THE BEGINNING OF THE WORD: INTRODUCTION TO A THEORY OF ARCHAEOLOGICAL GRAMMAR

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ABSTRACT

In this paper an outline of a theory of archaeological grammar is developed. The type of discourse this theory deals with is explained, as well as the relevance of the theory for a critique of both the positivist and the deconstructionist models of text and discourse. Reference is made to the opening phrases in the Prologue of the Gospel of John to illustrate some of the basic concepts of the theory. Examples such as the modern reverence for the human mind or for social justice are also dealt with in the analysis, to indicate how the principles of archaeological grammar underlie both the biblical and the modernist language of belief. Connecting links which this grammar may have with other theories, such as the study of rhetoric or speech act theory or conceptual semantics, are briefly pointed out.

INTRODUCTION: ARCHIVAL DISCOURSE, SEMANTICS AND COGNITION

The beginning words of both the Gospel of John and the First Letter ascribed to him, refer to the Word. In their beginning words, both texts refer to the Word in the beginning. But there is another beginning at work in these texts. A beginning which precedes the thoughts and words of the writer as he begins to reflect on the theme: what stands at the Beginning?

Religious discourse, philosophical discourse, sociology, psychology, physics - every discourse that concerns itself with a Beginning of some kind, is subjected to another beginning: a structure of origin that prefigures the thoughts behind, and the words and expressions in, the discourse. It is specifically this latter beginning of the word that is the subject of this paper: the beginning of every writing that deals with a Grand Beginning. My claim is that such writing is generated by conceptual deep structures operating on a specific level of human reflection. The study of these structures requires a special kind of analysis - which I shall refer to as archaeological discourse analysis. In my view, the project of archaeological analysis can contribute conceivably toward the development of other projects, such as those of conceptual semantics (Jackendoff 1983, 1987a) and cognitive linguistics (Langacker 1986, 1987; Lakoff 1987). That is to say, in so far as a specific mode of conceptualisation is concerned. The mode in question comprises this theme of Grand Beginnings: how exactly do people conceptualise the most basic realities which, they believe, govern their lives or their culture or their society or the world? What structures of knowledge and belief aid them in producing this (what I shall refer to as) archival discourse?
We understand archaeological discourse analysis, then, to be directed to those discourses (or to that level of a discourse) which give expression to the specifically human competence to conceptualise in megacontexts - to think the ultimate in terms of: Beginnings or Endings, Centres or Wholes, Causes or Conditions. Let us refer to the set of concepts which are formed on this level and in this context, as alpha-concepts. Archival discourse characteristically features such alpha-concepts. It is characteristic, in turn, of alpha-concepts to revolve around entities (principles, processes, laws, events, phenomena) which individual discourses proclaim as governing factors in relation to the universe, the lifeworld, or important parts of the lifeworld. Let us refer to these governing factors or principles (which are the reference point for alpha-concepts) as GPs. Examples of segments of the lifeworld that are held to be governed in this way are: (the foundations of) knowledge, (the origin of) history, (the conditions of) culture, (the cause of) social-economic behaviour, and so forth. Examples of GPs that are identified to perform the governing task are: principles of mind, power, psychological processes, biological laws and so forth.

Let us take as an example of archival discourse, a body of expressions produced by the belief that biological laws are the origin of culture. This belief is then discursively expressed by virtue of a set of alpha-concepts. The latter refer, minimally, to governing principles (GPs), to the specification of a certain knowledge concerning foundations, origins, centers and so forth, and to certain segments of experiential reality that are conceived of as directly related to both the previous classes of concepts. In our example, biological law acts as GP, while causes and culture represent the other two classes of alpha-concepts.

The way in which our minds deal with alpha-concepts is probably rather complex. It may very well be that special mechanisms of concept-formation are operative on this level and that these mechanisms are founded on specialised 'programmes' located in the structure of the brain itself - programmes that provide the possibility-horizon for actions like believing and worshipping (Young 1978).

Certain studies done within the framework of archaeological grammar, (Visagie et al 1989), suggest that GPs function only within the immediate vicinity of a number of other alpha-concepts that contribute to the primitive 'archival meaning' which the discourse at issue wants to communicate. We have already focused on two types of concept in this regard. One such type has as its content the actual work that the GP does: whether it precedes, or grounds, or transcends, or encloses, etcetera that segment of our world which it is believed to govern. Another type of concept comprises, rather obviously, the object or segment that is being governed in one of these permissible ways. Thus, alpha-concepts always stand in certain relations to other alpha-concepts. These different classes of concepts we may regard as representing certain basic categories which are essential for a possible grammar of archival discourse.

It is clear that the relations consisting between the categories that are being distinguished here, are similar to the syntactic relations consisting between the parts of a sentence. There is a subject (the GP),
an action of the subject and an object of the action. This roughly corresponds to a simple sentence consisting of a noun phrase and a verb phrase (with another noun phrase embedded in the latter). The point is, however, that a sentence like *Principles of mind constitute knowledge*, indeed represents not only syntactic but also (specialised) conceptual categories. And despite some similarities which we would naturally expect, there is clear evidence that the categories of archaeological grammar, referring to conceptual representations as they do, do not always map one to one on the syntactic categories and those representations that are uniquely syntactical (cf Jackendoff 1987a:377). Nevertheless, the project of constructing an archaeological grammar seems to some extent dependent on the possibility of defining categories, rule systems and representational levels that are uniquely conceptual and that appeal to a distinctive competence, while preserving some correspondence relations with syntactic structures (cf Jackendoff 1987b:355).

Of course, the conclusion Jackendoff reaches in the cited literature, pertains only to a generalised theory of conceptual semantics. As implied earlier, I am assuming that a general theory of conceptual semantics can be divided successfully into specialised subtheories such as the one being introduced here. In this regard, I should like to refer to the interest that generative linguists have recently manifested in a 'generatively' modelled theory of vision, that of David Marr (1982). And Ray Jackendoff himself has drawn attention to the cognitive significance of the relation thought to obtain between a general theory of vision and a highly specific visual activity such as the recognition of faces (Jackendoff 1987c:208-209).

Before I continue, I should point out that an adequate archaeology of discourses really comprises more than the grammar theory that is being introduced here. For example, the nature of the ideological frameworks and value-paradigms within which discourses originate, are the object of a separate subtheory, complementing the 'grammatological' theory — as it is sometimes referred to in other studies (cf Visagie et al 1989). In the present context we shall focus solely on aspects of the latter theory.

3 ARCHAEOLOGICAL GRAMMAR VERSUS POSITIVIST AND DECONSTRUCTIONIST INTERPRETATIONS

Let me sketch briefly, at this stage some implications of archaeological grammar with regard to two major paradigms operative in theological thought: the one firmly established (a theological type of positivism or empiricism), and the other currently gaining ground (deconstructionism).

3.1 Positivism
In *doctrinal theology*, the 'logic' of faith is often regarded as something inherently foreign to human nature and its natural capabilities and capacities. Archaeological grammar is diametrically opposed to this view. It holds that belief, as such, is an intrinsically human mode of behaviour; that an intricate logic belonging to the mind's conceptual apparatus underlies the basic competence required by this behaviour; and that part of this logic can (in principle) be reconstructed in a theory of archaeological grammar. Of course the principles that are postulated by
such a theory, apply only to the abstract form and not to the actual content of faith.

The former of the above interpretations is designated 'positivist' or 'empiricist' in so far as it regards religious belief as solely governed by a certain group of experiences plus the appropriate set of sentences describing them (Revelation) - a data set, in effect, located completely and objectively outside the believer and 'grounding' a certain received knowledge within the believer.

Regarding textual theology, the widely held idea that all theological theorising should be ultimately associated with, and verified by, a special knowledge of underlying textual structures (whether of a linguistic or a literary nature), would also be an example of the kind of positivism that archaeological theory criticises. For this theology is equally at odds with the (in my view) reasonable assumption that an innate schematism of archival knowledge actually precedes both the formation and the interpretation of the text.

3.2 Deconstructionism
The choice for archaeological reconstruction would also be a choice against Derridean deconstruction. After all, the latter would vehemently oppose the idea of a specific conceptual competence as the natural origin of archival discourse. All manifestations of this kind of discourse are regarded by the deconstructionist to be 'logocentric' aberrations. She does not realise that her own discourse is a prime example of archival discourse, replete with alpha-concepts and accompanying categories and different levels of representation. (For an introductory archaeological analysis of Derrida's concept of 'Writing', see Visagie 1988. Cf also the implications of the representational structure accorded to example [2a] below.) This does not imply that the deconstructionist camp does not have some valuable lessons to teach us, for example on the art of developing an immanent critique of a given discourse through the analysis of metaphor-tensions in the text. Some of these insights would, it seems, even be fully consistent with the framework of archaeological grammar.

To substantiate the latter claim somewhat, I shall try to furnish a relevant example. Consider the reference, in the Prologue of the Gospel of John, to the Word possessing life and this life being the light of the people (v 4). A typical deconstructionist reading would search for a hidden tension beneath the surface complementarity of life and light. Suppose that it could indeed be substantiated that such a tension exists. This might be (for example) on account of the fact that light is, on the one hand, overtly associated with 'Jewish' religious concepts (like holiness, love, omnipotence, redemption etc) while, on the other hand, it is covertly and inextricably linked to certain 'Greek' metaphysical concepts (the notion of an eternal, immutable and reasonable order transcending earthly reality) that are ostensibly foreign to the message of the gospel.

Within the framework of archaeological grammar, tropes such as life and light would be represented as direct complements (see the remarks on 'block D' in the concluding section of this paper) of given elements in the string of alpha-concepts that 'anchors' John's discourse on the Word. And it is quite possible that a 'deconstructive' analysis of metaphor
complexes may cast some light on the relation between alpha-concepts and on their ideological connotations within a given discourse. But the important thing to note is that the figurative tensions in a text, far from depositing the notion of conceptual structure (as the deconstructionist would have it), actually presuppose it.

In the present context, these few remarks on rival paradigms will have to suffice.

4 THE PROPOSITIONAL STRUCTURE OF ALPHA-EXPRESSIONS

I will now proceed to describe in more detail how thinking with alpha-concepts proceeds according to the precepts of a conceptual grammar. This description is once again limited to the briefest of outlines. (For an extended discussion, see Visagie et al 1989.)

Exploring further the basic approach began in section 1 above, we can define alpha-expressions as those expressions in a discourse that feature an implied proposition constituted by a combination of specific conceptual categories. The kernel-categories involved are those pertaining to a combination of alpha-concepts, namely the GP-element itself, that is the propositional subject; the action which this subject performs on an appropriate object; and the object itself. In technical terms we shall speak, respectively, of the subject; the operation it enacts (whether causing, grounding, transcending etc); and the domain undergoing this operation. Consider the following examples of alpha-expressions:

(1a) It is the inborn principles of mind that form our experience of the world.
(2a) Language or rather textuality is the ultimate context of all analytical thought and every kind of social practice.
(3a) Social justice is the true purpose of cultural progress.
(4a) In the beginning was the Word.

The propositions (in the sense that this term is used in archaeological grammar) contained in these expressions are, in kernel-form, those indicated below (in simplified bracketing):

(1b) \([SP_{\text{Mind}}][OP_{\text{forms}}][DP_{\text{experience of the world}}]\)
(2b) \([SP_{\text{Textuality}}][OP_{\text{encloses}}][DP_{\text{analytical thought and social practice}}]\)
(3b) \([SP_{\text{Social justice}}][OP_{\text{goals}}][DP_{\text{cultural progress}}]\)
(4b) \([SP_{\text{Word}}][OP_{\text{precedes}}][DP_{-}\text{ }]\)

In each case the proposition is constituted, in kernel-form, by the combination of three categories: the subject phrase (SP); the operational phrase (OP) featuring a choice from a whole spectrum of different operators like form, enclose, etcetera; and the domain phrase (DP). Note that in (4b) the domain phrase is regarded as an unspecified conceptual element, even when it has no syntactic equivalent in the corresponding expression (4a) above (cf Jackendoff 1987a:377). Conceptually implied here, could be a notion like the world or creation. This 'filling in' of
an unspecified conceptual element could be derived from the context within which an expression like (4a) is contained. On the other hand, propositions which are analysed as abstractly underlying not only a particular expression but rather whole fields of discourse – for example the propositions informing the basic ideas of empiricism or systems theory or deconstructionism etcetera – can obviously never feature an unspecified domain. The reason for this is that such (most) basic ideas are per definition about GPs and their relation to part(s) of the world, the latter thus accounting for a specified domain.

5 CONCEPTUALISING THE BEGINNING: REMARKS ON OPERATOR-SEMANTICS
Consider the three expressions below:

(5) God rules.
(6) God creates.
(7) Biological chance rules.

(Note that (4a) of the previous section and (6) above may represent part of the elementary assumptions presupposed by those reflections on the Very Beginning found in the Prologue of the Fourth Gospel.) The three expressions listed above all have a (three-category) kernel-proposition structure (which, in the terminology of predicate logic, is equivalent to a two-place predicate structure), similar to the one analysed in (4b). In (5) and (6) the SP is God and in (7) the SP is Biological chance. In (5) and (7) the OP is rules and in (6) it is creates. In all three cases the DP is unspecified, as in (4b). But note now that the expressions (5)-(7) seem to be syntactically well-formed even though they clearly lack a syntactic phrase functioning as object. In a way this is remarkable, because on the syntactic level, many other alpha-expressions of the sort that are identical in their syntactic form to their propositional structure, (like (5)-(7), but unlike (4a)) cannot, in fact, do without a specified object. Consider the examples below:

(8) *Mind forms.
(9) *Textuality encloses.
(10) *God precedes.

The reason for the ill-formedness (indicated by the asterisk-convention) of (8)-(10) seems to have something to do with the syntactic requirements (specifically the question concerning the subcategorisation of zero Complements) of the verb phrase. Thus, a proposition that is in the content of its first two categories exactly similar to the syntactic form of its corresponding alpha-expression, cannot have an unspecified domain phrase, if the expression itself contains a transitive verb incapable of subcategorising a zero Complement (the verb being of course the equivalent of the propositional operator). Nevertheless, there are circumstances where it is possible for an operator which is semantically identical to a transitive verb to appear in a proposition without a specified domain. This occurs where the operator itself does not appear as a verb phrase in the alpha-expression, but is only indirectly derived from the expression. And this is exactly what happens in expression (4a) (In the beginning was
the Word) and the proposition (4b) which is associated with it. Thus we can account for the fact that precedes in (10) and its associated proposition cannot do without an object/domain, although it may occur without a specified domain as in (4b); while creates in (6) can do without an object as well as occur - on the propositional level - without a specified domain. (Unspecified domains being limited, as we have seen, to only those propositions underlying actual expressions in a text - in contrast to discourse-governing propositions which do not feature unspecified domains.)

What is the relevance of this kind of analysis for New Testament studies? To my mind it is the fact that we are focusing here, on a very elementary level, on certain behavioural differences occurring within a set of concepts that form part of a larger set, the latter featuring centrally in any discourse dealing with the properties of God (or any medium through which God is portrayed as expressing Himself, such as the Law or the Word). Of particular importance here, is that we are lead, I believe, to assume a certain correspondence between (what we may hope to uncover as) the rules of a specialised conceptual grammar, and the rules of a linguistic grammar. Of course, up to now the rigorous structural analysis of expressions in theological discourse, has been all but identified with the (mere) linguistic aspect of these expressions. Regarding the postulated correspondence, we could envisage this as being (ultimately) specified in a set of correspondence rules providing for the mapping of one grammar to another. In research undertaken by Jackendoff and others, much importance is attached to the uncovering of such correspondence rules as they would apply to mapping between conceptual systems and numerous other systems with which the former interacts. Even something like vision is a candidate in this context!

Let us now reflect for a moment on the classification of operators in the lexicon of archaeological grammar. In (1b) of section 3 we have forms as one operator and in (6) creates seems to be (on the propositional level) a different operator. There is, however, evidence (which I will not review here) which suggests that the concept of creates is in fact derived from the deeply intuitive notion of forms. If this is the case, then only forms should be considered as one of the set of 'primitives' which constitute the operator-vocabulary. For biblical texts, this means that our idea of God creating is conceptually dependent on our basic experiential intuition of an X forming a Y. This intuitive concept is then modified to produce the experience-transcending idea of an X (God) forming a Y (creation), such that the operator's analytical implication of a pre-existent material is suspended.

Also, the thematic role that an operator like forms would project onto the propositional subject, would be that of AGENT - the concept of forming arguably implying some kind of rational purposiveness inherent in the act. This distinguishes forms from, for example, causes or generates - operators which can also project an inanimate SOURCE-role to the subject, compare a proposition like [Nature] [causes/generates] [everything that lives]. In fact an operator like forms can only metaphorically be adjoined to a SOURCE-subject such as 'Nature'. In the Prologue of John it seems to be the case (drawing on analyses in Visagie et al 1989) that, propositionally speaking, God forms and the Word causes and precedes, both
subjects taking the role of AGENT. But notice that forms here also confers
an INSTRUMENT-role on the Word, because God's creation is apparently
effectuated through the Word's causing all things to come into existence.

On the basis of the conclusions drawn above, we may now propose the
following kernel-propositions for the first three verses of the Prologue
(cf also the analysis in Newman and Nida 1980:10). The outer brackets
indicate the category unit of 'proposition':

(11) \[ p \{ SP \text{Word} \} \{ OP \text{precedes} \} \{ DP \text{all things} \} \]
(12) \[ p \{ SP \text{Word} \} \{ OP \text{causes} \} \{ DP \text{all things} \} \]
(13) \[ p \{ SP \text{God} \} \{ OP \text{forms} \} \{ DP \text{all things} \} \]

Moving on now to another aspect of operator-semantics, we find that
comparison of operators like form and cause with operators like transcend
and precede, reveals an interesting difference. This has to do with the
fact that operators such as form and cause exert much more of a direct
'operational force' on their domains, than do transcend and precede. The
latter two operators (and others like them) are evidently not so bound
to (in the sense of being actively involved with) their domains as other
operators are. Thus for Textuality or the Word to precede their respective
domains, is from this point of view comparable to their transcending them,
but not to their causing, forming or pervading them. On the other hand,
despite these internal differences in binding structure, the Word's
preceding is on equal footing with God's forming in the sense that both
feature the propositional subject's capacity for operational power of some
sort over an appropriate domain.

6 CONCLUDING REMARKS: SKETCHING THE SURROUNDING CONTEXT
In bringing these introductory remarks on archaeological grammar to a
close, let me indicate very briefly something of the surrounding
theoretical context from which the preceding discussion has had to
abstract only (fragments of) partial perspectives. Some idea of this
context can perhaps best be gained by considering the diagram below:
containing more categories than the three constituting its kernel-form. For example, the *infinity* ascribed to God or Mind or Textuality, would belong to the category of *attributes*. Explorations in this area have indicated that attribute-semantics is in itself a theme worthy of quite specialised study. There is for example the question of which rules, if any, specify the possible combinations of binary-structured attributes (like finite/infinite, simple/complex) within a propositional context. Research along these lines can make a major contribution to an archaeological analysis of the theological discourse on the 'properties' of God.

The block C represents a 'layer', as it were, separate from the pure categorial content of the proposition. This layer or level specifies the various ways in which the categorial content can be *schematised*. That is, a proposition such as (13) above is interpreted by both author and audience in terms of a certain 'mind-picture' into which the categorial content is fitted. In this instance (namely that of (13) above), 'God' and 'all things' might be constructed, for example, either as totally separated entities or as actually connected somewhere on a graded continuum. Both representations are part of a package of schematising-images, available for 'spatially' specifying the domain relation. The work of Ronald Langacker (eg 1986, 1987) in cognitive grammar has some very pertinent implications for a full theory of this schematising-competence. His theory seeks to demonstrate (among other things) how the meaning of an expression depends on an inventory of images by means of which we structure conceptual content. Analyses along these lines can assist in making perfect the crucial differences between, for example, an X regulating a Y, or governing or controlling it.

The block D represents another layer that we have largely abstracted from in the preceding analysis. This is the layer of semiotic figures and rhetorical units such as models, metaphors, signs and symbols. These units function in the immediate vicinity of the propositional structure or even within the latter. For example, the *Word* in (11) and (12) above, clearly represents such a unit functioning as a subject phrase on the propositional level.

Apart from the components represented in the diagram above, we have had to refrain from exploring the possible connections between a fledgling theory of archaeological grammar and other influential language theories, for instance speech act theory. In the context of the latter theory, alpha-expressions would of course function as a specific type of utterance. The so-called illocutionary aspect of such an utterance would then be found in the particular act (stating, asserting, promising, etc) performed in the utterance containing an alpha-expression. The perlocutionary aspect would entail, characteristically for alpha-expressions, that feeling of awe which speech acclaiming archival GPs generally inspires in the (sympathetic) listener.

Hopefully, these concluding remarks will further strengthen the case this paper has tried to make out for a theory of archaeological grammar. I am convinced that the development of such a theory can only be a highly rewarding enterprise. This conviction is motivated by taking account of factors such as the truly foundational nature of this research; the degree of formalisation and explicitness attainable; the implications of such a
theory for the current debate on foundationalism; the opportunity for developing a research programme that will be informed by frontier research in linguistics and cognitive studies; and the potential of this research for creating wide-ranging interdisciplinary contact and communication.

With regard to the field of New Testament studies, I shall be so bold as to claim that this type of theory (not necessarily the particular model demonstrated in this paper) could be capable of advancing the structural analysis of biblical discourse to a new level of sophistication. New, because of the significant deductive depth this type of theorising is capable of reaching (as opposed to the inductive generalisations that satisfy most practitioners in the field), and because of the focus on universal structures of human conceptualisation (as opposed to ad hoc analyses for the sake of individualised textual understanding). Another important aspect of the approach advocated here, is the understanding that applications of a theory such as this to chosen textual material, should be guided by the aim of contributing to the continual refinement of the theory itself.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS
I am grateful to Christo Saayman, Johan Oosthuizen and Andries Snyman for their assistance in a research project to which this paper is heavily indebted. Thanks to Wilhelm Wuehlner, A J Greimas and H Quéré for helpful comments on a manuscript related to this project. Thanks also to Timothy Austin for reading an earlier version of this paper and considering the possible implications for a linguistic theory of poetic syntax.

ENDNOTES
1 Examples of Grand Beginnings that are to be found in the discourses of the disciplines mentioned, are: God, Nature, Culture, Psyche, Energy and so forth.
2 In terms of archaeological grammar theory, the central question concerning our example can be phrased thus: does light function solely as a complement of life, which is itself a complement of the GP-element: Word; or does light also function as a covert complement of various other alpha-concepts (like infinity, causality) which are predicated of the GP and receive specific interpretations within an ideological paradigm like that of Greek metaphysics?
3 I use the expression 'syntactically well/ill-formed' here in a very broad sense. The term is only meant to indicate (in the latter sense) some form of 'oddness' or unacceptability. I am also not excluding the possibility of this 'oddness' being (strictly speaking) more semantic than syntactic in character.
4 That is to say some verbs can be used without any Complement. (The latter term is used here in a technical linguistic sense, varying from its informal meaning in note 2 above.)
5 The same procedure could conceivably apply to other operator notions predicated of God. Note the implication here of the God-talk generating propositional structure being 'filled in' with 'limiting concepts' or 'ideas', to use the Kantian terminology. In other words, although the functions of metaphorical language (as distinct from those of conceptual language) are clearly of fundamental importance to the
systematic study of God-talk (and are also accounted for in the overall architecture of archaeological theory), it would not be correct to assume – with a dominant trend in philosophical theology – that the possibility of God-talk is only given with the phenomenon of metaphoricity.

6 As alternatives to the rendering 'through him God made all things', Newman and Nida suggest 'God made all things; the Word did it', or: 'God used the Word to make all things', or: 'God caused the Word to make ....' In the light of the operational difference in meaning between (12) and (13) above, their third alternative seems less acceptable. Note that here we have an example where considerations of archaeological semantics (if correct), have decided consequences for the evaluation of an exegetical interpretation.

7 Though we have had cause to refer to this layer at the close of section 2.1 above (in the remarks on the life and light associated with the Word). Regarding the status of the blocks in the diagram: while C and A (the latter representing attribute-semantics) are certainly capable of engendering relatively differentiated theories, I would say that D and the theory of paradigmatic values mentioned at the close of section 1, are different in the sense of constituting two of the four major subtheories comprising archaeological discourse theory (Visagie et al 1989).

WORKS CONSULTED


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