

## DISCOURSE ANALYSIS AS NEW TESTAMENT HERMENEUTIC: A RETROSPECTIVE AND PROSPECTIVE APPRAISAL

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Although I have subtitled this paper “A Retrospective and Prospective Appraisal,” the observant reader might realize that this is but a pedantic way of asking “What is discourse analysis, and what can it do for you?” As is the case with any methodology that claims to be a NT hermeneutic, scholars and students are most of all interested in what it is—that is, its purpose and central tenets—and what it can do for them in their analysis of the NT texts. I have therefore set forth a daunting if not impossible task for myself in this essay, since discourse analysis (as even its proponents will claim) is not easily defined, being comprehensive in scope as far as hermeneutical systems go. Furthermore linguists, and especially NT linguists, are known for obscure methodologies, often inventing fanciful words referring to only slightly modified, already-existing concepts. Nevertheless similar excuses are readily thrown around in scholarly circles often as absolution for not at least attempting to define a slippery concept. If discourse analysis is to have any lasting, substantive impact on the whole of NT scholarship (and to date it has not) it requires theoretical definition and then specific application, leaving it open to scholarly critique. In this essay I have taken up the former task, seeking (1) to define major tenets of discourse analysis based on the writings of its leading (especially linguistic) proponents and (2) to set forth a research agenda for future applications of discourse analysis to the NT.<sup>1</sup> It is only intended as a prolegomenon to a more detailed theory of NT discourse analysis.

### I. DISCOURSE ANALYSIS AS HERMENEUTIC

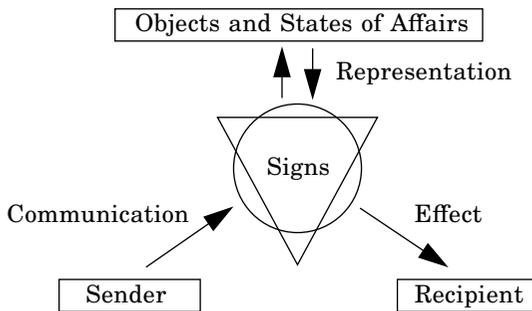
1. *Preliminary definitions.* Discourse analysis is here to stay, at least for a while. The tenth anniversary issue of the journal *Text* (1990), volume 11 of *Annual Review of Applied Linguistics* (1990) and the International Congress of Linguists in Berlin (1987)—where discourse analyses formed the largest contingent—all testify to this model’s popularity among practitioners of both

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<sup>1</sup> I have often heard the complaint that NT discourse analysts do not apply the theory to actual texts. This is simply not true on a general level. Rather, what is noticeably absent from many NT discourse analyses is a clear definition of method.

theoretical and applied linguistics. Popularity has its problems, however. Because of its far-reaching impact, discourse analysis is one of the least well-defined areas of linguistics.<sup>2</sup> Idiosyncratic models and terminological confusion proliferate as more linguists, as well as nonlinguists, adopt discourse analysis as a theoretical framework to read texts. In addition the expansive scope of this linguistic theory has led to a diversity of opinion. One reason for this is that discourse analysis is a way of reading. It is a framework with which the analyst approaches a text and explicates what it says and how it has been said in addition to what has been understood and how it has been understood. It may be classified under the rubric of hermeneutics. Consequently it has marginally influenced Biblical scholarship (more so translation theory), where there is very little collaboration on what discourse analysis is and might do. Diversity does not necessarily spell its demise, however. Instead discourse analysis is at an exciting juncture in its history, diversity being its greatest strength. Terminological consistency and collaboration in the midst of creative thinking, nonetheless, are needed if discourse analysis is to have a significant impact on NT hermeneutics. The following study is an attempt at defining terminology and suggesting new, mostly unstudied ways in which discourse analysis may be applied to NT scholarship.

The term “discourse analysis,” which is used in somewhat different ways by various modern linguists, at its broadest level refers to the study and interpretation of both the spoken and written communication of humans.<sup>3</sup> The following diagram illustrates the basic components of this type of analysis.<sup>4</sup>



To use an approach adopted by D. Hellholm, discourse analysis is broadly concerned with the communication (*Ausdruck*) of signs (*Zeichen*) by an author/speaker (*Sender*) and the effect (*Appell*) they have on a reader/listener (*Empfänger*). Such signs arbitrarily represent (*Darstellung*) such things as objects, subject matter and circumstances (*Gegenstände und Sachverhalte*)

<sup>2</sup> D. Schiffrin, “Conversation Analysis,” *Annual Review of Applied Linguistics* 11 (1990) 3.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. the definitions of M. Stubbs, *Discourse Analysis: The Sociolinguistic Analysis of Natural Language* (Language in Society 4; Oxford: Blackwell, 1983) 1, 9–10.

<sup>4</sup> Adapted from D. Hellholm, *Das Visionenbuch des Hermas als Apokalypse: Formgeschichtliche und texttheoretische Studien zu einer literarischen Gattung* (ConBNT 13; Lund: Gleerup, 1980) 1.20.

of the external and internal worlds of the text. This is largely what the “analysis” part of the term “discourse analysis” entails. It is analysis that takes seriously the role of the speaker, the text and the listener in the communicative event. The “discourse” part of the term is not as easily defined, since a complete discourse might involve a twenty-volume history of the world or a one-word exchange between a parent and child. Discourse, then, is probably best treated as whatever language users decide, or “texts are what hearers and readers treat as texts.”<sup>5</sup> Speakers and listeners determine when a communicative event begins and when it ends. This communicative event, determined by the communicants, is what is referred to here as discourse. More specifically the term refers to (1) the linguistic units surrounding a sentence (cotext), (2) the immediate situation (context of situation), and (3) the wider cultural background of the text (context of culture).

Occasionally the term “text linguistics” (*Textwissenschaft*) and “text grammar” refer to the same type of analysis, but that of written texts. Hence some reserve the term “discourse” solely for speech (including paralinguistic features) and the term “text” for the written use of language. In current practice the two are rarely distinguished, as R. de Beaugrande notes:

Although “text linguistics” and “discourse analysis” originally emerged from different orientations, they have steadily converged in recent years until they are usually treated as the same enterprise. . . . An exception is the “discourse analysis” practiced by philosophers, cultural anthropologists, and literary scholars, especially in France, within such frameworks as post-structuralism, deconstruction, radical feminism, and so on, whose relationship to text linguistics has yet to be clarified.<sup>6</sup>

For some the term “text linguistics” is too narrow, and more comprehensive terms have been suggested, such as “text studies,” “text science” and “textology.” “Discourse analysis” is generally the preferred term, although at times giving way to the broader term “discourse studies.” I would suggest that, for the sake of consistency, NT discourse analysts should adopt the term “discourse analysis” unless they are specifically doing the type of text linguistics found in older works.

2. *Brief history of discussion.* Discourse analysis has a relatively brief history as far as linguistic models are concerned.<sup>7</sup> Several major tenets of discourse analysis, however, were discussed and developed by the Greeks and Romans, from Aristotle’s *Poetics* to Cicero’s *Institutio Oratoria*.<sup>8</sup> The

<sup>5</sup> G. Brown and G. Yule, *Discourse Analysis* (2d ed.; Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1983) 199; cf. D. Tannen (“Discourse Analysis: The Excitement of Diversity,” *Text* 10 [1990] 109): “Discourse—language beyond the sentence—is simply *language*—as it occurs, in any context . . . in any form.”

<sup>6</sup> R. de Beaugrande, “Text Linguistics and New Applications,” *Annual Review of Applied Linguistics* 11 (1990) 26 n. 1.

<sup>7</sup> For more detailed histories of the model see esp. R. de Beaugrande, “Text Linguistics through the Years,” *Text* 10 (1990) 9–17; Stubbs, *Discourse Analysis* 1–12.

<sup>8</sup> Cf. T. A. van Dijk, “The Future of the Field: Discourse Analysis in the 1990s,” *Text* 10 (1990) 135, who sees the 2,000-year-old tradition of rhetoric as a precursor to modern discourse analysis.

ancient rhetoricians, for example, debated over the best way to structure a discourse, the pragmatic effects of discourse, and various genres of discourse. They spoke of three central components of any speech, which are useful for analyzing discourse today: *logos* (logical reasoning), *pathos* (emotive effect) and *ethos* (establishing credibility). Furthermore in the third and second centuries BC the Stoic grammarians developed a theory of sign that in some ways parallels the work of F. de Saussure two thousand years later. Despite such ties to the past, modern discourse analysts generally look to this century for the original architects of the theory. Z. Harris is sometimes cited as one of the earliest attempts at a suprasentential analysis, but his theories have garnered little support (primarily because he divorced semantics from formal structural units).<sup>9</sup> Another pioneering analysis from a more semantic perspective came from T. F. Mitchell.<sup>10</sup> Other linguists who did not necessarily use the term discourse analysis have contributed to its historical development. Some of these include stratificational, tagmemic and systemic linguists. Even some transformational-generative (TG) grammarians have researched aspects of discourse structure, although TG theory does not readily lend itself to the basic tenets of discourse analysis.<sup>11</sup> Other influences on the development of discourse analysis were related to linguistics in only a tangential way, such as anthropology, sociology, rhetoric, literary studies, psycholinguistics, computational linguistics and philosophical linguistics. For example, in the 1920s anthropologist B. Malinowski emphasized the view of “language as action” occurring in both “contexts of situation” and “contexts of culture” (he coined the terms), which is central to discourse analysis today.<sup>12</sup> His views would later influence his younger colleague J. R. Firth. M. A. K. Halliday, who has had a significant impact on theories of discourse analysis (and yet little known to NT scholars), inherited Firth’s views of language and incorporated them into his theory of language and discourse. J. L. Austin argued that language and action are inseparable, leading to the theory of “speech acts,” which was later developed especially by J. R. Searle.<sup>13</sup> This too has had a profound effect on discourse analysis. But perhaps not until the 1960s and especially the 1970s did discourse analysis take a more discrete form, during which time occurred more concerted deliberation on its theoretical moorings and its application to actual texts. Eventually this shared interest in various phenomena of language use, texts, and conversation by researchers in such diverse fields as anthropology, linguistics, semiotics, poetics, psychology, sociology and mass communication became more integrated under the label “discourse analy-

<sup>9</sup> Cf. Z. Harris, “Discourse Analysis,” *Language* 28 (1952) 1–30; “Discourse Analysis: A Sample Text,” *Language* 28 (1952) 474–494.

<sup>10</sup> T. F. Mitchell, “The Language of Buying and Selling in Cyrenaica,” *Hesperis* 44 (1957) 31–71.

<sup>11</sup> See e.g. J. M. Williams, *Some Grammatical Characteristics of Continuous Discourse* (dissertation; University of Wisconsin, 1966).

<sup>12</sup> B. Malinowski, “The Problem of Meaning in Primitive Languages,” *The Meaning of Meaning* (ed. C. K. Ogden and I. A. Richards; London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1923) 296–346.

<sup>13</sup> J. L. Austin, *How to Do Things with Words* (London: Oxford University, 1962); J. R. Searle, *Speech Acts: An Essay in the Philosophy of Language* (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1969).

sis" (*Textwissenschaft*). Several dissertations were produced on the subject, linguists of various theoretical backgrounds developed their own views on the matter, and several introductions and full-scale monographs appeared. These researchers often pleaded that grammatical frameworks needed to extend their analysis "to the real form of language use, that is, discourse."<sup>14</sup> The 1980s proved that this perspective on language was not merely a novelty, during which time theorists recognized the need for more systematic and consistent terminology and broadened the scope of discourse analysis to include other fields of study. In closing, a detailed history of discourse analysis is beyond the goal of this modest essay. Indeed, to be accurate I would need to narrate its histories. In 1968 H. A. Gleason could state that "discourse analysis is really just getting underway. There are as yet very few firm substantive results."<sup>15</sup> This is understandable for a young discipline of study. But later M. Stubbs would still claim that "no one is in a position to write a comprehensive account of discourse analysis. The subject is at once too vast and too lacking in focus and consensus."<sup>16</sup> In a 1990 special 10-year anniversary issue of the journal *Text*, D. Tannen would still admit that discourse analysis "may seem almost dismayingly diverse." But she then goes on to suggest that "an attitude of catholicism toward the necessary diversity of the field" is a strength of discourse analysis theoreticians.<sup>17</sup> Despite its variegated past and still somewhat unstable present, discourse analysis has established itself as a significant and most likely a long-term linguistic field of inquiry that will evolve both in methodology and application. In the near future, perhaps we will be able to see more clearly the main trajectories of its evolution. Indeed, the above brief discussion of the history of discourse analysis only represents a few trajectories. Others may have wished to highlight different ones.

The use of discourse analysis in Biblical studies is of course even younger than the methodology itself and thus has received less attention. Despite its youthfulness as a hermeneutical model, however, it has been recognized for its possible application to the NT. In 1989 W. A. Beardslee prophesied about the potential alliance between discourse analysis and Biblical studies:

It may well turn out to be the case that another type of linguistic interpretation [discourse analysis], making much less extensive hermeneutical claims, will come to be even more fruitful for actual exegesis than structuralism or Güttermann's generative poetics.<sup>18</sup>

Despite such promising words, it can hardly be claimed that discourse analysis has presently been established as a hermeneutic in mainstream Biblical

<sup>14</sup> T. A. van Dijk, "Introduction: *Text* in the New Decade," *Text* 10 (1990) 1.

<sup>15</sup> H. A. Gleason, "Contrastive Analysis in Discourse Structure," *Georgetown University Monograph Series on Languages and Linguistics* 21 (1968) 41.

<sup>16</sup> Stubbs, *Discourse Analysis* 12.

<sup>17</sup> Tannen, "Discourse Analysis" 109, 111; cf. B. Palek, "Discourse: The Forecast of Its Study?," *Text* 10 (1990) 69; van Dijk, "Future" 135-138.

<sup>18</sup> W. Beardslee, "Recent Literary Criticism," *The New Testament and Its Modern Interpreters* (ed. E. J. Epp and G. W. MacRae; Atlanta: Scholars, 1989) 188.

scholarship. This is especially true of NT scholars, who lag behind their OT contemporaries. Although many scholars have heard the term, few know its underlying theories or employ them in their research. Those who do are largely relegated to Bible translators using it in their fieldwork. They are not part of mainstream scholarship. A handful of NT scholars are beginning to draw from discourse analysis as a heuristic device for their own particular questions of the text. One of the most notable is J. P. Louw, both for his application of discourse analysis to the NT and more importantly for his erudite comments on its methodology. Although Louw wrote his programmatic article on discourse analysis almost twenty years ago,<sup>19</sup> the discipline has as yet garnered the attention of only a few NT scholars, several of whom are linguists by profession. This failure is partly due to the differing models of discourse analysis being advocated by various linguists. In their work on linguistics and Biblical interpretation P. Cotterell and M. Turner warn that

we must at least comment on the tentative nature of this particular aspect of linguistics [discourse analysis]. The fact is that at the present there are no firm conclusions, no generally accepted formulae, no fixed methodology, not even an agreed terminology.<sup>20</sup>

I might respond that in any interdisciplinary field of study like discourse analysis similar criticisms will surely arise. The diversity of backgrounds of discourse analysts, whether they be literary critics, psychologists, philosophers or linguists, has contributed to the problems noted by Cotterell and Turner. Such diversity is inevitably a strength for the growth of the field as well as a prevention against academic parochialism. Biblical scholars will also likely choose from linguistic models best known to them (often in terms of their own continental scholarship), resulting in sometimes slight and sometimes major differences in theory. This can only assist the development of a discourse model appropriate for analyzing ancient texts. Inept models will eventually be weeded out through scholarly critique.

Another factor resulting in NT scholars' hesitancy toward discourse analysis stems from the affiliation between discourse analysis and modern linguistics. Whereas many scholars continue to study NT Greek through older philological and grammatical models, most NT discourse analysts have kept apace with the theoretical developments of modern linguistics. If discourse analysis is to impact NT studies, the scholarly guild will at least have to modify their view of NT Greek grammar and language in general.

It is too soon to know if Beardslee's prophecy will be fulfilled or if discourse analysis will disappear from the annals of NT interpretative models. Surprisingly, discourse analysis has not significantly influenced mainstream NT scholarship in the United States, despite the fact that "the study of text and talk is a thriving specialization in the U.S.A."<sup>21</sup> But there are a growing number of authors attempting to demonstrate its worth for students,

<sup>19</sup> J. P. Louw, "Discourse Analysis and the Greek New Testament," *BT* 24 (1973) 101–119.

<sup>20</sup> P. Cotterell and M. Turner, *Linguistics and Biblical Interpretation* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1989) 233.

<sup>21</sup> van Dijk, "Introduction" 2.

pastors, translators and scholars. A number of theses and dissertations have come out of the Summer Institute of Linguistics, partly in conjunction with the University of Texas at Arlington.<sup>22</sup> Much of the work is based on the tagmemic theories of K. Pike and R. Longacre. Closely related, but more eclectic in the use of linguistic theory, is the translation work carried out by the United Bible Societies. Here the works of E. Nida and especially J. P. Louw have been influential. Some of the most significant work in discourse analysis is coming out of South Africa. D. Hellholm's work (*Das Visionenbuch*) in discourse analysis of ancient texts has been mostly influential in European circles of NT scholarship, with other scholars, most notably B. Johanson and B. Olsson, applying similar models to NT texts.<sup>23</sup> These may be broadly classified as representing a Scandinavian school of discourse analysis.

3. *Major tenets of discourse analysis.* The above definition of discourse analysis is far too broad to be of any practical, heuristic use. Nevertheless it does demonstrate that discourse analysis concerns all kinds of human interaction, whether verbal or written. Discourse analysis, accordingly, is influenced by many social-scientific models such as anthropology (especially ethnography), sociology, philosophy, psychology, and artificial intelligence.<sup>24</sup> Discourse analysis is not, however, a mixed-bag hermeneutic with no guiding principles. The following tenets characterize core beliefs of modern discourse analysts as found in their writings. These tenets will certainly evolve over time and perhaps lose some of their importance in the future. For now they have made discourse analysis what it is, and they dominate the types of questions being asked about discourse.

Discourse analysts take seriously the roles of the author, the audience, and the text in communicative events. These are viewed as a network of influences contributing to the production and consumption of communicative events. On the one hand, discourse analysts seek to interpret a speaker/author's role in the production of discourses.<sup>25</sup> The term "author" here is not a static one but takes into account such things as original and implied authors (and readers). This does not alter the fact that much of discourse analysis has been concerned with naturally occurring texts and, consequently, how original speakers/authors create those texts and how original listeners/readers process them. This is perhaps one area of research that has distinguished discourse analysis from literary theory. The complexity of meaning, however, is not ignored by discourse analysts, but they have not abandoned the idea of intended meaning. Someone might say "Your glass is empty" not

<sup>22</sup> See R. E. Longacre, "A Brief Note Regarding Discourse Centered Ph.D. Studies at the University of Texas at Arlington," *Notes on Linguistics* 41 (1988) 47–48.

<sup>23</sup> I have found Johanson's theory of transitional devices particularly useful. For a survey of other works of the "Scandinavian school" of discourse analysis see B. Olsson, "A Decade of Text-Linguistic Analyses of Biblical Texts at Uppsala," *ST* 39 (1985) 107–126.

<sup>24</sup> For relevant works in these fields see Stubbs, *Discourse Analysis* 12; cf. de Beaugrande, "Text Linguistics" 17.

<sup>25</sup> Cf. J. P. Louw, "Reading a Text as Discourse," *Linguistics and New Testament Interpretation: Essays on Discourse Analysis* (ed. D. A. Black; Nashville: Broadman, 1992) 20.

for the sake of observation but as an offer to buy someone a drink.<sup>26</sup> Linguistic pragmatics (e.g. speech-act theory) has resulted in theories that are broad enough to account for such language use without abandoning the concept of intended meaning. Nevertheless further research is needed by discourse analysts “that recognizes the problematic role of awareness, consciousness, and/or intentionality.”<sup>27</sup> This will likely be, and to some degree has already begun to be, answered by those working in psycholinguistics.

There is another side to the coin of communication: the listener or reader. In addition to the speaker’s (intended) meaning(s), discourse analysts also seek to interpret the listener/reader’s comprehension(s) of and response(s) to the discourse. Communication is not a one-way street, even if only one person does the talking. Every discourse eventually has an audience who will listen to or read it, ponder over it, and likely respond to it in some way. Even monologue is based on dialogue. We rarely communicate with ourselves. We communicate with others. We communicate to be heard. This results in difficulties, since what is meant is not always what is understood. And yet this does not prevent the listener/reader from trying. Stubbs comments on the impulse to interpret: “Hearers and readers have a powerful urge to make sense out of whatever nonsense is presented to them.”<sup>28</sup> They may not get it right, but they attempt to understand and, more than that, to understand correctly. The fact that the same message may invoke multiple interpretations presents another dilemma for discourse analysis. The analyst again must look to the actual language of the discourse, the situation and knowledge of the participants involved, and the responses invoked by the message in order to account for multiple interpretations. The “why” of multiple interpretations, not the “fact” of them, is important to the discourse analyst. Speakers/authors and listeners/readers realize that language often should not be taken literally, that language is used to perform actions and produce responses, and that different social situations result in different uses of language to say essentially the same thing. Discourse analysis of the NT must take into account such principles of communication. Most importantly, this tenet takes seriously both the role of speaker/author and of listener/reader in the communicative process occasioned by the text. On the one hand the authors create the textual product—that is, they are responsible for putting the words down on paper. On the other hand this product may invite and constrain the reader’s interpretation, but it does not determine it. Brown and Yule summarize this two-part tenet appropriately.

We shall consider words, phrases and sentences which appear in the textual record of a discourse to be evidence of an attempt by a producer (speaker/writer) to communicate his message to a recipient (hearer/reader). We shall be particularly interested in discussing how a recipient might come to comprehend the producer’s intended message on a particular occasion, and how the requirements of the particular recipient(s), in definable circumstances, influ-

<sup>26</sup> For this and other examples see Stubbs, *Discourse Analysis* 4–5.

<sup>27</sup> A. Pomerantz, “Discourse and Awareness,” *Text* 10 (1990) 87.

<sup>28</sup> Stubbs, *Discourse Analysis* 5.

ence the organization of the producer's discourse. This is clearly an approach which takes the communicative function of language as its primary area of investigation and consequently seeks to describe linguistic form, not as a static object, but as a dynamic means of expressing intended meaning.<sup>29</sup>

The discourse analyst is also guided by the tenet to examine language at a linguistic level larger than the sentence.<sup>30</sup> This is perhaps the most distinguishing, if not best known, feature of the theory. The long-lived taboo in linguistics that grammar is confined to the boundary of the sentence has been forsaken by discourse analysts. Grammar, they claim, is influenced by linguistic levels beyond the sentence (e.g. discourse). J. P. Louw's prediction that linguistics in the 1970s would direct its attention to units larger than the sentence was already being fulfilled between the late 1950s and the early 1970s.<sup>31</sup> K. L. Pike noted in 1964 that "*beyond the sentence* lie grammatical structures available to linguistic analysis."<sup>32</sup> This change in perspective arose from the observation that words or sentences are rarely used in isolation but typically as part of an extended discourse of sequenced sentences (esp. in the case of written texts). T. Givón criticizes those who do not observe this fact of language:

It has become obvious to a growing number of linguists that the study of the syntax of isolated sentences, extracted without natural context from the purposeful constructions of speakers, is a methodology that has outlived its usefulness.<sup>33</sup>

S. Wallace is even more trenchant:

That linguistic categories contribute significantly to the structure of an extra-sentential text, indeed, that one does not truly understand the meaning of a linguistic category until one comprehends its function in a text, are suggestions that mainstream twentieth-century linguistics has all but ignored.<sup>34</sup>

Much of this criticism arose in the mid-1960s when the basic assumptions of Saussurean-Bloomfieldian-Chomskyan linguistics were questioned.<sup>35</sup> Similar criticism may be redirected at NT scholars who analyze the sentences of NT texts isolated from their context (i.e. extralinguistic context) as well as from their cotext (i.e. intralinguistic context)—especially in view of much of Biblical scholarship's preoccupation with interpreting "words" and their "meanings." In addition, traditional grammars of the last two centuries say little about the discourse features of Greek.

<sup>29</sup> Brown and Yule, *Discourse Analysis* 24.

<sup>30</sup> Cf. Stubbs, *Discourse Analysis* 6–7; Palek, "Discourse" 69; D. Schiffrin, "The Language of Discourse: Connections Inside and Out," *Text* 10 (1990) 97.

<sup>31</sup> Louw, "Discourse Analysis" 102.

<sup>32</sup> K. L. Pike, "Beyond the Sentence," *College Composition and Communication* 15 (1964) 129.

<sup>33</sup> T. Givón, "Preface," *Syntax and Semantics Volume 12: Discourse and Syntax* (New York: Academic, 1979) xiii.

<sup>34</sup> S. Wallace, "Figure and Ground: The Interrelationships of Linguistic Categories," *Tense-Aspect: Between Semantics and Pragmatics* (ed. P. J. Hopper; Amsterdam: Benjamins, 1982) 201; for the many significant works influencing this shift see R. de Beaugrande, *Text, Discourse and Process: Toward a Multidisciplinary Science of Texts* (Advances in Discourse Processes 4; ed. R. O. Freedle; Norwood: Ablex, 1980) xi–xii.

<sup>35</sup> So Stubbs, *Discourse Analysis* 11–12.

The study of larger discourse units, however, does not eliminate the need for investigating words and clauses. Discourse analysts advocate a bottom-up and top-down interpretation of discourse. The analyst might begin at the bottom with morphology, moving up through words, phrases, clauses, sentences and paragraphs/sections/pericopes (i.e. sequences of sentences and embedded sequences of sentences) until reaching the top—namely, the discourse. From here the direction would be reversed to see how the larger discourse influences paragraph construction and on down.<sup>36</sup> Sentences are important, but only in that the analyst reads both up and down the text. If possible the analyst is better off identifying the genre of the text before moving to an analysis of its parts—that is, starting from the top and then working downwards. In this framework the analysis of words and clauses is important, but only from the perspective of the larger discourse. For example, Rom 6:15 begins with the terse phrase *ti oun* (“what therefore”), a common expression found in ancient philosophical diatribes used to signal the words of an interlocutor (i.e. a hypothetical speaker who debates with the speaker/author). This phrase forms a coherent part of vv. 15–23, which consist of the false conclusion of the interlocutor and then a twofold response from Paul (vv. 15b–16), followed by a two-part development of his response (vv. 17–18, 19–23), and then another response (7:1), again followed by a two-part development (vv. 2–6). At a larger level this dialogue is a development from v. 14 in the preceding interlocutor-author debate, and all together form part of the argument in chaps. 6–8 regarding the behavior of the believer in the light of justification/salvation/redemption. At yet a broader level, chaps. 6–8 conclude Paul’s discussion of human plight and God’s solution begun in Rom 1:16 and precede an argument regarding God’s faithfulness to Israel in chaps. 9–11, which itself occurs before Paul’s words of exhortation in chaps. 12–14. At an even broader level, all of these sections take place within the epistolary framework of Romans, signaled primarily in chap. 1 and 15:14–16:27.

Although discourse analysts of the NT generally advocate this tenet, Louw’s definition of the pericope as “the largest readily perceptible whole . . . having some autonomy of its own and exhibiting its own peculiar structural pattern”<sup>37</sup> has resulted in NT applications of discourse analysis that are often limited to the pericope rather than the entire text. Although this is a reasonable starting point for a difficult task, a thoroughgoing discourse analysis would be better off including the entire text, such as W. Schenk’s *Die Philipperbriefe des Paulus*. Such an analysis is understandably formidable but well worth the effort, since each microstructure may be viewed in relationship to the entire macrostructure rather than just part of it. Furthermore this tenet emphasizes that meaning is not located solely in the word, clause, or even paragraph. J. L. Lemke puts it aptly:

<sup>36</sup> On “bottom-up” and “top-down” processing of texts see Brown and Yule, *Discourse Analysis* 234–236; de Beaugrande, *Text, Discourse and Process* 26–27.

<sup>37</sup> Louw, “Discourse Analysis” 103.

Language is not simply used to produce word-meaning or clause-meaning, it is used to produce text-meaning, and text, by co-patterning many word-choices and clause formations, can make meanings that words and clauses cannot. That is why we make texts. Text-meaning realizes social functions . . . , and among the most important social functions of texts is the maintenance and modification of social value systems.<sup>38</sup>

A third tenet of discourse analysis is that discourse should be analyzed for its social functions and thus in its social context.<sup>39</sup> This has resulted in a strong marriage between discourse analysis and sociolinguistics, as well as the field of linguistics called pragmatics. As Brown and Yule state:

Any analytic approach in linguistics which involves contextual considerations necessarily belongs to that area of language study called *pragmatics*. "Doing discourse analysis" certainly involves "doing syntax and semantics," but it primarily consists of "doing pragmatics."<sup>40</sup>

The study of actual language use provides insights into social interaction and social action, whether it be in the domain of education, politics, advertising or the like. Other areas of interest include conversational analysis, discourse markers, formulaic speech, gender and language, and ritual language. Language did not come into existence for grammarians to ponder its intricate rules and exceptions. People use language. And they use it in relation to others within their culture, be it the larger culture of a city-state or the group psychology shared between members of ancient philosophical schools such as the Stoics and Epicureans. And they use it for a reason (*Kommunikationssituation*). Consequently discourse is not simply a set of propositions (logical, literal, conceptual or cognitive) with a certain factual content but rather social, communicative interaction between communicants. This has led discourse analysts away from abstract formalisms of language and into the realm of the "communicative-functional role of language."<sup>41</sup> This is based on the principle that increasingly larger units of language are less and less constrained by grammar and more and more by the communicative context. Consequently both the immediate context (Malinowski's "context of situation") and the broader culture ("context of culture") factor into a discourse analysis, since language and language behavior "cannot be acquired in isolation, but rather can only be learnt and are only available for one's use in situational contexts."<sup>42</sup> M. A. K. Halliday has made this

<sup>38</sup> J. L. Lemke, "Semantics and Social Values," *Word* 40 (1989) 48.

<sup>39</sup> See the work of J. J. Gumperz, *Discourse Strategies* (Studies in Interactional Sociolinguistics 1; Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1982).

<sup>40</sup> Brown and Yule, *Discourse Analysis* 26; cf. D. Macdonell, *Theories of Discourse: An Introduction* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1986) 1-4, who takes a more sociopolitical perspective; Gumperz, *Discourse Strategies* 1-8, who provides a helpful history of sociolinguistics on pp. 9-37; and Stubbs, *Discourse Analysis*, who subtitles his introduction to discourse analysis *The Sociolinguistic Analysis of Natural Language*.

<sup>41</sup> P. Chen, "Reflections on the Development of Discourse Analysis in the Nineties," *Text* 10 (1990) 23.

<sup>42</sup> R. Wodak, "Discourse Analysis: Problems, Findings, Perspectives," *Text* 10 (1990) 126.

tenet central to his theory of language: "Language is as it is because of its function in social structure."<sup>43</sup> Critical discourse analysis—that is, the analysis of manipulative functions of discourse with a view to empower the exploited with the knowledge of such devices—must of necessity be historically oriented if it is to be able to identify those in power who create manipulative discourse and the social contexts in which it is carried out.

Finally, because language is not an abstract phenomenon but a social one, discourse analysts emphasize the need to interpret natural occurrences of language—language as use (*parole*). Decontextualized, fabricated data are sometimes used to make an argument more clear,<sup>44</sup> but these are exceptions to the rule. Such artificial use of language may simply represent the biases of the grammarian who concocted the sentence. Brown and Yule put it succinctly: "The analysis of discourse is, necessarily, the analysis of language in use."<sup>45</sup>

That there is a relationship grammatically, semantically and pragmatically between the various parts of a given text, and that there is a thematic element that flows through it, allows the listener/reader to recognize discourse as a cohesive piece of communication rather than a jumble of unrelated words and sentences. How is it, then, that speakers go about forming texts into a cohesive unit? How do they combine relatively unrelated words and sentences into a meaningful whole? Discourse analysts repeatedly seek answers to such questions, attempting to identify how a language is used to create cohesive communication. Labov describes the task similarly: "The fundamental problem of discourse analysis is to show how one utterance follows another in a rational, rule-governed manner—in other words, how we understand coherent discourse."<sup>46</sup> When we attempt to answer such questions, it is important to note that the structural cohesiveness of texts should be viewed as a continuum. At one pole are texts with a high degree of unity and cohesiveness. At the opposite pole are texts that can be quickly recognized as a jumble of words and sentences with little textuality. Whether a text might be elegantly unified or grossly fragmented, most texts lie somewhere between these two poles: neither altogether cohesive nor altogether incohesive. Surprisingly, despite all of the barriers confronting successful communication we typically get our message across to an audience. We are able to combine words into cohesive units that are understandable to a listener/reader. And when failing to do so, we typically attempt to adjust our message into a more coherent unit.

<sup>43</sup> M. A. K. Halliday, *Explorations in the Functions of Language* (London: Edward Arnold, 1973) 65.

<sup>44</sup> This is especially true of philosophers working in the area of speech acts (M. Coulthard, *An Introduction to Discourse Analysis* [2d ed.; London: Longmans, 1985] 12).

<sup>45</sup> Brown and Yule, *Discourse Analysis* 1; cf. Stubbs, *Discourse Analysis* 5–6; de Beaugrande, "Text Linguistics" 10–11. The 1987 Congress of Linguistics similarly emphasized *parole* (not *langue*) as the proper focus of investigation for analysis of text (de Beaugrande, "Text Linguistics" 24).

<sup>46</sup> W. Labov, *Sociolinguistic Patterns* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania, 1972) 252.

Whereas the first tenet of discourse analysis emphasizes the speaker's role in the production of discourse, this tenet recognizes the important role that specific languages (i.e. linguistic codes) play in the production of discourse. Granted, humans are the ones who communicate, who interact with others, who convey meaning. Nevertheless language, as it has been formulated and agreed upon by cultural groups, significantly determines the ways in which speakers/authors are expected to construct their message. Successful communication implies shared grammar. Or as J. Gumperz maintains:

It seems clear that knowledge of grammatical rules is an essential component of the interactive competence that speakers must have to interact and cooperate with others. Thus if we can show that individuals interacting through linguistic signs are effective in cooperating with others in the conduct of their affairs, we have prima facie evidence for the existence of shared grammatical structure.<sup>47</sup>

There is an interplay between language and context, both influencing the use of the other in actual discourse. To analyze the cohesiveness of a text is invariably to analyze the linguistic structures of the text.

In summary, it is helpful to phrase the above tenets in the form of questions, since the questions an interpreter brings to a text often reveal the methodology with which he or she analyzes a text. What is the speaker/author trying to mean? How does the listener/reader respond to the message? Similarly, how do humans generally acquire, store, use and process information in communicative events? What types of social factors influence the communication between the speaker/author and listener/reader? Conversely, how does language shape the way people communicate and receive discourse? What is it that makes a text coherent? How do the bits and pieces seemingly fit together into a cohesive whole? These and similar questions provide a framework for analyzing discourse. For some Biblical scholars, another way of formulating the above tenets has been to relate them to the three major categories of modern linguistics. When discussing how it is that speakers/authors use language in specific contexts (the focus of the first and third tenets) we are concerned with the pragmatics of language—extralinguistic features (deictic indicators of time and place, medium, background and history). When analyzing the organization and meaning of the forms of language (the focus of the second and fourth tenets) we are concerned with the syntax and semantics of language—linguistic features. Hellholm portrays discourse analysis in terms of these three categories. He describes it in terms of communication between “Sender und Empfänger (pragmatischer Aspekt) über einen Sachverhalt (semantischer Aspekt) mit Hilfe von Zeichen verschiedener Art (syntaktischer Aspekt).”<sup>48</sup> W. Schenk takes a similar approach: “Sie [Textanalyse] eine geordnete (methodisch

<sup>47</sup> Gumperz, *Discourse Strategies* 19.

<sup>48</sup> Hellholm, *Visionenbuch* 25. Translation: Text linguistics concerns communication between “a sender and recipient (pragmatic aspect) concerning states of affairs (semantic aspect) by means of various kinds of signs (syntactic aspect).”

durchgeführte) Befragung eines Textes nach seiner Zeichengestalt (Textsyntax), seinem Zeichengehalt (Textsemantik) und seinem Sinn/seiner Funktion (Textpragmatik) ist."<sup>49</sup> While it is useful to show a relationship between discourse analysis and general linguistics, however, the compartmentalization of texts into syntax, semantics and pragmatics tends to prolong the misconception that meaning exists somewhere apart from what language users intend to mean and that pragmatic meaning is something other than semantic meaning.<sup>50</sup> The so-called categories of syntax, semantics and pragmatics are not neatly divided in actual texts but dynamically interrelate. The interpreter must inspect syntactic elements for their semantic functions, and semantic elements for their pragmatic effects.<sup>51</sup>

## II. AN AGENDA FOR RESEARCH

The above retrospective appraisal of discourse analysis is largely traditional. Few practicing discourse analysts would substantively disagree with my portrait. The remainder of the paper, however, sketches a not-so-traditional, prospective research agenda for NT discourse analysis, including the following five topics.<sup>52</sup> These areas of research, although receiving considerable attention by modern linguists, have had little impact on NT discourse analysis.

1. *Psycholinguistic and cognitive studies.* Psycholinguistic and cognitive studies done from a discourse perspective may have special interest to NT scholars working in the area of reader-response criticism. Linguists working in the field of psychology and artificial intelligence want to account for the actual processes involved in the use of discourse—that is, in the production and comprehension of discourse by speakers and hearers. As T. A. van Dijk notes: “Real interpretation is a mental act, or rather a cognitive process, of language users. The result of this process is a conceptual representation of the discourse in memory.”<sup>53</sup> One important result of experimental approaches to discourse processing, such as protocol analysis (think-aloud reports), is that it may be empirically shown that many structural properties of discourse such as syntactic sentence organization, pronominalization,

<sup>49</sup> W. Schenk, *Die Philipperbriefe des Paulus* (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1984) 20. Translation: “It [text analysis] is an ordered (methodically carried out) questioning of a text according to the form of its signs (syntax), the content of its signs (semantics) and its meaning/function (pragmatics).”

<sup>50</sup> So de Beaugrande, “Text Linguistics” 11.

<sup>51</sup> Traditionally, syntax refers to the formal features of the linguistic code, especially with respect to their system networks (e.g. the system of verbal voice). Semantics refers to the functions or meanings associated with the syntactic networks. Pragmatics refers to the relationships between different ways of saying and the contextual factors conditioning them. The compartmentalizing of language study into these three categories is, however, being challenged by many modern linguists.

<sup>52</sup> For a ten-point research agenda of non-Biblical discourse analysis see van Dijk, “Future” 154–155.

<sup>53</sup> T. A. van Dijk, “Semantic Discourse Analysis,” *Dimensions of Discourse* (ed. van Dijk; London: Academic, 1985) 2.106.

topic-comment articulation, and story structures have cognitive bases. Such studies are interested in the storage, retrieval, cognitive strategies, memory limitations, and effective organization procedures for information processing. Consequently Biblical scholars emphasizing the reader's role in the hermeneutical process may find these types of studies more empirically based than, for example, some literary approaches.

2. *Critical discourse analysis.* Critical discourse analysis, a growing trend in linguistic studies, has had little impact on NT discourse analysis. Instead, literary critics of the NT have led the field in this area of hermeneutics. This is primarily due to the fact that critical discourse analysis asks traditionally different questions regarding discourse processes. For example, the critical discourse analyst may be interested in how Biblical texts are used to manipulate modern peoples unjustly, both in the realm of the local church and that of larger religious institutions (e.g. cultic groups). Fundamental to this approach is that discourse analysis should not remain descriptive and neutral but must aim at uncovering injustice, inequality, and taking sides with the powerless and oppressed. R. Wodak lays down an agenda for critical discourse analysis: "We want to uncover and de-mystify certain social processes in this and other societies, to make mechanisms of manipulation, discrimination, prejudice, demagoguery, and propaganda explicit and transparent."<sup>54</sup> In sum, critical discourse analysis attempts to reveal the underlying class conflicts, power relations, and ideologies in texts. It is often applied today to the analysis of political discourse, news, and the texts of governments or large organizations. It needs to be applied more rigorously to religious discourse. That I should propose critical discourse analysis as a necessary agenda for NT discourse analysts may sound suspiciously politically correct. But I think there is an equally important motivation behind critical discourse analysis with respect to the future of the humanities. While the growing trend of capitalistic modern societies is to cut budgets from educational institutions, the humanities and thus Biblical studies are being demanded to demonstrate their economic and social worth. In setting an agenda for discourse analysis, van Dijk makes a similar point:

We should not be surprised when the old call for "social relevance," scorned by conservatives or "pure" theorists and welcomed by critical scholars, will be increasingly paralleled by a more forceful claim by corporate and state funding agencies to "deliver the goods," even in the humanities and social sciences. . . . Market philosophies, profitability and a more business-like approach to research and academic education have increasingly encroached upon the traditional ivory tower spirit of pure theorizing and description for description's sake.<sup>55</sup>

Another aspect of critical discourse analysis relevant to Christian mission is the differing effects of Biblical discourse on different cultures. S. K. Maynard has rightly called discourse theorists to an internationalization of

<sup>54</sup> R. Wodak, "Discourse Analysis: Problems, Findings, Perspectives," *Text* 10 (1990) 127.

<sup>55</sup> van Dijk, "Future" 139.

the field.<sup>56</sup> Discourse analysis, and linguistics in general, have been dominated by western research. It would only benefit current discourse theory if nonwestern speech communities were investigated. Thankfully, linguists working in Bible translation have contributed significantly to this area of discourse analysis.

3. *Empirically-based discourse grammar of the NT.* Tagged texts of the NT and computers are making it more feasible to categorize and analyze large amounts of linguistic data. Consequently the publication of a discourse grammar of the NT along the lines of the works of R. Longacre, J. E. Grimes and M. A. K. Halliday is becoming more feasible.

Such a grammar would be, firstly, functional in nature. W. Chafe prophesies about the future of such functional approaches to language:

My guess is that much of what passes for syntax today will be explained in functional-discourse terms tomorrow. . . . I have a vision of language structure in which the relevance of syntax as currently conceived will decline, while morphology at one end, discourse at the other, will share between them most of what is necessary to understand what has traditionally been called grammar.<sup>57</sup>

Such a grammar, secondly, would be based on the grammar of both the sentence and the discourse. Several areas of Greek grammar traditionally treated at the level of sentence would be explained in terms of discourse influences—for example, passive and middle voices, word order, pronominalization, selection of article, position of adjuncts (adverbs, prepositional phrases, etc.), choice of tense-aspect-modality, formation of questions, relative clauses. What is needed is a reference volume that brings together the studies and statistics into a coherent and usable whole.<sup>58</sup> Discourse analysis that will not only be persuasive to the broader scholarly community as to its veracity but also as to its usefulness must be based on the grammar of discourse—that is, the linguistic regularities governing the surface structure of actual texts. The theories that will endure the scrutiny of others will be systematic, elegant, and applicable to the majority of actual instances of language. As Brown and Yule propose: “The theoretical linguist typically operates with criteria such as economy, consistency and comprehensiveness when considering the competing claims of alternative descriptions of linguistic phenomena.”<sup>59</sup>

4. *Systemic-functional linguistics.* To date, linguistic study of the NT has been mostly dominated by transformational-generative and tagmemic

<sup>56</sup> S. K. Maynard, “An Open Forum for International Scholarship,” *Text* 10 (1990) 61–62.

<sup>57</sup> W. Chafe, “Looking Ahead,” *Text* 10 (1990) 21.

<sup>58</sup> The series *Biblical Languages: Greek* published by Sheffield Academic Press is an attempt to apply modern linguistics to traditional grammatical pedagogy in a way that is not overly technical. Indeed, to varying degrees this series is based on the principles of corpus grammars being described here.

<sup>59</sup> Brown and Yule, *Discourse Analysis* 117.

models of linguistics. Systemic-functional linguistics, originating in Britain primarily through the work of Halliday, has had little to say in the linguistic analysis of NT language and literature. Nor has it had much impact on discourse analysis of the NT, despite the fact that systemics (or systemic-functional linguistics [SFL]) has had a profound effect on theories of discourse in linguistic circles. Halliday himself has set forth a comprehensive theory of discourse and grammar that could serve as a framework for Greek grammarians. R. Hasan and M. Berry have also done significant work in the area of discourse analysis from the perspective of SFL. Systemics may also provide a model of discourse analysis that is useful to the critical discourse analyst (see above). Noteworthy scholars who have used systemic linguistics for the study of ideological uses of language include G. Kress, R. Hodge, R. Fowler, R. Trew and J. L. Lemke.

Currently, more NT discourse analysts are needed who are applying SFL to Biblical texts and comparing their research with other linguistic models of discourse. According to a systemic-functional model, what would a discourse grammar of the NT look like? It would, as Halliday concludes, lean toward "the applied rather than the pure, the rhetorical rather than the logical, the actual rather than the ideal, the functional rather than the formal, the text rather than the sentence. The emphasis is on text analysis as a mode of action, a theory of language as a means of getting things done."<sup>60</sup> "Systemic theory is designed not so much to prove things as to do things. It is a form of praxis."<sup>61</sup>

5. *Discourse prominence.* A particular aspect of discourse analysis that has received considerable attention in literary and linguistic research and increasing attention among NT scholars is that of prominence (also known as emphasis, grounding, relevance, salience)—that is, drawing the listener/reader's attention to important topics and motifs of the discourse and supporting those topics with other less prominent material. This approach to the grammar of texts suggests that language may be used to set apart (i.e. to disassociate) certain entities from other entities in the discourse. As Longacre humorously comments: "If all parts of a discourse are equally prominent, total unintelligibility results. The result is like being presented with a piece of black paper and being told, 'This is a picture of black camels crossing black sands at midnight.'"<sup>62</sup>

This concept is not entirely new to NT studies. NT scholars frequently claim that certain grammatical constructions are "emphatic." By this they generally mean that some linguistic element (either a word or clause) is

<sup>60</sup> M. A. K. Halliday, *Introduction to Functional Grammar* (London: Edward Arnold, 1985) xxviii.

<sup>61</sup> M. A. K. Halliday, "Systemic Background," *Systemic Perspectives on Discourse* (ed. J. D. Benson and W. S. Greaves; Advances in Discourse Processes 15; Norwood: Ablex, 1985) 1.11.

<sup>62</sup> R. E. Longacre, "Discourse Peak as Zone of Turbulence," *Beyond the Sentence: Discourse and Sentential Form* (ed. J. R. Wirth; Ann Arbor: Karoma, 1985) 83; cf. van Dijk, "Semantic Discourse Analysis" 131: "Without a semantic macrostructure, even a fragmentary one, there is no overall coherence and hence no point to the discourse."

being emphasized by the author. This is often treated in terms of word order. For example, if a prepositional phrase is placed at the front of a clause, the author is supposedly emphasizing that item. Although this type of interpretation is not inherently flawed, the term "emphasis" needs further defining. The study of prominence in linguistic, literary and psycholinguistic theory may provide a more methodologically rigorous approach to questions of theme and emphasis. Most studies of prominence have been concerned with narrative. More work is needed with respect to nonnarrative discourse strategies.

### III. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, perhaps the biggest stumbling block for the successful integration of discourse analysis into NT hermeneutics is the very scholars promoting it. Several studies of the NT claiming to be about discourse analysis or textlinguistics of the NT look to me suspiciously like the type of analysis found in most commentaries. Other discourse analyses appear to be second-hand applications of linguistic models but with little interest in linguistics as an enterprise in and of itself.<sup>63</sup> More scholars are needed who not only have formal training in linguistics (or at least have devoted significant time to understanding the discipline) but also will interact with mainstream Biblical scholarship. To date, discourse analysis is a peripheral hermeneutic of NT studies, perhaps eventually doomed to the wastebasket. I have been personally told by a respected senior NT scholar that discourse analysis is nothing more than exegesis disguised in the garb of linguistic terminology. So goes the argument: Why read a discourse analysis of Philippians when I can read a master like J. B. Lightfoot who speaks in my own hermeneutical language? But rather than respond with isolationism, NT discourse analysts must take this critique seriously and respond by answering two issues of methodology: (1) What is it about this hermeneutic that makes it unique with respect to traditional exegesis? (2) How can this hermeneutic support, supplement, or advance the wealth of NT interpretation already available? Future discourse analyses of the NT, I believe, must answer such questions. In other words, they must intelligently answer the questions, "What is discourse analysis, and what can it do for the NT interpreter?" The above modest retrospective and prospective appraisal of discourse analysis is hopefully a step in that direction. If current models of discourse analysis can teach students and scholars of the NT anything, it is that traditional aspects of Biblical hermeneutics such as grammar, semantics and social setting still deserve the theoretical (not just applicational) attention of researchers.

<sup>63</sup> To this extent, most of the theoretical and practical work being done in discourse analysis of the OT is more coherent than studies of NT discourse. For brief surveys see C. H. J. van der Merwe, "Recent Trends in the Linguistic Description of Old Hebrew," *JNSL* 15 (1989) 217-241; P. J. MacDonald, "Discourse Analysis and Biblical Interpretation," *Linguistics and Biblical Hebrew* (ed. W. R. Bodine; Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1992) 177-189.