

LEXICAL PRAGMATICS AND BIBLICAL INTERPRETATION

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I. LEXICAL STUDIES IN BIBLICAL INTERPRETATION

The literature on lexical studies in biblical interpretation suggests that words have a range of meaning and the interpreter's task is one of selecting the appropriate sense of the word from among the various available options. The standard NT Greek-English lexicon, *BDAG*, conveniently numbers these interpretive options, with categories and subcategories clearly outlined. In their text on biblical interpretation, Kline, Blomberg, and Hubbard suggest that "[o]nce students have a good feel for the possible meanings of a word, they must select the one that fits best in the passage under study."¹ They go on to affirm that, "*The use of a word in a specific context constitutes the single most crucial criterion for the meaning of a word*"² (emphasis theirs). Likewise, Silva reacts vigorously against the notion that "[c]ontext remains an untrustworthy guide" (quoting Peter Ackroyd),³ preferring to stand with those linguists "who would assign a *determinative* function to context; that is, the context does not merely help us understand meaning—it virtually *makes* meaning."⁴ He recognizes various levels of context (literary and situational) and argues that the smaller contextual circles should be given priority since these will more likely "affect the disputed passage."⁵ Black further observes that "semantic change" occurs when a word appears in a new context and even

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¹ William W. Klein, Craig L. Blomberg, and Robert L. Hubbard, Jr., *Introduction to Biblical Interpretation* (rev. and exp. ed.; Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2003) 257.

² *Ibid.*

³ Peter R. Ackroyd and Barnabas Lindars, *Words and Meanings. Essays Presented to David Winton Thomas* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1968) 6.

⁴ Moisés Silva, *Biblical Words and Their Meaning. An Introduction to Lexical Semantics* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994) 139. Grant Osborne similarly remarks that words "function on the basis of convention and practical use in any language system, and they must be studied descriptively (how they are actually employed) rather than prescriptively (according to preconceived rules)" (*The Hermeneutical Spiral* [Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1991] 75–76). D. A. Carson laments the inattention to contextual considerations when doing word studies: "Perhaps the principal reason why word studies constitute a particularly rich source for exegetical fallacies is that many preachers and Bible teachers know Greek only well enough to use concordances, or perhaps little more. There is little feel for Greek as a language; and so there is the temptation to display what has been learned in study, which as often as not is a great deal of lexical information without the restraining influence of context" (*Exegetical Fallacies* [2d ed.; Carlisle: Paternoster/Grand Rapids: Baker, 1996] 64).

⁵ Silva, *Biblical Words and Their Meaning* 156.

suggests that “expansion or restriction of meaning” takes place. But how does this “expansion or restriction of meaning” occur? And to what extent do contextual and pragmatic (language-in-use) considerations become determinative for word meaning?

The problem of biblical lexicography is not simply that “New Testament lexicons are built upon an incredibly small database of comparative evidence of how biblical words are used in other ancient sources.”⁶ Rather, the contextual influences upon the meaning of words are substantially more significant than the standard lexicons would suggest. The present essay forwards Relevance Theory (RT) as a framework within which we may understand the way words mean in context. The emerging field of lexical *pragmatics*, which explores the way word meaning is modified in use, and the notion of *ad hoc* concept formation provide useful and, indeed, essential perspectives for the interpretation of any communication, including the interpretation of biblical literature. The essay will conclude with a case study in lexical pragmatics on Paul’s use of κύριος (“Lord”) as a Christological title in Phil 2:11.

II. WORDS AND CONCEPTS

1. *Logical, encyclopedic, and lexical entries of concepts.* The relationship between words and concepts lies at the heart of understanding *how* words mean. The sign system or language, the words by which we communicate, is related to the concepts in our mind. Concepts are mental constructs or schemas which are organized or structured together to form what Sperber and Wilson, the founders of RT, call “psychological objects.”⁷ Barsalou states that our concepts are flexible and vary widely “both between and within individuals.” They are also structured hierarchically and exhibit “linguistic vagary.”⁸ Concepts may be said to have an “address or node in memory”⁹ that provides some ordered storage of information and allows for procedural retrieval. These concepts are sometimes labeled “atomic” and should be differentiated from complex concepts which are “structured strings of atomic concepts.”¹⁰

⁶ J. T. Fitzgerald, “Textual Criticism, Languages, and Linguistics,” in *Methods of Biblical Interpretation: Excerpted from the Dictionary of Biblical Interpretation* (foreword Douglas A. Knight; Nashville: Abingdon, 2004) 50.

⁷ Dan Sperber and Deirdre Wilson, *Relevance. Communication and Cognition* (2d ed.; Oxford and Cambridge, MA: Blackwell, 1995) 86. I cannot take on board the full scope of current debates about the nature of concepts. Jerry Fodor’s book, *Concepts: Where Cognitive Science Went Wrong* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), discusses and critiques philosophical, linguistic, and psychological models of concepts. Indeed, Fodor is not without his own critics. See also Eric Margolis and Laurence Stephen, *Concepts: Core Readings* (Cambridge: MIT, 1999); Lawrence W. Barsalou, “Flexibility, Structure, and Linguistic Vagary in Concepts: Manifestations of a Compositional System of Perceptual Symbols,” in *Theories of Memory* (ed. Alan F. Collins et al.; Hove and Hillsdale: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 1993) 29–101.

⁸ Barsalou, “Flexibility, Structure, and Linguistic Vagary in Concept” 30.

⁹ Robyn Carston, *Thoughts and Utterances. The Pragmatics of Explicit Communication* (Malden, Oxford, Victoria and Berlin: Blackwell, 2002) 321; Sperber and Wilson, *Relevance* 86.

¹⁰ Carston, *Thoughts and Utterances* 321.

According to RT, three types of information are stored at the conceptual address: the logical entry, the encyclopedic entry, and the lexical entry. The *logical entry*, according to Sperber and Wilson, “consists of a set of deductive rules, each formally describing a set of input and output assumptions: that is, a set of premises and conclusions.”¹¹ The information contained in the logical entry is relatively small and somewhat consistent across time and culture and between speakers or hearers. Thus it comprises that information which is “essential to that concept”¹² yet it falls short of anything which could be called a definition.¹³ Sperber and Wilson give the example of the logical entry for the concept MOTHER¹⁴, using the elimination rule “(Where X and Y stand for possibly empty strings of constituents): . . .

Mother-elimination rule

Input: (X - mother - Y)

Output: (X - female parent - Y).¹⁵

We should not confuse the logical entry for MOTHER as *female parent* with either its lexical or encyclopedic entries since the logical entry only points to the irreducible properties of the concept, nothing more.¹⁶

The *encyclopedic entry* of a concept, according to Sperber and Wilson, “contains information about its extension and/or denotation: the objects, events and/or properties which instantiate it.”¹⁷ The concept CAT will bring to mind images of cats, including fur and tails and legs and claws. Anatomy and disposition, food preferences and hunting techniques, sounds and sleeping habits are built together in the encyclopedic entry that, to be sure, will expand and modify with time and experience. An encyclopedic entry will contain information which is shared culturally, such as sacred notions in the ancient Egyptian’s concept of CAT, but it may also have elements which cross cultures, such as the patience, stealth, and speed with which cats hunt. One’s encyclopedic entry for CAT will also include idiosyncratic knowledge such as our allergies to cats or a disturbing childhood experience with a nasty clawed cat. Gutt notes that the encyclopedic entry “contains all sorts of information that is incidental to the concept.”¹⁸ As we may suspect, the encyclopedic entry is “open-ended, allowing for the constant addition of

¹¹ Sperber and Wilson, *Relevance* 86.

¹² Ernst-August Gutt, *Translation and Relevance. Cognition and Context* (2d ed.; Manchester and Boston: St. Jerome Press, 2000) 142; Sperber and Wilson, *Relevance* 88.

¹³ Carston, *Thoughts and Utterances* 321. Diane Blakemore adds that “[t]he logical entry for a concept consists of the set of inference rules that apply to propositions of which that concept is a constituent” (*Semantic Constraints on Relevance* [Oxford: Blackwell, 1987] 55–56; also Sperber and Wilson, *Relevance* 89).

¹⁴ The use of capital letters identifies the concept.

¹⁵ Sperber and Wilson, *Relevance* 90.

¹⁶ Carston notes that the logical entry of a concept is, in most cases, inadequate to distinguish it from other concepts. CAT is an ANIMAL OF A CERTAIN KIND, but the same is true of DOG, COW and HORSE (*Thoughts and Utterances* 321).

¹⁷ Sperber and Wilson, *Relevance* 87.

¹⁸ Gutt, *Translation and Relevance* 141.

new information; none of the information they contain is essential for the mastery of the concept, nor is there a point at which an encyclopedic entry could be said to be complete.”¹⁹

All the information which comprises the encyclopedic entry of a concept gathers together at the conceptual address, so for CAT thoughts about purring, sleeping, fur, legs, mice chasing, small bowls of milk, and the like are schematized together. The wonder of cognition is the brain’s ability to organize such encyclopedic knowledge in some coherent and accessible way. The inability to organize conceptual data would constitute insanity. Exactly how this information is organized is a matter of discussion, but such relations are variously understood as schema, frames, scenarios or scripts, analogues, or even mental images.²⁰ There is a “chunkiness” to the encyclopedic entries which allows us to bite into them with ease.

When we access a conceptual address, the conceptual schema of the encyclopedic entry makes available this range of assumptions which are then selectively used in the process of the interpretation of another person’s utterance, that is, the sum of what a person says and implies when she²¹ speaks or writes. But while the conceptual frames of the encyclopedic memory bind together the mutually accessible information of the concept, they are also related to other information which may be mutually attached to other concepts. Part of the conceptual frame of CAT is the “fur” which characterizes the creature, but “fur” also attaches to RABBIT.²²

However, some of the information that is part of the schema of the concept may be more accessible than other pieces. So, if someone in passing mentions the “rough lick of the cat,” we will readily understand that cats lick since our typical cat is usually found doing just that. But the characterization of the cat’s licking as “rough” may require some additional processing effort that will be rewarded when we access a more remote part of the encyclopedic entry for CAT which contains the information that the tongue of these creatures feels like sandpaper. It may be, however, that in a given context in which the anatomy of the digestive system is the topic, the notion of the “rough lick” would be accessible with little effort. The accessibility of encyclopedic information is a function not only of the structure of memory but the context in which an utterance is interpreted.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁰ Sperber and Wilson, *Relevance* 88; Carston, *Thoughts and Utterances* 321, 226–27; Barsalou, “Flexibility, Structure, and Linguistic Vagary in Concept” 41–43; Lawrence W. Barsalou, “Frames, Concepts, and Conceptual Fields,” in *Frames, Fields, and Contrasts: New Essays in Semantic and Lexical Organization* (ed. E. Kittay and A. Lehrer; Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 1992) 21–74.

²¹ In RT, speakers or writers are commonly marked with feminine pronouns while hearers or readers are marked with masculine pronouns.

²² A principle exploited in Laura Joffe Numeroff, *If You Give a Moose a Muffin* (New York: HarperCollins, 1991). Deirdre Wilson and Dan Sperber observe the same: “an utterance mentioning cars makes accessible (to varying degrees) the set of propositions in the encyclopedic entry attached to the concept *car*; these in turn give access to the encyclopedic entries attached to the concepts they contain, and so on indefinitely” (“Inference and Implicature in Utterance Interpretation,” in *Reasoning and Discourse Processes* [ed. Terry Myers et al.; London: Academic, 1986] 249).

In the same way, the encyclopedic entry for the concept ΕΥΓΕΝΗΣ (“NOBLE”) during the NT era included the notions of being well born, possessing wealth, recognition of membership within the social elite, and possessing social respectability. It also brought together the ideas of “noble sentiments, character, morals.”²³ For readers of the NT, the concept NOBLE also includes idiosyncratic information such as the noble character demonstrated by the Jewish inhabitants of Berea as evidenced by their receptivity to the apostolic message (Acts 17:11). Although the broad encyclopedic information regarding the concept ΕΥΓΕΝΗΣ would have been available to the first readers or hearers of Acts, not all of it would have been accessed in the interpretation of Luke’s utterance. They would not have assumed that the Berean Jews were wealthy or members of the social elite of the city.

In addition to their encyclopedic entry, concepts also have a *lexical entry*, that is, “information about the natural-language counterpart of the concept: the word or phrase of natural language which expresses it.”²⁴ This does not mean that the sign system encodes all the information which is available through the encyclopedic entry. According to the classic code model of communication or semiotics, messages are paired with signals by means of a code. To know the code, which is the mutually shared language of the transmitter and receiver, is to understand the message. Any misunderstanding can be accounted for by noise or a lack of adequate understanding of the code employed by the encoder.²⁵ RT, on the other hand, understands communication as a fundamentally inferential process in which the linguistic code supplies evidence of the speaker/writer’s meaning. The code is strong but is itself incapable of fully containing the meaning which a person wishes to communicate.²⁶ A gap exists between sentence meaning and utterance meaning

²³ Ceslas Spicq, *Theological Lexicon of the New Testament* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1994) 2.93–96.

²⁴ Sperber and Wilson, *Relevance* 86.

²⁵ Reddy observes that our tendency is to speak of communication using a “conduit” metaphor: “(1) language functions like a conduit, transferring thoughts bodily from one person to another; (2) in writing and speaking, people insert their thoughts or feelings in the words; (3) words accomplish the transfer by constraining the thoughts or feelings and conveying them to others; and (4) in listening or reading, people extract the thoughts and feelings once again from the words” (Michael J. Reddy, “The Conduit Metaphor: A Case of Frame Conflict in Our Language About Language,” in *Metaphor and Thought* [ed. Andrew Ortony; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993] 168). It could be argued that the code model of communication has been the dominant paradigm in the Western intellectual tradition. Commenting on Western literary studies, for example, Trotter notes that, “From Aristotle to Roland Barthes and beyond, literary criticism has been based on a code model of communication. It has been preoccupied with the encoding and decoding of messages: sometimes in the name of hermeneutics, sometimes in the name of semiology, sometimes in the name of radical scepticism. Although the problem of inference—of what readers *do* with the output of decoding—confronts us at every turn, it lacks an inferential model of communication, and has therefore been reduced, more often than not, to piety or sociology” (David Trotter, “Analyzing Literary Prose: The Relevance of Relevance Theory,” *Lingua* 87 [1992] 11). For a discussion of semiotics and its relation to deconstruction, see Anthony C. Thiselton, *New Horizons in Hermeneutics* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992) 80–141.

²⁶ For a critique of the code model of communication, see Sperber and Wilson, *Relevance* 1–21.

which must be filled by a constrained inferential process if communication is to be successful. As Wilson and Sperber observe, “the linguistically-encoded sentence meaning gives no more than a schematic indication of the speaker’s meaning. The hearer’s task is to use this indication, together with background knowledge, to construct an interpretation of the speaker’s meaning, guided by expectations of relevance raised by the utterance itself.”²⁷

The encyclopedic entries of concepts are triggered by the words of the speaker’s or writer’s utterance. Indeed, the words make the encyclopedic entry accessible while encyclopedic entry is that which provides the meaning of the words which are spoken or written. So when Luke used εὐγενέστεροι (“more noble,” the comparative of εὐγενής, “noble”) to speak of the Bereans, this lexical entry made available to his first readers conceptual information about nobility of birth or character although, as noted above, only part of that information was used in the interpretation of the utterance.

While some concepts may be lexicalized by a single word, such as “cat” which provides access to the concept CAT, some concepts can only be lexicalized via a phrase, such as “best friend.” On the other hand, a particular word may access a variety of different concepts. This is evidently the case when we consider the homonyms “well” (as a hole in the ground from which one may draw water) and “well” (as a state of being). Another example is polysemy where the multiple senses of a word are related. A “model” may be an “‘example to imitate’ and ‘a person who poses for artists,’” both senses being suggested by the utterance, “My sister Rachel has always been a model for me, and so she was for the sculpture class.”²⁸ If you say to your spouse, “Open the bottle,” you may mean “Unscrew the bottle-top,” “Uncork the bottle,” or even, “Saw the bottom off the bottle.” As Sperber and Wilson note, “It is impossible for all of these [concepts] to be listed in the lexicon.”²⁹

2. *Ad hoc concept formation.* Words uttered in a particular context provide access to concept schemas, but in any particular utterance the concepts themselves will shift and morph to such an extent that we should regard concepts, along with their entities, as *ad hoc* constructions.³⁰ There

²⁷ Deirdre Wilson and Dan Sperber, “Truthfulness and Relevance,” *UCL Working Papers in Linguistics* 12 (2000) 268.

²⁸ Carston, *Thoughts and Utterances* 275.

²⁹ Dan Sperber and Deirdre Wilson, “The Mapping between the Mental and the Public Lexicon,” *UCL Working Papers in Linguistics* 9 (1997) 3.

³⁰ Barsalou examines “people’s profoundly creative ability for constructing linguistic descriptions that are relevant in the current context. In our protocol studies of planning, we often found people constructing amazingly *ad hoc* descriptions of attributes. Consider the category of *companions*. One attribute of *companions* that subjects described frequently was *the extent to which a possible companion will want to do the same vacation activities that I will want to do*. After describing this attribute, subjects often evaluated possible companions with respect to it. . . . Clearly, such attributes are context-dependent. In the context of a different event, the attributes described for *companion* . . . might well be different” (“Flexibility, Structure, and Linguistic Vagary in Concept” 48).

may be, on the one hand, a narrowing of the concept in use or, on the other, a broadening of the concept. In the utterance, "All doctors drink," the speaker is using "drink" to lexicalize the concept DRINK* which has to do with consuming alcohol. In this case, "drink" does not mean simply "drink liquid" but the concept has been narrowed to drinking of a particular kind.³¹ On the other hand, a concept may be broadened, as in the statement, "The piece of property was square." In fact, the corner angles were not precisely but only approximately 90 degrees, and each side of the property was nearly, but not exactly, 100 feet. This approximation would be an example of concept broadening.

Concepts may also go through some form of category extension. An example would be the use of metaphors. Mary may be upset by a sharp, critical response to her paper, and someone comments on her agitated state saying, "Mary was boiling." We know Mary well and remember that, at times, she can become quite upset to the point of anger. But the "boiling" in this case is unique, since her paper had been publicly dismissed and she suffered humiliation and shame in the presence of her colleagues, causing her to react in anger toward the one who critiqued her paper. In this case, the concept BOILING* is constructed on the fly, and the only way that one may understand the observation is by knowing the attendant contextual information which is essential for interpretation of the utterance (which may include Mary's preparation, the presence of an august group of listeners, some knowledge of the critical response, an understanding of Mary's character, etc.). This particular metaphorical extension of "boiling" will not be found in any dictionary. Concept extension, however, is not the unique domain of metaphor. The utterance "All doctors drink" could, in a given context, communicate an extended concept which concerns doctors' character or their workload or both. Concept narrowing and extension are not mutually exclusive.

When Luke spoke of the Bereans as εὐγενέστεροι, he accessed the concept EYGENHΣ yet modified it in light of the particular receptivity shown to the gospel by those gathered in the synagogue, resulting in the *ad hoc* concept EYGENHΣ*. Indeed, the translation of the lexeme εὐγενέστεροι in *BDAG*³² as "more open-minded" (similarly, the *NRSV*'s "more receptive") reflects their understanding of Luke's *ad hoc* construction of the concept. The concept EYGENHΣ known to us through in the literature of the era did not include the notion of openness to ideas or receptivity. Luke talks about nobility of character of a particular kind, that being an openness to receive and explore new ideas presented. In this way he engages in concept narrowing in this *ad hoc* construction.

3. *Ad hoc concepts and lexical pragmatics.* Given that concepts are modified in use and are therefore *ad hoc* in nature, we may speak of *lexical*

³¹ Deirdre Wilson, "Relevance and Lexical Pragmatics," *UCL Working Papers in Linguistics* 16 (2004) 344.

³² 404.

pragmatics which studies “the relation between words and the mentally-represented concepts they encode.”³³ Lexical pragmatics starts with the observation that word meaning cannot be narrowed to examination of “literal” meanings since words are merely clues to what a speaker/writer intends to communicate. The process of interpretation is not a simple matter of decoding. Lexical pragmatics “investigates the processes by which linguistically-specified (‘literal’) word meanings are modified in use.”³⁴ While lexical semantics explores the way words encode concepts, lexical pragmatics seeks to understand the ways “the concept communicated by the word often differs from the concept encoded.”³⁵ This gap between the encoded meaning of a lexical item and the meaning someone wishes to communicate in an utterance (the *ad hoc* concept) is bridged by an inferential process which will result in narrowing, broadening, or extension, as noted previously.³⁶

On-line modification of concepts is not an occasional occurrence but rather a characteristic of all communication. These *ad hoc* concepts “are constructed pragmatically by a hearer in the process of utterance comprehension.”³⁷ In other words, while we may speak of schemas for the encyclopedic entry of a concept, we should not assume that these are static entities which are then lexically encoded. The mind is plastic and is able to “construct and use new concepts at a moment’s notice (generally on the model of existing concepts).”³⁸ This process changes our perception of how words mean. When we want to communicate a concept, our lexical choice only provides a bit of evidence, a clue, regarding that which we wish to make known. In the process of interpreting our words, pragmatic processes are in full play. As Carston comments, “While sentences encode thought/proposition templates, words encode concept templates; it’s linguistic underdeterminacy all the way down.”³⁹ In fact, Carston suggests that all concepts are *ad hoc*, “that is, tem-

³³ Deirdre Wilson, “Pragmatic Theory (PLIN M202)” lectures (University College London, Dept. of Phonetics and Linguistics, 2004–2005) 9.5; Enikő Németh T. and Károly Kibok, eds., *Pragmatics and the Flexibility of Word Meaning* (Amsterdam, London, Oxford, New York, Paris, Shannon, and Tokyo: Elsevier, 2001).

³⁴ Wilson, “Relevance and Lexical Pragmatics” 1.

³⁵ *Ibid.*; *idem*, “Pragmatic Theory”; Carston, *Thoughts and Utterances*; Robyn Carston, “Metaphor, *Ad Hoc* Concepts and Word Meaning—More Questions Than Answers,” *UCL Working Papers in Linguistics* 14 (2002) 83–105; Wilson and Sperber, “Truthfulness and Relevance”; Sperber and Wilson, “The Mapping between the Mental and the Public Lexicon.”

³⁶ The approach I am adopting is at variance with the rather robust encoding proposed by Generative Lexicon Theory. See James Pustejovsky, *The Generative Lexicon* (Cambridge and London: MIT, 1995); James Pustejovsky and Branimir Boguraev, eds., *Lexical Semantics. The Problem of Polysemy* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1996); James Pustejovsky, “The Semantics of Lexical Underspecification,” *Folia Linguistica* 32 (1998) 322–63; and the responses by Anthony Hunter and Lutz Marten, “Context Sensitive Reasoning with Lexical and Word Knowledge,” *SOAS Working Papers in Linguistics* 9 (1999) 373–86; Jerry A. Fodor and Ernie Lepore, “The Emptiness of the Lexicon. Critical Reflections on J. Pustejovsky’s The Generative Lexicon,” *Linguistic Inquiry* 2 (1998) 269–88.

³⁷ Carston, *Thoughts and Utterances* 322.

³⁸ Wilson, “Pragmatic Theory” 9.8.

³⁹ Carston, *Thoughts and Utterances* 360.

porary constructs arising for specific purposes at particular times.⁴⁰ Even in biblical literature, the dynamic of *ad hoc* concept formation is fully in play, giving interpreters acute challenges as they seek to understand the meaning of the biblical authors' utterances. In this process, the determinative factor of context is much greater than is sometimes realized.

4. *The constraints imposed by relevance.* This linguistic underdeterminacy does not destabilize meaning and give way to freeplay.⁴¹ The process of bridging the gap between sentence meaning and utterance meaning, and here between the concept encoded by the word and the *ad hoc* concept it expresses, is constrained by the principle of relevance.⁴² Communication creates the general expectation of relevance, that is, when someone communicates the person addressed expects that the input ostensibly communicated is worth processing and that some benefit will be gained at the expense of processing effort. Wilson notes that communicators attempt to "predict, at least to some extent, what stimuli an addressee is likely to attend to, and what contextual assumptions he is likely to use in processing it, and what conclusions he is likely to draw."⁴³ On the other side, "The addressee takes the linguistically decoded meaning: following the path of least effort, he enriches it at the explicit level and complements it at the implicit level until the resulting interpretation meets his expectations of relevance; at which point he stops."⁴⁴ That which is relevant is information that produces cognitive effects by strengthening, modifying, or contradicting existing assumptions.⁴⁵ As secondary readers of the biblical text, we ask questions regarding which assumptions both the author and readers could have supplied.

⁴⁰ Ibid. 362, 367, n. 1. She asks, "Could it be that the word 'happy' does not encode a concept, but rather 'points' to a conceptual region, or maps to an address (or node, or gateway, or whatever) in memory?" (*Thoughts and Utterances* 360). Coming at the issue from the side of cognitive psychology, Barsalou similarly states that "a perceptual view of concepts explains the daunting problems surrounding linguistic vagary. . . . linguistic vagary simply reflects the fact that perceptual symbols—not linguistic symbols—constitute the cores of concepts" ("Flexibility, Structure, and Linguistic Vagary in Concept" 50).

⁴¹ "The fact that any sentence, if thought of as an authorless string of material signifiers, taken out of context—or rather, transposed into a variety of contexts—can have a wide range of potential meanings, does not entail that language is unstable or that all understanding is necessarily aberrant, because every instance of language use and understanding takes place within a particular context. We focus our attention on what seems to be the most relevant information, and construct a context that seems to maximise relevance, which enables us to disregard the plainly irrelevant linguistic possibilities that, in the abstract, could destabilise any particular spoken utterance or written sentence" (Ian MacKenzie, *Paradigms of Reading. Relevance Theory and Deconstruction* [Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002] 196).

⁴² See especially Sperber and Wilson, *Relevance*, and for a summary, Deirdre Wilson and Dan Sperber, "Relevance Theory," in *The Handbook of Pragmatics* (ed. Laurence R. Horn and Gregory Ward; Oxford: Blackwell, 2004) 607–32.

⁴³ Wilson, "Relevance and Lexical Pragmatics" 16.

⁴⁴ Ibid. 17.

⁴⁵ Wilson and Sperber explain this notion simply: "When is an input relevant? Intuitively, an input (a sight, a sound, an utterance, a memory) is relevant to an individual when it connects

In the process of communication the speaker or writer expects that the hearer or reader, on the basis of the code and accessible contextual information from the physical environment, the discourse, and a person's encyclopedic memory, will engage in reference assignment ("He is late," where "he" refers to John, not Sam), disambiguation ("She sat by the bank," where "bank" is edge of a river and not a financial institution), and enrichment ("You're too late," that is, to get on the train as opposed to all the other things one might be too late for). These are the explicatures: the code and all the pragmatically inferred information related to it. Explicit information goes well beyond that which is encoded. Decisions regarding who "he" is, which "bank" is in mind, and that for which someone is "late" are inferred on the basis of the available input from the code and the context. The relevant contextual information that is accessed in the interpretation is that which produces a cognitive benefit for the processing effort invested. The hearer may also recover implicatures that are not tied to the linguistic code. A speaker may say, "It's three o'clock," by which she means, "It is too late to catch the train" in the context of the implicated premise that the train pulls into the station at 2:45. Again, the implicated assumptions and conclusions are part of what is communicated, but not just any assumptions will do. The search for relevance constrains this process. Understanding an utterance includes the recovery of both explicatures and implicatures, a process in which pragmatic forces are in full play. This model of communication identifies "context" as that information which is relevant for the interpretation of an utterance—it is not all the information "out there." It is rather a subset of a person's cognitive environment. Therefore the interpretation of a particular word is a process that is more complex than simply examining the possible meanings of a word and selecting the one which seems to fit best in the passage we are examining.

III. LEXICAL PRAGMATICS AND "WORD STUDIES"

1. *Lexicons and lexical pragmatics.* Word meaning is not independent of the context in which the words are uttered and, as argued, is constructed *ad hoc* in communication. New senses are always being constructed on-line. While words are a public good, we cannot assume that the concepts they communicate are the same for all users, and, yet, communication is successful due to the constraints imposed by the search for relevance.⁴⁶ What does this then mean for our "word studies?" How will a shift to lexical pragmatics modify our approach to lexicons and theological dictionaries? Would or should our practices be changed in any way? In the first instance, adopting the

with background information he has available to yield conclusions that matter to him: say, by answering a question he had in mind, improving his knowledge on a certain topic, settling a doubt, confirming a suspicion, or correcting a mistaken impression. In relevance-theoretic terms, an input is relevant to an individual when its processing in a context of available assumptions yields a positive cognitive effect." Wilson and Sperber, "Relevance Theory" 607.

⁴⁶ Sperber and Wilson, "The Mapping Between the Mental and the Public Lexicon" 18.

perspectives of lexical pragmatics will, indeed, be a strong counter to what Barr dubbed the “illegitimate totality transfer.”⁴⁷ *Ad hoc* concept construction occurred when the biblical authors wrote, and we would not expect every meaning of κύριος (“Lord”) to be present when Paul uttered κύριος Ἰησοῦς Χριστός (“Jesus Christ is Lord,” Phil 2:11). By the same token, word meaning cannot be determined by etymology or examination of the root of any particular word, since words provide evidence of concepts which are being modified and constructed on-line. Barr’s cautions have become axiomatic, and no commentator worth their salt would dare engage such practices in the exegesis and exposition of the biblical text apart from any consideration of lexical pragmatics.

However, texts on interpretation commonly refer to the “semantic range” of a word, assuming that the biblical authors selected from a set menu of concepts when writing and that the task of the interpreter is to know the range and to select the meaning which best suits a text. Kline, Blomberg, and Hubbard direct the interpreter to “[d]etermine the range of meaning for the word” as a first step in interpretation. “The first part of this step,” they say, “involves research into *lexicons* to determine the range of meaning the word had at the time of the author.” The interpreter then makes the appropriate selection: “Weighing these possible meanings of the word in light of the train of thought in the immediate context and the historical background enables the interpreter to make a preliminary selection of the best English translation.”⁴⁸ The assumption upon which this approach rests is that there exists a stable set of concepts which are encoded and which may be neatly categorized. However, as in the case with the example “Open the bottle,” *ad hoc* concept formation comes into play to such a degree that the lexicon falls far short of telling us if the appeal is to uncork, unscrew, saw open or hit the bottle with a hammer. Perhaps the bottle is made of wax and contains the kind of sweet liquid children enjoy, in which case “Open the bottle” would mean to bite the top off!⁴⁹ Yet this information is an essential part of the meaning of the speaker’s utterance which must be recovered if communication is to be successful.⁵⁰ In the same way, the meaning of Paul’s confession κύριος Ἰησοῦς Χριστός cannot be determined by a simple lexical survey of the semantic range and choosing the meaning of the terms which seems best suited.

2. *An example from Philippians 2:11.* What did Paul mean by the confession κύριος Ἰησοῦς Χριστός, and how would the Philippians have understood

⁴⁷ Barr, *Semantics of Biblical Language* 168.

⁴⁸ Klein, Blomberg, and Hubbard, *Introduction to Biblical Interpretation* 247; Osborne, *The Hermeneutical Spiral* 81–83.

⁴⁹ “But when we try to think about the general concept OPEN and to have a thought in which such a general concept features opposed to any of the more specific concepts that we grasp in understanding ‘open one’s mouth,’ ‘open the window,’ ‘open a can,’ ‘open a discussion,’ etc., the experience is an odd one, as we seem to have no definite thought at all” (Carston, *Thoughts and Utterances* 361).

⁵⁰ RT understands that the goal of interpretation is to work out the interpretation to the best possible explanation.

him? The semantic range of κύριος in *BDAG*⁵¹ is organized under two categories: “① one who is in charge by virtue of possession, *owner*” and “② one who is in a position of authority, *lord, master*.” These are then broken down into subcategories so that under ② the main classifications are: “a. of earthly beings, as a designation of any pers. of high position” and “b. of transcendent being.” Category b. further classifies the use of κύριος in NT passages as “α. a designation of God”; “β. Closely connected w. the custom of applying the term κ. to deities is that of honoring (deified) rulers with the same title”; and “γ. κύριος is also used in ref. to Jesus.” Philippians 2:11 is listed under a further subdivision of this final category: “λ. Even in the passages already mentioned the use of the word κ. raises Jesus above the human level” and, with specific reference to this passage, *BDAG* says, “‘Jesus is κύριος’ . . . is the confession of the (Pauline) Christian church.” Is it sufficient to say that the concept Paul communicates by κύριος in Phil 2:11 is that Jesus is raised “above the human level” and that here we have “the confession of the (Pauline) Christian church”? Or is the apostle constructing an *ad hoc* concept which, while drawing upon encyclopedic entry of the concept ΚΥΡΙΟΣ, makes a unique claim?

The confession of Phil 2:11 is indeed one of the places in the NT where we hear the fundamental confession of the church, as in Rom 10:9 and 1 Cor 12:3. We may assume that the Philippian church was familiar with and even repeated the confession (Phil 1:2; 3:20; 4:23), having heard and learned Paul’s own confession (Phil 3:8). But unique in Phil 2:11 is the claim that the confession will become universal (πᾶσα γλῶσσα, “every tongue”). Paul combines here the common confession of the Christian community with the Isaianic proclamation of the universal reign of God celebrated in Isa 45:23 (LXX): ὅτι ἐμοὶ κάμψει πᾶν γόνυ καὶ ἐχομολογήσεται πᾶσα γλῶσσα τὸν θεόν (“For before me every knee will bow and every tongue will confess [or praise] God”). The Isaianic passage (45:22–25) is a call for “all the ends of the earth” (a reference to Gentiles in Isa 49:6 and Acts 13:47) to turn to Yahweh and be saved, since he alone is God and there is no other. In the Pauline construction of the concept, Christ becomes the one who has universal rule as Lord, and in evoking Isa 45:23 he makes an unequivocal affirmation of Christ’s divinity (cf. Isa 45:22b; and Rom 14:11).

At the same time, the confession from Isaiah undergoes a further modification as the call to turn to Yahweh for salvation is substituted for an affirmation of Christ’s triumph and rule over all other authorities (Phil 2:9–10, “Therefore God also highly exalted him and gave him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bend, in heaven and on earth and under the earth,” NRSV). This does not appear to be a willful and joyous submission in all cases but the final acknowledgment of his universal reign.⁵²

⁵¹ 576–79.

⁵² Peter T. O’Brien, *The Epistle to the Philippians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans/Carlisle: Pater-noster, 1991) 249–50; Ralph P. Martin, *Carmen Christi. Philippians 2:5–11 in Recent Interpretation and in the Setting of Early Christian Worship* (2d ed.; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1983) 262–64; Moisés Silva, *Philippians* (2d ed.; Grand Rapids: Baker, 2005) 111–12.

This poetic account of Christ's humiliation and exaltation also comes in the midst of a hortatory section in Philippians where Paul seeks to arrest the division in the church which tears at the fabric of Christian friendship (Phil 1:27–2:18). Paul calls the Philippians to the *imitatio Christi* over against acting in “selfish ambition or conceit” and looking after one’s “own interests.” The recognition that the one who is Lord over all is the very one who humbled himself, even unto death, adjusts the confession of the lordship of Jesus Christ even further, this time from the immediate literary context. Indeed, Paul presents a series of figures who are examples of self-sacrificial service, including himself (Phil 1:12–26), Timothy (Phil 2:19–24), and Epaphroditus (Phil 2:25–30). The κύριος who humbles himself is another dimension of the *ad hoc* concept Paul constructs and communicates.

Moreover, the paragraph preceding the affirmation of Christ's humiliation and exaltation (Phil 1:27–30) taps into the Philippians concerns about being persecuted by their opponents. Such people will meet destruction. So the exaltation of the κύριος over all powers would include those who opposed the church. The confession that “Jesus Christ is Lord” evokes the concept that he is Lord over the Philippians' opponents.

Paul communicates the complexity of the *ad hoc* concept KYPIOS*, relying upon the readers or hearer of this letter to do more than decode the term. In evoking the conceptual schema of LORD he creates the *ad hoc* concept LORD*. The concept LORD* embraces notions of Christ's divinity, universal rule, triumph over all other authorities and their submission to him, his exaltation over those who oppose the church and his self-humbling. This combination of conceptual information is unique to the passage in Philippians and cannot be completely understood with reference to the semantic range of κύριος found in *BDAG*.

IV. CONCLUSION

Given the pragmatic forces at play, we should not hold to the notion that the proper procedure for undertaking lexical studies is simply to examine the possible meanings of a term and chose the best option given the context in which it is found. In utterance interpretation certain meanings of words are not merely “called up” in discourse but are rather modified and constructed in discourse. For this reason our emphasis in lexical studies should not be upon encoded concepts but on pragmatically inferred concepts. Such an approach calls to the field of play our keenest observations about the discourse and the shared encyclopedic knowledge of the writer and first readers or hearers. This will include information which is both canonical (as in the case of Isa 45:23) and non-canonical, without prioritizing one of these over another. Context is all that information, whatever its source, which supplies the necessary assumptions in the process of utterance interpretation. The available information is explored and received or rejected on the basis of the cognitive principle of relevance. Would the information yield cognitive effects at the expenditure of appropriate processing effort?

This does not suggest that the meaning of words is indeterminate. Words point to concept schemas which, in turn, are modified in use in accordance

with the intentions of the speaker or writer (ostensive communication) and are inferred by the hearer or reader (inferential communication). Our lexicons are therefore only general surveys and should not be viewed as a promise box from which we take our word for the day. The words they discuss are addresses for general schemas, "a package (or packages) of information," but no more than that. As with all conceptual schemas, "We dip into this package and take out just a part of it. The process is always selective, there is always some subset of the activated information which is left behind or discarded, whether the ultimate upshot is one of narrowing or a broadening."⁵³ All words can achieve is to make available the schemas which are the stuff from which *ad hoc* concepts are constructed. Lexical pragmatics affirms the attempts by biblical commentators to explore the implicatures and the explicatures of the language as they seek to interpret Scripture.

⁵³ Carston, *Thoughts and Utterances* 361–62.