PREFACE

This volume of essays is the third in a series emerging from the Biblical Greek Language and Linguistics Section of the Society of Biblical Literature. The previous two volumes are S.E. Porter and D.A. Carson (eds.), *Biblical Greek Language and Linguistics: Open Questions in Current Research* (JSNTSup, 80; SNTG, 1; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1993), and S.E. Porter and D.A. Carson (eds.), *Discourse Analysis and Other Topics in Biblical Greek* (JSNTSup, 113; SNTG, 2; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1995). Like its two predecessors, this volume collects papers delivered at various sessions of the Biblical Greek Language and Linguistics Section. At the two sessions of the annual meeting of the society, one is devoted each year to a particular topic, and the other issues a call for other papers. This volume contains the papers delivered at the devoted session of 1996 in New Orleans, Louisiana, entitled 'Linguistics and...' in Part I, and papers delivered at other times and in other sessions in Part II, here entitled 'Words on Words'. The subtitle, 'Critical Junctures', reflects our belief that, through the course of this debate, we have now arrived at some critical junctures in the use of linguistics to study the Greek of the New Testament. These essays reflect that on-going debate.

The editors wish to thank the participants and the attenders of the Biblical Greek Language and Linguistics Section who have been actively involved in this section over the years. The contributors have been numerous, and those who have attended have done so with a desire to engage in the discussion. We have been the co-chairs of this section since its inception as a consultation, and have had the privilege of seeing this grow into a vibrant and active section, making a very important contribution to the activities of the Society of Biblical Literature. Our tenure as co-chairs of this section is now over. We have enjoyed the opportunity of continuing our friendship through working together on this section and on these several book projects, and wish continued success to subsequent chairs. We believe that the study of the

Greek of the New Testament is one of the most vital areas of current biblical study, and further believe that it needs a forum such as this for on-going discussion and debate regarding its nature and understanding.

AN INTRODUCTION TO INTRODUCTIONS

D.A. Carson

I

It is a commonplace of those who comment on the current state of biblical studies that what used to be called 'our discipline' has become fragmented.

Of course, there have always been debates among competing schools of thought. 'Biblical studies' or even 'New Testament studies' has never been a unified discipline. But in the past the fragmentation was felt most keenly in the diversity of the conclusions reached. Most practitioners were convinced that there was more-or-less objective truth to be found; most deployed the same sorts of 'tools' (though deploying them with highly divergent degrees of confidence in them). Differences in results were often traced back to different presuppositions in the deployment of those tools. But with a good deal of energy and time, it was possible for one scholar to become a master of most of the approaches to biblical study that were common to the guild.

No longer. Now the fragmentation extends beyond presuppositions and conclusions to the methods themselves. Now we speak not only of highly divergent conclusions, but of new 'tools' that have become disciplines and sub-disciplines in their own right. Indeed, we even distinguish one entire hermeneutical framework from another (e.g. 'the hermeneutics of feminism', 'the hermeneutics of race', and so forth). Entire epistemologies compete for our attention. To a Stephen Moore[1] and others of the Sheffield school, modernist epistemology is passé, and the sheer open-endedness of postmodernism is the responsible way forward; to a John Barton, postmodernism is 'absurd, rather despicable

1. E.g. Stephen D. Moore, *Poststructuralism and the New Testament: Derrida and Foucault at the Foot of the Cross* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1994).

in its delight in debunking all serious beliefs, decadent and corrupt in its indifference to questions of truth'.[2] Arguably, we are coming unglued.

A further element of fragmentation stems from the widespread conviction that there is little unity to be found among the source documents we study. Once there was biblical theology; then there was New Testament theology; then there was Synoptic Gospel theology; then there was Matthean (or Markan, or Lukan) theology; then there was Q theology. Now there is Q theology under a feminist reading of Q's couplets in the third Q source, or a narrative-critical reading of the signs source in John, or a reader-response approach to Galatians, or a textlinguistic reading of Philippians.

At the risk of oversimplification, we may distinguish four responses to this fragmentation.

The first approach ignores or marginalizes all recent developments. We shall gamely go ahead with commentaries and theologies the way we have always done them. One cannot learn everything; it is simply a waste of time to try to master every new tool or hermeneutical perspective that comes out. Somebody needs to do so, of course, but our job is simply to get on with a serious reading of the text—the normal tracks of responsible scholarship.

This sounds good, perhaps even pious, but it is a recipe for obsolescence. Such scholarship will reassure traditionalists for a while, but on the long haul they will simply be bypassed.

The second approach focuses on just one method, preferably the most recent. At one level, this offers a certain amount of control. We carefully distance ourselves from competing approaches, define all the parameters, and then apply them consistently through the literature in question. We know very well that a book written along these lines will win warm reviews. Such work, after all, is not only controlled, but perceived to be on the cutting edge.

Yet quite apart from the temptations of faddishness, there are more serious dangers. If one has bought into the open-endedness of postmodern epistemology, then doubtless which method or approach one uses is an exclusively personal matter, or the preference of some interpretative school. But if one still holds that there is something in the text that is objectively there, something that can in substantial measure be

2. John Barton, *Reading the Old Testament: Method in Biblical Study* (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 2nd edn, 1996), p. 235.

recovered and identified, then the single approach is intrinsically dangerous. In other words, if there is meaning in the text which, if not exhaustively recoverable, is nevertheless objectively 'there' and is something that can be approached asymptotically, then it is not only legitimate but far-sighted to ask what method or methods are best suited to make that asymptotic approach. Almost certainly it will not be a single method. That is almost a recipe for reductionism. Rigorous grammatical exegesis without wrestling with questions of literary genre, detailed historical-critical work without deploying (in appropriate texts) narrative-critical tools, narrative-critical approaches that refuse to ask questions about extra-textual referentiality (even in texts that ostensibly talk about witnesses observing things in real time)—all of these wretched oversimplifications are almost calculated to give us a reading that is distorted.

The third approach is to rejoice in the fragmentation, and to insist that such developments are not only inevitable but delightful, even liberating. There is no meaning in the text, only meanings—and they are not so much in the text, as in the interplay between text and interpreter, as channelled by some method or methods. This is, of course, the slant taken by those most enamoured with postmodern epistemology. This is thought to be freeing, even redemptive. The only wrong approach is the one that suggests other approaches are wrong; the only heresy is the view that there is such a thing as heresy. If such interpretations can be assessed at all, it is not so much by their findings (which might not be found by some other approach or by some other interpretative group) but by the internal consistency of the method.

But although postmodernism has been proficient at exposing the weaknesses and pretentiousness of modernist certainties, its own pretentiousness is bound to trip it up.[3] Protestations notwithstanding, there is something vaguely absurd about publishing challenging new insights whose significance is restricted to the sub-sub-interpretative-group deploying some rigidly controlled tool or tools—unless, of course, they are only publishing for themselves. If they are *not* trying to get others to see things their way, are they merely trying to be admired? If they *are* trying to get others to see things their way (even if only by expanding their horizons), are they not rather pretentiously, in some (horrors!)

3. I have tried to make the point in *The Gagging of God* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995), Chapters 2–3.

modernistic fashion, claiming that they have something worth saying that other interpretative communities should adopt? The camel keeps sticking its nose back in the tent.

The fourth approach emphasizes the classic disciplines first: the necessary languages, detailed familiarity with the relevant texts, wide reading and reflection, a secondary (but important) grasp of the principal secondary literature. It insists that a concentration on tools, hermeneutical debates, and epistemological shifts without absorbing the primary texts is a distraction that promises more than it can deliver. At the same time, it frankly admits that these 'distractions' churn up some useful material. This approach is unhappy to see these genuine advances magnified disproportionately, but it tries to learn from them. It may acknowledge, for instance, that postmodern epistemology has exposed some of the more arrant claims of the assured results of modern biblical science, and convincingly shown how all reading is done, among finite readers, in some limited framework that shapes one's conclusions, but it nevertheless insists (whether this is a reasoned philosophical response or not) that there is some objective meaning in the texts themselves, and even if we cannot retrieve all of it, or any of it with the certainty of omniscience, we can so spiral in on it that genuine communication, in part if not in whole, is possible.

Some scholars in this heritage will become experts in one or more of the new disciplines that are developing, but if they stay there, they shift to the second option sketched above. At that point the only thing they can lecture on or write about is a social science approach to various New Testament documents, or a linguistic approach to exegesis, or whatever. Of course, this may have enormous value in constructing some of the bridges that need to be built between disciplines. But if they stay focused on the primary texts themselves, perhaps becoming expert in one or more of the rising auxiliary disciplines but in any case trying to cream the best off most of them, then they pass on an enduring tradition in the biblical arena while remaining contemporary. They set the baseline for the next generation of biblical scholars.

The problem with this approach, of course, is the sheer volume of material. A scholar's life is not long enough to become an expert in every field that butts up against biblical studies. But are there genuine alternatives beyond the four approaches suggested here? We do the best we can, try to learn from the most important lessons from the new disciplines—and remain focused on the texts themselves.

II

Linguistics is one of the fields that has erupted with torrential force in the twentieth century. Strangely, the power of that flood is only now beginning to wash over New Testament studies. It is also dividing into many distinguishable streams, sub-disciplines that develop their own journals and experts and arcane jargon, with the result that the entire field can seem terribly daunting to those who have spent little time exploring it.

Although one of the purposes of the Biblical Greek Language and Linguistics unit of the Society of Biblical Literature has been to foster front-line work in the field, another has been to introduce biblical students to some of the work being produced in the various branches of linguistics, in the hope of encouraging some cross-fertilization. The purpose of this section of the present book is to present some essays, all reworked presentations from the Society of Biblical Literature, that introduce three areas of linguistic thought that have a bearing on biblical studies, introductions prepared at a competent level but in a form congenial to readers without specialist knowledge of the subject. Before briefly introducing those contributions, however, it may be worth saying something about linguistics as a whole, and some of its divisions. Those with any training in linguistics should skip the next few paragraphs and use their time more profitably.

The father of modern linguistics is almost universally acknowledged to be Ferdinand de Saussure, whose lectures and notes on the fledgling discipline were published posthumously in 1916.[4] From this distance it is difficult to grasp how groundbreaking his work really was, especially in the area of semantics. Which of us has not been influenced by James Barr's justly famous *The Semantics of Biblical Language*,[5] which picks up and applies to Greek words principles first developed by de Saussure?

4. The work is available in English as *Course in General Linguistics* (trans. W. Baskin; New York: McGraw–Hill, 1966). Perhaps the operative word is 'modern', as several studies of the history of linguistics trace its origins to the ancient Greeks: e.g. F.P. Dinneen, *An Introduction to General Linguistics* (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 1967); R.H. Robins, *A Short History of Linguistics* (London: Longman, 2nd edn, 1979).

5. J. Barr, *The Semantics of Biblical Language* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1961).

The best general introduction to linguistics, without particular reference to the New Testament, is still the much-cited work by John Lyons.[6] Despite the usefulness of this volume, however, it does not convey the extraordinary fecundity of the discipline, nor can it, within its confines, hint at the contributions, models, and scholars in the complex and overlapping specializations that have developed: semantics, semantic field theory, discourse analysis (= textlinguistics), pragmatics, sociolinguistics, corpus linguistics, formal grammar, functional grammar, transformational-generative grammar, systemic linguistics, tagmemics, ethnography, historical linguistics, translation theory, artificial intelligence, applied linguistics, and more. To make sense of these subfields, one may usefully refer to two dictionaries[7] and a recent encyclopedia.[8]

Today there are books and articles that attempt to relate one or more of these fields to the study of the New Testament, which, if done properly, invariably means the study of the Greek New Testament.[9]

6. J. Lyons, *Introduction to Theoretical Linguistics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1968).

7. The older one is R.R.K. Kartmann and F.C. Stork, *Dictionary of Language and Linguistics* (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1972); the more recent one is D. Crystal, *A Dictionary of Linguistics and Phonetics* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 3rd edn, 1991).

8. W. Bright (ed.), *International Encyclopedia of Linguistics* (4 vols.; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992).

9. E.A. Nida, 'Implications of Contemporary Linguistics for Biblical Scholarship', *JBL* 91 (1972), pp. 73-89; M. Silva, *Biblical Words and Their Meaning: An Introduction to Lexical Semantics* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1983); R.J. Erickson, 'Linguistics and Biblical Language: A Wide-Open Field', *JETS* 26 (1983), pp. 257-63; D.A. Black, *Linguistics for Students of New Testament Greek* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1988); P. Cotterell and M. Turner, *Linguistics and Biblical Interpretation* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1989); J.P. Louw, 'New Testament Greek: The Present State of the Art', *Neot* 24 (1990), pp. 159-72; S.E. Porter, 'Keeping Up with Recent Studies. 17. Greek Language and Linguistics', *ExpTim* 130 (1991), pp. 202-208; S.E. Porter and J.T. Reed, 'Greek Grammar since BDF: A Retrospective and Prospective Analysis', *FN* 4 (1991), pp. 143-64; J.T. Reed, 'Modern Linguistics and the New Testament: A Basic Guide to Theory, Terminology, and Literature', in S.E. Porter and D. Tombs (eds.), *Approaches to New Testament Study* (JSNTSup, 120; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995), pp. 222-65. Many of these publications focus attention on only some part of the broad field of linguistics. For example, the last-cited essay, though it begins with a survey of the broad field, proves to be the best introductory article I have seen with respect to semantics, pragmatics and sociolinguistics.

That, in turn, has required more than a little nudging to encourage New Testament scholars brought up on traditional grammars that there is anything more to learn. Gradually the tide is beginning to turn. Meanwhile, some highly technical works are crossing the divide between linguistics and New Testament study.[10] Most of these are a bit daunting unless a reader has first done at least a little preliminary work in the linguistics field, but granted such preparation there is considerable profit in them. Some of them, one suspects, will with the passage of time and the acquisition of hindsight be judged ground-breaking. New tools are being developed, some of them generated by linguists connected with the work of Bible translation.[11]

10. For example, choosing to work out of the framework of the systemic linguistics most comprehensively articulated by M.A.K. Halliday, and adopting some of the categories of linguists working in the Slavic languages, S.E. Porter, *Verbal Aspect in the Greek of the New Testament* (SBG, 1; New York: Peter Lang, 1989), develops a comprehensive aspect theory for the Greek verb, which he has subsequently refined in various particulars. Others working on the question in the same time frame (especially B.M. Fanning, *Verbal Aspect in New Testament Greek* [Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990]; K.L. McKay, *A New Syntax of the Verb in New Testament Greek: An Aspectual Approach* [SBG, 5; New York: Peter Lang, 1994]) have arrived at broadly similar conclusions, the former out of a background in New Testament exegesis and the latter out of a classics background, but it is Porter who attempts to make his work *linguistically* rigorous (whether one agrees with all of his conclusions or not). Porter is the first to insist that he is standing on the shoulders of many scholars who have been working away at elements of the problem for almost a century, but whose work has not until now found its way into the mainstream of biblical studies. Adapting the transformational-generative grammar of Noam Chomsky, D.D. Schmidt, *Hellenistic Greek Grammar and Noam Chomsky* (SBLDS, 62; Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 1981), surveys the present state of the study of Hellenistic Greek grammar, introduces Chomsky, and develops transformational rules for nominalizations in Hellenistic Greek. M.W. Palmer has produced the first major study of *Levels of Constituent Structure in New Testament Greek* (SBG, 4; New York: Peter Lang, 1995). And discourse analysis, a favourite with Bible translators and frequently discussed in short articles, has now found expression in major scholarly contributions such as those of G.H. Guthrie, *The Structure of Hebrews: A Text-Linguistic Analysis* (NovTSup, 73; Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1994) and J.T. Reed, *A Discourse Analysis of Philippians: Method and Rhetoric in the Debate over Literary Integrity* (JSNTSup, 136; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1997).

11. One thinks especially of J.P. Louw and E.A. Nida (eds.), *Greek–English Lexicon of the New Testament based on Semantic Domains* (New York: United Bible Societies, 1988). The work may be preliminary in certain respects, but few doubt that it is a major development.

III

I turn now to the three essays in this section. The first, George H. Guthrie's 'Boats in the Bay: Reflections on the Use of Linguistics and Literary Analysis in Biblical Studies', begins with an amusing analysis of developments in biblical studies during this century (I suspect that more than one lecturer will incorporate this one into his or her notes!), before probing the relationship between linguistics and literary analysis. He argues that currently those who are attempting to integrate linguistics and biblical studies are still orientated to author and text, or at least to text, and operate largely at the micro-level of the discourse, while those preferring literary-critical approaches to biblical literature evince a wider array of stances on the author–text–reader question, and embrace questions more expansive than those of textlinguistics. Even so, he carefully identifies points of overlap, and then cautiously suggests the way forward.

The essay by Jeffrey T. Reed examines another application of linguistics to biblical study: 'Modern Linguistics and Historical Criticism: Using the Former for Doing the Latter'. What Reed's application of linguistic models adds to the discussion of literary unity and literary integrity (which, as he demonstrates, are not necessarily the same thing) is methodological rigour. Using Philippians as a test case (esp. Phil. 4.10-20), he defines linguistic cohesiveness and then develops and demonstrates the factors that go into a rigorous definition of genre (on which arguments for 'macrostructural cohesiveness' are based), and the nature and limitations of adducing lexical parallels (on which arguments for 'microstructural cohesiveness' are based). One of the strengths of the essay is that if the evidence is not strong enough to constrain more than a probabilistic conclusion, Reed himself goes only that far.

The essay by Stanley E. Porter, 'Linguistics and Rhetorical Criticism', is probably the one of the three that demands the greatest linguistic knowledge of the reader. As for those reasonably informed of the classical categories of rhetoric, it would probably help some of them to begin by scanning another recent book, one jointly edited by Porter and Thomas H. Olbricht.[12] In the present essay, Porter begins by noting

12. *Rhetoric and the New Testament: Essays from the 1992 Heidelberg Conference* (JSNTSup, 90; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1993).

the 'genetic relationship' between linguistics and rhetoric, that is, their common ancestry in the Greek and Roman worlds (under acceptable definitions of both linguistics and rhetoric). After a brisk history of the developments of both fields, Porter summarizes attempts that have been made to relate linguistics to rhetoric: in various grammars, in tagmemics, in communication theory, in sociolinguistics, and in discourse analysis. In each case he offers his own evaluation. In his conclusion, Porter argues that although some useful work integrating linguistics and rhetorical criticism has been attempted, no single model has proved very successful so far, and very little of this work has been applied to biblical Greek. As for the future, after weighing the possibilities, he cautiously suggests that for various reasons linguists are the ones most likely to probe these overlapping areas of theorizing and research in the future.

To extend George Guthrie's analogy a little, it appears that some joint fishing companies are setting up business off 'Author's Point'.