

NEW TESTAMENT DISCOURSE ANALYSIS: DEFINITIONS AND APPROACHES  
by Matthew D. McDill

Discourse analysis is an approach to studying the New Testament that is difficult to understand. It is related to a variety of disciplines such as linguistics, semantics, literary criticism, rhetorical criticism, and syntactical analysis. One may be able to identify with Moisés Silva when he commented on the confusing character of discourse analysis: “Indeed, the more I read the more lost I feel.” He confessed that he began to think that “discourse analysis is about . . . *everything!*”<sup>1</sup> The question that this paper seeks to answer is: What is discourse analysis (DA)? To answer this question, definitions of DA and some of the unique terminology discourse analysts use will be provided; how DA relates to various similar disciplines will be explained; the basic characteristics and categories of DA will be presented; and the various approaches to DA will be explored. Key terms will be in bold and included in the Glossary of Appendix A.

### Definitions

Discourse analysis belongs to the field of **linguistics**, which is the study of language.<sup>2</sup> Linguists investigate how various aspects of language work together to accomplish an act of communication.<sup>3</sup> Within the last thirty years, scholars have utilized DA in the study of the New

---

<sup>1</sup>Moisés Silva, “Discourse Analysis and Philippians,” In *Discourse Analysis and Other Topics in Biblical Greek*, ed. Stanley E. Porter and D. A. Carson (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995), 102–103.

<sup>2</sup>Stanley Porter writes, “Within the discipline of linguistics, one of the most important and most widely discussed and investigated areas of research is discourse analysis or text-linguistics.” Stanley E. 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, 14–35 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995), 17.

<sup>3</sup>George H. Guthrie, *The Structure of Hebrews: A Text-Linguistic Analysis* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1994), 35.

Testament.<sup>4</sup> This is appropriate because, as Stanley Porter observes, “the study of the New Testament is essentially a language-based discipline.”<sup>5</sup> The use of DA in New Testament studies places it under the rubric of hermeneutics as well.<sup>6</sup> Although DA is a well known discipline of linguistics outside of biblical scholarship, this study is limited to DA as it is applied to New Testament studies. Discourse analysis is sometimes referred to as **text-linguistics**. According to Porter and Jeffery Reed, “text-linguistics” has referred to the linguistic analysis of written texts while “discourse analysis” referred to the analysis of spoken discourse or of an act of communication (including texts).<sup>7</sup> However, this distinction has largely faded and text-linguistics and DA are interchangeable terms.<sup>8</sup>

Discourse analysts admit that DA is difficult to define.<sup>9</sup> Silva (who would not refer to himself as a discourse analyst) laments the confusion: “Part of the difficulty is that the term

---

<sup>4</sup>One of the earliest and best known introductions of DA into New Testament studies is that of Johannes P. Louw, “Discourse Analysis and the Greek New Testament,” *Technical Papers for the Bible Translator* 24/1 (January 1973): 101–118. See Porter, “Discourse Analysis,” 22.

<sup>5</sup>Porter, “Discourse Analysis,” 14.

<sup>6</sup>Jeffrey 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, ed. Stanley E. Porter, vol. 136 (Sheffield: JSOT, 1997), 16.

<sup>7</sup>See Porter, “Discourse Analysis,” 17; Reed, *Philippians*, 18.

<sup>8</sup>See Porter, “Discourse Analysis,” 17; Reed, *Philippians*, 18; See also Joel B. Green, “Discourse Analysis and NT Interpretation,” In *Hearing the NT: Strategies for Interpretation*, ed. Joel B. Green (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 176. Concerning these terms, Reed wrote, “I would suggest that, for the sake of consistency, NT discourse analysts should adopt the term ‘discourse analysis’ unless they are specifically doing the type of text linguistics found in older works.” Jeffrey T. Reed, “Discourse Analysis as New Testament Hermeneutic: A Retrospective and Prospective Appraisal.” *JETS* 39/2 (June 1996): 223–240.

<sup>9</sup>Reed writes that DA is “not easily defined,” and that it is “one of the least well-defined areas of linguistics.” Reed, “Discourse Analysis as New Testament Hermeneutic,” 223–24. David Black explains that “discourse analysis is one of the least understood branches of biblical studies at present.” David Alan Black, *Linguistics for Students of New Testament Greek: A Survey of Basic Concepts and*

*discourse analysis* is being used by different scholars to describe a bewildering variety of different concerns. . . . Such diversity is unfortunate.”<sup>10</sup> Reed admits that its diversity is the reason that it is difficult to define, but argues that “diversity does not necessarily spell its demise,” instead it is “its greatest strength.”<sup>11</sup> A broad and simple definition of DA that would include the wide range of applications and related disciplines is given by D. F. Watson: “The study and interpretation of spoken and written communication.”<sup>12</sup> However, one may be able to define DA in more detail as he grasps the scope and purpose of DA in New Testament studies (see below). George Guthrie contributes such a definition: **discourse analysis** is “a process of investigation by which one examines the form and function of all the parts and levels of a written discourse, with the aim of better understanding both the parts and the whole of that discourse.”<sup>13</sup> In order to comprehend and evaluate the definition of DA given by Guthrie, one must consider the basic tenets, sub-categories, levels of discourse and purposes involved in DA.

There is one more question to ask before addressing these issues: What do discourse analysts say constitutes a “discourse?” Some define a discourse broadly: it “might be a twenty-

---

*Applications* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1995), 138. Porter reasons, “It is difficult to define discourse analysis . . . since it is still emerging.” Porter, “Discourse Analysis,” 18.

<sup>10</sup>Moisés Silva, *Interpreting Galatians: Explorations in Exegetical Method*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2001), 81.

<sup>11</sup>Reed, *Philippians*, 16.

<sup>12</sup>D. F. Watson, “Structuralism and Discourse Analysis,” In *Dictionary of the Later New Testament and Its Developments*, ed. Ralph P. Martin and Peter H. Davids, 1129–1135 (Downers Grove: Intervarsity, 1997), 1132. For similar definitions see Michael Stubbs, *Discourse Analysis: The Sociolinguistic Analysis of Natural Language* (Chicago: The University of Chicago, 1983), 1; Reed, “Discourse Analysis as New Testament Hermeneutic,” 224.

<sup>13</sup>George H. Guthrie, “Discourse Analysis,” In *Interpreting the New Testament: Essays on Methods and Issues*, ed. David Alan Black and David S. Dockery, 253–271 (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2001), 255. See also Black, *Linguistics*, 171.

volume history of the world or a one-word exchange between a parent and child.”<sup>14</sup> Although any act of communication can legitimately be called a discourse, what distinguishes DA from other linguistic disciplines is its concern with larger units of language.<sup>15</sup> Therefore, in the context New Testament DA, a **discourse** is “a semantic unit of communication which is more than one sentence in length and forms a unified whole.”<sup>16</sup>

### Characteristics and Categories

Discourse analysis is build upon several linguistic principles. According to Black, there are three basic characteristics of DA. Discourse analysts 1) look beyond the sentences to larger units of discourse and how they relate, 2) investigate the cohesion and coherence of a discourse, and 3) consider all the situational features that shape the discourse.<sup>17</sup> In some ways these three characteristics relate to what Porter and Reed call the three major categories of DA: syntax, semantics and pragmatics.<sup>18</sup>

---

<sup>14</sup>Reed, *Philippians*, 17. See also Porter, “Discourse Analysis,” 19.

<sup>15</sup>Stubbs, *Discourse Analysis*, 1.

<sup>16</sup>Guthrie, *Structure*, 46. See also Black, *Linguistics for Students*, 138, 171.

<sup>17</sup>Black, *Linguistics*, 171.

<sup>18</sup>Porter, “Discourse Analysis,” 18; and Reed, *Philippians*, 32.

Porter describes the first characteristic of DA, looking beyond the sentences to larger units of discourse and how they relate, as the “fundamental starting point of discourse analysis.”<sup>19</sup> Reed writes that it is the “most distinguishing, if not best known, aspect of the theory.”<sup>20</sup> A discourse is constructed from words, phrases, sentences, and paragraphs.<sup>21</sup> These elements are called the **micro-structure** of a discourse. **Syntax** refers to the way that these elements relate to one another to create meaning. The syntax of words and sentences are used to build the larger units that make up a discourse. The **macro-structure** is the discourse itself, or the largest thematic units of the discourse, which “govern the interpretation of the micro-structure.”<sup>22</sup> It follows, then, as Guthrie expresses, that “the primary locus of discourse meaning resides above the sentence level.”

The second characteristic, the investigation of the cohesion and coherence of a discourse, relates to the sub-category of semantics. It is through the study of semantics that one is able to discover the cohesion of a discourse. When describing **semantics**, Anthony Thiselton writes, “What is at issue is the varied meanings and kinds of meanings which belong to words and to sentences as they occur within a context that is both linguistic and extra-linguistic.”<sup>23</sup> This is a good definition because it notes that semantics involves meanings of words as well as kinds of meanings, or categories of meanings.

---

<sup>19</sup>Stanley E. Porter, *Idioms of the Greek New Testament* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999), 298.

<sup>20</sup>Reed, *Philippians*, 27.

<sup>21</sup>Porter, *Idioms*, 298.

<sup>22</sup>Ibid.

<sup>23</sup>Anthony C. Thiselton, “Semantics and New Testament Interpretation,” In *New Testament Interpretation: Essays on Principles and Methods*, ed. I. H. Marshall, 75–104 (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1977), 75.

Louw explains that “semantics crosses word boundaries.”<sup>24</sup> Semantics is not just about the meanings of words, but about how words relate to one another and their grammatical structure. The most significant work in semantics and New Testament Study is that of James Barr, *The Semantics of Biblical Language*.<sup>25</sup> He argues that the meanings of words are not properly understood from their history (etymology), but from their contextual use. Therefore meaning is determined by context. Black explains, that “semantics is concerned not only with words but also with the relations that exist between words and that permeate an entire argument.”<sup>26</sup> Semantics is foundational to DA because DA, in essence, is a semantic investigation that seeks to see the context of a discourse in a broad and comprehensive manner.

The semantic or conceptual meaning of a phrase is what is known as **deep structure**. Deep structure is different than the **surface structure**, which is the syntax and grammatical relationships between words and phrases. The attempt to find the deep structure of a paragraph is called **colon analysis**, according to the approach of Louw in *Semantics of New Testament Greek*. When one finds the semantic meaning and relationships of words and phrases, he is able to discern the cohesion of the discourse.

**Cohesion** is “the means of linking sentences into larger syntactical units.”<sup>27</sup> Cohesion is what makes a discourse a unified whole. Peter Cotterell and Max Turner point out that “discourse,

---

<sup>24</sup>Johannes P. Louw, *Semantics of New Testament Greek* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1982), 67.

<sup>25</sup>James Barr, *The Semantics of Biblical Language* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 1961). Black writes, “The modern debt to James Barr, whose monumental study *The Semantics of Biblical Language* ‘demythologized Kittel’ (as one writer has put it), simply cannot be tallied.” David Alan Black, “Hebrews 1:1–4: A Study in Discourse Analysis.” *WTJ* 49 (1987), 175. Porter refers to Barr’s work as “ground-clearing.” Porter, *Discourse Analysis*, 15. Thiselton calls it an “epoch-making book.” Thiselton, “Semantics,” 75.

<sup>26</sup>Black, “Hebrews 1:1–4,” 175.

<sup>27</sup>Black, *Linguistics*, 171.

in fact, is characterized by *coherence*, a coherence of supra-sequential structure and a coherence of topic.”<sup>28</sup> Coherence is mainly established thematically, which emphasizes the importance of semantics for this task. An element of tracking cohesion is prominence. “**Prominence** refers to those semantic and grammatical elements of discourse that serve to set aside certain subjects, ideas, or motifs of the author as more or less semantically and pragmatically significant than others.”<sup>29</sup> Reed suggests that some of the ways that one can identify prominence include “semantic relations, verbal aspect, verbal voice, verbal mood, noun-verb relations, word order, boundary makers, and formulas of genre.”<sup>30</sup> Robert Bergen calls prominence “author intended significance” and suggests that this is found by observing the order, quantity, and type of information presented by the author.<sup>31</sup>

The third characteristic of DA, “the consideration of all the situational features that shape the discourse,” relates to the third sub-category, “pragmatics.” **Pragmatics** is the study of language that “seeks to understand how the context in which an utterance is made affects the interpretation of that utterance.”<sup>32</sup> From this perspective, the discourse is viewed primarily as an act of communication. What the author was trying to accomplish through his message is very

---

<sup>28</sup>Peter Cotterell and Max Turner, *Linguistics and Biblical Interpretation* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1989), 230.

<sup>29</sup>Jeffrey T. Reed, “Identifying Theme in the New Testament: Insights from Discourse Analysis,” In *Discourse Analysis and Other Topics in Biblical Greek*. Stanley E. Porter and D. A. Carson, eds. (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995), 101.

<sup>30</sup>Ibid.

<sup>31</sup>Robert D. Bergen, “Text as a Guide to Authorial Intention: An Introduction to Discourse Criticism.” *JETS* 30/3 (September 1987): 331.

<sup>32</sup>Jeffrey T. Reed, “Modern Linguistics and the New Testament: A Basic Guide to Theory, Terminology, and Literature,” In *Approaches to New Testament Study*, ed. Stanley E. Porter and David Tombs, 222–265 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995), 235.

important pragmatically, which brings in rhetorical elements of New Testament studies.<sup>33</sup> The underlying linguistic principle is that a discourse is a dynamic act of communication between parties in a social context.

One way that the relationship of many of these elements and levels of discourse can be depicted is by a chart similar to that which Reed constructed.

Table 1. Levels of Discourse

Standard Language/Code Variety of Language/Dialect Idiolect	Context of Culture
Genre/Register	Context of Situation
Discourse (Paragraph) Sentence (Clause) Phrase Word	Co-text

There are three levels of context to consider when doing DA. The largest is the context of culture, which includes language and dialect of the discourse, and the use of language that is characteristic of the author. The second level is the context of the situation: the circumstances that precipitated the act of communication and the form genre that it became. The most immediate context is the literary context, here called co-text. This includes all the words, phrases, clauses, sentences, paragraphs, and the discourse itself.<sup>34</sup>

What are discourse analysts trying to accomplish when they examine the text of the New Testament? A general description of the purpose of the linguist and discourse analyst is

---

<sup>33</sup>Black, *Linguistics*, 195–96.

<sup>34</sup>Reed, *Philippians*, 58.



supplied by Reed: “to understand the relationships between language, discourse, and situational context in human communication.”<sup>35</sup> However, the biblical scholar is not primarily a linguist, so his ultimate purpose is not to learn about language, but to comprehend the message of Scripture. His aim is to grasp the original intent of the author. Discourse analysis enables an interpreter to do this more accurately because he is able to understand how the parts of a discourse form to reveal the overall meaning. He also sees the flow of the argument and the dynamics surrounding the communication event, giving him further insight into the author’s meaning. Guthrie explains that “discourse analysis is an approach to examining a text by which the critic seeks to understand the relationships between the various sections of an author’s discourse.”<sup>36</sup>

### **Current State and Approaches**

Nearly all discourse analysts seem to say that DA is in great need of development and has not significantly influenced New Testament studies.<sup>37</sup> Guthrie writes, “Discourse analysis is just now making its way into New Testament critical methodology and is in great need of methodological and terminological development.”<sup>38</sup> In 1989, Cotterell and Turner commented on “the tentative nature” of DA and that there are “no firm conclusions, no generally accepted

---

<sup>35</sup>Jeffery T. Reed, “Discourse Analysis,” In *Handbook to Exegesis of the New Testament*, ed. Stanley E. Porter (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1997), 189.

<sup>36</sup>Guthrie, *Structure*, 36–37. Porter presents a similar purpose statement: “to provide as comprehensive a description as possible of the various components of a given discourse, including its meaning and structure, and the means by which these are created and conveyed.” Porter, “Discourse Analysis,” 19. And Black writes, “A textlinguist would like to know how the individual parts of a discourse combine to produce the text’s overall meaning.” Black, *Linguistics*, 170.

<sup>37</sup>See Reed, “Discourse Analysis as New Testament Hermeneutic,” 223; and Guthrie states, “The use of text linguistics in biblical studies is in its infancy.” Guthrie, *Structure*, 46. Porter explains that scholars have heard of DA, but do not comprehend or use its methods. Porter, “Discourse Analysis,” 22.

<sup>38</sup>Guthrie, “Cohesion,” 47.

formulae, no fixed methodologies, no even an agreed terminology.”<sup>39</sup> Scott Kellum, in *The Unity of the Farewell Discourse: Literary Integrity of John 13:31–16:33*, mentions Cotterell and Turner’s complaint and writes that “the situation continues. . . . That uniformity is not forthcoming.”<sup>40</sup> In spite of this, many still have hope that other New Testament scholars will see DA as David Allen does, that “discourse analysis offers those of us interested in biblical exegesis one of the most exciting, challenging, and fruitful methodological frontiers on the contemporary linguistic landscape.”<sup>41</sup>

Louw remarks on the diversity of approaches and applications in discourse analysis: “The past two decades have produced extensive literature on discourse analysis dealing with various aspects of a text.”<sup>42</sup> He mentions approaches that include focus on syntax, semantics, pragmatics, types of texts, psycholinguistics and rhetoric. “All these studies indicate how extensive the field of discourse analysis is.”<sup>43</sup>

The only organized presentation of approaches to DA appears to be in Porter’s essay, “Discourse Analysis and New Testament Studies: An Introductory Survey,” in *Discourse*

<sup>39</sup>Cotterell and Turner, *Linguistics*, 233. Likewise, Guthrie wrote, “Discourse analysis is just now making its way into New Testament critical methodology and is in great need of methodological and terminological development.” George H. Guthrie, “Cohesion Shifts and Stitches in Philippians,” In *Discourse Analysis and Other Topics in Biblical Greek*, ed. Stanley E. Porter and D. A. Carson, 36–53 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1995), 47.

<sup>40</sup>L. Scott Kellum, *The Unity of the Farewell Discourse: Literary Integrity of John 13:31–16:33* (T & T Clark International: New York, 2004), 136.

<sup>41</sup>David Allen, “The Discourse Structure of Philemon: A Study in Textlinguistics,” In *Scribes and Scripture*, ed. D. A. Black, 77–96 (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1992), 78.

<sup>42</sup>Johannes 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 Levinsohn, 17–30 (Nashville: Broadman, 1992), 19.

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

*Analysis and Other Topics in Biblical Greek*. He delineates four major schools of thought. Before explaining them, he offers four warnings concerning his categorization: 1) “The analysis is strictly preliminary;” 2) “Several of the major figures can be identified with several of the schools of thought;” 3) “There is not much theoretical literature that has actually emerged from New Testament scholars themselves on discourse analysis. Most of them work that has appeared has been interpretive in nature;” and 4) “Not all of these schools of thought have been equally productive in the study of the New Testament as they have been in non-biblical discourse analysis.”<sup>44</sup>

The first school Porter mentions is the North American model, which is largely carried forth by the Summer Institute of Linguistics (SIL). This approach has been influenced by linguists such as E. A. Nida, K. L. Pike, and S. M. Lamb. It has also been influenced by Louw, who is also associated with the South Africa school of DA. The context for SIL’s discourse analysis work has been for Bible translation. “These functional models work on the principle of levels and layers of language, proceeding from what they see as the smallest parts of the language (whether phonetically or morphologically) to increasingly larger structures.”<sup>45</sup> SIL is known for its Semantic Structure Analysis as described by John Beekman, John Callow and Michael Kopeseć in *The Semantic Structure of Written Communication*.<sup>46</sup> From this school also comes Stephen H. Levinsohn and his book *Discourse Features of New Testament Greek*, in which he presents linguistic devices used by New Testament authors such as constituent order,

---

<sup>44</sup>Porter, “Discourse Analysis,” 24.

<sup>45</sup>Ibid., 25.

<sup>46</sup>John Beekman, John C. Callow, and Michael Kopeseć, *The Semantic Structure of Written Communication* (Dallas: Summer Institute of Linguistics, 1981).

sentence conjunctions, patterns of reference, backgrounding and highlighting, the reporting of conversation, and boundary features.<sup>47</sup> The recently published dissertation of Scott Kellum, *The Unity of the Farewell Discourse: Literary Integrity of John 13:31–16:33*, contains an example of a Semantic Structure Analysis as applied to the Farewell Discourse.<sup>48</sup>

The second school of thought is English and Australian model of DA. This is the approach preferred by Porter and Reed, who draw largely from the linguistic theory of M. A. K. Halliday.<sup>49</sup> Porter states, “The potential of the model can be seen in the fact that it is not merely an extension of sentence grammar but attempts to analyze discourse in context, with a reasoned and systemic link between meaning and instantiation in text.”<sup>50</sup> This model integrates pragmatics and socio-linguistics more fully into its approach. Reed’s book, *A Discourse Analysis of Philippians: Method and Rhetoric in the Debate over Literary Integrity*, is an attempt to apply Halliday’s approach to biblical studies.<sup>51</sup>

The third school of thought in New Testament DA is the Continental European model, which is associated with the Scandinavian school of New Testament studies. This approach has been influenced by discourse analysts such as W. Dressler, T. A. van Dijk, R. A. de Beaugrande, E. Gulich and W. Raible. They “contribute an interest in and the terminology to discuss the

---

<sup>47</sup>Stephen H. Levinsohn, *Discourse Features of New Testament Greek: A Coursebook*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Dallas: Summer Institute of Linguistics, 1992).

<sup>48</sup>Kellum, *Unity*, 154ff.

<sup>49</sup>Porter describes his approach, “Halliday’s model of language is that language is seen as a social semiotic consisting of networks of systems, that is, interconnected groupings of sometimes simultaneous and sometimes subsequent choices that establish the meaningful components of language.” Porter, “Discourse Analysis,” 28.

<sup>50</sup>Porter, “Discourse Analysis,” 28.

<sup>51</sup>Read, *Philippians*, 24, 35ff.

macro-structure or superstructure of a text, in opposition to its micro-structure or the individual elements that make up this super-structure. The result is a division into discussion of syntax, semantics and pragmatics.”<sup>52</sup>

Finally, the fourth school of thought regarding DA is the South African school. The main representative of this school is Louw. In several articles and in the last chapter of his book, *Semantics of New Testament Greek*, Louw describes concept of semantics and colon analysis. Porter explains this method: “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.”<sup>53</sup> Porter concludes that Cotterell and Turner are heavily influenced by this approach.<sup>54</sup>

### Summary

Guthrie’s definition given above is a good description of DA, except that it does not mention the pragmatic aspect of the investigation. One might modify Guthrie’s definition as follows: Discourse analysis belongs to the field of linguistics and may be defined as “a process of investigation by which one examines the form and function of all the parts and levels of a written discourse,” as well as its situational and cultural context, “with the aim of better

---

<sup>52</sup>Porter, “Discourse Analysis,” 30.

<sup>53</sup>Ibid., 33.

<sup>54</sup>Porter, “Discourse Analysis,” 23. It is interesting to note that the DA section in their book, *Linguistics and Biblical Interpretation*, lacks any examples that are similar to Louw’s colon analytical approach.

understanding both the parts and the whole of that discourse.”<sup>55</sup> It is very helpful in the study of the New Testament for understanding the total context, overall unity and theme, and the progression of the argument and structure of a discourse.

There are three basic characteristics of DA. Discourse analysts 1) look beyond the sentences to larger units of discourse and how they relate, 2) investigate the cohesion and coherence of a discourse, and 3) consider all the situational features that shape the discourse.<sup>56</sup> In some ways these three characteristics relate to what Porter and Reed call the three major categories of DA: syntax, semantics and pragmatics.<sup>57</sup> Regarding characteristic one, syntax refers to the way that these elements relate to one another to create meaning. The syntax of words and sentences are used to build the larger units that make up a discourse. The discourse governs the interpretation of the micro-structure. In reference to characteristic two, it is through the study of semantics that one is able to discover the cohesion of a discourse. And from this perspective of characteristic three, the discourse is viewed primarily as an act of communication.

There are three levels of context to consider in DA: the context of culture, the context of the situation, and the literary context. “Discourse analysis is an approach to examining a text by which the critic seeks to understand the relationships between the various sections of an

---

<sup>55</sup>George H. Guthrie, “Discourse Analysis,” In *Interpreting the New Testament: Essays on Methods and Issues*, ed. David Alan Black and David S. Dockery, 253–271 (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2001), 255. See also Black, *Linguistics*, 171.

<sup>56</sup> Black, *Linguistics*, 171.

<sup>57</sup>Porter, “Discourse Analysis,” 18; and Reed, *Philippians*, 32.

author's discourse."<sup>58</sup> DA is in great need of development and has not significantly influenced New Testament studies. Currently, there are four major schools of thought: the North American model, the English and Australian model, the Continental European model, and the South African model.

---

<sup>58</sup>Guthrie, *Structure*, 36–37. Porter presents a similar purpose statement: “to provide as comprehensive a description as possible of the various components of a given discourse, including its meaning and structure, and the means by which these are created and conveyed.” Porter, “Discourse Analysis,” 19. And Black writes, “A textlinguist would like to know how the individual parts of a discourse combine to produce the text’s overall meaning.” Black, *Linguistics*, 170.

## **Appendix A: Glossary of Terms Related to New Testament Discourse Analysis**

**Deep Structure** - The semantic or conceptual meaning of a phrase; as opposed to surface structure.

**Discourse** - “A semantic unit of communication which is more than one sentence in length and forms a unified whole.”<sup>59</sup>

**Discourse Analysis** - “The study and interpretation of spoken and written communication.”<sup>60</sup> In the context of New Testament studies, it may be defined as “a process of investigation by which one examines the form and function of all the parts and levels of a written discourse, with the aim of better understanding both the parts and the whole of that discourse.”

**Cohesions** - “the means of linking sentences into larger syntactical units.”<sup>61</sup>

**Linguistics** - The study of language. Linguists investigate how various aspects of language work together to accomplish an act of communication.<sup>62</sup>

**Macro-structure** - The discourse itself and the largest thematic units of the discourse.<sup>63</sup>

**Micro-structure** – The smaller units (words, phrases, sentences, and paragraphs) that form a discourse or macro-structure.<sup>64</sup>

<sup>59</sup>Guthrie, *Structure*, 46. See also Black, *Linguistics for Students*, 138, 171.

<sup>60</sup>Watson, “Structuralism and Discourse Analysis,” 1132. For similar definitions see Michael Stubbs, *Discourse Analysis: The Sociolinguistic Analysis of Natural Language* (Chicago: The University of Chicago, 1983), 1; Reed, “Discourse Analysis as New Testament Hermeneutic,” 224.

<sup>61</sup>Black, *Linguistics*, 171.

<sup>62</sup>Guthrie, *Structure*, 35.

<sup>63</sup>Ibid.

<sup>64</sup>Porter, *Idioms*, 300.



**Pragmatics** – The study of language that “seeks to understand how the context in which an utterance is made affects the interpretation of that utterance.”<sup>65</sup>

**Prominence** – “Those semantic and grammatical elements of discourse that serve to set aside certain subjects, ideas, or motifs of the author as more or less semantically and pragmatically significant than others.”<sup>66</sup>

**Semantics** – “The varied meanings and kinds of meanings which belong to words and to sentences as they occur within a context.”<sup>67</sup>

**Syntax** - The way that words and phrases relate to one another to create meaning; the grammatical structure of language.

**Surface structure** - The syntactical relationships of words and phrases; as opposed to deep structure.

**Text-linguistics** is another term for discourse analysis.

---

<sup>65</sup>Reed, “Modern Linguistics,” 235.

<sup>66</sup>Jeffrey T. Reed, “Identifying Theme in the New Testament: Insights from Discourse Analysis,” In *Discourse Analysis and Other Topics in Biblical Greek*. Stanley E. Porter and D. A. Carson, eds. (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995), 101.

<sup>67</sup>Thiselton, “Semantics,” 75.

### Bibliography

- Allen, David. "The Discourse Structure of Philemon: A Study in Textlinguistics." In *Scribes and Scripture*, ed. D. A. Black, 77–96. Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1992.
- Barr, James. *The Semantics of Biblical Language*. Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 1961.
- Beekman, John, John C. Callow, and Michael Kopesec. *The Semantic Structure of Written Communication*. Dallas: Summer Institute of Linguistics, 1981.
- Bergen, Robert D. "Text as a Guide to Authorial Intention: An Introduction to Discourse Criticism." *JETS* 30/3 (September 1987): 327–336.
- Black, David Alan. "Discourse Analysis, Synoptic Criticism, and Markan Grammar." In *Linguistics and New Testament Interpretation: Essays on Discourse Analysis*, ed. David Alan Black with Katharine Barnwell and Stephen Levinsohn, 90–97. Nashville: Broadman, 1992.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Hebrews 1:1–4: A Study in Discourse Analysis." *WTJ* 49 (1987), 175–194.
- \_\_\_\_\_, ed. with Katharine Barnwell and Stephen Levinsohn. *Linguistics and New Testament Interpretation: Essays on Discourse Analysis*. Nashville: Broadman, 1992.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Linguistics for Students of New Testament Greek: A Survey of Basic Concepts and Applications*. Grand Rapids: Baker, 1995.
- Brown, G., and G. Yule. *Discourse Analysis*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2d ed., 1983.
- Cotterell, Peter and Max Turner. *Linguistics and Biblical Interpretation*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1989.
- Green, Joel B. "Discourse Analysis and NT Interpretation." In *Hearing the NT: Strategies for Interpretation*, ed. Joel B. Green. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995.
- Guthrie, George H. "Cohesion Shifts and Stitches in Philippians." In *Discourse Analysis and Other Topics in Biblical Greek*, ed. Stanley E. Porter and D. A. Carson, 36–53. Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1995.

- \_\_\_\_\_. "Discourse Analysis." In *Interpreting the New Testament: Essays on Methods and Issues*, ed. David Alan Black and David S. Dockery, 253–271. Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2001.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *The Structure of Hebrews: A Text-Linguistic Analysis*. Grand Rapids: Baker, 1994.
- Guthrie, George H. and J. Scott Duvall. *Biblical Greek Exegesis: A Graded Approach to Learning Intermediate and Advanced Greek*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1998.
- Janssen, Steve. "The Greek Article with Proper Names in Matthew: Traditional Grammar And Discourse Perspectives." Th.M. Thesis, Dallas Seminary.  
[http://www.bible.org/page.asp?page\\_id=2013](http://www.bible.org/page.asp?page_id=2013)
- Kellum, L. Scott. *The Unity of the Farewell Discourse: Literary Integrity of John 13:31–16:33*. T & T Clark International: New York, 2004.
- Levinsohn, Stephen H. *Discourse Features of New Testament Greek: A Coursebook*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. Dallas: Summer Institute of Linguistics, 1992.
- Longacre, Robert E. *The Grammar of Discourse: Notional and Surface Structures*. New York: Plenum, 1983. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. 1996.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Towards an Exegesis of 1 John Based on the Discourse Analysis of the Greek Text." In *Linguistics and New Testament Interpretation: Essays on Discourse Analysis*, ed. David Alan Black with Katharine Barnwell and Stephen Levinsohn, 271–86. Nashville: Broadman, 1992.
- Louw, Johannes P. "Discourse Analysis and the Greek New Testament." *Technical Papers for the Bible Translator* 24/1 (January 1973): 101–118.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Reading a Text as Discourse." In *Linguistics and New Testament Interpretation: Essays on Discourse Analysis*, ed. David Alan Black with Katharine Barnwell and Stephen Levinsohn, 17–30. Nashville: Broadman, 1992.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Semantics of New Testament Greek*. Philadelphia: Fortress, 1982.
- Porter, Stanley E. "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, 14–35. Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Idioms of the Greek New Testament*. Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999.
- Porter, Stanley E., and D. A. Carson, eds. *Discourse Analysis and Other Topics in Biblical Greek*. Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995.
- Porter, Stanley E., and Jeffrey T. Reed, ed. *Discourse Analysis and the New Testament:*

*Approaches and Results*. Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999.

Reed, Jeffrey T. *A Discourse Analysis of Philippians: Method and Rhetoric in the Debate over Literary Integrity*. Journal for the Study of the New Testament Supplement Series, ed. Stanley E. Porter, vol. 136. Sheffield: JSOT, 1997.

\_\_\_\_\_. "Discourse Analysis." In *Handbook to Exegesis of the New Testament*, ed. Stanley E. Porter. Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1997.

\_\_\_\_\_. "Discourse Analysis as New Testament Hermeneutic: A Retrospective and Prospective Appraisal." *JETS* 39/2 (June 1996): 223-240.

\_\_\_\_\_. "Identifying Theme in the New Testament: Insights from Discourse Analysis." In *Discourse Analysis and Other Topics in Biblical Greek*, ed. Stanley E. Porter and D. A. Carson, eds. Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995.

\_\_\_\_\_. "Modern Linguistics and the New Testament: A Basic Guide to Theory, Terminology, and Literature." In *Approaches to New Testament Study*, ed. Stanley E. Porter and David Tombs, 222–265. Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995.

Sawyer, M. James. "An Analysis of the Larger Semantic Units of Galatians." Th.M. thesis, Dallas Theological Seminary, 1978; Biblical Studies Press, 1998, <http://www.bible.org/docs/nt/books/gal/sawyer/gal-01.htm>.

Silva, Moisés. "Discourse Analysis and Philippians." In *Discourse Analysis and Other Topics in Biblical Greek*, ed. Stanley E. Porter and D. A. Carson. Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995.

\_\_\_\_\_. *Interpreting Galatians: Explorations in Exegetical Method*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2001.

Stubbs, Michael. *Discourse Analysis: The Sociolinguistic Analysis of Natural Language*. Chicago: The University of Chicago, 1983.

Thiselton, Anthony C. "Semantics and New Testament Interpretation." In *New Testament Interpretation: Essays on Principles and Methods*, ed. I. H. Marshall, 75–104. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1977.

Watson, D. F. "Structuralism and Discourse Analysis." In *Dictionary of the Later New Testament and Its Developments*, ed. Ralph P. Martin and Peter H. Davids, 1129–1135. Downers Grove: Intervarsity, 1997.