

Syllabus

(Avram) Naom Chomsky, the founder of transformational or generative grammar, revolutionized the study of linguistics. In his view, language is the performance of a universal innate ability possessed by humans. Though human language is a highly complex and abstract manipulation of symbols, by the age of three most children are able to use it successfully for the purposes of ordinary communication. This profound ability is somewhat deceptive, in that few individuals come to recognize the ambiguities and preconceptions that are part of all communication.

The complexity of communication increases when dealing with historical documents, such as the Bible, or abstract ideas, such as theology. For this reason there is much disagreement over “what the Bible says,” and over our concepts of the person of God and his relationship to the world.

Computers have come to the aid of virtually every aspect of modern life, and the study of the Bible is no exception. Various original texts, ancient versions, many translations of the Bible, and a great variety of Biblical tools for exegesis are readily available on relatively affordable or even free programs. These have the capability of searching and comparing texts for words and syntactical constructions. They make possible grammatical and textual analysis, the development of word meanings, and associated concepts. As with any technology, this can be very helpful, or it can produce errors on a much grander scale.

The *goal of this course* is to provide a basic knowledge of the complex factors that enable the function of communication. This includes an analysis of the paradigmatic and syntagmatic relationships of words, as well as the various literary and social factors that are essential to conveying meaning. This knowledge is essential to all reading of Scripture. It is critical to understanding linguistic development of words, the structures of sentences and paragraphs, and the development of concepts within the Bible. All these factors of communication contribute to an understanding of Biblical theology, its application to contemporary questions in a Systematic Theology, and an ability to incorporate these in life as “doers of the word and not hearers only.”

Texts

Grant Osborne, *The Hermeneutical Spiral: A Comprehensive Introduction to Biblical Interpretation*, Downer's Grove: InverVarsity Press, 1991.

Moisés Silva, *Biblical Words and Their Meaning*, Revised and Expanded Edition, Zondervan, 1994.

James K. A. Smith, *Who's Afraid of Post Modernism?* Baker Academic, 2006.

Course Schedule and Requirements

1. *Lexical Semantics*

1.1 Required Readings

- (1) Silva, *Biblical Words and their Meaning*, Part 2, Descriptive Semantics.
- (2) Osborne, *The Hermeneutical Spiral*, Semantics (chapter 3).

1.2 Class Exercises

- (1) A study of *nomos* in Romans and Galations.
- (2) A study of the Hebrew and Greek words translated righteous/righteousness in Genesis, Isaiah (*sedeq/saddiq/sedeqah*) and Romans *dikaioi/dikaioisune*.
- (3) Review of study on prison in Scripture.

1.3 Written Assignment (25%; due Feb. 3)

Do a study of a semantic domain of your choice in which you select a cluster of words related to a concept, whether theological (e.g. righteousness) or referential (e.g. prison). Your study and comparison of the use of these terms would include metaphorical extensions. For example, how does the term “father” as understood in family relations help us understand what it means for God to be father of the Israelites (Isa. 1:2) or our father in heaven (Matt. 6:9)? You will wish to use Theological Dictionaries as an aid to the development of your project.

2. Formal Analysis

2.1 Required Readings

- (1) Tremper Longman III, “Form Criticism, Recent Developments in Genre Theory and the Evangelical,” *WTJ* 47 (1985) 46-67.
- (2) Osborne, *The Hermeneutical Spiral*, Part 2.

2.2 Class Exercises

- (1) Poems: Analysis of Proverbs 23:29-35; Ps. 74.
- (2) Palistrophe: Analysis of Amos 5:1-17.
- (3) Parables: Matthew 13.

2.3 Written Assignment (25%; February 24)

Choose a unit of scripture (from a poem to a book) and analyze it for its contexts (historical, social and literary), genre, semantics, and meaning. Show the goals of the author and his method in conveying his message to his audience in his time.

3. Determining Meaning

3.1 Required Readings

- (1) Osborne, *The Hermeneutical Spiral*, Appendix 1
- (2) James K. A. Smith, *Who's Afraid of Post Modernism?*

3.2 Class Exercises

- (1) Review of author, text, reader, and ideological approaches to interpretation.
- (2) The Ten Commandments for today.

3.3 Written Assignment (25%; due March 17)

Explain how Derrida, Lyotard, and Foucault have responded to modernism and how the demise of modernism is a positive development in Scripture interpretation. Evaluate the contributions that literary criticism and deconstructions have made to understanding texts, and the dangers they may pose.

4. Determining Significance

4.1 Required Readings

- (1) Osborne, *The Hermeneutical Spiral*, Appendix 2.
- (2) Kevin Vanhoozer, "Lost in Interpretation? Truth, Scripture and Hermeneutics," *JETS* 48 (2005) 89-114.

4.2 Written Requirement (25%; due April 14)

Take a difference of doctrine or interpretation that is distinct to your church denomination or some significant person in your life in comparison to other viewpoints (e.g. eschatology of Israel, baptism, gifts of Spirit, women in ministry, etc.). Show how hermeneutical questions are critical to establishing different positions. Explain what prevents this issue from being resolved, and what would be necessary to move the issue to resolution.

Computer Bibles

Computer Bibles enable the user to search Biblical texts using the original languages and translations. They can include a great variety of helps such as lexicons, other ancient texts, and a great variety of reference works. The following list is an annotated sampling of computer Bibles. All these programs come in various editions of accompanying tools and databases.

1. BibleWorks

Bible works is recommended for advanced Biblical studies students wishing to have full access to searching all original languages of the Bible in morphologically tagged texts. The Biblical texts do not include the text critical apparatuses. Its databases include a vast variety of translations in several major languages (French, German, Spanish, Italian), both modern and older. Available modules include the Targumim, Pehitta, Flavius Josephus, Koehler-Baumgartner-Stamm (unabridged 4th edition), and Qumran Sectarian Manuscripts. The program is windows based, easy to install, but requires some learning to do the more complex syntactical searches. It is a very cost effective program.

2. Stuttgart Electronic Study Bible

This Bible has all the tools of BibleWorks, but allows the student more syntactic search options. Access to the text critical databases is simple through a pop up window. The texts are managed through the powerful Libronix Digital Library, allowing the user to search for words, phrases or clauses, and to specify morphological and grammatical criteria such as parts of speech, noun or verb forms, stems, and functions. Syntactical searches are of course limited to the extent that the databases of the base texts are complete.

3. Logos Bible Software

Logos is a vast resource of Biblical materials that boasts up to 10,000 books. Logos employs the same Libronix Digital Library search engine as the Stuttgart Electronic Study Bible. It is remarkably user friendly, with powerful capabilities in search presentations of word relationships, correlating the various versions. It can search the libraries for related information. Data can be transmitted to an i-phone. It is costly in the higher editions (over \$1000), but it ranks at the very top in capability and resources.

4. Accordance

Accordance was developed for the Macintosh computer, and has won rave reviews for sophisticated searches and grammatical analysis. Biblical related texts available with morphological tagging include the Mishna and Pseudepigrapha, Targums, Inscriptions, Qumran and Apostolic fathers. Various teaching tools including theological dictionaries, atlases, bible

dictionaries, as well as Jewish and Catholic collections are available. A Macintosh Emulator allows the program to run on windows platforms.

5. Quickverse

Quickverse is recommended as a Bible concordance and associated tools for most Biblical studies students who are not involved in analysis of grammar and syntax, or literary and stylistic comparisons. It can be purchased with a variety of Bible resources. Its maps are reputed as among the best in computer Bibles.

Bibliography

An annotated bibliography of aids for Biblical interpretation is found in Michael J. Gorman, *Elements of Biblical Exegesis: A Basic Guide for Students and Ministers* (Hendrikson Publishers, 2001), 147-193 (chapter eleven). This includes nine sections, the last being a section of bibliographic entries which can be consulted for further references on particular topics. Section six has a subdivision of "Handbooks and Other Works on Detailed Textual Analysis," which includes several texts particularly germane to the subject matter of this syllabus.

For a review of interpretive developments in the Roman Catholic tradition, and the effect of the Second Vatican Council to Scripture studies, see Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *The Interpretation of Scripture: In Defense of the Historical-Critical Method* (New York: Paulist, 2008).