NEW TESTAMENT GREEK - THE PRESENT STATE OF THE ART

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ABSTRACT
The Greek of the New Testament has been variously explained throughout the centuries with significant implications for hermeneutics due to different definitions of its nature, and the application of different linguistic methodologies. Though modern insights have not fully replaced old convictions, the 70s saw a gradual acceptance of general linguistic principles, while the 80s may be called a time of awakening. Hopefully the 90s will see a renewal moving beyond traditional grammar towards a full-fledged semantic approach.

The study of ancient Greek dates back to the early Greek philosophers and grammarians, whose observations were rooted in the belief that there is a logical connection between language and grammar, in fact, a consistent pattern applicable to any and all languages. When Latin gradually superseded Greek as a world language, these ideas continued to be accepted and Classical philology, the science of reading and commenting on Greek and Latin texts, set the pace and established the principles for language studies in general, especially for the period following the Renaissance. Thus, at the time of the Reformation in the 16th century, when the first Greek New Testaments were produced, Classical philology was the yardstick for all language studies - a set of rules and constructions based on the supposedly best authors of the Classical period.

The Greek text of the New Testament published by Desiderius Erasmus in 1516 contained notes to explain certain grammatical peculiarities of the Greek text, judged to be quite inferior and often 'incorrect' in terms of Classical Greek. Theodor Beza's Annotationes, published in 1556, defended the so-called Hebrew-Greek 'excellence' of the New Testament and introduced a controversy that has continued even to the present time, as can be seen in Nigel Turner's article 'The literary character of New Testament Greek'. (1974). The principal differences of opinion were between the purists who tried to prove that New Testament Greek can match the elegance of Classical authors and the Hebraists who insisted that it is 'Jewish Greek'. These divergent opinions, along with popular ideas of earlier centuries about the differences between New Testament Greek and Classical Greek, led people to regard the divergence from Classical Greek as proof of the work of the Holy Spirit. Later Adolf Deissmann, who was totally at the other end of the linguistic spectrum, insisted that New Testament Greek was on a par with the everyday language, the so-called Koine. These matters have been adequately discussed by Simon Wong in Scriptura (1990) and he has also pointed out how the idea of New Testament Greek being a unique language was continually stressed. Since the Reformation these discussions were instrumental in gradually creating a general conviction that
New Testament Greek is something apart and therefore in our time not really a matter for concern to Classical and Hellenistic Greek scholars. It is only something for theologians to worry about as they write their commentaries. This idea was reinforced by those theologians who accepted the challenge and wrote the grammars and the lexicons. And so, with a few exceptions, New Testament Greek remained almost completely the concern of theology and never came into its own by being studied as Greek writings. It was scarcely ever a subject for study in any Classics department.

Before focusing our attention on what has happened in the 20th century, it is important for us to understand another reason for the very slow progress made in the study of New Testament Greek, namely the fact that grammatical investigations were largely superseded by work in lexicography. Winer's monumental grammar of New Testament Greek, first published in 1822, took the position in its Introduction that Hebraisms were pervasive in the grammar and that New Testament Greek should be regarded as a branch of Hebrew studies. This remarkable development was also observed by Gert Kruger (1975), who showed that in the 17th and 18th centuries New Testament Greek was often taught in European universities by the professor of Hebrew. A grammar published in 1815 by P H Haab in Tübingen was called Hebräisch-griechische Grammatik zum Gebrauch für das Neue Testament. Is it a mere coincidence that Nigel Turner's fourth volume on style (1976), which completes Moulton's Grammar of New Testament Greek, treats style almost exclusively in terms of Semitisms?

The renewal in Classical Greek studies, introduced by Gottfried Hermann at the beginning of the 19th century in his book on Greek grammar (De emendanda ratione grammaticae Graecae, 1801), revitalised the ancient logical (or 'rational' or 'philosophical') approach to language. George Winer, who preferred to take a position somewhere between the purists and the Hebraists, was strongly attracted to Hermann's views and in 1822 he published his New Testament grammar (mentioned in the previous paragraph) within this school of thought. Winer's grammar soon became the handbook for practically all subsequent treatments of New Testament Greek. In the Introduction to his grammar Winer explicitly states that, as a result of the fact that Biblical scholars adhered so strongly to the conviction that New Testament Greek was Hebraistic and therefore believed that it could not be subjected to philosophical investigation, they separated themselves entirely from Classical philologists. Furthermore, he insisted that Hebrew itself should be subjected to 'rational treatment'. This contention introduced a somewhat new school of thought, but in fact this viewpoint was not essentially different from the principles employed by the ancient Greek grammarians, since both reasoned that there should be a logical connection between words and meanings, and that grammar reflects a consistent pattern applicable to all human languages.

The present state of the art in New Testament Greek studies is such that while quite new insights are pursued and quite new schools of thought have emerged, much of the earlier way of dealing with New Testament Greek has remained. Consequently one cannot adequately understand and evaluate present developments without proper insight into the underlying presuppo-
sitions of Winer's grammar, which went through eight editions between 1822 and 1894/95, and was the grammar of the 19th century. The Blass-Debrunner grammar of the 20th century (1896-1976, 14 editions) continued the same philological approach, although modern linguistics was born in 1916 when Ferdinand de Saussure's Cours de linguistique générale appeared. Even the 1976 revision of Blass-Debrunner by Rehkopf is amazingly still innocent of linguistics (see G D Kilpatrick's review of the Rehkopf edition in The Classical Review 28, 1978, p99).

The present state of New Testament Greek is still intricately linked with Winer's approach and it is only in the past decade that considerable changes have occurred. These changes are, however, still in the process of being accepted, while older philological concepts still prevail in numerous publications, even to the present time. One should not assume that all of the philological and/or Semitic approaches to New Testament Greek are to be discarded. It is more a matter of narrowing their relevance and it is for this reason that we must resume our discussion of Winer.

Winer explained that he meant 'rational investigation' to be the proper method for grammatical investigations. In the Introduction to his grammar he insists that he does not construct *a priori* the laws and rules of language, but that a historical survey of the language is the means by which the causes of individual phenomena can be discovered. Accordingly, the grammarian must trace the course of thought underlying each New Testament writer's thinking by noting every transition from one meaning of a word to another, from the fundamental signification of every particle to each of its secondary meanings. In essence Winer goes back to the philosophical approach of the ancient Greeks. Plato's *Cratylus* laid the foundation for these convictions.

One of the most far-reaching implications of this presupposition — in vogue since the early Greeks and even up to the 20th century — is that there must be one basic meaning of each word or grammatical construction that will highlight and explain all of the various usages. This so-called etymological approach was the prevailing philosophy of grammar for almost fourteen centuries. By the end of the 19th century the historical approach still dominated thinking, although not on philosophical grounds, but on the grounds of the history of each item. The oldest known or reconstructed stage of the language became the yardstick, and Greek and Latin roots provided the historical setting. Then, in the latter part of the 19th century, languages began to be diligently compared to one another. Sir William Jones's speech in 1786, which drew attention to the value of Sanskrit in language studies, is often said to have opened the way. Jones's contention that Greek, Latin and Sanskrit, as well as the Germanic, Celtic and Persian languages must have a common background prompted others to proceed along these same lines. Thus the comparative study of languages was born, yet within an overshadowing historical approach. In such a mode New Testament Greek was also pursued within a historical-comparative framework. A T Robertson's monumental grammar of close to 1500 pages first appeared in 1914 (although it was started in 1886) and emphasised this historical approach by even calling itself *A grammar of the Greek New Testament in the*
light of historical research.

Through all these centuries the basic unit of linguistic analysis was
the word (especially in terms of its origin and development) in order to
determine a type of Grundbedeutung from which all usages could be explained. The same applied to nominal cases, verbal aspects and sentence constructions. Usage, as the mode of description of parallel forms and constructions, dominated the linguistic scene, since this was the essence of philology. Even a cursory examination of the leading New Testament grammars from the last part of the 19th and the first part of the 20th century (e.g. Winer's and Blass-Debrunner's Grammatik, as well as Moulton's Grammar of New Testament Greek) shows this general contention which Robertson made explicit in the title, as referred to above.

This historical approach to grammar is still quite popular. Springhetti's Introductio historica-grammatica in Graecitatem Novi Testamenti (1966) is mainly a listing of usages similar to M Zerwick's Graecitas Biblica, first edition 1944. One can easily enlarge upon the grammars published in the 20th century. They all seem very similar in approach to the grammars of Winer and Blass-Debrunner. The well-known grammars by Radermacher (1925), Abel (1927), Chamberlain (1941), Dana-Mantey (1957), Jay (1958), Moule (1959) and Greenlee (1963) are all the same in set-up and approach. Accordingly, it is no wonder that Lars Rydbeck (1974/75), in an article with the striking title 'What happened to New Testament Greek Grammar after Albert Debrunner?' deplores the fact that research into post-classical Greek, in particular New Testament Greek, has almost come to a standstill. Rydbeck offers three reasons for this state of affairs: the lack of a so-called 'classical education', an artificial antithesis between theological and grammatical interpretations of the New Testament and, finally, an assumption that everything in New Testament Greek scholarship has been done already. This final lament is perhaps the most crucial of the three, since various grammars after Debrunner all merely repeat what has been said and what is already known. Consequently, it stands to reason that people would think that we have all the facts. Without new methodologies and a new theory of language no one could expect to offer anything different.

If one looks at the grammars on New Testament Greek that appeared since the 1960s, it is remarkable that one of the first grammars with a modern linguistic orientation is that of Goetchius, The Language of the New Testament (1965), in which he applies linguistic terminology to his description of the phonology and morphology of New Testament Greek. At that time it was quite a bold venture. One would have expected that Margaret Thrall in Greek particles in the New Testament (1962) would at least have exhibited some acquaintance with linguistics. Though her book is an excellent descriptive exposition of the usages of particles, she remains fully within a philological framework, with, however, some critical awareness of the weakness of the traditional philosophical approach, especially in regularly pointing out that a basic meaning for the various particles represents a false approach to the problems of semantic analysis.

It is hardly thinkable that Biblical scholars and Greek grammarians in
the first half of the 20th century could be totally unaware of the new approach to language introduced by Ferdinand de Saussure in 1916. Saussure's insistence that a synchronic structural approach to language should be primary and that consequently the historical-comparative method should be supplemental to determining the meaning in a text, was so revolutionary that it took at least half a century to be accepted. Linguists such as Jespersen, Bloomfield, Ullmann, Gray and many others were apparently totally unknown to New Testament Greek scholars.

One might think that these linguists were generalists and, as such, far removed from New Testament studies. However, the situation in Classical Greek was not much different. The monumental Griechische Grammatik by Eduard Schwyzer (first published in 1938, but continued and enlarged for many decades) likewise shows no acquaintance with anything outside of Greek studies. Even when Chomsky's Transformational generative grammar (1957, 1965) and other structural approaches such as sociolinguistics and the study of meaning within a semiotic framework (to mention only two) began to dominate the linguistic scene, Greek studies (whether in the New Testament or in any other area) continued the philological approach. It is no wonder that James Barr's publications in the early 1960s, despite favourable reactions from linguists, had little or no influence, except for some lip service, even as Moisés Silva contends in his Foreword to David Black's Linguistics for students of New Testament Greek (1988).

Silva also rightly maintains that even during the 1970s significant works employing modern linguistics in Biblical scholarship were few and far between. Nevertheless, the 1970s may be regarded as a time of pondering the value of linguistics for New Testament exegesis. Nida was an important voice at the time. His article in the Journal of Biblical Literature in 1972 on the implications of contemporary linguistics for Biblical scholarship provided an important stimulus. As early as 1969 he and Charles Taber published their Theory and practice of translation, which became one of the strongest means for awakening many New Testament scholars to the relevance of modern linguistics. Similarly, Bertha Siertsema's article with the significant title 'Language and world view (Semantics for theologians)' in The Bible Translator (1969) endorses the criticism James Barr launched at Bohman's distinction between Hebrew and Greek thought as reflected in their languages.

Perhaps no one else had such a profound influence on New Testament Greek as Nida. His Componential analysis of meaning (1975) and his Exploring semantic structures (1975), in which a number of his significant publications in various journals were reworked, opened the minds of many New Testament scholars and set the scene for what happened in the 1980s. Silva also pointed out that the 1980s had seen a genuine awakening to the relevant contribution that linguistics can make to Biblical exegesis. This is certainly true, yet the present state of New Testament Greek grammar should not be assumed to be one of total awakening. It is rather a mixed bag. While publications (articles, monographs, books) with a modern linguistic approach are no longer rare, commentaries and publications on Biblical theology reflect only a superficial acquaintance, if any, with mod-
ern linguistics.

The 1970s not only opened up new horizons, but also preserved old convictions. In a Festschrift to honour F W Gingrich as a lexicographer, Otto Piper (1972) wrote a chapter on the unfinished task of lexicography. Yet he says that with Bauer's Wörterbuch and the publications edited by Kittel on key theological terms, the task of New Testament lexicography 'has now been solved forever' (p176). What task was then still 'unfinished'? He mentions such features as the relation between knowledge and action, the historical character of language, and theological matters pertaining to the nature of God. This is still fully in line with concepts strongly criticised by Barr. What is even more astonishing is Piper's plea for etymology (p203). This is but one example, but it indicates a trend. New ideas are accepted slowly.

One can justifiably contend that the 1960s and early 1970s still regarded a general philological approach as practically the only methodology. Perhaps one of the main reasons for such a state of affairs lay in the fact that those scholars who were aware of the profound changes in linguistics probably did not consider it feasible to venture into a new grammar for New Testament Greek before modern linguistics had developed more fully. And so they remained quiet. Those who were not sympathetic to or even unaware of such developments regarded Moulton, Robertson and Blass-Debrunner as the standard grammars to which little or nothing could be added. Therefore, even up to the 1980s, all New Testament Greek grammars that did appear were 'beginners' grammars', offering nothing new except for presenting some new teaching methods. That is to say, the focus was not on the content as such, but rather on the presentation of the accepted content. Even a superficial glance at grammars such as the following will illustrate this point: An introductory grammar of New Testament Greek with exercises (1965) by A W Argyle, and A beginner's New Testament Greek grammar (1979) by S Kubo. Some were updated reprints of earlier editions, but others merely continued the trend, such as Beginners' grammar of the Greek New Testament by W Davis, New Testament Greek: an introductory grammar by E G Jay, Einführung in das neutestamentliche Griechisch by L Lentz, Lehrbuch des neutestamentliche Griechisch by J Warns, and Satzlehre des neutestamentllicher Griechisch by G Steyer. Some grammars proposed specific new teaching approaches, such as Teaching New Testament Greek, a psycholinguistic approach by C A Allen and Handbook of New Testament Greek by W S Lasor, which followed an inductive method by using Acts as the text and teaching the grammar as items came along in the process of reading the text. This trend continued despite remarkable advances made in linguistics. A notable example is Nigel Turner's Grammatical insights into the New Testament, with no reference whatsoever to anything but philology. The same applies to his edition of volume III Syntax of Moulton's Grammar of New Testament Greek.

Another trend, which has not yet been mentioned, since it is more restricted in scope, but in fact a part of the philological approach, is to treat New Testament Greek as Semitic Greek, using the LXX to explain various features of New Testament Greek, for example, Semitische Syntax in
Neuen Testament (1968) by K Beyer, and Essays in Biblical Greek: studies on the value and use of the Septuagint (1970) by E Hatch. These publications, as well as a number of others, were in a way merely a revival of strong positions at the beginning of the 20th century.

New linguistic insights, however, have gradually begun to be accepted. In 1978 Learn to read the Greek New Testament by W Powers applied linguistic principles to various aspects of grammar, though more descriptively. However, though his definitions became much better linguistically and the more precise terminology from modern linguistics enhanced this grammar, almost all of his 'innovations' were in the area of phonology and morphology. Some stimulus was given by the Society of Biblical Literature in publishing D D Schmidt's Hellenistic Greek grammar and Noam Chomsky (1981). Although this was a commendable effort, the formalising of descriptions according to the symbols and notation of transformational-generative grammar made it a difficult book to cope with and to reveal the relevance of linguistics. In proving the relevance of linguistics, an earlier publication, namely David Kiefer's New Testament Greek for Bible students, 3 vols (1975), substantiated the fruits of linguistics and made these available to Bible students. Since it is a publication for beginners, the level is elementary, even though the approach is quite modern and scientific, perhaps even better than Theodore Muller's New Testament Greek: a case grammar approach (1978), in which he tried to incorporate insights from generative-transformational grammar, as well as case grammar as more relevant means of explaining New Testament Greek. Though case grammar is explicitly mentioned in the title, not too much of it is found in the actual core of the book.

Developments illustrating changes in approaches to New Testament Greek are currently more often found in journal articles than in full-scale books. An important article by Richard Erickson (1983), based on his doctoral dissertation, shows how theology has always been closely linked to the Bible and yet how the text of the Bible must be regarded as a language text. Together with Erhardt Güttgemanns, he pleads for a complete integration of theology and linguistics. Güttgemanns has done much to expose the lack of linguistics, especially in German theology. His writings, however, have had more influence in countries other than Germany.

Most articles on more restricted grammatical issues show the need for proper methodology. Traditional grammar is largely descriptive and often provides little more than names assigned to constructions.

The plight of New Testament Greek grammar is mainly due to a lack of proper methodology and a satisfactory linguistic theory. To rectify this situation is the purpose of most recent doctoral theses, e.g. P W Brennan, The structure of Koine Greek narrative (1984), dealing with the discourse patterns of narrative prose, and J E Botha, A study in Johannine style: history, theory, practice (1989), in which speech acts are treated for the first time as part of style. Studies such as these all contribute to a new theory of New Testament Greek; in fact, they provide a new frame of reference that will eventually constitute the infrastructure for a new grammar.
Simon Wong has recently submitted a thesis on *Case frames in the Pauline Epistles* (1990). Semantic cases as a means of establishing sentence meaning is a new application of case theory, whereby syntax and semantics are joined in analysing utterances. Case theory defines the roles which entities play in events. These roles are the primary elements in determining what an utterance means. Many additional examples may be quoted from dissertation abstracts. They all prove that the process is ongoing. New Testament Greek has not come to a standstill.

These new approaches are not, however, very numerous, as can be readily seen by checking *New Testament Abstracts*, although recent volumes do show some increase. The sections dealing with matters of language are mainly those marked philology (sic) and translation. In comparison with literary studies, exegesis and theology, these are, naturally, small areas. Yet they do show some activity in grammatical studies. Some are philological, perhaps the majority, while studies with a modern linguistic orientation are starting to appear. Perhaps the articles in *The Bible Translator* and in *Notes on Translation* show a much larger acceptance of modern linguistics since these journals are directed primarily at translators, who have to cope with meaning. The title of Erickson's article, referred to above, namely 'Linguistics and Biblical language: a wide-open field', illustrates the point.

Advances in linguistic studies of New Testament Greek are more often than not to be found in works other than grammars, e.g. Marshall's *New Testament interpretation: essays on principles and methods* (1977) and especially Thiselton's article 'Semantics and New Testament interpretation'. Note also *Biblical interpretation, principles, and practices* by Kearly et al (1986), in which articles by L Crouch on word studies and C D Osborn on interpreting Greek syntax are notable. In the South African context, Fika van Rensburg's *Grammatikos* (1984) is more of a grammar and a welcome treatment of New Testament Greek from a functional point of view as it incorporates numerous features of linguistics.

Two areas of linguistics, namely discourse analysis and style/rhetoric, have received almost no attention in any grammar of the Greek New Testament. As a matter of fact, we are just beginning to see something of this in David Black's commendable book, which has already been referred to. However, his treatment of rhetoric is confined to figures of speech and he advises the reader to consult *Style and discourse* (1983) by Nida et al. for more information. The same applies to his section on 'Analyzing discourse', in which he refers to Louw's *Semantics of New Testament Greek*. Nevertheless, these aspects are being acknowledged and will hopefully gain more acceptance in the future. It is perhaps still part of the old tradition to restrict grammars largely to morphology and syntax. In David Black's book, however, semantics comprises a full chapter, which is in itself a heartening event.

Louw's *Semantics of New Testament Greek* (1982) was the first to employ the insights of linguistics as a semantic explication of the grammar and style of New Testament Greek. It took seriously the contention expressed in Wallace Chafe's book *Meaning and the structure of language* (1970) that
semantics is the crucial component of language. In Louw's volume, the paragraph became the basic unit of analysis and the methodology moved the focus from there to sentences and then to words.

The following year (1983) a very valuable book Biblical words and their meaning: an introduction to lexical semantics by Moisés Silva was published. Silva gives a lengthy account of how meaning has been treated within a historical framework and he then provides the reader with an excellent exposition of descriptive semantics in the framework of modern linguistics.

These books, as well as Style and discourse (1983), mentioned above, and Lexicography and translation (1985), in which a number of scholars (Wendland, Nida, van Wyk, Lübbe, Vorster and Louw) prepared the way for the new Greek-English lexicon of the New Testament based on semantic domains (1988), may all be regarded as preliminaries to a new grammar of New Testament Greek that must emerge in the near future. In all these publications a totally new view of Greek is proposed within a framework of modern linguistics by taking into consideration important insights from discourse analysis, sociolinguistics, sociosemiotics, functional theories of meaning and speech acts.

A notable application of new linguistic insights applied to New Testament Greek is Exegetical fallacies (1984) by D A Carson, in which pitfalls resulting from philological approaches are discussed. This has also been a valuable tool for sharpening the skills of exegetes and introducing new approaches. The most recent grammar (1988) by David Black, Linguistics for students of New Testament Greek (already mentioned), is also a welcome publication. It treats phonology, morphology, syntax and semantics from a linguistic point of view and adds a chapter on valuable insights from historical-comparative grammar. This is important, since one should not discard what is valuable in older studies merely because other methodologies have been developed.

A very delightfully written book applying modern linguistics to biblical study and rendering it useful for understanding the meaning of a New Testament text is Linguistics and Biblical interpretation (1989) by Peter Cotterell and Max Turner. The book is up to date with modern insights and is aimed at providing the student with a clear and readable introduction to lexical semantics, as well as to the semantics of sentences, along with a good introduction to discourse analysis.

In the above survey the term New Testament Greek has been used throughout. Strictly speaking, however, there is no such thing as New Testament Greek. This statement, in itself, is part of a new development in appraising so-called New Testament Greek. The name as such has generally been understood as referring to a particular form of Greek. Especially since the Reformation in the 16th century the type of Greek found in the New Testament was regarded and analysed as a special, even unified, branch of Greek. This probably occurred because of the theological perspective that the writings grouped as 'The New Testament' comprised one book by one primary author.

When Desiderius Erasmus criticised the grammatical 'impurities' of the Greek New Testament as compared with Classical Greek, he met with strong
opposition — not on the grounds of a linguistic argument as to why Classical Greek (in fact, Attic Greek) should be normative, but because of the theological doctrine of verbal inspiration. Thus the stage was set for an unquestioned assumption that New Testament Greek was a distinctive and unified type of Greek. A number of assessments of New Testament Greek reflected in such names as ‘Hebraistic Greek,’ ‘Sacred Greek’ (often called ‘Holy Ghost Greek’), or even ‘Common Greek’ were made in the 19th century. These were largely the result of Adolph Deissmann’s endeavours, which for the first time related the Greek as found in the New Testament to the ordinary speech of the day. All of these names reflect the view that the Greek in the New Testament is distinctive and more or less homogeneous. Some even went so far as to think that New Testament Greek is typically Koine Greek, or even worse, to identify Koine Greek with New Testament Greek. At present one often hears people say at conferences or in private conversations that none of the above evaluations is really valid.

The expression ‘Koine Greek’ is better understood as a cover term for various forms of Greek used in everyday speech in many parts of the ancient world during the Hellenistic era. Greek as a world language was then in a sense comparable to English today, a language known and used in most parts of the world, a koine language. Yet, there is no such thing as Koine English. Similarly, one should not talk of New Testament Greek as being Koine Greek. Rather one should talk of various forms and styles of Greek within the area of Hellenistic Greek, ranging from fairly highbrow, as for example in 1 Peter and Jude, to quite colloquial in Mark and even substandard in Revelation. What we, therefore, have in the New Testament is one variety among several varieties of Greek as used in the Hellenistic period.

Since, however, the expression ‘New Testament Greek’ is quite convenient, it may very well prevail even though the understanding of the expression is certainly on the brink of change. This may have a profound influence on further developments in grammar and exegesis, especially in cautioning analysts against using a grammatical or stylistic peculiarity in John to explain features of other writings in the New Testament. The *Greek–English lexicon of the New Testament based on semantic domains*, published in 1988, already distinguishes clearly between meanings of the same Greek term in different books of the New Testament.

What has been said is not an exhaustive account, since this presentation does not permit a detailed exposition. However, the above outline is believed to illustrate the main features of the present state of the art. Unfortunately, it may still be summarised as a mixed bag. While many articles, monographs and dissertations clearly show a total break with traditional grammar, old views are by no means totally absent. We have perhaps passed from the old to the new in the 1980s. The next decade will, hopefully, see a new interest in linguistic approaches to New Testament Greek grammar.

What now lies ahead is to tackle specific issues in building up a database for a new grammar. Such a grammar must be semantic in orientation and
must explain the functions of the morphological and syntactical categories. These functions, however, must not be explained in isolation, but rather by comparing different linguistic items that can be used to represent the same function. This type of functional approach is absolutely necessary in order to break new ground. For example, for the purpose of describing the semantics of verbal aspects, very little is contributed to our understanding of the meaning of aspect by re-evaluating the tense system of Greek only because the tense system has traditionally been said to mark different verbal aspects. We must first of all define what we understand by aspect, that is, what type of linguistic feature it is. This will lead us to its function in language. Then we will have to determine how languages can express this particular function, e.g. the duration of an event. If we find that linguistic items such as lexical markers, contextual situations, componential features and speech perspectives mark durative aspect, then we have to determine how verbal tenses function in respect to other markers of aspect. The question to be solved is then whether verbal tenses are really markers of aspect. This methodology is in line with stylistics and provides us with a complete picture. It will surely lead to new insights.

Since language is a code by which semantic information is transmitted, a functional approach is imperative if we are to map the semantic content of an utterance. This is but one small item, but it shows how looking at language from new angles can add numerous insights to our understanding, especially in determining meaning. The 1990s will probably be a time of justifying the way in which we determine meaning. This is a tremendous challenge. Nothing that remains static can survive. Life implies moving on. This philosophy should be our yardstick in looking for a new grammar of New Testament Greek. The old one has become obsolete. This we have learned in the 1980s.

WORKS CONSULTED


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