

## **Discourse Analysis: Its History, Tenets, and Application in Evangelical Biblical Scholarship**

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In historical terms, Discourse Analysis (DA) is the new kid on the block. Though its antecedents can be traced from ancient times, the field that is now called Discourse Analysis only truly developed into a coherent school in the last half of the twentieth century. Because of this, DA is very much a still-developing discipline and its usefulness is still being discovered. This paper is an attempt to provide an introduction into the history and basic tenets of DA. This is a difficult task because of the broad and varied nature of the discipline. Teun van Dijk has written that DA cannot refer to single theory or method, “instead, it designates any work in language science devoted to the text as the primary object of inquiry.”<sup>1</sup> This definition is unsatisfactory, not only because of its lack of clarity as to praxis, but also because of the vague nature of the term “text.” As we will see below, part of what defines DA is its definition of what constitutes a text. Once this question is answered, one is still left with the question of what to do with such a text. What further complicates an introduction to Discourse Analysis is that it has been influenced by a variety of fields, including anthropology, sociology, literary and rhetorical analysis, psycho-linguistics, computational linguistics, sociolinguistics, and philosophical linguistics.<sup>2</sup>

Generally speaking, Discourse Analysis is a field of study that examines the way in which a text communicates an intended message between a sender (speaker/writer) and receiver (hearer/reader). It analyzes how language is used, not at the word or sentence level, but at the

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<sup>1</sup> Robert-Alain de Beaugrande and Wolfgang Ulrich Dressler, *Introduction to Text Linguistics* (London: Longman, 1981), 14.

<sup>2</sup> Stanley Porter, “Discourse Analysis and New Testament Studies: An Introductory Survey,” in *Discourse Analysis and Other Topics in Biblical Greek*, ed. Stanley E. Porter and D.A. Carson. Journal for the Study of the New Testament Supplement Series 113 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1995), 20.

level of discourse, which can be various sizes. It understands language and discourse as human acts to communicate messages within a specific communicative context. DA attempts to analyze *how* such messages are communicated, both in the sending and the receiving. The way in which this is done may vary, as we will see below, but it is ultimately a study of linguistics. Because of this, DA is often referred to a Text Linguistics or Discourse Linguistics.

Admittedly, the above definition of DA is general and unnuanced. Its intent is to provide the reader with first step into the field. The following discussion will go into more detail and hopefully help the reader make better sense of the discipline. However, it is impossible in the space of this paper to explore all areas and implications of Discourse Analysis. As such, I will limit myself to a narrow examination. First, this paper will outline a brief history of the development of DA. Second, it will examine a few of the basic principles on which DA is built. Finally, there will be a discussion of how DA is used in biblical studies and an evaluation of the field in light of evangelical thought.

### **The Development of Discourse Analysis**

Because of the variety of fields with which Discourse Analysis interacts, the history of its development is diverse. Any historical interest in the text (whether its form or function) as a whole would serve as a development in Discourse Analysis. Though I cannot here provide a complete discussion of the development of discourse analysis, a study of its development can help the reader better understand it. By discovering the focus of the discipline (or disciplines as the case may be for such a diverse subject), the reader can better understand its function. It should be noted that this section will concern itself with only a general history of discourse analysis. A discussion concerning the discipline's use in biblical studies will come later in this paper.

The central theme in its history is its focus on the text, or on larger units of meaning than simple clauses or words. Such a focus is not new; indeed, from the ancient Greeks and Romans, through the Middle Ages, and into the present there has been an interest in the text, most obvious in the ancient study of rhetoric, defined by Aristotle as, “the art of discovering the best possible means of persuasion in regard to any subject whatever.”<sup>3</sup> Further, the first century AD also saw a rise in Stylistics, which focused on the study of styles, which result from “the characteristic selection of options for producing a text or set of texts.”<sup>4</sup>

### Toward an Interest in the Whole Text

Much of DA has developed from the field of linguistics, not just rhetoric and stylistics. As linguistic study developed, investigation was generally limited to the sentence as the largest unit of meaning. De Saussure, for example, is often credited with beginning modern, general linguistics, but his focus was only on the sentence.<sup>5</sup> This approach tended to be structuralist, as modern linguistics concerned itself with minimal units of meaning: morphemes (form), phonemes (sounds), and syntagmemes<sup>6</sup> (word order), where each unit was still distinct from the other. This focus is most visible in the development of grammars, which have often focused on morphemes and syntax, but not on larger units of discourse.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Grant R. Osborne, *The Hermeneutical Spiral: A Comprehensive Introduction to Biblical Interpretation* (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 1991), 35. For further discussion on the development of rhetoric, see Osborne, 121-124.

<sup>4</sup> de Beaugrande and Dressler, 16.

<sup>5</sup> So also with Bloomfield and Chomsky. Walter Bodine, “Discourse Analysis of Biblical Literature: What it Offers,” in *Discourse Analysis of Biblical Literature* ed. Walter Bodine. The Society of Biblical Literature Semeia Studies (Atlanta, GA: Scholars, 1995) 2.

<sup>6</sup> de Beaugrande and Dressler, 20.

<sup>7</sup> Bodine, 2.

In response to the narrow focus of structuralism, which does not seem to account for many of the social and contextual aspects of language and communication, there arose a greater appreciation for and interest in “ordinary language.” Vanhoozer notes the rise in the mid-twentieth century of a school of thought that believed “language can only be understood in the situation and circumstances of its use.”<sup>8</sup> J.L. Austin studied the limits in the study of syntax, insisting that there is a performative aspect to much communication. For Austin, language and actions are in many ways inseparable, leading to the development of a “speech-act theory.”<sup>9</sup> He distinguished between the *locutionary* (speaking the words), *illocutionary* (what is being done by speaking the words—greeting, commanding, etc.) and *perlocutionary* (what is accomplished by speech) functions of words used in communication.<sup>10</sup> John Searle built on this, positing a comprehensive typology of all speech.<sup>11</sup> In his view, “[s]peaking a language is engaging in a (highly complex) rule-governed form of behavior. To learn and master a language is . . . to learn and to have mastered these rules.”<sup>12</sup>

Other areas of study have also had a large influence on the development of Discourse Analysis. Anthropological study has explored texts as cultural artifacts, and has studied language as a *human* activity—the human aspect being what gives the communication meaning. It has also used Tagmatics, which looks beyond the boundaries of the sentence and text at the complexities

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<sup>8</sup> Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *Is There a Meaning in This Text? The Bible, The Reader, and the Morality of Literary Knowledge* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1998), 208. For a more detailed discussion, see Vanhoozer’s own, p. 207-214.

<sup>9</sup> Jeffery T. Reed, *A Discourse Analysis of Philippians: Method and Rhetoric in the Debate Over Literary Integrity*. Journal for the Study of the New Testament Supplement Series 136 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1997), 20.

<sup>10</sup> Vanhoozer, 209.

<sup>11</sup> “There are, he says, five basic things we do with language: ‘We tell people how things are, we try to get them to do things, we commit ourselves to doing things, we express our feelings and attitudes [*sic*] and we bring about changes through our utterances. Often we do more than one of these at once in the same utterance.’” *Ibid.*, 209.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 210

of human interaction. Tagmatics have been useful in describing languages of which the investigator has no previous knowledge. Here, anthropologists are able to get the native speaker to perform certain *types* of utterances, the context of which allows the researcher to discover meaning.<sup>13</sup> Sociology has contributed by its analysis of conversation as a social instrument used for organization and interaction. Particularly relevant is its insight in how people adapt language to certain situations—originally called discourse analysis.<sup>14</sup> Philology has also contributed to discourse analysis in its study of the evolution and organization of language sounds and forms.<sup>15</sup>

### Discourse Analysis in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century

The following is a brief outline of some of the most influential works developed the methodology of Discourse Analysis in the field of linguistics. The first major work of text organization (in what could be called discourse) was done by Ronald Harweg in 1968; it was entitled *Pronomina und Textkonstitution*. In it, Harweg suggested the principle of substitution, by which expressions follow one another with the same sense or reference, thereby forming a relationship between them.<sup>16</sup> Another study, done at the University of Konstanz, showed that a “text grammar” (focused on an explanation of how individual words function) differed more significantly from “sentence grammar” (focused on an explanation of how words functioned together) than was initially supposed. This led some to wonder if a grammar for the hearer (reader) should be developed, since the hearer approaches the message differently than the reader: that is, the speaker (writer) starts with meaning and then gives that meaning structure; the hearer (reader) starts with the structure and tries to discover meaning. Out of this understanding

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<sup>13</sup> de Beaugrande and Dressler, 18-19.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 19.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 20.

<sup>16</sup> Bodine, 3; de Beaugrande and Dressler, 22.

developed a “Text Structure/World-Structure Theory” (TeSWeST), which is based on the premise that a knowledge of how the world works accompanies the reader’s interaction with the text and informs his reading.<sup>17</sup>

In 1972, Teun van Dijk wrote *Some Aspects of Text Grammar*, which studied both literary and poetic texts, showing that they did not follow what would be considered the normal rules of grammar. He concluded that there must be some sort of “literary operations” applied to sound, syntax, and meaning. These were addition, deletion, and permutation, and were present in the text to allow the main idea to be extracted. Concerning the main idea, van Dijk developed the concept of macrostructure, which is a large idea of the whole discourse that shows up in the sentence and lower structure.<sup>18</sup> As the discipline came into its own, analysts began producing textbooks dedicated to Discourse Analysis as a study in and of itself. The two most notable examples are Brown and Yule’s *Discourse Analysis* and de Beaugrande and Dressler’s *Introduction to Text Linguistics*. Each of these works share a focus on the basic principles of Discourse Analysis, as discussed in the section below.

### **Basic Principles of Discourse Analysis**

It bears repeating that the field of Discourse Analysis (or Text Linguistics) is varied, and to present a comprehensive discussion of its various methodologies would fall well beyond the scope of a simple paper. However, this section will seek to outline the basic underlying philosophy and approach that Discourse Analysts have in common.

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<sup>17</sup> deBeaugrande and Dressler, 25; Bodine, 4.

<sup>18</sup> Bodine, 4; deBeaugrande and Dressler, 26.

## Communication as a Personal Event

In many ways, Discourse Analysis is hard to define, since it is relatively new and is still a developing discipline.<sup>19</sup> However, the following definitions are illustrative of its central focus. Jeffery Reed defines it as 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.”<sup>20</sup> Gillian Brown and George Yule define it as a study of how “humans use language to communicate and, in particular, how addressers construct linguistic messages for addressees and how addressees work on linguistic message in order to interpret them.”<sup>21</sup> Such communication could be either spoken or written.<sup>22</sup> Note the focus in both of these definitions on both aspects of the communicative process: the speaker/writer and the hearer/reader. The analyst is not solely concerned with the way the writer has chosen his words and expressed his meaning, but the way in which the reader receives and decodes the message. This approach puts the speaker and the hearer at the center of the communication process. It is *people* who communicate and have purpose and message; they are the ones encode and decode—Discourse Analysis evaluates linguistics and discourse, but not apart from people. Analysis of discourse, then, is an

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<sup>19</sup> Porter, 18; cf. Christo H.J. van der Merwe, “Discourse Linguistics and Biblical Hebrew Grammar,” in *Biblical Hebrew and Discourse Linguistics*, ed. Robert D. Bergen (Dallas: Summer Institute of Linguistics, 1994), 13

<sup>20</sup> Reed, 16.

<sup>21</sup> Gillian Brown and George Yule, *Discourse Analysis* (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1983), ix.

<sup>22</sup> Discourse linguists observe that there are several differences between spoken and written discourse. For instance, spoken discourse is generally less structured syntactically, less explicit, shorter, and simpler. Spoken discourse is more likely to follow a topic-comment structure (e.g. “The rain; do you think it is going to stop soon?”) as opposed to a subject-predicate structure (“Do you think that this rain is going to stop soon?”). Further, spoken discourse is more likely to use more general vocabulary, use gesture to identify referent, and use fillers (e.g. well, er, um, you know, like). *Ibid.*, 15-17.

“analysis of discourse in use,” which cannot be separated from the purposes and functions of use in *human* interaction.<sup>23</sup>

The human element in language instills in the communicative act meaning that might move beyond a simple analysis of the words in use. In this, DA recognizes that communication is a personal event. That is to say, the human element puts meaning into the communicative act—meaning that may be implied by the nature of the act as much as by the words used. For example, the observation that “my glass is almost empty,” may be intended to do more than simply state an observed fact; it may, in certain context, be an implied request for some more to drink.<sup>24</sup>

Discourse Analysis would seek to understand how such language is used in human communication to produce a meaning the speaker intends and the listener would understand given their knowledge of the social and situational context of the speech-act. DA further recognizes that the intended meaning is not always the one that is received by the listener, and is interested in the *why* of multiple interpretations.<sup>25</sup>

Language has a couple of functions in human interaction: transactional or interactional.<sup>26</sup> In transactional language, the primary purpose of the speaker is the “efficient transference of information.”<sup>27</sup> For example, the preceding sentence served a transactional purpose (as does this one). Interactional language is used to maintain social interactions, negotiate role-relationships,

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<sup>23</sup> Brown and Yule, 1. cf. Reed, 17; de Beaugrande and Dressler, 3

<sup>24</sup> Reed, 25.

<sup>25</sup> Reed, 26.

<sup>26</sup> Brown and Yule, 1. “Transactional and Functional” are the terms Brown and Yule use, but they note that this is not a concept unique to them: Buhler used “representative and expressive;” Jakobson used “referential and emotive;” Halliday used “ideational and interpersonal;” and Lyons used “descriptive and social-expressive.” Though the terms are the same, the basic meaning is the same. Unless otherwise noted, the discussion on the two functions of language is taken from Brown and Yule, 1-3.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.

for peer-solidarity, or the saving of face. It can even include the taking of turns in speaking. This can be illustrated by use of Austin's speech-act theory, as discussed above: in the locutionary act of the above sentences, there was the illocutionary act of supplying information (interactional language) that served the perlocutionary purpose of providing you, the reader, with information (transactional). Though here we see a mix of the two functions, such is not always the case. A greeting, apology, argument, farewell, and the like would not serve a transactional purpose, only interactional. While this is only a basic examination, it should serve as sufficient illustration of the focus DA places on the human nature as it pertains to the structure of the communicative act.

Essentially, the focus of DA on the human element of communication is an attempt to identify "how a language is used to create cohesive and coherent communication."<sup>28</sup> This focuses on the context in which words and phrases are used, because the manner and method of communication can change based on the environment in and purpose for which it is uttered.

### Discourse Analysis and Text

Another philosophy underlying Discourse Analysis is its definition of text. Brown and Yule offer this definition: the text is "the verbal record of a communicative act,"<sup>29</sup> both written and spoken. Note that there is no clear definition of the length of the text. This is because complete discourse can range in length from a one-word exchange to a multi-volume epic.<sup>30</sup> What is important is an examination of the discourse as a whole. De Beaugrande and Dressler define a text as "a communicative occurrence which meets seven standards of textuality."<sup>31</sup> These standards are as follows: (1) cohesion, how components are mutually connected; (2) coherence,

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<sup>28</sup> Reed, 31.

<sup>29</sup> Brown and Yule, 6.

<sup>30</sup> Reed, 17. A one word exchange, such as "Hey," could be viewed as discourse in that it would be intended in a specific context to convey a greeting and the listener would recognize it as such.

<sup>31</sup> de Beaugrande and Dressler, 3.

that the elements are mutually relevant and accessible; (3) intentionality, that the producer intends the communication to attain a goal (whether transactional or interactional); (4) acceptability, the relevance of the text to the reader (will he understand—to whatever level); (5) informativity, how much of a communicative occurrence is expected or not (there will always be unforeseen variables in the act, such as new information, which can make the event both interesting and frustrating to the listener); (6) situationality, what makes the text relevant to a situation (for example, a keep off the grass sign placed on a yard would have a meaning based on its context); (7) intertextuality, how much a text is dependent on knowledge of another text that has been previously encountered.

While the above criteria of a text may be met with debate (such as the necessity of intertextuality), they illustrate the mind-set behind DA. There is a common factor in that it seeks to view the text's function *as a whole, endowed with a meaning*, an instrument of *human interaction*, and *dependent on context* (in the point of view of both the speaker and the hearer). Note that the focus is not necessarily on form, but function. Note well that there is no focus on length. A text may meet the above criteria and contain only a short sequence of words.

While phonology, morphology, and syntax may be important elements in analyzing the discourse, they are not the major focus of the discipline. Rather, DA moves beyond the “low” level of expression toward a wider view—that is, it reads the text beyond the word level.<sup>32</sup> While a grammarian will use the sentence (or even series of sentences) to show a particular feature of the language under study, DA looks beyond a single sentence at the whole of the output—it is

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<sup>32</sup> J.P. Louw, “Reading a Text as Discourse,” in *Linguistics and New Testament Interpretation: Essays on Discourse Analysis*, ed. David Alan Black with Katharine Barnwell and Stephen Levinson (Nashville, TN: Broadman, 1992) 18.

not looking for “rules” but “regularities.”<sup>33</sup> While language students are often frustrated by the various “exceptions” to all of the grammar rules they study, the discourse analyst moves beyond grammatical rules to how the language of the discourse as a whole works to serve its intended communicative function. DA may start at syntax and semantics, but then move to pragmatics, the meanings of various forms in specific contexts.<sup>34</sup> It moves from the smaller unit to the larger, seeking to give as “comprehensive a description as possible of the various components of a given discourse.”<sup>35</sup> This movement can start at the morphological level, moving up to words, phrases, clauses, sentences, paragraphs, and then whole discourse, and back again.<sup>36</sup> Essentially, in discourse there is an entity greater than the sum of its sentences and any simple summary sentence.<sup>37</sup> Though there may be meaning to be found in the microstructure of a text, such structure should be viewed in relation to the macrostructure. This focus on the language at a level beyond the sentence has been called Discourse Analysis’ most distinguishing feature.<sup>38</sup>

No matter the length of the text, its analysis can occur on different level, analyzing various linguistic features. According to J.P. Louw, there are three major sets of features that DA studies.<sup>39</sup> Extra-linguistic features include time, place, typography, format, medium of presentation, and the background and history of a text. Para-linguistic features include punctuations, intonation, pause, speech acts, genre, and discourse types (narrative, exposition,

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<sup>33</sup> Brown and Yule, 20-22. In other words, DA’s interest is in a *descriptive*, rather than *prescriptive* analysis.

<sup>34</sup> Porter, 18

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., 19.

<sup>36</sup> Reed, 28.

<sup>37</sup> Bodine, 3.

<sup>38</sup> Reed, 27.

<sup>39</sup> Louw, 18.

description). Linguistic features are, for example, word order, embedding, nominalization, and levels of language. Other areas of focus can be the psychology of processing, with attention on the “cognitive processes of comprehension and recall,” and stylistic devices, such a rhetorical choices and theme dynamics. The range of possible foci within the analysis of discourse illustrates the difficulty in performing DA. It is difficult, if not impossible, for any single scholar to perform all aspects of what would be considered Discourse Analysis on a discourse of any size, particularly on a text the size of the Pentateuch, for instance. In such a case, the whole can be broken into lower levels of discourse, but even then the analyst is faced with a herculean task. Before moving on, there is one more element of general Discourse Analysis that should be noted. J.P. Low further stresses that it is not the purpose of DA to seek an interpretation of the text. A Discourse Analysis of any text is simply an analysis of its structure; when one moves beyond this and into application, one moves outside of the range of Discourse Analysis.

### **Discourse Analysis in Biblical Studies**

As new as DA is to linguistic and literary study, it is even newer to biblical studies. Though the way biblical studies have utilized DA has generally shared the underlying philosophy, there has been a divergence in schools of thought concerning how to apply DA principles. Stanley Porter has identified four schools within biblical studies.<sup>40</sup> The North American model of the Summer Institute of Linguistics (SIL) concentrates on issues of translation, where it tends to provide a systematic analysis of smaller units of language and how they contribute to larger units of meaning within discourse. Recent study has tended to analyze specific linguistic phenomena. The English and Australian model of Discourse Analysis focuses on the use of the use of

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<sup>40</sup> For a more detailed description of the four schools, see Porter, 24-35. The following description concerning the schools of DA in biblical studies is dependent on him.

grammatical structures within “particular linguistic contexts.”<sup>41</sup> The Continental European model divides the analysis of discourse into a discussion of syntax, pragmatics, and semantics, noting the macrostructure of a text in opposition to the microstructure.<sup>42</sup> The fourth school of Discourse Analysis is the South African school, heavily dependent on Louw’s colon analysis. Porter provides the following explanation:

Colon analysis consists of breaking the text down into its constituent cola. A colon is a unit that is formed around a nominative and predicate structure. These cola are first isolated and then their interconnections are re-established in diagrammatic form, illustrating the semantic relations among them as increasingly larger semantic units are formed. Thus there is at least a theoretical relation between form and meaning, extending beyond the smallest unit of meaning, the colon.<sup>43</sup>

It is also relevant to bring up, briefly, an area of study that is closely related to Discourse Analysis, especially because of its influence in biblical studies. This area is that of poetics, the “science of literature.”<sup>44</sup> Like Discourse Analysis, Poetics does not seek to interpret the text, but rather to analyze how a piece of literature is put together. It focuses on such features as characterization, dialogue, point of view, repetition, *leitwort*, motif, and the like. Of particular note in this field is Robert Alter, whose *The Art of Biblical Narrative* has gained wide influence over the study of biblical literature.<sup>45</sup> This type of literary analysis understands that the way the author constructed his message was intended for communication. As Sternberg writes, “communication presupposes a speaker who resorts to certain linguistic and structural tools in order to produce certain effects on the addressee; the discourse accordingly supplies a network of

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<sup>41</sup> Porter, 28.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, 30.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, 33.

<sup>44</sup> Adele Berlin, *Poetics and Interpretation of Biblical Literature* (Reprinted, Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1994; Almond Press, 1983),

<sup>45</sup> Robert Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative*, rev. ed. (New York: Basic Books, 2011).

clues to the speaker's intention."<sup>46</sup> Such a presupposition is shared by Discourse Analysis. In essence, then, biblical poetics is a form of Discourse Analysis.

### Examples of Biblical Discourse Analysis

What the preceding discussion has shown is that while many biblical scholars may be utilizing the underlying principles of DA, the way in which they do so may differ. To demonstrate or even to discuss all of the ways in which the discipline has been utilized in the field of biblical studies is, again, obviously impossible here. The field is too multi-faceted. It should be sufficient, however, to provide a few examples of biblical studies utilizing DA. These examples should give the reader an idea of how DA can be used in biblical studies. They are not intended to provide an in depth analysis or critique of each study, but only to paint the broad strokes of each author's methodology.

Robert Longacre, in his study on Exodus 25:1-30:10, utilizes DA to identify a microstructure within the larger macrostructure of the entire text.<sup>47</sup> He differentiates between various types of discourse, such as narrative, predicative, hortatory, and expository. The way these types are differentiated are based on linguistic structure, such as the use of the *vav*-consecutive followed by an imperfect. Longacre concludes that the passage under consideration is instructional. He posits this from the macrostructure, and attempts to demonstrate that such a structure is undergirded by smaller details and structure within the text, such as the "distribution and function of the *waw*-conjunctival," consideration of theme; and the "ranking of verb

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<sup>46</sup> Meir Sternberg, *The Poetics of Biblical Narrative: Ideological Literature and the Drama of Reading* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1987), 9.

<sup>47</sup> Robert E. Longacre, "Building for the Worship of God: Exodus 25:1-30:10," in *Discourse Analysis of Biblical Literature*, ed. Walter Bodine. The Society of Biblical Literature Semeia Studies (Atlanta, GA: Scholars, 1995), 21-50.

forms/clause types in a scheme of relative closeness to or departure from the main instructional line of the discourse.”<sup>48</sup>

Alviero Niccacci, in “Analysis of Biblical Narrative,” provides a discussion on how to analyze biblical narrative according to the form of verbs to the author uses.<sup>49</sup> He posits that sentences that begin with the *wayyiqtol* form are those that create the “mainline of communication.”<sup>50</sup> When the chain of *wayyiqtol* forms is broken by a nominal phrase (without the *wayyiqtol*), the phrase is dependent on the mainline, and can serve to shift from foreground to background (information pertaining to the events of the text, but not directly occurring). He then analyzes a larger text (in this case Genesis 1:1-2:25) based on its structure, starting at a classification of the sentences and moving on to how they relate to one and another to form a larger structure. In this way, he seeks to demonstrate the flow of the larger narrative based on the way the smaller parts fit together.

In his essay, “The Poetic Properties of Prophetic Discourse in the Book of Micah,” Francis Anderson analyzes the oracles of Micah according to cola, charting cola length and syllable.<sup>51</sup> He notes that there are various sizes of cola in Micah, but that the shorter ones seem to carry more emotional weight. He writes,

The extraordinary range of the lengths of Micah’s poetic units, by any method of counting, is matched by a similar range of patterns used, covering everything from bicola of classical size and shaper with all kinds of parallelism . . . The conventions for prophecy, whether spoken messages or written texts, resemble only partly the conventions of classical Hebrew poetry. There is more freedom, more room for originality, more variety. Instead of expecting the

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<sup>48</sup> Both quotes from Longacre, 39.

<sup>49</sup> Alviero Niccacci, “Analysis of Biblical Narrative,” in *Biblical Hebrew and Discourse Linguistics*, ed. Robert D. Bergen (Dallas: Summer Institute of Linguistics, 1994), 175-198.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, 176.

<sup>51</sup> Francis Anderson, “The Poetic Properties of Prophetic Discourse in the Book of Micah,” in *Biblical Hebrew and Discourse Linguistics*, ed. Robert D. Bergen (Dallas: Summer Institute of Linguistics, 1994), 520-528.

prophet to speak or write like a psalmist, we should let him do it his own way and accept the result for what it is.<sup>52</sup>

What Anderson's essay demonstrates is an application of the colon analysis. Note in the quote above the interest in the human aspect of the prophetic expression, where the prophet's own way of writing is allowed to stand in contrast to an expected norm.

### Discourse Analysis and Evangelical Biblical Interpretation

What is evangelical scholarship to make of Discourse Analysis? First, the underlying focus on textual units beyond word and sentence level is not foreign or hostile to evangelical thought. Indeed, DA's evaluation of the contextual role of language is a sound principle. Grant Osborne's *The Hermeneutical Spiral* presents as its first principle the following: "The first stage in serious Bible study is to consider the larger context within which the passage is found. Unless we can grasp the whole before attempting to dissect the parts, interpretation is doomed from the start. Statements simply have no meaning apart from their context."<sup>53</sup> To understand the parts by the whole, and the whole through the parts—this is a goal of DA that evangelical interpretation does not reject.

Further, DA is useful in biblical interpretation in that it evaluates the text—in its canonical form—as a means of communication. This can provide insight into how the text is structured and how it attempts to communicate its message. This allows the text to speak for itself, instead of imposing on the text based on source or form critical concerns that may not reflect the intended structure.<sup>54</sup> Such an analysis can shed light on what the text is trying to communicate and the response it is trying to illicit from its readers. DA can identify, for example, the flow of the

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<sup>52</sup> Anderson, 528.

<sup>53</sup> Osborne, 19.

<sup>54</sup> This is not to say that such analysis necessarily ignores such concerns. So Sternberg: "'Literary' approaches have nothing to fear, and occasionally something to learn, from genetic criticism as such, that, in its source-directed role as an inquiry into the historical processes of composition." Sternberg, 22.

drama of the text, helping the reader to identify the functions various discourses are attempting to serve. Questions of supposed grammatical and syntactical irregularities within, for example, the poetic texts of the Old Testament no longer necessitate theories about botched transmission of the texts (though such a possibility is not excluded), but can be the result of the way in which the poetic communication is expressed. This allows for an element of aesthetics within the composition of the text, not restrained by the prescriptive nature of a “sentence grammar.” Further, it recognizes a cohesiveness within the text that source and form criticism would not allow. Instead of dividing the text and interpreting it in parts, DA allows the text, the whole text, to speak for itself.

By itself, however, DA cannot stand alone as a hermeneutic tool in biblical studies. A weakness of DA is that it does not concern itself with issues of authorship, authority, or inspiration. Nor is it interested, *per se*, in the history or truth of the text. It is not important who wrote the discourse, just how the discourse is trying to communicate. The authority of the text is ultimately irrelevant to the structure of its message. Nor is it necessarily concerned with theology. For discourse analysts, the focus is not on the message, but how the message is communicated. While this is an important avenue of investigation, the nature of biblical study demands more. One should seek to understand *how* the biblical message is communicated as a means of understanding the message *itself*. Further, questions of authorship and historicity cannot be ignored because of their implications for the authority of the text. Ultimately, it is the message and its provenance that is the goal of evangelical biblical study. Discourse Analysis then, must be judged as a useful tool in the belt of the evangelical interpreter.

## **Conclusion**

While still a young discipline, Discourse Analysis has much to offer the study of texts, and especially the text of Holy Scripture. This paper has attempted to provide a general introduction to the discipline, highlighting its central tenets: the personal nature of communication, a focus on the text in context beyond the sentence level, and an emphasis in how texts are formatted to perform communicative acts. There is much to be commended in this field, and it is refreshing to see an interest in textual coherence and context. While DA is still finding its way, it will be interesting to see what fruits biblical scholarship may see from its future labors.

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Almalki. Discourse Analysis. The Study of Language By. George Yule. Discourse analysis: The study of language in text and conversation. TEXTS. "What helps us make sense of a text is that it must have a certain structure with cohesion and coherence." Philosopher Paul Grice described the co-operative principle with its four maxims. (Maxims=Rules). "Make your conversational contribution such as is required, at the state at which it occurs, by the accepted purpose or direction of the talk exchange in which you are engaged." This paper will illustrate how discourse analysis had been incorporated in Translation Studies. Discourse Analysis originated in Applied Linguistics and refers to the investigation of language in use. The application of their discourse analytical model is illustrated with various examples, addressing, among others, cross-cultural differences in generic structures. As a case in point, they show differences in argumentative text types in English and Arabic. English texts are usually characterised by a pattern of counter-argumentation, in contrast to Arabic discourse which shows a preference for through-argumentation. Discourse analysis (DA), or discourse studies, is an approach to the analysis of written, vocal, or sign language use, or any significant semiotic event. The objects of discourse analysis (discourse, writing, conversation, communicative event) are variously defined in terms of coherent sequences of sentences, propositions, speech, or turns-at-talk. Contrary to much of traditional linguistics, discourse analysts not only study language use 'beyond the sentence boundary' but also prefer to analyze