Linguistics and New Testament Greek

Key Issues in the Current Debate

EDITED BY

David Alan Black
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Contents

Preface

Where Did We Come From?

DAVID ALAN BLACK

Recently I ordered a book edited by Stanley Porter and Don Carson called *Discourse Analysis and Other Topics in Biblical Greek*.[1] Though reprinted by Bloomsbury in 2015, it was first published by Sheffield Academic Press way back when the ark landed on Ararat (1995). Most of my students weren't even alive back then. I originally read this book when it first came out, but I have a big reading problem: I can never read a good book only once. This disorder started when I was in seminary and reading books by F. F. Bruce and Bruce Manning Metzger. I've long been a fan of books about linguistics, so when I ordered this one, I knew I was in for some pleasant surprises. I will give you one example. The irrepressible Moisés Silva, in his chapter titled "Discourse Analysis and Philippians," writes the following (keep in mind that Silva is discussing his growing confusion about the character of Greek discourse analysis):

> Every researcher seems to be following his or her own agenda—usually quite an expansive agenda. Certain that the problem was not the early onset of senility, I picked up the recent and fine collection of papers edited by David Black,

1. Stanley E. Porter and D. A. Carson, eds., *Discourse Analysis and Other Topics in Biblical Greek* (London: Bloomsbury, 2015).

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with the hopes of clarifying matters once and for all. My anxiety, however, was only aggravated to realize in a fresh way that discourse analysis is about . . . *everything*! It is grammar and syntax, pragmatics and lexicology, exegesis and literary criticism. In short, fertile ground for undisciplined minds.[2]

Silva's was a tough chapter to get through because it is so blatantly honest and on target. As he puts it, "The more I read the more lost I feel."[3] There's no need to fool ourselves into thinking that our discipline (New Testament Greek) has gotten any less confusing since Silva wrote that chapter twenty-four years ago. What to do? Hold a conference, of course!

Two years ago, having previously organized three major New Testament conferences on our campus, I asked my colleague Benjamin Merkle if he would be interested in helping me organize yet another one, this time a summit dealing with the intersection of linguistics and New Testament Greek.[4] To this request he graciously agreed, and the book you now hold in your hands is the result of our joint effort to try to help our Greek students become more familiar with the significant contributions that linguistics can make to their study of New Testament Greek. In this preface I will endeavor to briefly explain the reasons we felt such a conference was necessary. In the postscript, my co-editor, who is currently writing (with Robert Plummer) a new beginning grammar of New Testament Greek, will summarize his impressions of the conference and make some suggestions as to where he thinks the discipline of New Testament Greek studies is likely to go in the future.

One of the most notable features of New Testament Greek scholarship during the past ten to twenty years has been the recovery of our temporarily mislaid interest in the science of linguistics. In the mid- to late twentieth

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2. Moisés Silva, "Discourse Analysis and Philippians," in Porter and Carson, *Discourse Analysis*, 102. The "collection of papers" to which Silva is referring is David Alan Black, with Katharine Barnwell and Stephen Levinsohn, eds., *Linguistics and New Testament Interpretation: Essays on Discourse Analysis* (Nashville: B&H Academic, 1993).

3. Silva, "Discourse Analysis and Philippians," 102.

4. Those three conferences were Symposium on New Testament Studies: A Time for Reappraisal, April 6–7, 2000; The Last Twelve Verses of Mark: Original or Not, April 13–14, 2007; and Pericope of the Adulteress Conference, April 25–26, 2014. I had the privilege of editing the papers from these conferences. The fruit of the first conference was published in the form of two books, the first edited with my colleague David R. Beck and titled *Rethinking the Synoptic Problem* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2001) and the second titled *Rethinking New Testament Textual Criticism* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2002). The papers from the second conference were published under the title *Perspectives on the Ending of Mark* (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2008). The third conference resulted in the collection of essays I edited with Jacob Cerone for the Library of New Testament Studies Series titled *The Pericope of the Adulteress in Contemporary Research* (London: T&T Clark, 2016).

century, teachers of New Testament Greek were generally preoccupied with more or less traditional approaches to Greek grammar that often involved little more than lists of paradigms and principal parts. But now many of us who teach Greek are convinced that God has given us insights from the science of linguistics that can and should inform our traditional approaches to exegesis. At the same time we realize that our discipline is far behind in this area, and we have a long way to go to catch up. This book is one attempt to bring New Testament Greek studies up to speed. It contains eleven papers delivered at a conference called Linguistics and New Testament Greek: Key Issues in the Current Debate, held on the campus of Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary on April 26–27, 2019. The editors confess that they are not specialists in the science of linguistics and have no particular expertise in most of the subjects treated in this volume. (You will notice that neither of us read papers at the conference.) Moreover, each topic is uniquely complex and has attracted a very extensive literature, only some of which we have been able to explore. Yet we venture to offer to the reading public (mostly those who have had at least one year of Greek instruction) a book that will hopefully help ordinary students of Greek think more linguistically about the language they are studying.

Proverbs 27:17 might well have been a suitable motto for our conference: "As iron sharpens iron, so one person sharpens another" (NIV). In its original context, this proverb is about individuals. But could it not also apply to Greek and linguistics? Each subject is a challenge to the other, for better or for worse. In fact, many if not most evangelicals today would argue that there is a strong correlation between the Bible and science, between Greek and linguistics. God is the God of nature as well as Scripture, of reason as well as revelation. During the so-called Enlightenment, of course, many abandoned the Bible for science altogether. To them, the Bible seemed incompatible with their Western culture and with its scientific approach to all things in the universe. Conversely, some Christians withdrew from the world of science, asking themselves, "Can anything good come out of Athens?"[5] In recent years, however, the Bible and science have moved closer together. It has become apparent to many New Testament scholars that Greek is, in fact, a *language* just like any other human language, even though God used it to inscripturate his divine truth. And if it is true that Koine Greek is a language,

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5. An insightful documentation of these developments can be found in Mark A. Noll, *Between Faith and Criticism: Evangelicals, Scholarship, and the Bible in America* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1991). To read about details specific to the NT not only in America but also in Europe, see the standard treatment in Stephen Neill and N. T. Wright, *The Interpretation of the New Testament, 1861–1986*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988).

then the science of linguistics has much to commend it.[6] It seems clear that the main alternative—viewing the Greek of the New Testament as sui generis, as a kind of Holy Ghost language—has little evidence for it compared with a linguistic understanding of how languages work.[7]

In the past century, the study of New Testament Greek has gradually moved from viewing Greek as a special field of study to viewing it as a part of the broader science of linguistics. The shift began well before I published my book *Linguistics for Students of New Testament Greek* in 1988. This new forward impetus was based on the groundbreaking work of nineteenth-century and early twentieth-century New Testament Greek scholars, including Winer, Blass, Moulton, and A. T. Robertson.[8] Since then,

6. One excellent defense of this idea is Moisés Silva, *God, Language and Scripture: Reading the Bible in the Light of General Linguistics* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1990). For an attempt to locate the phenomena of language in a theological framework, see Vern S. Poythress, *In the Beginning Was the Word: Language—a God-Centered Approach* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2009). Recent interest in the application of modern linguistics to the study of the biblical languages is evidenced by a series of works intended to introduce biblical language students to linguistic concepts. In addition to my *Linguistics for Students of New Testament Greek: A Survey of Basic Concepts and Applications*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1995), there is also Peter Cotterell and Max Turner, *Linguistics and Biblical Interpretation* (London: SPCK, 1989); Peter James Silzer and Thomas John Finley, *How Biblical Languages Work: A Student's Guide to Learning Hebrew and Greek* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2004); Constantine R. Campbell, *Advances in the Study of Greek: New Insights for Reading the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2015); and Douglas Mangum and Josh Westbury, eds., *Linguistics and Biblical Exegesis* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham, 2017).

7. For the crucial role of the papyri in deconstructing the idea of "Holy Ghost Greek," see James Hope Moulton, *Prolegomena*, vol. 1 of *A Grammar of New Testament Greek*, 3rd ed. (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1908), 2–5. Somewhat different is Nigel Turner's evaluation of the "inner homogeneity of Biblical Greek." See Nigel Turner, *Style*, vol. 4 of *A Grammar of New Testament Greek* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1976), 2. See also his comments in Nigel Turner, *Syntax*, vol. 3 of *A Grammar of New Testament Greek* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1963), 9:

> I do not wish to prove too much by these examples, but the strongly Semitic character of Bibl. Greek, and therefore its remarkable unity within itself, do seem to me to have contemporary significance at a time when many are finding their way back to the Bible as a living book and perhaps are pondering afresh the old question of a "Holy Ghost language." The lapse of half a century was needed to assess the discoveries of Deissmann and Moulton and put them in right perspective. We now have to concede that not only is the subject-matter of the Scriptures unique but so also is the language in which they came to be written or translated. This much is plain for all who can see, but the further question arises, whether such a Biblical language was the creature of an hour and the *ad hoc* instrument for a particular purpose, or whether it was a spoken language as well, something more than an over-literal rendering of Semitic idioms, a permanent influence and a significant development in the language. Students of Greek await the answer with interest.

8. Georg Benedikt Winer, *Grammatik des neutestamentlichen Sprachidioms* (Leipzig: Vogel, 1822); English translation: *A Treatise on the Grammar of New Testament Greek*, trans. W. F. Moulton, 3rd ed. (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1882); Friedrich Blass, *Grammatik des*

New Testament scholars have been split over whether or not exegesis allows for the full integration of linguistics into biblical studies. Some scholars have even felt threatened by this new approach to the study of the Greek of the New Testament.[9] However, since evangelicals believe that God is the unifier of the cosmos, the editors are convinced that no one should feel intimidated by the various models of linguistic research that have become available over the past century.

Among the branches of linguistics, comparative-historical linguistics proved to be the most interesting to New Testament scholars of the past century. Robertson's *Grammar of the Greek New Testament in the Light of Historical Research*—affectionately known to students as his "Big Grammar"—moved biblical studies in this direction like no other work that preceded it. Then discoveries in the field of semantics began to inform our discipline, resulting in groundbreaking works like Johannes Louw's *Semantics of New Testament Greek* and Moisés Silva's *Biblical Words and Their Meaning*.[10] Currently it looks like the field of New Testament Greek linguistics has begun to burgeon far beyond anyone's wildest imaginations, owing in large part to the tireless efforts of scholars like Stanley Porter, Stephen Levinsohn, and Steven Runge, all three of whom contributed papers to this volume.[11] If, for example, we take lexical semantics as a trustworthy approach, books like *Biblical Words and Their Meaning* become indispensable. Clearly our

neutestamentlichen Griechisch (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1896), the tenth edition of which (better known as Blass-Debrunner-Funk [BDF]) was translated and updated as Friedrich Blass, Albert Debrunner, and Robert W. Funk, *A Greek Grammar of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1961); James Hope Moulton, Wilbert Francis Howard, and Nigel Turner, *A Grammar of New Testament Greek*, 4 vols. (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1908–76); and A. T. Robertson, *A Grammar of the Greek New Testament in the Light of Historical Research* (New York: Hodder & Stoughton, 1914).

9. One of the most prominent in this regard is the late Robert L. Thomas. See Robert L. Thomas, "Modern Linguistics versus Traditional Hermeneutics," *Masters Seminary Journal* 14, no. 1 (Spring 2003): 23–45.

10. J. P. Louw, *Semantics of New Testament Greek* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1982); Moisés Silva, *Biblical Words and Their Meaning: An Introduction to Lexical Semantics*, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994).

11. Stanley Porter has been one of the most prolific proponents of linguistic exegesis of the Greek NT. He has authored or coauthored 28 books and edited or co-edited 124 books and journal volumes. His most important works include *Verbal Aspect in the Greek of the New Testament, with Reference to Tense and Mood* (New York: Peter Lang, 1989) and *Idioms of the Greek New Testament*, 2nd ed. (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1994). Stephen H. Levinsohn's most important work is *Discourse Features of New Testament Greek: A Coursebook on the Information Structure of New Testament Greek*, 2nd ed. (Dallas: SIL International, 2000). Steven E. Runge's *Discourse Grammar of the Greek New Testament: A Practical Introduction for Teaching and Exegesis* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2010) is an essential work in the field.

discipline could do without such exegetical fallacies as illegitimate totality transfer, etymologizing, and anachronistic interpretation.[12] With the rise of the field of biblical linguistics, evidence that the Greek of the New Testament is in fact not sui generis has risen dramatically, putting even more pressure on the claim that the New Testament is composed of "Holy Ghost Greek."

In my chapter "The Study of New Testament Greek in the Light of Ancient and Modern Linguistics," published in 1991 and revised in 2001, I noted several potentially fruitful areas of research for Greek scholars.[13] Allow me to quote them here and then make a few brief comments about the progress made since I originally wrote these words:

1. The problem of the reticence to break the traditional mold and strike out for newer and more productive territory. No longer can students of Greek be considered knowledgeable if they still believe *the* grammar they were taught; it is now painfully obvious that there are *many* grammars—traditional, structural, transformational, etc.—and that each of these comes in a wide variety of sizes and shapes. And it seems a reasonable assumption that more will follow.

2. The problem of the atomization of methods currently employed in New Testament philology. To take just one example, in the United States, Chomskyan linguistics once held the day, but today several other methods are being employed, such as Kenneth Pike's Tagmemics, Charles Fillmore's case grammar, and Sydney Lamb's stratificational grammar. This diversity, including significant terminological confusion, remains a problem, and this situation is only exacerbated by the recent influx of methods currently in vogue in Europe.

3. The present crisis over the nature of "New Testament Greek." What is to be done about the strongly Semitic character of New Testament Greek, and can one speak of New Testament Greek as a linguistic subsystem when a comprehensive grammar of Hellenistic Greek has yet to be written?

12. As pointed out in Silva, *Biblical Words and Their Meaning*, 137–69. See also D. A. Carson, *Exegetical Fallacies*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1996).

13. David Alan Black, "The Study of New Testament Greek in the Light of Ancient and Modern Linguistics," in *New Testament Criticism and Interpretation*, ed. David Alan Black and David S. Dockery (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1991), 379–406. The items listed are from pp. 404–5. This book was revised and renamed in 2001, and numbers 8 and 9 were added to the list. See David Alan Black, "The Study of New Testament Greek in the Light of Ancient and Modern Linguistics," in *Interpreting the New Testament: Essays on Methods and Issues*, ed. David Alan Black and David S. Dockery (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2001), 230–52.

4. The problem of defining the relationship between linguistics proper and New Testament "philology," which itself can refer both to *Literaturwissenschaft* (the study of the New Testament as a part of ancient Greek literature) and *Sprachwissenschaft* (the study of the Greek of the New Testament). This duel between diachronic and synchronic approaches must, it seems to me, be resolved if New Testament scholarship is to arrive at a synthesis capable of using the best of both approaches to language.

5. The riddle of the Greek verbal system: Can the tense structure of New Testament Greek continue to be described in terms of a rigid time structure when the latest research indicates that verbal aspect is the predominant category of tense (see especially the recent works by Buist Fanning and Stanley Porter)?

6. The challenge posed by "rhetorical criticism" in taking us beyond hermeneutics and structuralism. The recent revival of interest in rhetoric in New Testament studies bodes well for the future of our discipline, but neither James Muilenburg nor his school has produced a workable model of rhetorical criticism (though F. Siegert's 1984 dissertation is a positive step in the right direction).

7. The mention of structuralism raises the onerous hermeneutical question concerning surface and deeper linguistic meaning in the interpretation of New Testament texts, a question posed most radically by Erhardt Güttgemanns (1978) but certainly not by him alone.

8. The value of linguistics for New Testament Greek pedagogy. There are signs that a linguistic approach is becoming more acceptable to a new generation of Greek teachers. Phonology is seen as useful in that it helps students see that many seeming irregularities about Greek are perfectly normal and operate according to certain phonological "rules" in the language, while morphology is especially helpful in acquiring and retaining vocabulary and in understanding the Greek verb system. The "slot and filler" approach to grammar used by the present writer in his *Learn to Read New Testament Greek* (expanded edition, 1994) helps students *understand* what they are learning (instead of just requiring them to memorize a phalanx of linguistic minutiae). Semantics reminds us that meaning is the ultimate goal of all linguistic analysis and that both syntagmatic and paradigmatic relations deserve careful study.

9. Finally, the place of discourse analysis (textlinguistics) requires further discussion. Traditional studies of New Testament Greek have tended to ignore the macrostructure of a given text (the "forest"), emphasizing

instead the trees and the tiny saplings. It is everywhere apparent that New Testament exegesis remains somewhat "word-bound," though more and more seminarians are being exposed to the dangers of a "wall motto" or "bumper sticker" mentality in doing exegesis. Discourse analysis is especially helpful in doing exegesis above the sentence level and promises to become a standard instrument in the pastor's toolbox.

Fortunately, there is evidence that, in all of these areas, significant progress has been made since 2001: (1) More and more New Testament Greek scholars are eager to engage in linguistically oriented research when it comes to the language of the New Testament. (2) Although the problem of atomization remains, conferences like the one in Great Britain on the Greek verb have made serious strides forward.[14] (3) Today one can speak of a consensus among New Testament scholars that the Greek of the New Testament, although it is often characterized by Septuagintalisms, is related to Koine Greek as a whole. (4) Most agree that exegesis requires both a diachronic approach and a synchronic one. (5) Even those who argue that time is grammaticalized in the indicative mood in Greek would affirm that Koine Greek is largely aspectual in nature. (6) Rhetorical criticism is duly recognized as an indispensable step in exegesis in many of our current handbooks. (7) The issue of deep versus surface structures has become a fairly common theme in our hermeneutical primers. (8) Our most recent evangelical introductory grammars of New Testament Greek have consciously adopted linguistically aware methodologies.[15] (9) The practice of discourse analysis among New Testament scholars is perhaps as common today as it was uncommon three or four decades ago.

With this brief summary, we can see that the field of New Testament Greek linguistics has made a number of discoveries that challenge evangelicals' traditional approach to exegesis. It has also made other discoveries that challenge the methodological certainty of our exegetical methods. Unfortunately, evangelicals have not found as much common ground as we would like for a unified response to modern linguistic science. All can (and do) agree that the Bible is God's inspired Word and that it is crucial for people to recognize this. However, there is as of yet no agreement on the detailed model (or models) of

14. These conference papers were published as Steven E. Runge and Christopher J. Fresch, eds., *The Greek Verb Revisited: A Fresh Approach for Biblical Exegesis* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham, 2016).

15. Here I am thinking especially of Stanley E. Porter, Jeffrey T. Reed, and Matthew Brook O'Donnell, *Fundamentals of New Testament Greek* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010); Rodney J. Decker, *Reading Koine Greek: An Introduction and Integrated Workbook* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2014).

linguistics that should prevail in our schools and seminaries. Other questions arise as well: How should Koine Greek be pronounced? How many aspects are there in the Greek verb system, and what should we call them? Should the term "deponency" be used anymore? What is the unmarked word order in Koine Greek? What is the proper place of discourse analysis in exegesis? What are the semantics of the perfect tense-form? How should linguistics affect our classroom pedagogy? These are basic and central matters that should not be overlooked amid our intramural disputes.

To be sure, the speakers at our conference did not agree among themselves on many of these topics. We should not be surprised to find such disagreement. After all, evangelical New Testament scholars are not united in many other areas of interpretation, including the mode of baptism, the biblical form of church government, eschatology, and whether miraculous gifts are valid today. Despite our disagreements, however, we should not throw up our hands in despair but should continue to seek solutions in all these areas. We hope that the papers included here will give all of us helpful suggestions for making progress in relating the New Testament to the science of linguistics. For an evangelical, both nature and Scripture are sources of information about God. But because both have fallible human interpreters, we often fail to see what is there. Ideally, scientists (whether secular or evangelical) should favor the data over their pet theories.

I draw this preface to a close with some final thoughts. For two thousand years, Christian theologians have taught that God is a rational God and that humankind is made in God's image and likeness. Moreover, God has given us in nature and in Scripture a double revelation of himself. All scientific research is based on the conviction that the universe is intelligible and that there is a fundamental correspondence between the mind of the scientist and the data that he or she is investigating. And what connects the objective universe with the human mind is precisely what we call rationality.

It is no accident that many if not most of the pioneers of the scientific enterprise were Christian men and women.[16] They believed that a rational God had stamped his rationality both upon the world and upon themselves as they attempted to investigate the natural world. Thus every scientist, whether consciously or not, in the words of the seventeenth-century astronomer Johannes Kepler, is "thinking God's thoughts after Him."[17] And if the scientist

16. See especially James Hannam, *The Genesis of Science: How the Christian Middle Ages Launched the Scientific Revolution* (Washington, DC: Regnery, 2011).

17. My attempts to track down the exact source of this quotation have proven fruitless. Yet I know of no scientist other than Kepler to whom it is attributed. All seem to agree that the sentiments, if not the exact words, are an accurate reflection of his thinking on the subject.

is doing that, so is the student of the Bible, for in Scripture we have an even fuller revelation of God than what we find in the natural order. If, therefore, God has created us as rational beings, are we going to neglect his revelation, both in nature and in Scripture? A thousand times no, for the Christian doctrine of revelation, far from being an unreasonable thing, is an eminently reasonable doctrine.

Many pastors and even New Testament professors in our schools do not think they are exegeting God's revelation in nature when they study Greek grammar. But that doesn't mean they aren't. All study of language is linguistic by its very nature, whether or not we are aware of it. This is not to say that New Testament Greek linguists have completed the task of relating the biblical and scientific data to each other. Further investigation and reflection, long after the publication of this book, will still be needed in this area. Our desire in organizing our linguistics conference was that, far from treating science as an enemy, we should all realize that science is simply the process of studying general revelation. Our hope is that God will continue to reveal himself to us as long as we do not rule out divine inspiration in the process.

Linguistics is, of course, a large subject. No one can ever hope to master its entire scope. Nevertheless, it is obvious that students of New Testament Greek can and should have a working knowledge of linguistics. Although the editors have not solved all the problems involved with integrating New Testament Greek with linguistics, least of all by providing another book on the subject, certain things are clear. We who study and teach New Testament Greek cannot be satisfied with superficial answers. We must carefully scrutinize the pages of general revelation and consider how they may influence our current approach to Greek exegesis. If we need to be cautious in our handling of the scientific data, we also need to be hopeful and optimistic. Further, we must welcome the new approach and not remain locked into traditional methods of Greek instruction. Even the simplest application of linguistics can benefit our beginning students enormously. Finally, we must all be willing to subordinate our own pet theories and preferences to what will best serve the believing communities in which we worship and serve. Love and mutual respect are to be the hallmarks of all we do as New Testament scholars (John 13:35).

These prefatory words are meant to be nothing more than an entrée into the papers read at our linguistics conference. The editors sincerely hope that the chapters will help to identify what is essential and inessential in an era of renewed curiosity about the language of the New Testament.

1

Linguistic Schools

STANLEY E. PORTER

This chapter is concerned with linguistic schools and their impact upon the study of the Greek language of the New Testament. As I shall explain, the study of New Testament Greek has not been clear in its methodologies. The result is a widely accepted positivist view of language in which the Greek language is seen as a "thing" predescriptive in nature—that is, there is an essentialist nature of the Greek language that we, as Greek grammarians and linguists, have progressively discovered over the years and now know. At this stage, we are no longer engaging in new descriptions of Greek but are fine-tuning our previous, agreed-upon understandings. The major problem with this viewpoint is that it is not only out of keeping with virtually every other field of study but also clearly wrong for Greek.

A case in point is the discussion of verbal aspect over the last thirty years. The Greek verbal system was previously described as temporal, even if this was not entirely satisfactory, and we must recognize that Greek, on at least some occasions, is concerned not just with *when* an action took place as signified by a verb but with *how* it took place. Many will be familiar with this discussion over the semantics of the Greek tense-forms and their relationship to *Aktionsart*, or "kind of action." Thirty or more years ago, however, the notion of verbal aspect was introduced as a better description of the Greek verbal edifice. According to aspect theory, the Greek verbal system was aspect prominent, not tense prominent, so that the Greek tense-forms were used to

represent the subjective conception of processes by the language user, not the time at which the event occurred. The result was a debate over the semantics of the Greek verbal system and whether aspect or tense was prominent, both of which had implications for understanding the entire Greek language. I have an opinion of which view is correct, but that is not important here. What is important is that the traditional view of Greek sounds much more like a description of German, a heavily tensed language, or perhaps even more importantly of English, a tensed language that also has categories for kinds of action. I suspect that the understandings of German and English were, for many of those in the discussion, far more important in their examinations of Greek than attempting to offer a description of Greek without drawing upon these well-established categories, especially as they represented the first language of the analyst.

The resistance to an aspectual view of Greek is probably not based upon actual examination of the language—something I attempted to do.[1] By at least one accounting, there are as many tenseless as tensed languages among the world's languages.[2] Rather, such resistance is often based upon prior belief that the semantics of the Greek verbal system had already been resolved—if not by the ancient Greeks themselves, then by the Latin grammarians or surely by the nineteenth-century comparative philologians. This simply is not true. Much of what is labeled as linguistic description is projection of one's prior understanding of language, often one's first language, upon another language. That is why linguistic models are so important. Linguistic models—and the linguistic schools of thought that grow up around them—are attempts to find conceptual structures by which to examine language without accepting what we have been told or what we assumed without further reflection and without imposing our own language upon another. These attempts instead provide a linguistic framework that acknowledges its presuppositions and helps us to think about language in new ways, using the resources of the linguistic model.

In this chapter, I wish to examine the major linguistic schools that are currently productively functioning within New Testament Greek studies. In this regard, biblical studies is a problematic discipline since it often demands that a scholar be an expert in a variety of methods, such as linguistics. Most biblical scholars are at least competent in the historical-critical method, as

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1. Stanley E. Porter, *Verbal Aspect in the Greek of the New Testament, with Reference to Tense and Mood* (New York: Peter Lang, 1989).
2. See Jo-Wang Lin, "Tenselessness," in *The Oxford Handbook of Tense and Aspect*, ed. Robert I. Binnick (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 668–95, esp. 669; cf. criteria for determining tensed and tenseless languages (670–71).

well as knowledgeable about other post-historical-critical methods, such as social-scientific criticism, literary criticism, and the like. Linguistics, however, is not like that. The methodological boundaries are much more strongly and exclusively drawn, to the point that some may be aware of "linguistic wars" among those who have called into question others' methods. In that sense, being a master of several different methods is not just unpracticed but is often frowned upon, because it implies an inappropriate crossing of boundaries. Therefore, I cannot claim to be an expert in all of the approaches or schools that I will be discussing, but I will attempt to do the best that I can in presenting each one, offering some representative examples of scholars within these schools of thought, and then making some evaluative comments.

■ What Are Linguistic Schools?

Before I divide the linguistic world into its various schools, I must ask what constitutes a linguistic school and how I decide what constitutes a linguistic school within New Testament Greek studies. In 1980, Geoffrey Sampson published his *Schools of Linguistics*, an excellent introduction up to the time of publication. He defines a linguistic school thus: "Often one individual or a small group of original minds has founded a tradition which has continued to mould approaches to language in the university or the nation in which that tradition began; between adherents of different traditions there has usually been relatively limited contact."[3] I will use this definition to define schools of linguistics, with the minimum publication requirement of at least two major monographs or the equivalent in the field of linguistics or linguistic theory and at least two major monographs in the field of New Testament Greek studies, and with some sign of continuing work using the approach. I realize that by imposing this requirement I run the risk of excluding approaches to linguistics that some might follow and find useful. However, the notion of a school, as Sampson indicates, implies a tradition that continues to shape scholarship, rather than simply an individual who develops a particular idea (although I will make a significant exception to this rule). I can offer only a rough outline of the schools of thought as reflected by those who follow a tradition, recognizing that individual scholars will have their own variations upon its major concepts. I am sure that I will overlook some schools of thought in other countries, as I concentrate upon English-language scholarship. I also concentrate upon what Sampson calls "core" linguistic fields, not

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3. Geoffrey Sampson, *Schools of Linguistics* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1980), 9.

what he terms "peripheral branches," so I am not discussing sociolinguistics, multilingualism, and the like, although I will touch lightly upon that very broad and encompassing subject called discourse analysis. I also do not deal in detail with various areas of applied linguistics.

There are many different ways of describing linguistic schools. Sampson provides a generally diachronic view beginning in the nineteenth century to the present.[4] Jeremy Thompson and Wendy Widder provide the only similar study for biblical studies, although their treatment problematically does not mention the most productive school in contemporary biblical studies (in my opinion), Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL).[5] Robert Van Valin Jr. and Randy LaPolla differentiate between what they call the "syntactocentric perspective" and the "communication-and-cognition perspective"—in other words, basically Noam Chomsky and everyone else.[6] John Bateman has proposed a more nuanced categorization for the study of language focusing upon whether language is seen as in contexts, texts, heads, or groups. Chomskyans would locate language in texts, cognitivists would locate it in heads, and functionalists would locate it in contexts or groups.[7] An arguably more straightforward means is suggested by David Banks, who distinguishes between formal, cognitive, and functional theories of language.[8] I use this distinction in this chapter.

■ Traditional Grammar

Before I turn to the formalists, cognitivists, and functionalists, however, I include traditional grammar, as represented in the two major periods in language study before the rise of modern linguistics: the rationalist and comparative-historical schools. Many in New Testament Greek study still follow the

4. Sampson acknowledges that other schools might have developed since 1980, including cognitive linguistics, on which he has recently commented. Geoffrey Sampson, *The Linguistics Delusion* (Sheffield: Equinox, 2017), 77–87.

5. Jeremy Thompson and Wendy Widder, "Major Approaches to Linguistics," in *Linguistics and Biblical Exegesis*, ed. Douglas Mangum and Josh Westbury (Bellingham, WA: Lexham, 2017), 87–133.

6. Robert D. Van Valin Jr. and Randy J. LaPolla, *Syntax: Structure, Meaning and Function* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 8–15.

7. John A. Bateman, "The Place of Systemic Functional Linguistics as a Linguistic Theory in the Twenty-First Century," in *The Routledge Handbook of Systemic Functional Linguistics*, ed. Tom Bartlett and Gerard O'Grady (London: Routledge, 2017), 11–12.

8. David Banks, *A Systemic Functional Grammar of English: A Simple Introduction* (London: Routledge, 2019), 1; cf. David Banks, *The Birth of the Academic Article: Le Journal des Sçavans and the Philosophical Transactions, 1665–1700* (Sheffield: Equinox, 2017), 7.

principles of these schools of thought, even though these principles have been superseded by forms of modern linguistic study.

"Traditional grammar" refers to an approach to language that is pre-linguistic. David Crystal defines its major features: the failure to recognize the difference between spoken and written language, emphasis upon restricted forms of written language, a failure to recognize various forms of language and how they are used, the tendency to describe language in terms of another language (often Latin), the appeal to logic as a means of describing and even assessing language, and the tendency to evaluate language as more or less logical or complex or primitive or beautiful or the like.[9] These traditional criteria grew out of a long history of discussion of language that dates back to the ancients and continued until the advent of modern linguistics. They were found in the two major periods of language study before the rise of modern linguistics: the rationalist and the comparative-historical.[10]

Rationalist Language Study

Rationalism, growing out of the Enlightenment, was characterized by rational thought, a shift from dogmatic to empiricist epistemology, an emphasis upon naturalism (as opposed to supernaturalism), and dissolution of the divide between secular and sacred. This desacralization included the Bible. The movement is perhaps captured best in the work of Baruch Spinoza (1632–77), a rationalist who believed in deduction from common knowledge.

The rationalist period of language study went hand in hand with the Enlightenment. This period extended from roughly the middle of the seventeenth century to the turn of the nineteenth century (1650–1800), with the rise of Romanticism (more precisely in 1798, with publication of *Lyrical Ballads* by William Wordsworth and Samuel Taylor Coleridge). Language study during the rationalist period was dominated by philosophers and linguists approaching language from a rationalist perspective, along with having historical concerns. Étienne Bonnot de Condillac (1714–80) believed that "abstract vocabulary and grammatical complexity developed from an earlier individual concrete vocabulary," and Johann Gottfried Herder (1744–1803) believed in the "inseparability of language and thought."[11] William Jones (1746–94), the British judge in India, opined that Sanskrit was "more perfect than the Greek,

9. David Crystal, *What Is Linguistics?*, 3rd ed. (London: Edward Arnold, 1974), 9–17.
10. See R. H. Robins, *A Short History of Linguistics*, 3rd ed. (London: Longman, 1990), 148–264, for the basic facts recounted in this chapter.
11. Robins, *Short History of Linguistics*, 165, 166.

more copious than the Latin, and more exquisitely refined than either,"[12] and James Harris (1758–1835) thought one could derive "grammar from ontology, since the verb, to him, denotes nothing less than existence itself."[13] The rationalist period was characterized by a philosophical orientation that logically deduced the nature of language from prior beliefs, usually grounded in one's understandings of reality. Hence there was the notion of better- and worse-formed languages, thought and language were inseparable, tense-forms indicated reality grounded in time, and more complex forms were developed from simpler ones.

Georg Benedikt Winer's (1789–1858) *Grammatik des neutestamentlichen Sprachidioms* (during his lifetime, editions were published from 1822 to 1855),[14] though not the first Greek grammar, fully represented the rationalist period. Winer was on the forefront of a new phase of New Testament Greek language study, even if he wrote in the rationalist mode as the period passed. Prior to Winer, study of Greek was dominated by the categories of Latin grammar, with a basic descriptivism verging on prescriptivism. Winer systematically applied the rationalist framework, with New Testament Greek seen as a logically based set of categories. Winer sees Greek as the "sure basis" for exegesis, with the Jewish writers of the Greek New Testament writing in a mixed Greek and Semitic language that represents a unified "single syntax." Winer specifically speaks of the "rational method" of Greek language study, equated with empiricism.[15] He follows these rationalistic principles throughout, finding consistency and regularity based upon empirical evidence (or his perception of empirical evidence). Hence Winer confines the meanings of the Greek tense-forms to temporal categories (he was a German, after all). He states: "Strictly and properly speaking no one of these tenses [of Greek] can ever stand for another," with the present tense-form being "used for the future in appearance only," because the label indicates that it must be only a present tense-form.[16]

Winer's grammar would otherwise be simply a curiosity of linguistic history were it not for the fact that the rationalistic approach is still widely found in New Testament Greek language study. The rationalistic approach is evidenced in many beginning Greek grammars, where tense-forms and temporal-

12. Robins, *Short History of Linguistics*, 149.
13. Hye-Joon Yoon, *The Rhetoric of Tenses in Adam Smith's "The Wealth of Nations"* (Leiden: Brill, 2018), 47.
14. Georg Benedikt Winer, *Grammatik des neutestamentlichen Sprachidioms* (Leipzig: Vogel, 1822); English translation: G. B. Winer, *A Treatise on the Grammar of New Testament Greek*, trans. W. F. Moulton, 3rd ed. (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1882).
15. Winer, *Treatise on the Grammar*, 3, 7.
16. Winer, *Treatise on the Grammar*, 331.

ity are equated as if there were an inherent logic in their meanings and names, reference is made to the "definite" article (Greek has no definite article), and other similar comments are made. The vast majority of elementary Greek grammars fall within this category, from J. Gresham Machen's (1923) to Daniel Zacharias's (2018), with that of William Mounce (1993; 4th ed., 2019) in between, and many others besides. More disturbing, perhaps, is the fact that intermediate-level Greek grammars continue to reflect rationalism as well. The most obvious examples of the rationalistic approach are Daniel Wallace's *Greek Grammar beyond the Basics* and, more recently, Andreas Köstenberger, Benjamin Merkle, and Robert Plummer's *Going Deeper with New Testament Greek*.[17] These grammars may not at first appear to be rationalistic grammars, as they seem to be familiar with the latest developments in Greek language study. Wallace, for example, accepts such apparently linguistic notions as "semantics and semantic situation," "synchronic priority," and "structural priority." However, he also relies upon the notion of "undisputed examples," reintroduces diachrony, has a nonsystemic view of structure, and maintains the strange belief in the "cryptic nature of language."[18] Köstenberger, Merkle, and Plummer don't even include as much linguistic information as the minimalist Wallace. They too define the meanings of the tense-forms in rationalistic terms (such as the "combinative aspect" of the aorist and present), utilize a traditional lexical-incremental morphology, and attempt to explain both the five- and eight-case systems.[19]

Comparative Historicism

Comparative-historical language study emerged in the nineteenth century, as languages were discovered and then studied in relation to each other under the influence of the dominant developmental hypothesis. This approach ended with the publication of Ferdinand de Saussure's *Course in General Linguistics* in 1916 and the rise of the Prague School. The comparative-historical approach was mostly influenced by the rise of Romanticism, with its emphasis upon the

17. Daniel B. Wallace, *Greek Grammar beyond the Basics: An Exegetical Syntax of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996); Andreas J. Köstenberger, Benjamin L. Merkle, and Robert L. Plummer, *Going Deeper with New Testament Greek: An Intermediate Study of the Grammar and Syntax of the New Testament* (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2016).

18. Wallace, *Greek Grammar beyond the Basics*, x–xvii.

19. By contrast, there are some intermediate grammars that are linguistic in orientation. Among others, these include Stanley E. Porter, *Idioms of the Greek New Testament*, 2nd ed. (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1994); Robert A. Young, *Intermediate New Testament Greek: A Linguistic and Exegetical Approach* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1994); and David L. Mathewson and Elodie Ballantine Emig, *Intermediate Greek Grammar: Syntax for Students of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2016).

self, subjectivity, and experience. The German poet and philosopher Friedrich Schlegel (1772–1829) formulated the term "comparative philology" (1808) to describe the comparisons of both derivational and inflectional morphology.

The Danish scholar Rasmus Rask (1787–1832) and the German Jacob Grimm (1785–1863) were major figures in the emergence of comparative historicism. Rask wrote grammars for Old Norse and Old English, and Grimm wrote the first Germanic grammar, developing terminology still used in linguistics ("strong/weak verbs," "ablaut," and "umlaut"). The high points were Franz Bopp's (1791–1867) major treatment on the conjugation system of Sanskrit, Greek, Latin, Persian, and German, and then his comparative grammar in three volumes. Wilhelm von Humboldt (1767–1835) defined the inner forms of languages as agglutinative, isolating, and flexional, and August Schleicher (1821–68) developed the comparative-philological tree diagram to describe the family of languages. The comparative-historical period reached its culmination in the New Grammarians, including Karl Brugmann (1849–1919) and Berthold Delbrück (1842–1922). The New Grammarians were an informal group of younger German linguists who took a scientific approach to language and believed that all sound changes followed exceptionless rules.

The three major reference grammars of New Testament Greek all reflect the comparative-historical perspective and were written during this period. These grammars are by Friedrich Blass, James Hope Moulton, and A. T. Robertson. Friedrich Blass (1843–1907) was not a comparative philologian but a classical philologian, as he acknowledges in the preface to the first edition of his Greek grammar, which appeared in 1896.[20] Nevertheless, he follows many of its principles by describing New Testament Greek in relationship to Attic Greek and Latin. For the fourth edition (1913), the Swiss comparative philologian Albert Debrunner (1884–1958) became the author. A number of further editions were made, and after Debrunner's passing, David Tabachowitz added supplementary volumes in 1965 and 1970, and then Friedrich Rehkopf took up the editorship in 1976 and continued to 2001. Robert Funk translated the ninth and tenth editions in 1961. The most important feature to note about the grammar, however, is that, no matter how many editions, the grammar is in its essentials the same, with its comparative-historical dimension becoming more explicit especially through the work of Debrunner.

James Hope Moulton (1863–1917), who was educated as a comparative philologian at Cambridge, acknowledges that he writes from this standpoint

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20. Friedrich Blass, *Grammatik des Neutestamentlichen Griechisch* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1896); English translation: Friedrich Blass, *Grammar of New Testament Greek*, trans. Henry St. John Thackeray (London: Macmillan, 1898).

in his preface to the second edition of his *Prolegomena*, the first volume of his projected three-volume grammar.[21] Whereas Adolf Deissmann made the discovery of the common vocabulary of the Greek New Testament and the Greek documentary papyri, Moulton emphasized the common grammar. His *Prolegomena* went through two further editions, in 1906 and in 1908, and then he began work on his accidence and word-formation. He wrote about two-thirds of this second volume before being killed crossing the Mediterranean in 1917. This work was completed by his student Wilbert Francis Howard (1880–1952).[22]

The culmination of the comparative-historical method in the study of the Greek New Testament, the grammar of A. T. Robertson (1863–1934), was published in 1914. Beginning by revising Winer's grammar, Robertson then realized that such a plan would not work because "so much progress had been made in comparative philology and historical grammar since Winer wrote his great book."[23] Robertson provides a twenty-four-page list of works most often cited, including two additional pages for the third edition, with the list full of comparative philologians. He notes the pre-Winer and then Winer periods, before referring to the "modern period," with its new tools, such as comparative philology. Robertson clearly recognizes that his grammar is an example of comparative philology. The comparative-historical perspective has continued in New Testament Greek grammatical study, in large part because of reliance upon these reference grammars.[24]

I note two important factors regarding both the rationalist and comparative-historical language schools. The first is that, no matter what developments may have occurred within linguistics (and some of those who persist in their rationalism and comparative historicism are aware of such developments), some continue to model these traditional forms of grammar in their work. The second is that these models of language, which arguably have been superseded in subsequent linguistic thought, remain foundational within New

21. James Hope Moulton, *Prolegomena*, vol. 1 of *A Grammar of New Testament Greek* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1906).

22. James Hope Moulton and W. F. Howard, *Accidence and Word-Formation*, vol. 2 of *A Grammar of New Testament Greek* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1929). The third and fourth volumes in the series, *Syntax* and *Style*, written by Nigel Turner, do not follow the same language theory.

23. A. T. Robertson, *A Grammar of the Greek New Testament in the Light of Historical Research* (New York: Hodder & Stoughton, 1914), vii.

24. E.g., Chrys C. Caragounis, *The Development of Greek and the New Testament: Morphology, Syntax, Phonology, and Textual Transmission* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2006); David S. Hasselbrook, *Studies in New Testament Lexicography: Advancing toward a Full Diachronic Approach with the Greek Language* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2011).

Testament studies, providing most examples of beginning New Testament Greek grammars, several of the intermediate Greek grammars, virtually all of the advanced reference grammars, and occasional monographs. The fact that this situation exists should be a major concern for those who are in the field of New Testament Greek studies.

I turn now to the three categories of modern linguistic schools of thought—that is, those developed after the work of Saussure and the Prague School—in relationship to New Testament Greek language study. I treat them in the order of formalist, then cognitive, and finally functional schools.

◼ Formalist Schools

The formalist schools of linguistics emphasize the forms of language, as opposed to its meaning or function. As Banks states concerning formalists, they "treat language as if it were no more than its form, a sort of linguistic algebra, with independent existence."[25] There are two major expressions of formalist linguistic schools within contemporary New Testament Greek study: Chomskyan formalism and construction grammar.

Chomskyan Formalism

The first linguistic school, and the most important so far as the wider field of linguistics is concerned, revolves around Chomsky and his followers. Chomsky's formalist linguistics was influenced by two teachers, Roman Jakobson (1896–1982) at Harvard University and Zellig Harris (1909–92) at the University of Pennsylvania. Jakobson promoted phonemic universalism, and Harris approached language in terms of the "formal" distribution of morphemes apart from meaning, along with the notions of generativity and transformations.[26] As a result, Chomsky's assumption is that there is an "autonomous cognitive faculty," a universal grammar that results in human internal grammar that follows linguistic universals. Such linguistics investigates not language use (performance) but the speaker's competence (Saussure's *langue* over *parole*), and especially the cognitive dimensions of language such as its acquisition. Chomsky therefore provides an analysis of grammar but not of language, if language is defined as what humans actually produce (*parole*).[27] All this can be described apart from meaning. As P. H. Matthews states, "A systematic

25. Banks, *Birth of the Academic Article*, 7.
26. Sampson, *Schools of Linguistics*, 130–31, 134–35.
27. Van Valin and LaPolla, *Syntax*, 9.

description of the 'internal structure' or 'expression' side of a language could, in principle, stand on its own."[28] Chomsky reflects this emphasis upon form rather than meaning in his phrase-structure grammar, with its transformations, as found in his first two major works, *Syntactic Structures* (1957) and *Aspects of the Theory of Syntax* (1965), what came to be known as his standard theory, later extended.[29] It was not until 1963 and later that semantics was explicitly introduced into transformational generative grammar—not by Chomsky but by others, such as George Lakoff—as generative semantics.[30] Semantics was included in subsequent versions of Chomskyan linguistics, including "government and binding" and then "principles and parameters," or the minimalist program. Chomsky has inspired a number of other linguistic schools—as well as cognitive linguistics, as I will note below—but, apart from cognitive linguistics, New Testament studies has not generally followed Chomskyanism.

The few Chomskyans to note within the sphere of New Testament Greek linguistics include Daryl D. Schmidt, J. P. Louw, Micheal Palmer, and, after a hiatus, Robert Crellin. Schmidt wrote a brief monograph on complementation using Chomsky's extended standard theory.[31] Louw utilizes his own form of constituent structure analysis, with the explicit admission that "meaning" is a prerequisite of analysis, a claim that Chomsky would not have made when Louw wrote.[32] Palmer draws upon later developments in Chomsky (later abandoned in the minimalist program), which resulted in X-bar theory or a theory of projection of elements, to describe phrase structure in Luke's Gospel.[33] Most recently, Crellin has studied the historical semantic development of the perfect tense-form using Chomskyan linguistics and neo-Davidsonian semantics, indebted to analytic philosophy.[34]

28. P. H. Matthews, *Grammatical Theory in the United States from Bloomfield to Chomsky* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 23.

29. Noam Chomsky, *Syntactic Structures* (The Hague: Mouton, 1957), 93; Noam Chomsky, *Aspects of the Theory of Syntax* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1965), 3.

30. E.g., George Lakoff, "On Generative Semantics," in *Semantics: An Interdisciplinary Reader in Philosophy, Linguistics and Psychology*, ed. Danny D. Steinberg and Leon A. Jakobovits (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1971), 232–96. See Randy Allen Harris, *The Linguistics Wars* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), 101–59.

31. Daryl Dean Schmidt, *Hellenistic Greek Grammar and Noam Chomsky: Nominalizing Transformations* (Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 1981).

32. J. P. Louw, *Semantics of New Testament Greek* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1982), 67–89. Cf. John Beekman, John Callow, and Michael Kopesec, *The Semantic Structure of Written Communication*, 5th ed., Semantic Structure Analyses Series (Dallas: Summer Institute of Linguistics, 1981), part of a series of semantic structural analyses to guide translators.

33. Micheal W. Palmer, *Levels of Constituent Structure in New Testament Greek* (New York: Peter Lang, 1995).

34. Robert Crellin, *The Syntax and Semantics of the Perfect Active in Literary Koine Greek* (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2016).

The small amount of significant research using Chomskyan linguistic theories is surprising, since the formalist descriptions are well suited to the limitations of knowledge of an ancient language. One reason may be that semantics (however it is defined) is always at play in linguistic description, even if the analysis does not readily concede this. How one identifies syntagmatic units and their constituents and relationships is as much semantic as syntactic. Another reason is that the functions of language are as important as the structures of language, even if related to each other in diverse ways. Theories that do not address the functions of language—especially in a discipline such as New Testament studies, which is attentive to the uses of language—have less attraction than those concerned with function. Analytic views of meaning, as in Crellin, do not aid this situation. A third reason is the relatively insignificant accomplishments of previous studies. In other words, the question "So what?" has not been answered.

Construction Grammar

A number of movements that shared Chomsky's perspective rejected major components of his developing grammar. Some might place construction grammar—of which there are many kinds—within cognitive linguistics, but since Chomskyan linguistics is the major dialogue partner of construction grammar, I place it here.[35] One of those who questioned Chomsky was Charles Fillmore (1929–2014), who finished his career at Berkeley. Fillmore was part of the mid-1960s reaction to Chomskyan formalism that resulted in an emphasis upon meaning. Fillmore first proposed what he called "case grammar" in an article titled "The Case for Case."[36] Case grammar, as opposed to grammatical case (with which most New Testament scholars are familiar), identifies semantic functions of noun phrases in relation to their verbs, such as agent, patient, instrument, and so on.[37] In New Testament studies, Simon Wong used case theory by Fillmore in his study of Paul,[38] but apart from a few articles by Wong (and one response to him), no more has been done in this area that I know of.

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35. See Laura A. Michaelis, "Construction Grammar and the Syntax-Semantics Interface," in *The Bloomsbury Companion to Syntax*, ed. Silvia Luraghi and Claudia Parodi (London: Bloomsbury, 2015), 421–35. For example, William Croft is both a major figure in cognitive linguistics and the developer of what he calls radical construction grammar, one of the many forms of construction grammar.

36. Charles Fillmore, "The Case for Case," in *Universals in Linguistic Theory*, ed. Emmett Bach and Robert T. Harms (New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1968), 1–88.

37. See Matthews, *Grammatical Theory in the United States*, 179.

38. Simon S. M. Wong, *A Classification of Semantic Case-Relations in the Pauline Epistles* (New York: Peter Lang, 1997).

Fillmore, in conjunction with George Lakoff at Berkeley and Paul Kay at Stanford, developed the construction grammar adopted by the New Testament Greek scholar Paul Danove. Danove has been virtually alone in use of construction grammar, what he calls "case frame analysis." Danove himself, however, has been prolific. In virtually every monograph that he has written, case frame analysis has played a role.[39] Case frame analysis, according to Danove, is a descriptive, generative, and nontransformational theory concerned to describe predicators—that is, words that "license" other phrasal elements called arguments and adjuncts. A "valence description" is the fundamental descriptive mechanism, displaying predicators in terms of three strata: syntactic function (e.g., verbal subject, predicate, complement—there are three syntactic functions plus a function for adjuncts, called the C function), semantic function (based upon twenty-one thematic roles), and lexical information (realizations by various phrases, such as noun, verb, etc.).

This must be one of few areas in which other New Testament scholars have not developed an idea further, especially since Danove has been a tireless advocate for case frame analysis. However, the reasons are probably related to the fact that a number of features of the analysis are not readily apparent. The predicator is the unit of analysis, but the relationships among the levels of predicators are not obvious. Predicator is usually associated with a verb, but for case frame analysis, a predicator is any word that licenses other phrasal elements, and thus there is the potential for embedding and recursion. However, embedding and recursion are not adequately theorized in the model. There is also difficulty with the notion of function, since it is used of both syntax and semantics. More complex syntax is provided by Danove's C function (assigned to adjuncts), but that takes case frame analysis beyond its syntactical boundaries.

■ Cognitive Schools

I place cognitive schools of linguistics into their own category. This avoids the problem of deciding whether they should be placed with formalist theories

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39. Paul L. Danove, *The End of Mark's Story: A Methodological Study* (Leiden: Brill, 1993); Paul L. Danove, *Linguistics and Exegesis in the Gospel of Mark: Applications of a Case Frame Analysis and Lexicon* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 2002); Paul L. Danove, *Grammatical and Exegetical Study of New Testament Verbs of Transference: A Case Frame Guide to Interpretation and Translation* (London: T&T Clark, 2009); Paul L. Danove, *New Testament Verbs of Communication: A Case Frame and Exegetical Study* (London: Bloomsbury, 2015), 1–21. See also Paul L. Danove, *The Rhetoric of Characterization of God, Jesus, and Jesus' Disciples in the Gospel of Mark* (London: T&T Clark, 2005); Paul L. Danove, *Theology of the Gospel of Mark: A Semantic, Narrative, and Rhetorical Study of the Characterization of God* (London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2019).

on the basis of their cognitive similarities with Chomskyan linguistics, as well as the fact that some of the important early advocates of these cognitive schools were educated by Chomsky or were highly influenced by him (e.g., Lakoff), or placed with functional theories as has been done by Van Valin and LaPolla.

Cognitive Linguistics

Cognitive linguistics is the fastest-growing and fastest-developing area within contemporary linguistics. As noted above, it shares a cognitive base with Chomskyan linguistics. However, the major difference is that, whereas Chomsky and his followers have traditionally argued for a universal grammar within the human brain, cognitive linguistics believes that language is used according to more general cognitive principles. Cognitive linguistics began to develop in the 1970s with the emergence of semantics in Chomskyan grammar and became more robust in the 1980s, and it continues to be an expanding area of linguistics.[40]

There are various definitions of "cognitive linguistics." For example, William Croft and Alan Cruse state that "three major hypotheses" guide cognitive linguistics. These are the following:

- Language is not an autonomous cognitive faculty.
- Grammar is conceptualization.
- Knowledge of language emerges from language use.[41]

One sees why cognitive linguistics is sometimes placed alongside functional schools, as it too is concerned with language use (although I would say that language use and language function may mean two different things in such definitions). Croft and Cruse note how the first principle distances cognitive linguistics from generative grammar and its autonomous language module (but without rejecting the idea that humans have innate language capacity), the second opposes truth-conditional semantics, and the third opposes reductionism in the first two on the basis of use.[42] As a result, linguistic knowledge

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40. Vyvyan Evans and Melanie Green, *Cognitive Linguistics: An Introduction* (Edinburgh: University of Edinburgh Press, 2006), 3, state that it grew out of "dissatisfaction with formal [i.e., Chomskyan] approaches to language."

41. William Croft and D. Alan Cruse, *Cognitive Linguistics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 1.

42. Croft and Cruse, *Cognitive Linguistics*, 1. Ronald N. Langacker, *Cognitive Grammar: A Basic Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 5, refers to grammar as working through symbolic relationships.

in cognitive linguistics becomes "conceptual structure," whether phonological, morphological, or syntactical. Further, cognitive language ability is similar to other kinds of cognitive ability.[43]

A second, arguably similar, definition is offered by Vyvyan Evans and Melanie Green. They contend that cognitive linguistics affirms two fundamental commitments, first articulated by Lakoff. These are the generalization commitment and the cognitive commitment. The generalization commitment assumes that "there are common structuring principles that hold across different aspects of language, and that an important function of linguistics is to identify these common principles."[44] Categorization is based upon family resemblances, polysemy, and metaphor, the last an immensely important topic in cognitive linguistics. The cognitive commitment holds "that principles of linguistic structure should reflect what is known about human cognition from other disciplines, particularly the other cognitive sciences (philosophy, psychology, artificial intelligence and neuroscience)."[45] The cognitive commitment relies upon language profiling using fuzzy boundaries, as well as metaphor. Evans and Green further identify a central notion in cognitive linguistics as the "embodied mind."[46] Rather than considering the mind distinct from the body (as per Descartes and his follower Chomsky), cognitive linguistics emphasizes embodied experience by an embodied mind.

Although there are many areas of cognitive linguistics, such as frame theory, that could attract New Testament scholars, scholars have tended to focus upon conceptual metaphor theory. One of the leading figures in this area is, again, Lakoff, who has worked with the philosopher Mark Johnson to develop notions of metaphor drawing upon human embodiment.[47] Conceptual metaphor theory contends that all of language is based on mapping semantic domains or conceptual spheres upon each other, especially more remote upon more familiar, such as the body. Conceptual metaphor theory, with some of its developments, including conceptual blending theory,[48] expands the range of metaphor by blending various metaphors together into

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43. Croft and Cruse, *Cognitive Linguistics*, 2.
44. Evans and Green, *Cognitive Linguistics*, 28.
45. Evans and Green, *Cognitive Linguistics*, 40.
46. Evans and Green, *Cognitive Linguistics*, 44.
47. George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980); George Lakoff and Mark Turner, *More Than Cool Reason: A Field Guide to Poetic Metaphor* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989).
48. Gilles Fauconnier and Mark Turner, *The Way We Think: Conceptual Blending and the Mind's Hidden Complexities* (New York: Basic Books, 2002). For a good history of the development of cognitive metaphor theory, see Zoltán Kövecses, *Metaphor: A Practical Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002).

larger conceptual constructs within conceptual integration theory.[49] Significant works in conceptual metaphor and related theories within New Testament studies include studies by Bonnie Howe on 1 Peter, Beth Stovell on John's Gospel (although she also uses other linguistic theories, such as SFL), Jennifer McNeel on 1 Thessalonians and the infancy / nursing-mother metaphors, Frederick Tappenden on resurrection in Paul (plant and body-is-house metaphors), William Robinson on Romans 8 and "spirit-life is a journey," Erin Heim on adoption and sonship metaphors, and Gregory Lanier on a variety of Old Testament metaphors (e.g., horn, appearing, bird, stone), among others.[50] Most of these studies, with the exception of Stovell, are not readily concerned with the Greek language. Stovell's concern with Greek emerges from her use of SFL.

There has been much work in cognitive linguistics, but that work raises the question of whether this is in fact a school of linguistics. Evans and Green themselves state, "Cognitive linguistics is described as a 'movement' or an 'enterprise' because it is not a specific theory. Instead, it is an approach that has adopted a common set of guiding principles, assumptions and perspectives which have led to a diverse range of complementary, overlapping (and sometimes competing) theories."[51] An example of its limitations may be found in the failure of cognitive linguistics to develop a working model of grammar, at least as many if not most linguists would conceive of grammar. Ronald Langacker's notion that grammar is symbolic means simply—at least for him—that the relations between elements that form more complex structures are entirely symbolic. Sampson has criticized cognitive linguistics on several fronts. These include its making generalizations about human language on the basis of a limited array of evidence, primarily English. He notes that Chinese does not use metaphor in the same way, thus questioning whether conceptual metaphor theory follows general cognitive principles.

49. The notion of space is fundamental to conceptual integration theory, in which various concepts occupy space and are brought into relation with one another.

50. Bonnie Howe, *Because You Bear This Name: Conceptual Metaphor and the Moral Meaning of 1 Peter* (Leiden: Brill, 2008); Beth M. Stovell, *Mapping Metaphorical Discourse in the Fourth Gospel: John's Eternal King* (Leiden: Brill, 2012); Jennifer McNeel, *Paul as Infant and Nursing Mother: Metaphor, Rhetoric, and Identity in 1 Thessalonians 2:5–8* (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2014); Frederick S. Tappenden, *Resurrection in Paul: Cognition, Metaphor, and Transformation* (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2016); William E. W. Robinson, *Metaphor, Morality, and the Spirit in Romans 8:1–17* (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2016); Erin M. Heim, *Adoption in Galatians and Romans: Contemporary Metaphor Theories and the Pauline* Huiothesia *Metaphors* (Leiden: Brill, 2017); Gregory R. Lanier, *Old Testament Conceptual Metaphors and the Christology of Luke's Gospel* (London: Bloomsbury, 2018). Cf. Joel B. Green and Bonnie Howe, eds., *Cognitive Linguistic Explorations in Biblical Studies* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2014).

51. Evans and Green, *Cognitive Linguistics*, 3.

That some languages might draw upon the world around them for their metaphors is hardly a deep or unique insight in any case. Sampson also points out that once one moves beyond the notion of "embodiment," the situation becomes less clear, especially as one moves into other languages.[52] Perhaps in that respect it is better to think of cognitive linguistics as an approach or orientation, one that is confined to English until we can establish its basis in other languages. Whatever value there may be in the works mentioned above, what is clear is that they are not really theories of linguistics so much as theories of cognition, arguably very different categories both definitionally and phenomenologically.

Relevance Theory

Related to this area of cognition is relevance theory. In 1957, Harvard philosopher H. Paul Grice (1913–88) published an article titled "Meaning," in which he laid the basis of inferential rather than code-based communication.[53] In 1975, Grice published an article on "Logic and Conversation."[54] This article outlined his theory of conversational implicatures that developed further inferential meaning. He categorized the implicatures under the "cooperative principle" and then laid out several subcategories related to quantity, quality, relation, and manner. According to Grice, these are the implicatures of successful conversation. At around the same time as Grice published his second article, Daniel Sperber and Dierdre Wilson began researching pragmatics and inferential communication. In 1986, they published a volume simply titled *Relevance*. Their stated goal is clear: "What is needed is an attempt to rethink, in psychologically realistic terms, such basic questions as these: What form of shared information is available to humans? How is shared information exploited in communication? What is relevance and how is it achieved? What role does the search for relevance play in communication?"[55] The result, relevance theory, is a cognitive theory that rejects code theories of language to argue for what is called a "principle of relevance"—that is, that "human cognitive processes . . . are geared to

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52. Sampson, *Linguistics Delusion*, 77–87.

53. H. Paul Grice, "Meaning," in *Studies in the Way of Words* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989), 213–23. This article was originally published in *The Philosophical Review* 66 (1957): 377–88.

54. H. Paul Grice, "Logic and Conversation," in *Studies in the Way of Words*, 22–40. This article was originally published in *Syntax and Semantics*, vol. 3, *Speech Acts*, ed. Peter Cole and Jerry L. Morgan (New York: Academic, 1975), 41–58.

55. Dan Sperber and Deirdre Wilson, *Relevance: Communication and Cognition*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Blackwell, 1995), 38.

achieving the greatest possible cognitive effect for the smallest possible processing effort."[56] Relevance theory has become widely used in areas outside of New Testament studies, most notably in translation studies, including the Bible translation movement.[57]

Relevance theory has been applied to New Testament studies in a variety of ways. Stephen Pattemore applies relevance theory to the book of Revelation in two volumes.[58] Joseph Fantin uses relevance theory to treat the Greek imperative in one volume and the confession "Jesus is Lord" in another.[59] Margaret Sim has written a very basic introduction to the topic for use by biblical scholars in exegesis, along with an earlier work on the use of the Greek particles ἵνα and ὅτι.[60] Nelson Morales examines how the book of James uses the Old Testament on the basis of relevance theory's notion of metarepresentation.[61] As Fantin himself admits, however, it is highly questionable whether relevance theory is even a theory of linguistics, since it is arguably more a theory of communication.[62]

Despite the use of relevance theory in translation studies, the same kinds of questions arise as were asked above regarding cognitive linguistics. Relevance theory is perhaps better seen as an orientation than as a method or even a linguistic school. There is the further question of whether relevance theory has a sufficiently robust apparatus to answer the kinds of questions that linguists wish to ask of language. The generalizations that drive relevance theory—such as underdeterminacy and inference—may provide a foundation for pragmatic understanding, but questions remain whether these generalizations are sufficient without a more robust linguistic theory to provide suitable and sufficient linguistic description.

56. Sperber and Wilson, *Relevance*, vii.

57. See Ernst-August Gutt, *Translation and Relevance: Cognition and Context* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1991; repr., Manchester: St. Jerome, 2010).

58. Stephen Pattemore, *Souls under the Altar: Relevance Theory and the Discourse Structure of Revelation* (New York: United Bible Societies, 2003); Stephen Pattemore, *The People of God in the Apocalypse: Discourse, Structure and Exegesis* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

59. Joseph D. Fantin, *The Greek Imperative Mood in the New Testament: A Cognitive and Communicative Approach* (New York: Peter Lang, 2010); Joseph D. Fantin, *The Lord of the Entire World: Lord Jesus, a Challenge to Lord Caesar?* (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix, 2011).

60. Margaret G. Sim, *A Relevant Way to Read: A New Approach to Exegesis and Communication* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2016); Margaret G. Sim, *Marking Thought and Talk in New Testament Greek: New Light from Linguistics on the Particles ἵνα and ὅτι* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2010).

61. Nelson R. Morales, *Poor and Rich in James: A Relevance Theory Approach to James's Use of the Old Testament* (University Park, PA: Eisenbrauns, 2018).

62. Fantin, *Greek Imperative Mood in the New Testament*, 333–34.