
FOREWORD

This volume is long overdue. Students of the New Testament have been barraged for decades with linguists touting the value of discourse analysis, but few works have demonstrated its importance for exegesis. The esoteric vocabulary, minimal illustrations (especially of any substantial exegetical significance), and conflicting linguistic models have all contributed to massive inertia on the part of exegetes to dive into the material. In 2001, the theme of the annual convention of the Institute for Biblical Research was on the exegetical pay-off of grammar and linguistics. The very theme showed the nervousness of biblical scholars: they wanted to see the value of linguistic studies for the Greek and Hebrew texts, but the general sense was that there had been, to date, more bluster than substance.

Stanley Porter, Stephen Levinsohn, and others have been working tirelessly to show New Testament students that they need to learn about linguistics if they are to be accurate exegetes. They stand on good, solid shoulders. For biblical studies, the clarion call came with James Barr's *Semantics of Biblical Language*. His tome, produced fifty years ago, introduced students of the Bible to the fascinating work of Ferdinand de Saussure's *Cours de linguistique générale* (1916), which was translated into English in 1959. But it largely focused on lexical rather than grammatical linguistics. Still, Barr's *Semantics* stimulated many biblical scholars to investigate more thoroughly the realm of linguistics and to wrestle with its implications for exegesis. The ball was rolling, but it has taken decades to capture the imagination and interests of exegetes along the way.

What Runge has done is to focus on the exegetical significance of discourse grammar for *Neutestamenters*. He has gathered together several strands of linguistic insights (he calls his approach 'cross-linguistic' and

‘function-based’) that are often treated in isolation and sometimes without much more than lip service for exegesis. In short, Runge has made discourse analysis accessible, systematic, comprehensive, and meaningful to students of the New Testament. His presentation is clear, straightforward, and well researched.

At every turn, he offers linguistic insights into phenomena that are either only touched on in traditional grammars or dealt with too simplistically or even inaccurately. Plenty of examples from the New Testament are presented, along with detailed explanations. Traditional descriptions of various features of the Greek New Testament are compared with those of discourse analysis. At all points Runge is concerned to show that “if there is more than one way of accomplishing a discourse task, there is most likely a meaning associated with each choice” (148).

Discourse Grammar is a complement to traditional grammars, rather than in competition with them, although there are times when Runge chastises traditional grammarians (including me) for missing the forest for the trees. It almost goes without saying that not all grammarians or linguists will agree with every one of Runge’s points. Yet even on those issues over which one might disagree, there is much food for thought here. I have learned a great deal from this volume and will continue to do so for many years. To students of the New Testament, I say, “The time has come. *Tolle lege!*”

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