage for the ships, some took their meals on shore in their turn, while the others were anchored out at sea. But their

greatest discouragement arose from the unexpectedly long time which it took to reduce a body of men shut up in a desert island, with only brackish water to drink, a matter which they had imagined would take them only a few days. The fact was, that the Lacedaemonians had... (Thucydides 4.26, trans. by R. Crawley 1960)

5. Meanwhile at Pylos the Athenians were still besieging the Spartans on the island, and the Peloponnesian army remained in its positions on the mainland. Lack of food and water made the blockade a difficult operation for the Athenians. There was no spring except on the acropolis of Pylos, and that was only a small one. Most of them had to scrape about in the shingle on the beach for such water as they could find to drink. Then there was the lack of room, which made it necessary for them to camp close together, and there was no port for the ships, so that some had to take it in turn to have their meals ashore while the rest were anchored out at sea. But it was the unexpectedly long time taken over the operation which caused the greatest discouragement, since they had imagined that a few days would be enough to subdue these men besieged on a desert island and with only brackish water to drink. The fact was that the Spartans... (Thucydides 4.26, trans. by R. Warner 1970)

6. FIELD—the social action: "what is actually taking place" refers to what is happening, to the nature of the social action that is taking place: what is it that the participants are engaged in, in which the language figures as some essential component.

   TENOR—the role structure: "who is taking part" refers to who is taking part, to the nature of the participants, their statuses and roles: what kinds of role relationship obtain among the participants, including permanent and temporary relationships of one kind or another, both the types of speech role that they are taking on in the dialogue and the whole cluster of socially significant relationships in which they are involved.

   MODE—the symbolic organization: "what role is language playing" refers to what part language is playing, what is it that the participants are expecting the language to do for them in the situation: the symbolic organization of the text, the status that it has, and its function in the context, including the channel (is it spoken or written or some combination of the two?)... (Halliday 1989:12)

語言與現實：一個期望受挫的案例研究

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　　日常生活中，我們對語言和現實之間關係的認知，往往僅止於「現實世界裡的語言多半僅用來命名，或是指涉。」只有在某種情況下，我們才會毫不猶豫的承認，其實也有例外的時候，例如被用來創造藝術。在這種情況下，創作者通常擁有所謂的「破格」權力，以方便能用語言描述虛構的世界。然而，我們又會發現語言描述的現實，並不是我們熟知的現實；而語言的文本也不屬於我們通常被允許擁有破格特權的那種類型的文本。這種類型的文本正是史料，而這類史學家正如修昔底德。從古至今，修昔底德的語言運用，吸引了無數研究者的探討。這篇論文試圖利用系統功能語言學的理論，來解釋此矛盾的現象。根據這個理論，語言是一種記號系統，在其他更大、取決於社會的記號系統（例如：情境背景、文化、意識形態背景）的約束下來產生意義。這篇論文指出了解這些額外層面的意義，有助我們解釋修昔底德在文本中所做的選擇以及他如此選擇的理由，以及古今學者對修昔底德的作品做出不同詮釋背後的動機。

關鍵詞：符號學、系統功能語言學、史料編纂、修昔氏德