



RESEARCH

The Hebrew Discourse Features which are Observable in the Koine Greek of The Book of Revelation

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The linguistics theory which has enabled me to accomplish the research described in this study, arises out of the work accomplished by previous generations of SIL scholars, such as Pike, Beekman, Longacre, Kathleen Callow, John Callow and Levinsohn. In addition, a significant contribution was made by Parunak, from outside of SIL.

The particular interest of this study for Bible translators is the fact that the higher level features of discourse structure transfer across quite naturally into a second language. So in this case then, even though the original research was based on the Koine Greek of Revelation, nonetheless, Hebrew discourse features could be discerned.

The main body of this paper will list and describe the most important of those Hebrew discourse features.

In conclusion we will explain why a good understanding of this phenomenon is necessary for Bible translators. This is so that they can correctly transmit the full message which is carried by the structure of the book of Revelation, as well as the message carried by the words and sentences.

0. Introduction

Exploring a new field in the course of research always entails a process of moving from old (known) to new (previously unknown) information. In order to accomplish this, the researcher inevitably develops an idea in advance of what he is looking for, whether consciously or not. This is where pre-existing theoretical knowledge greatly enhances the possibility of producing meaningful and helpful discourse analyses. It serves as a foundation of known information, from which vantage point the new information can be both recognized and interpreted.¹

¹ I have outlined the characteristics of such a useful theoretical linguistics framework in another article which can be found in the references. (See Schooling, forthcoming)

The linguistics theory that was used to accomplish the research described in this study arises out of the work accomplished by previous generations of SIL scholars, such as Kenneth L. Pike, John Beekman, Robert E. Longacre, Kathleen Callow, John Callow, and Stephen H. Levinsohn. In addition, a significant contribution was made by H. Van Dyke Parunak, from outside of SIL. The most complete statement of the theory underlying semantic structural analysis in general, is to be found in Kathleen Callow's book *Man and Message*.²

The point is that human language is so complex and so finely tuned that it is possible to communicate using a variety of methods and systems of organization. Nonetheless, in spite of the range of possible choices, the cultural context—including the worldview and education of the writers—may cause some systems to be more popular and widely used than others. So then, when it is known in advance that the discourse in view was created in the context of a different culture, it is important to recognize these differences and to prepare oneself to recognize the unusual features that may be embedded in the text. This is where a broad but well-balanced theoretical foundation can greatly facilitate the research process.

We now come to the pivotal point in this article. The following statement may seem strange at first, but on reflection it will be observed that it is a truism:

If you set out to find something, but you do not know what you are looking for, then it is unlikely that you will find it. It could be that the thing which you are looking for is right there in front of your eyes, but if you do not know what you are looking for, then you will not recognize it.

I experienced this personally when I first started developing my Discourse Analysis of the book of Revelation (Schooling 2025). I approached it as a westerner, according to my western logic and preferences. This had two consequences: I did not find what I was looking for in the structure of the book, and for a very long time I did not recognize what I was looking at. However, because of past experience in applying the above-mentioned theory to a variety of other texts, I eventually realized that I was observing structures that are typical of the Hebrew Old Testament. The most important of these will be described below.

² If any reader requires more information on these issues than is provided in this brief summary, they are invited to consult Schooling (2025) for more detailed explanations. For the authors cited, representative examples of their publications may be found in the references below.

1. Repetition

All Hebrew literature is characterized by the systematic repetition of sounds, words, phrases, and whole linguistic units of various kinds and sizes. From a western culture perspective, this is a design fault. However, for the Hebrews, the opposite is the case; it was a design feature, for they seemed to delight in creating a whole interwoven fabric of repetition of different kinds. Many of the characteristics listed below are forms of repetition.

However, the majority of repetitions are not exact repetitions, but subsequent occurrences take up the same idea and repeat it in a similar or contrastive manner. The possible variations are endless, and limited only by the author's imagination, as well as his penchant for beauty and elegance.

2. Parallelism

Once you repeat a concept a second time, you have created a parallel. Once you have created a parallel, you cannot proceed in a straight line. Such a process, by definition, becomes impossible. This does not mean that there is no linear progression in a Hebrew discourse at all, but the point is that these linear structures are not so common.

A minimal parallel consists of two components. Such structures at the lexical and sentence level have always been called doublets, and they form the foundation of books like Psalms and Proverbs. In theory, there is no limit to the maximum number of parallels, but, on average, seven constituents would seem to be the most popular, and anything above fifteen would be unusual.³

3. Double Units or Doublets

Leaving lexical doublets aside, this discussion only refers to double units that occur at higher levels of the discourse hierarchy. A good example in Revelation of such a high-level doublet occurs in Chapter 7. The first part is the description of the 144,000 people called out from the 12 tribes of Israel. The second part is a description of a huge host of people, and these two units are placed side-by-side, without any grammatical connection or logical progression. Nonetheless, most commentators assume that these two textual units belong together and describe the same people.⁴

³ Patrick (2012, 154) has proposed that the passage contained in 1 Sam 4:11–2 Sam 6:23 is composed of a chiasm containing 41 parts. Sarfati (2015, 12–15) proposes that the whole of the Noah narrative in Gen 6:1–9:19 is composed of a chiasm containing 27 parts. These chiasms are unusually long; nonetheless, the numeric symbolism tends to confirm their validity. So, the number 41 symbolizes a critical phase of separation, purification, and preparation—marking the end of a wilderness journey and the threshold to divine fulfillment, which is very relevant to David's story. The number 27 in Hebrew culture symbolizes purity, divine completeness, spiritual perfection, and the fulfillment of God's covenantal promises, which is very relevant to the story of Noah.

⁴ The term which has been traditionally used for this feature is parataxis, although up until now, this has only been applied to the paragraph level and below. In this case, we are applying the concept to much larger constituents.

In the case of the double unit in Chapter 7, there is no lexical or semantic parallelism between the two sub-units, apart from the fact that they talk about a group of people that is very large. The parallelism that is present is the parallelism of the same sub-topic. This is because we infer from their juxtaposition that both describe the same group of people and provide different information about the same sub-topic. I am proposing, therefore, to use the term doublet to refer to this technique, and the notation for such a unit would be AB, in line with the existing convention for charting parallel structures.

In addition to the above example, there are also several cases in Revelation where particularly important constituents have a double function. So these are double units, or doublets, in a different sense of the word again. That is, they are variations on the same basic theme. These will be referred to below.⁵

4. Symmetric and Chiastic Structures

Once an author has decided to use repetition as the basis for the organization of his discourse, he can create a multiplicity of different patterns by organizing the constituent parallels in different combinations, and with different numbers of constituents. Some structures are created with an even number of constituents, and it is convenient to call them symmetric or concentric structures, in order to distinguish them from units with an odd number of constituents. The most common of the latter are composed of seven constituents, although three and five constituents can regularly be found. These odd-numbered structures are usually called chiasms. This is because they create a pattern like an X that has a point in the middle.

The smallest possible chiasm would be made up of three parts, and its notation would be ABA'. Such structures are extremely common in Hebrew-style literature. The whole of Revelation at the most fundamental level is based on a series of these chiasms.

In fact, it has been well known for a very long time that such structures are basically linguistic universals. This is because linguists know that all well-formed discourses normally have an introduction or a beginning, a middle, and a conclusion or an end.

Then from there, since introductions normally function together with their matching conclusion, this quite naturally creates a simple parallel structure. In such a case, the correct notation for this type of structure is ABA', as has already been noted.

⁵ Within the limited scope of this article, it is not possible to provide examples from the Old Testament of each of these discourse features. However, the interested reader can find such examples in Schooling (2025, 589–610). The Song of Solomon provides a very elegant example of a seven-part chiasm; see Schooling (2023). By contrast, Habakkuk is composed of a whole series of AB doublets (Schooling 1995). Many more examples of different kinds of parallel structures that can be found in the Old Testament are catalogued in Dorsey (1999).

Once the analysis of the body of the book has been included, the total discourse contained in Revelation is a chiasm composed of nine parts. The main body of the book (excluding the Prologue and the Epilogue) is a chiasm composed of seven parts. The Seven Letters also form a seven-part chiasm as a group.

5. The Use of Numbers

There are three ways in which a particular discourse can be characterized by numbers.⁶ Firstly, the whole book may be organized around a particular numerical system. According to the analysis referred to previously, the whole book of Revelation is organized around the number seven. In this particular case it is 7×7 , which creates a total of 49.

But in addition to that, actual cardinal numbers are regularly used, and it will come as no surprise that the most frequent cardinal number that is used in this book is once again the number seven, and it is used 49 times in total. This is, of course, the characteristic number for the book of Revelation and is used in a multitude of ways at various levels of the discourse hierarchy.

So, for example, in Rev 17:1 we are told that there are seven angels and seven bowls, and later on in verse 7 the woman who is being described is seen sitting on a beast with seven heads, which symbolize seven hills (v. 9). Overall, the fact that the number seven is by far the most commonly used number is clearly a reflection of the Hebrews' religious context and worldview.

But this convention is not limited to the number seven; there are also very many other cardinal numbers which are used, each of which has its own symbolic message to contribute to the book as a whole. The second most frequently occurring and most important is the number 12, which symbolizes the notion of government—an extremely significant concept in this book.

The third way in which numbers are important is the fact that certain linguistic features occur a specific number of times, either in their context or in the whole book. We have already noted above that chiasms are formed by using a specific number of constituents. In the following paragraphs other examples will be given illustrating the same principle.

6. Word Chains, Word Plays, and Puns

The specific characteristic of Revelation is word chains of various lengths that occur at different levels of the discourse hierarchy. Most of them are not contiguous but occur at various points throughout the book. Their primary purpose is to provide cohesion for the discourse—they are part of a

⁶ According to Hamilton (2023; 2024), this was a technique which had been used for centuries if not millennia. It was common in western culture for many centuries, and its practice only died out about 300–400 years ago.

multiplex, relational network. But the whole series can also be studied as a unit. This is because together, they will usually elucidate a major theme, or sub-theme, of the book, depending on the level of the discourse at which they are functioning. Not surprisingly, the most significant of these word chains is based on the word for the number ‘seven’, which, as we have seen previously, occurs 49 times all the way through the book.

This number, being symbolic of perfection or completion, functions as a very significant book-level thread, or prosody, for the whole book. In this way, the extra message is communicated that the message of the whole book is, in some senses, perfect or complete. At the lower levels, there are very many word chains as well, each with their own function and purpose. One of the most significant of these is the seven-part chain based on the word for ‘sign.’⁷

7. The Disjunctive Progression of Themes

When an author writes a book, he will usually have more than one thing to say about the topic of his book. The important things that he divulges about his topic are called themes. Confronted with the need to develop his themes, the author has only two choices. He can either fully develop one theme, and then, when that is finished, develop the next theme and so on, or he can intersperse them in some way or another. The first method would create a linear, chain-like structure with no going back on oneself and no repetition, whereas the second method lends itself to many different kinds of structure.

When coherent aspects of a text are broken up into pieces and scattered through a discourse, with different material in between, this is being called here a disjunctive organization.⁸ The word chains that were described above are an example of this phenomenon at the lexical level.

The words (or roots) relate to each other because they are identical to each other, or are synonymous, but they occur at various places in the discourse with many very different words in between.

At the higher levels of Revelation, the author develops two main themes throughout the book: Judgment and Salvation. These are presented disjunctively. The Judgment Theme takes up the most space, but the Salvation Theme abruptly interrupts the flow of the Judgment Theme at various points, and without any grammatical or logical connection, just like the doublets described above.

⁷ The ‘sign’ thread runs from 12:1 to 19:20 and creates a parallel structure with this notation: A. 12:1, B. 12:3, C. 13:13, D. 13:14, B’ 15:1, C’ 16:14, D’ 19:20.

⁸ Wendland (2018) also talks independently about the disjunctivity which can be observed in Hebrew style discourses. The examples which he gives are quite different from the ones which I have referred to. However, the point is that we are establishing between us that this objectively does occur in Hebrew style texts and is almost certainly a characteristic of such texts. From there, we can say that once this principle has been established, then it is to be expected that it will appear with a variety of manifestations at different levels of the linguistic hierarchy.

In order to capture in a descriptive manner, the way in which these passages interrupt the flow of the Judgment Theme, they have been called Interludes. However, like any technical term, these constituents must be defined carefully, and the definition must be respected. The fact that there is disjunctivity in the book does not give us license to call any little piece of text that we do not understand an Interlude, just out of convenience.

Chapter 7, which was already mentioned above, is the first example of an Interlude in the book. There are four main ones that are very similar in style, genre, and content, and they have many parallels that link them together. They can and should be studied together, as they all contribute to the Salvation Theme. But there is also a fifth one, if we count the Interlude contained within the Narrative Framework, which is Chapter 11. Since 5 is the number that is symbolic of grace, this is very appropriate for a set of texts that carry the theme of salvation.

8. Tail-Head Links

A Tail-Head link is a term that has been coined in certain branches of linguistics to denote a particular feature that is very common in Hebraic literature of all genres. There are three slightly different kinds in Revelation. The first kind is when just one word is repeated in quick succession to indicate a link between two linguistic units. An example of this is the word ‘sea,’ which occurs twice, once in the context of the end of Chapter 12, and then again at the beginning of Chapter 13.

A more complex example links together the end of Chapter 3 with the beginning of Chapter 4. In this case, several words and concepts are used. For the most part, they occur in the last few paragraphs of Chapter 3 and then recur in the course of several paragraphs at the beginning of Chapter 4. The relevant words are: the opening of a door in 3:8, 20; 4:1; God’s throne in conjunction with the verb ‘to sit’: 3:21; 4:2–6 et al.; and a voice ‘like a trumpet’: 1:10; 4:1.

A second example is even more complex and links Chapter 19 with the beginning of Chapter 20. First there is the concept of a throne, along with the whole concept cluster of reigning, rewarding, and judging. This cluster is reactivated from the previous example near the beginning of the book. Then there is the set of contrastive concepts—opening, shutting, sealing—associated with the word key. This was first activated back in Cycle 1 (3:7–8, 20) and is repeated here at 19:11; 20:1–2. There is also the reference to ‘armies’ in 19:17–21; 20:7–9. Then ‘bride’ 18:23, ‘wife’ 19:7, ‘bride’ again 21:2, and ‘bride’ and ‘wife’ co-occur in 21:9; the concepts of marriage and close communion are combined in the same context at 19:7–9; 21:2–4. Finally, there are less significant words like ‘assemble’ 19:17, 19; 20:8, ‘the rest’ 19:21; 20:5, and ‘white’ 19:11, 14; 20:11.

The examples given above of a Tail-Head link are only based on the occurrence of a few single words or concepts, and so these are relatively easy to locate once you know what you are looking for. However, in Revelation a large number of rather unusual Tail-Head links occur that involve units at least one paragraph in size. The whole unit is functioning as the Tail-Head link marker, not just one or two words.

These paragraph-size Tail-Head links are the constituents that have a double function as mentioned above. These are called overlap links because this term accurately describes what they are. This feature is so intentionally planned and put in place that there are, once again, seven of them, of similar size and import, in the whole of the book running from the Prologue right through to the Epilogue.

There is also an eighth overlap link, but it operates at a different level of the structural hierarchy, which has been labeled the Narrative Framework. So then, the seventh seal (8:1–6), the seventh trumpet (11:15–19), and the seventh bowl (16:17–21) are examples of these overlap links, for these sub-units function as the setting for the following cycle as well as being the conclusion to their own cycle.

In this discussion of the Tail-Head links it is clear how much the author is determined to ensure that his discourse is fully and comprehensively *joined together*. In the case of the overlap links in particular, he has made it impossible for anybody to prize apart the units concerned, and create a division between large, and very high-level, constituents of the discourse. This feature has created problems for western commentators for centuries. One reason for this is that such a feature did not occur in the discourses to which they were accustomed. Consequently, they did not know what they were looking at, and so the majority were never able to discern and describe what was there in the text before them.

Once again, to really appreciate and fully understand a book like Revelation, it is important to put aside one's own worldview bias, whatever it may be, and consciously look at it through the lens of the author's worldview, which in this case is a Hebraic one.

9. The Narrative Framework

Longacre was the first to notice the presence of a narrative framework in prophetic texts of the Old Testament. This was independently confirmed in this study of Revelation, in which the narrative framework forms a very significant part of the book. It is important to recognize this fact, and to keep the narrative framework separate in our analysis from the main content of the book. This is because prophetic books are not true narratives, and it is important not to treat them as if they were, and thereby to impose linear and

chronological templates on them, which are not appropriate. In Revelation, the narrative framework gives an impression that the book is a narrative, but it is not.

The practical outworking of this clarification means that the book as a whole is not organized according to a chronological timeline. If a book is a true narrative, then it is likely to be organized chronologically, but this is not the case for Revelation.

10. Prominence and Volitional Import

Every discourse is bound to have some parts that are intended to be understood as more important than others. This is a linguistic universal, and every theoretical foundation and subsequent discourse analysis has to be capable of locating the prominent points of the discourse.

The Hebrews had a specialty in this domain. Because they prefer to use repetition and parallelism, they are skilled in producing chiasms. The reason for reviewing this is that chiasms always have a point of prominence. But if you do not uncover the chiasms, then you cannot locate the points of prominence, which are crucial to unlocking a correct understanding of what the author wanted to communicate.

So, in the case of Revelation, since the whole book is organized in the form of a chiasm, one of the principal prominent points in the book will be in the middle, which coincides with the Signs Cycle 11:15–16:1. However, this is not the only point of prominence because there are other chiasms with their point of prominence, and there are other methods that John uses to indicate complementary points of prominence as well.

Another way of indicating a prominent point is to use markers that can loosely be called signposts. These are portions of text that seem to have no useful purpose in the general flow of the author's message. They are of the sort that could be removed from the text, and it would make no difference to the content of the message. Revelation has quite a number of these, approximately eleven in fact. As a result, commentators have always had great difficulty in accounting for these parts of the book and explaining their purpose, with the consequence that there is a plethora of opinions on these matters and very little consensus.

There is also another way by which the author can indicate what is important in his message. This is by the so-called imports that he uses in his discourse. There are several of these, but the one that carries the most emotional weight with the reader is the volitional import. It is called volitional because by means of his message the author is endeavoring to influence the readers' volition, or decision-making capacity.

In general terms, hortatory genre discourses are probably not very common. However, in the Bible they are predominant because the Bible is a book whose purpose is not only to inform, but also to persuade the reader. Consequently, in locating and describing the most important parts of a book like Revelation, it is necessary to take note of the volitional import material where this occurs, for this is the ultimate purpose towards which the book inexorably moves.

11. Topics and Settings

This is a delicate issue. This is because every item of speech that one hears or reads has a topic, a topic being whatever it is that a message is about. As a consequence, we are all so used to discerning what the topic of a message is (or so we think), that we do it automatically, without consciously processing the information that an author or messenger provides for us.

The proof is that the commentaries and discourse analyses that exist on this famous book essentially never take the time to define the topic of the book. However, if you never define the topic of a discourse, based on what the author has told you, then you run the risk of missing the point completely. This is another example of not finding what you were looking for, when you do not know what you are looking for.

The point is that authors tell the reader what their topics and sub-topics are, almost always in portions of the text that are called settings. Settings are universal, but it seems that the Hebrews took great delight in providing a great quantity of setting material.⁹

To give an example from Revelation, the whole of Chapter 1 is an extended setting for the whole book, but then soon after, the whole of Chapters 4 and 5 provide yet another extended setting. But that is not all, because when you reach Chapter 20, you find that this whole chapter provides still more setting material.

The point of bringing these linguistic features to our attention is that if we do not locate the setting material, then we cannot locate the topics and sub-topics correctly, and if we do not know what the topics and sub-topics are, then we are essentially working in the dark, and our conclusions are likely to be missing the point.

The opposite is also true, because the way in which an author refers to a participant in a setting can downgrade his importance relative to its context. This happens in Chapter 20 (and also in Chapter 12 as a matter of fact) where the dragon is downgraded in importance because he is not marked

⁹ It seemed to be very important to them, although more research would be needed to establish this point.

as the topic of the following unit. This means that any interpretation of Chapter 20 that assumes that the dragon is the main participant, or topic, of the chapter and is, therefore, important, is incorrect.

12. The 7 + 1 Principle

This is a principle that is deeply rooted in Scripture, and has a profound significance, since it first occurs in the Garden of Eden in Genesis 1–3.

It all began at the beginning when God created the heavens and the earth in six days and then rested on the seventh. However, the story did not stop there, for it is legitimate to ask what happened next. The answer is that, on the eighth day—which is the same as seven days plus one—a new season, or a new era began, for on that day Adam and Eve began to fulfill their mandate, and to live out their destiny. This has been going on ever since, in an accumulation of cycles, as the regular sequences of days have gone by, followed by the cycles of the weeks, and the months, and the seasons.

As we have seen, the body of Revelation is structured in a series of seven cycles, composed fundamentally of seven parts. However, closer observation reveals that in many strategic cases, the seventh unit is not just a seventh that brings to an end the preceding unit, but it is also a new beginning, for it functions as the first unit—7 + 1—that introduces the next unit. These are the overlap links that have been previously discussed.

As has also been explained previously, the Hebrews often created language units composed of seven parts. This is usually very neatly and tightly organized, so it is not difficult to count the seven parts and determine the boundaries of the unit in question. However, a disconcerting thing can happen, because having found a set of seven, then one can also find an eighth item that could possibly belong with the set of seven, and yet it does not conform completely to the definition of that group of seven. Then to make matters worse, it does not belong with anything else either. So the analytical solution was to recognize that this item was different, and yet to say, at the same time, that it belongs with the set of seven. This is why it is called the 7 + 1 principle.

A very important example of this occurs at the end of the book. You would have thought that when you reached the end of the seven sevens, when it seems as if everything has been said and done, and all is completed, then that would be the end of the matter. But, in reality, it terminates with an analytical problem, which turns out to contain a most profound message. At the end of 22:5, there is an extraneous sentence which does not fit with what has gone before. What has gone before is complete without it. This sentence is ‘and they will reign forever and ever.’ In order to be included in the analysis, because it clearly does not belong with what follows, it was allocated the function of a coda to the previous unit.

So, the final set of seven ends neatly at the end of the second sentence of verse five. This means that the book so far has produced 7×7 significant constituents or features. But then we have this very short coda tacked on the end. In this case, the feature of writing by numbers that we discussed previously comes to our rescue, because 7×7 is 49; plus one makes 50. This is a very significant theological statement because it refers to the Jubilee. So, at the very end of the book, the idea is communicated that this book is all about the Jubilee, the ultimate Jubilee that leads into a new beginning. It is the end of the old season. It is the end of evil and the end of slavery, and now what lies ahead is a new season or era, which will have no end because it is called eternity. The word 'jubilee' itself does not occur anywhere in the book, yet this extraordinary concept is, nonetheless, illustrated by the structure of this book, which uses the $7 + 1$ principle to communicate this message.

13. Cohesion Predominates over Unit Division

One of the fundamental difficulties that commentators have had in the past with this book is to agree on the boundaries between certain units. As I have personally wrestled with this issue over many years, I have finally come to the conclusion that there are deep-rooted issues of perspective and expectation, which are at stake here. These are difficult to explain and to adjust to, and this, in turn, may explain why there has been such slow progress in developing consensus on these issues.

The difficulty arises because the adjustments that need to be made do not fall into the domain of normal methodological practice. It is not as simple as beginning to look for overlooked components of the text, like narrative framework components or prominence features. This adaptation involves visceral elements of the analyst's own personhood; these are much more difficult to come to terms with, and even more difficult to change.

Perspective and evaluation are skills that arise out of our attitudes and preferences, which in turn are influenced, ever so subtly but also strongly, by our worldview. When I began to face this issue honestly and make an effort to think and see things differently, I also began to make progress in understanding the objective linguistic problems that had been dogging my steps.

So, with those observations in mind, let us go back to the text of Revelation and try to look at it with a greater degree of objectivity. If you search and count, you will not find many overt markers that noticeably and exclusively mark a division between units. This may be because the author was not concerned to mark the divisions clearly, perhaps because it was not of primary importance to him. On the other hand, there are so many markers of cohesion, that it is very difficult to miss them. Take the overlap links already referred to; in all my experience of different languages, I have never come across a connection between units that is so tightly glued together.

Then there are the settings. Why are there so many? What is their purpose? Closer inspection reveals that the settings of the cycles are not designed to start something new, like a new unit. They do not semantically or lexically connect back to or proceed from the unit that immediately precedes, as we would expect. Instead, they connect back over a long stretch of intervening text to their source setting. Once this is observed, it can be seen that the cycles mirror the season-based year. Each cycle is complete; it has its beginning, middle, and end. Then what happens? The answer is (and this would have been obvious to a Hebrew with a season-based worldview) you go back to the beginning and start another cycle with its own beginning, middle, and end. Yet, Cycle 2 is not identical in all details with the previous cycle, just as this current year is not identical in all its events and experiences to the previous year.

So, for example, all the settings of Cycles 2–6 connect back to the long setting for the whole of the series which is to be found in Chapters 4 and 5. Then, in the case of Cycle 7, its setting stretches back even further and connects back to its matching bracket, which is the setting of Cycle 1. In this way a whole network of relationships is created (along with all the other cohesion features), which harmoniously weaves together the various parts of the discourse, which do not have identical functions.

The more you study these connections, the more you can see that it is not a random, hope-for-the-best kind of system. On the contrary, the intricate, interwoven harmony is so amazing that the result is like a tapestry. Nobody can say that a tapestry is random or uninteresting. On the contrary, a creation of this nature is a beautiful product, satisfying to both the eye and to the soul. The irony of all this is that if you take the time to understand and appreciate the cohesion that is woven into this tapestry-like discourse, you will end up finding out exactly where the divisions between all the units actually occur. This is because when you look at a finished tapestry as a whole, from a top-down viewpoint, you can easily see the shapes of the people or the animals, which the weaver has woven into his work of art.

All this explains why it is important, when studying Hebrew discourses, to understand from the outset that Cohesion predominates over Unit Division. We must allow our mindset to shift so that we see the text from a different point of view.

14. The Negative Ethos and Double Negatives

In Hebrew-style literature as a whole, the writers are not diffident about writing about the negative symptoms of society that they observe, the cataclysmic judgment events that they witness, or the personal peccadillos of the participants in their story, and this is certainly the case in this book of

Revelation. This negative ethos seems to be quite characteristic of Hebrew-style writing, even if this style of writing is no longer considered to be very appropriate in our modern-day culture.

The reason for this linguistic feature is that it contributes to the prominence of the discourse. To put a different spin on Longacre's now famous example of the black camels crossing a black desert at midnight, we could propose the idea of a black piece of silk upon which an artist has carefully embroidered a white camel.

Nobody is going to argue that because the blackness takes up the most space, or that because silk is high-quality material, that this is the most important part of the picture. On the contrary, even a non-artist would know that that is not the case. The item that is inscribed in such a way that it can be clearly seen is obviously the most important part of the picture. An artist will tell you that the black background is very important because it enhances and attracts attention to the smaller object that is intended to be the prominent feature. The black background needs to be there because of its contribution to the whole picture, but, in and of itself, it is not important. It is the contrastive, visible object that is prominent to the observer and is, therefore, important.

It is therefore exactly the same principle that is operating here in a linguistic context. The space taken up in recounting all the judgment events is very large, but God's positive promises and the visions of glory are intended to be seen as more important. In summary, then, the negative components of the story serve as a contrastive background that serves to attract more attention to the positive components of the story. This is an artful way of making a particular part of the discourse more prominent than other parts.

There are also many double negatives in Revelation that contribute to this same negative ethos. The semantic purpose, therefore, of providing a contrastive backdrop for the positive elements that occur in the same context, is the same. But in this case, upon reflection, a double negative also turns out to be a positive. So even though this requires more processing power on the part of the reader, it is a powerful way of attracting attention to the importance of the underlying positives that are being communicated. Consequently, this feature also serves as a prominence marker.

An important example of this phenomenon can be found in 21:8. This is at the end of God's second, and last, speech in the whole book and is, therefore, the most prominent part of Cycle 7. It begins with a triplet of direct speech, followed by a dramatic double statement (a doublet) about who He is. All of this is very prominent (21:5–6a). This, in turn, is followed by another doublet, which is a double promise that is positive in nature (21:6b–7), and by normal logic, since this is the conclusion of the speech, it should also be considered to be very prominent.

But then we are surprised to read a lengthy negative statement (this could also be interpreted as a double negative) that is actually the last component of the speech. One might then ask why God would make such a dramatic, forceful, and positive speech only to end it on such a lengthy, negative note. It does not really seem appropriate to us. The most reasonable suggestion is that the negative ethos constituent serves as a prominence marker, which serves to attract more attention to the preceding two positive promises made to the people of God in general, and to the overcomers, more specifically. The same phenomenon occurs again at 22:15, which in this case is more clearly a double negative.

Conclusion

The purpose of this brief paper has been to show that Hebrew discourse features dominate the structural organization of Revelation. The central aim has been to describe the most important of these features so that translators and analysts alike can recognize them when they see them. Then, when they have seen them, they will be able to describe them accurately, and so to produce a coherent overview of the macro structure, which is based on what the author actually said.

If the macro structure is not correct, then the whole translation will be skewed. In particular, the layout on the page and the subheadings may well lead the reader down the wrong path from the very beginning.

In order to do a good job with our translations, it is essential to be aware of the characteristics of Hebrew-style discourses. Not only is the Hebrew system different, but the organization is so integrated with the message that, of necessity, it informs, influences, and shapes the message. It is not so much that the medium *is* the message, but that the medium is so artfully integrated with the message, that the two cannot be separated.

It is obvious that it is incumbent on us, the translators, when dealing with a Hebrew-style discourse, to come to terms with the author's preferred methods of communication. It is not his task to adapt to us, but it is our task to adapt to him and to learn how to fully appreciate, and benefit from, all the tricks of his trade, and the intricacies of his art. If we do not, we could run the risk of missing the point completely.

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