

THE NATURE OF THE GREEK OF THE NEW TESTAMENT - ITS PAST AND PRESENT

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Abstract

This study surveys the historical development of the understanding of the nature of New Testament Greek from the 16th to the 19th century. It aims at two main controversies, namely the Purist-Hebraist controversy, and the Sacred-Common Greek controversy. The former centres on the issues concerning the purity of the language reflected in the New Testament. Since examples of hebraisms are so common in the new Testament, the Purists who tried their very best to defend the subtleties and elegance of the language on a par with the classical literature, were bound to lose their battle. As a result, the victory of the Hebraists lead to another even more debated issue: the Sacred-Common controversy. The peculiarities of the language reflected in the corpus have prompted some biblical scholars to think that NT Greek is so closely linked with the message in the NT, that it is in fact a special means of the Holy Spirit to communicate with mankind. This view has become very popular under the aegis of Rothe's term, 'language of the Holy Ghost'. This view was soon taken over, especially after Deissmann's discoveries of the papyri, by the opponent view that NT Greek should actually be classified as the koine dialect spoken in Hellenistic times. In the final section, a brief evaluation of the entire situation is given in the light of the present state of the art.

I. Introduction

A. Moulton's grammar

In 1906 the first volume of the present four-volume grammar of the Greek New Testament appeared as: *Prolegomena*, vol 1 of 'A Grammar of the New Testament Greek'. Its importance was immediately recognized by James Hastings, editor of *Expository Times* (1906:245): 'In all future work on the New Testament it will be referred to as the close of one epoch of New Testament study and the opening of another.' On the title page, the book was said to be 'based on W F Moulton's edition of G B Winer's Grammar'. That was indeed a pious tribute to the work of Winer

and also of Moulton's father, whose translation of Winer's Grammar into English had gone into three editions (1870, 1877, and 1882). Nevertheless, in the second edition of Moulton's work which came just seven months later, these words are excised, because the Grammar, said Moulton, 'is entirely new, and does not in any way follow the lines of its great predecessor' (1906:vii). Actually his scholarly integrity had already been reflected in his modification of his view of the New Testament Greek as 'Hebraic Greek' in *Introduction to the Study of New Testament Greek, with a First Reader* (1st edition, 1895) to 'common Greek' (2nd edition, 1904). In the second edition of the Prolegomenon, Moulton himself had commented on this change as 'a change in our conceptions of the subject, nothing less than revolutionary' (1906: 1). It is a move from an age of viewing New Testament language a special and isolating language, standing still with all kinds of uncanny Semitisms, whether it was seen as 'Hebraic Greek' or 'Sacred Greek', to an era of studying the language as being in reality a normal, first-century spoken Greek. This kind of revolution was seen not only in Great Britain, but also in Germany (Blass and Debrunner), and in America (A T Robertson).

However, the scene is not that promising. Without finishing the second volume (on *Accidence*) of his Grammar, Moulton died in a shipwreck on his way back from India; so his student W F Howard took up the task and brought it to fruition. Before he could begin on *Syntax*, vol III, Howard died and passed his job to Nigel Turner, from whom this Grammar has received its completion. In the Introduction to vol III of this Grammar, which was published in 1963, Turner took great pains to present a plea for the peculiarities of the NT language, which is to be distinguished from Classical and Hellenistic Greek. The distinction between biblical and secular Greek is explicit throughout the book - a sign of a return to the pre-Moultonian age. In the last paragraph, he laid down his striking reversal,

... the strongly Semitic character of biblical Greek, and therefore its remarkable unity within itself, do seem to me to have contemporary significance at a time when many are finding their way back to the Bible as a living book and perhaps are pondering afresh the old question of a 'Holy Ghost language'. The lapse of half a century was needed to assess the discoveries of Deissmann and Moulton and put them in right perspective. We now have to concede that not only is the subject-matter of the Scriptures unique but so also is the language in which they came to be written or translated (1963: 9).

In the last volume of the Grammar, entitled *Style*, published in 1976, Turner has continued to press his case even further. This is more evidently clear if we look at his recent work, *Christian Words* (1980), where he goes as far as to suggest that the Jewish-Christian Greek of the New Testament helps to explain the nature of glossolalia.¹

¹ For an excellent review, see Moisés Silva (1982: 103-109), whereas the review by J Welch (1983: 130-140) is helpful but far too mild. In the Introduction of his monograph Turner remarks that *Christian*

In fact, this return is even beyond what Moulton held in his earlier stage (in 1895), for Moulton, though with all his faithful commitment to the divine inspiration of the Scriptures, never confused what is papyrologically-based evidence and what is shéer religiosity.²

B. The subject matter

This is the situation: a standard grammar covering a period of almost a century stands out to be contradictory in its fundamental presupposition; the most unfortunate thing, to speak on behalf of W F Moulton, is that, even in the latter two volumes by Turner, people still call them 'Moulton's Grammar' - a kind of attribution that Moulton would certainly not enjoy! The entire Grammar can be seen as having an 'anachronistic' view in the study of New Testament Greek,³ from the 16th century to our present day. The rationale of this anachronism may be realized by surveying the historical development of the subject. The purpose of this paper is not to survey the evolution but the historical development of the New

words are 'Greek terms which ... the first believers devised for themselves', or words which require 'a deeper sense and a new consecration within the Christian vocabulary' (1980: ix-x).

² One must not think that Turner has ignored the papyrological evidence used by earlier scholars like A Deissmann, J H Moulton and others. Rather, as a result of close familiarity with such evidence, he has advanced a contrary thesis. One can clearly see his keen observation in his earlier article, 'Second Thoughts: VII. Papyrus Finds' *Exp* 1964: 44-48; in this article, he also claims that this has been his position since 1945. In his *Christian Words*, he emphasizes how little these papyri have aided our understanding of NT usage (1980:xi-xii). Another major difference is that, as Dr. Turner confessed, 'his view on the language is guided by the traditional views of inspiration: " ...I cannot believe that the Scriptures enshrine any ultimate or essential error, any defect, any excess, anything except heavenly wisdom"' (p ix). Furthermore, in his 1964 article he surely showed his dislike of Deissmann's and Moulton's idea that 'the Holy Spirit had chosen the simple tongue of ordinary folk to be the vehicle of the new revelation of God in Christ.' p 44).

In fact, this view has been Turner's approach in all he has published: e g, 'The Testament of Abraham: Problems in Biblical Greek' *NTS* 1 (1954-55) 219-223; 'The Unique Character of Biblical Greek' *VT* 5 (1955) 208-213 and *Grammatical Insights into the New Testament* (Edinburgh 1965), especially p 183. One wonders why Barr should spare Turner in his criticism of biblical lexicography in *The Semantics of Biblical Language* (1961).

³ In this paper, the term 'New Testament Greek', as a convenient label, is used only as a non-technical descriptive term; the writer has no intention of proposing that the Greek of the New Testament is a kind of Greek *sui generis*, as the adjectival phrase 'New Testament' may suggest. In fact, in terms of its linguistic affinity, the New Testament is very heterogenous: the Greek in the Gospel of Mark, which is highly semitized (cf E C Maloney's *Semitic interference of Marcan syntax* in SBLD Scholars Press, 1981), is very different from the Greek in John's Gospel, plain and ordinary, and Pauline epistles, whose Greek is elevated and classical. This becomes more obvious when we consider the different kinds of genres, such as the Apocalyptic and the Epistolary styles. Cf C K Barrett (1978:71).

Testament Greek⁴ understanding of its nature from the 16th to the 19th century. It will also interact with the philosophical and theological trends of the periods under discussion and will show how these tendencies affect the development of New Testament language study. We have particularly in mind two controversies: the Purist-Hebraist controversy prior to the 19th century (ca 16th to 18th century), and the Sacred-Common Greek controversy (from the 19th century up to the time of Deissmann). The period which is set for the former controversy is rather artificial and it only marks the blazing peak of the controversy - particularly, in the 16th century (1516), after the first printed Greek New Testament Text was published by Erasmus. There is really no way of tracing exactly the origin of the controversy but its existence is easily detectable,⁵ especially through the writings of Rothe (1863) and Hatch (1889). To choose Deissmann as a dividing line for discussion is another arbitrary decision.

No matter how we mark the dates of these two controversies, we must bear in mind that they are continuous and closely related to each other. In short, we can say that the rise of the latter controversy is because of the triumph and the dominance of the Hebraists; the heavy emphasis on the 'extreme peculiarity' of New Testament Greek because of the Semitisms has prompted some scholars to call it 'Sacred Greek' or even 'Language of the Holy Ghost'. In order to highlight the different emphases and presuppositions of the Purist-Hebraist and the Sacred-Common Greek controversies, the following two sections are labelled as the Linguistic School and the Religious School respectively. In the concluding section, we will briefly give a final evaluation of the entire situation, and our present state of the art in the study of New Testament Greek. As this paper often makes mention of many scholars of past centuries, with whom the readers may not be familiar, it seems better for the present writer also to include a brief note on these scholars, especially their great achievements. This information appears in the footnotes.

⁴ Silva has given a brief summary in his 'Biblical Greek', as unpublished paper. For a more detailed and technical discussion, see L R Palmer's *The Greek Language*, ch 3, and A N Jannaris's *Historical Greek grammar chiefly of the Attic dialect as written and spoken from Classical antiquity down to the present time*.

⁵ Some scholars have traced it back to the anti-action of the Atticists (e.g. Aristophanes and Didymus, both of whom wrote lexical works regarding the techniques of composing Atticized Greek) against the 'anti-atticista' (e.g. Galen and Artemidorus, who remained unconverted to the literary movement) from the first century B C to second century of the Christian Era. G K Kilpatrick in his article 'Atticism and the Text of the Greek New Testament' (1963: 125-137) has demonstrated that this tendency clearly existed in the so-called 'Golden Age' of literary composition (100 B C to A D 200). It seems reasonable to assume that the tendency for preserving the 'genuine' structure of Attic Greek was revived at the time of the Renaissance, because during this period, the atmosphere of the revival of learning had prompted people, especially religious people, to learn Hebrew and Greek. Nevertheless, the origin of the controversy can only be a tentative speculation based on scanty evidences and can in no way be proved convincingly.

2. The linguistic school

A. The rebirth

The Renaissance nourished everyone with a spirit of 'rebirth' in all aspects of human knowledge. It prompted man to rethink his religious and moral relationship with God and other people. More importantly to our concern, there was a renewed enthusiasm for a better understanding of Latin, Greek and Hebrew. Under all these influences, the best minds of the day, whether Roman Catholics or those who were to become Protestants, were not content to submit their interpretations to the old mechanical traditions of their own schools, but turned instead to the improved resources derived from the return by the humanist scholars *ad fontes*, that is, to the original languages of the Scriptures. This process was especially advanced by the introduction of the printing press at the middle of the 15th century. This new scientific invention made the production of books possible on a scale hitherto never dreamed of. Thus, in the 16th century, which was characterized by all kinds of Bible-printing activities, people had already been helped by an increased knowledge of Hebrew and Greek. This process was accelerated by their understanding of the Bible.⁶ This process was accelerated by the first printing of the Greek New Testament Bible in 1516 by Erasmus, which had just superseded Cardinal Ximenes' six-volume Complutensian Bible (the entire Bible containing the Hebrew, Greek, and Latin texts in parallel columns).⁷ This was also the time when Tyndale was busy translating the Bible from the original languages into English, while in Germany Martin Luther undertook the task of translating it into the German vernacular (1522).

B. The controversy

Although Erasmus' Bible had helped to spread the Reformation spirit, concerning the Greek of the Apostles (with his mind on the classical styles of Ancient Greek), he commented:

⁶ One really has to appreciate this change, namely, the emphasis on studying Greek and Hebrew. For at the end of the 15th century, very few humanist scholars had a sound knowledge of Greek; it is because Latin was usually thought of as being essential to a well-educated scholar. And in order to be able to translate the Bible, a knowledge of Latin is almost a prerequisite. 'Greek was regarded as the language of the eastern heretics and schismatics; therefore, good work in Greek had to struggle against this traditional disapproval' (CHB 2:42). It was not until the hard work of people like Erasmus, Cardinal Ximenes, Melancthon, who became the Professor of Greek at Wittenberg in 1518, and the Estienne family, that people started to concentrate on Greek studies. We should remember that the kind of Greek that served as a measuring rod at this time was Thucydidean or Aristotelean Greek. Januarius (1968:9) called this the 'Ecclesiastical Attic', which is actually quite a correct description.

⁷ Originally, Ximenes formulated his scheme in 1502; the New Testament in Greek was printed in 1514, and the Old Testament in Hebrew in 1517, but the whole Bible was not published until 1522. Nevertheless, his Greek text is superior to Erasmus' hasty and rough product. The sixth volume was devoted to a glossary of the words in these languages that appeared in the text, thus constituting the first polyglot dictionary.

*apostolorum sermon non solum impolitus et inconditus verum etiam imperfectus et perturbatus, aliquoties plane soloecissans*⁸ (Winer 1870:13).

Very soon his remarks met opposition and were criticized by Theodore Beza.⁹ In his *digressio de dono linguarum et apostolorum sermone* (on Acts 10:45), Beza defended the simplicity and force of the New Testament diction, and naturally he placed the Hebraisms in a very favourable light, by suggesting that,

*ejusmodi, ut nullo alio idiomate tam feliciter exprimi possint, imo interdum ne exprimi quidem (They are) gemmae quibus (apostoli) scripta sua exornarint*¹⁰ (Winer 1870:13).

Siding with Beza was the great Greek lexicographer Henri II Estienne (or, latinized as Stephanus), who was responsible for the production of the four-volume *Thesaurus linguae Graecae* at Geneva in 1572.¹¹ In the Preface to his edition of the New Testament in 1576, he declared himself against those '*qui in his scriptis inculta omnia et horrida esse putant*',¹² and he took pains to show the niceties of Greek expressions in the language of the New Testament and explained how the Hebraisms, as they are more rhetorical than linguistic, give inimitable force and emphasis to its style.

To call these two excellent Greek scholars 'purists' is rather unfair, for their comments are much more moderate than any of the later commentators. Most purists were driven by two opposing forces. On the one hand, they ranged

⁸ 'The discourse of the apostle is not only unpolished and unorganized but in truth it is incomplete and confused, sometimes it is clearly solecism.'

⁹ Thanks to the advertising preface of Elzevir brothers in 1624, Beza's smaller 1565 edition was vaunted as *Textum ergo habes, nunc ab omnibus receptum: in quo nihil immutatum aut corruptum damus*, which gave birth to that famous phrase *Textus Receptus* (Metzger 1968: 106 n 2).

¹⁰ It may be translated as, 'of such a kind, that they (Hebraisms) could be better expressed by no other expression (*idiomate*) - indeed, sometimes, they could not be expressed at all (They are) gems with which the apostles embellish their writings'. The Cambridge History of the Bible (2:78) states that Beza held a blasphemous presupposition against the nature of the Greek of the New Testament. But it seems that Winer's report, with the quotation given, is more reliable.

¹¹ A brief history of the Estienne's family may interest readers. The grandfather, who was also the founder of his family business as a publisher, Henri I Estienne (c 1470-1520), was famous for the publication of Lefevre's version of the Pauline Epistles with commentaries (1512), and *Quincuplex Psalterium* (1509), which was the first edition of any part of the Scriptures to give the Masoretic verse-division. His son, Henri II's father, Robert I Estienne (1503-1559) produced his *Biblia* of 1527-8 (for the later editions, in 1532, 1534, 1540, 1545, and 1546), which became one of the ancestors of the *Textus Receptus*. Robert also produced his monumental *Thesaurus Linguae Latinae* in the years 1531-43; but it was left to his son Henri II to produce the best Greek dictionary of the century, the *Thesaurus Linguae Graecae*. For a more detailed account of the achievement of this French family, see Collison (1982, ch 5), and *CHB*, ch 2 in vol II.

¹² '... those people who consider everything in these writings to be uneducated (or, unpolished) and unadorned'.

themselves with those ancient Atticists, such as Dionysios of Halicarnassos, Aristides, Pausanias, Aelian, and others in the Graeco-Roman period, who opposed any changes in the Greek language and condemned as moral obloquy any literary compositions which did not match with the Attic of the glorious times of Athenian hegemony.¹³ On the other hand, they held fast the view that the New Testament, being fully inspired by God, must be absolutely pure in its language. As a result, they tried to explain everything in the Greek of the New Testament from the Attic standpoint in all its classic purity and elegance.¹⁴ On the other side of the controversy were the Hebraists, who were of the opinion that since all the New Testament writers were Jews (except Luke), their styles, on the whole, were inevitably moulded by their Jewish thought. Furthermore, their theological and educational background was greatly influenced by the Greek Old Testament (this is especially obvious in Luke's writings), since the New Testament was but an extension of the Old Testament, and its idiosyncrasies passed largely into the New Testament writers. Thus the Hebraists developed their arguments along the line of the Semitisms found in the New Testament; but in not a few cases, these five Semitisms were highly exaggerated. Among the active Hebraists were J Drusius (1550-1616),¹⁵ Reuchlin (1455-1522),¹⁶ and Sebastian Münster of Basle.¹⁷

In 1629, Pfochen presented his treatise with much zeal against these Hebraists in his *Diatrise de linguae Graecae NT puritate* (1629, 1633). He defined the question under discussion to be,

*an stylus NT sit vere Graecus nec ab aliorum Graecorum stylo alienior talisque, qui ab Homero, Demosthene aliisque Graecis intelligi potuisset*¹⁸ (Winer 1882:13).

However, his rigid Purism has excited little attention. In the meantime, another heated battle arose in Hamburg, Germany. It was between Victor Joachim Jung (1587-1657) and a local pastor Jasque Grosse. On a certain occasion, Junge explained himself rather ambiguously,

¹³ Jannaris (1960: 8) distinguishes four different strata of the language in the literary productions of this period: Atticists, common or conventional school, the Levantine group represented by the Asiatic Greeks and Hellenized foreigners, and the colloquial or popular speech.

¹⁴ A similar kind of tension can also be found among those who propose the idea of 'Sacred Greek'.

¹⁵ Johann C Drusius was once the Professor of Oriental languages at Oxford (from 1572). He wrote several books on Hebrew grammars including *Alphabetum ebraicum vetus* (1587), and *Grammatica Linguae sanctae nova* (1612).

¹⁶ Johann Reuchlin, referring to the dictionary contained in his *De rudimentis linguae Hebraicae* (1506), regarded himself as being the first important Christian Hebrew scholar of the West.

¹⁷ Münster dedicated a lifetime to Hebrew studies, and in 1527, he produced the first Aramaic grammar written by a Christian.

¹⁸ 'Whether the style of the NT is truly Greek (and not of such a kind too different from the style of other Greek authors), so that it could have been understood by Homer, Demosthenes and others.'

I have indeed said, and I still say, that there exists in the NT what is not really Greek The question *an NT scateat barbarisms* (tr 'whether the New Testament gushes with barbarisms') is so offensive a question, that no Christian man raised it before; ... that (*sic*) barbarous formulas are to be found in the NT. I have never been willing to allow this, especially because the Greeks themselves recognize a barbarism as a *vitium* (Winer 1882:14).

His ambiguous confession even gained his opponent Grosses's friendly acceptance. Because of this, Grosses was attacked by his own colleague, Daniel Wülfer, for being unclear, and more seriously, for jeopardizing the doctrine of verbal inspiration. This circumstance endangered his career as a pastor, and this forced him to write five short treatises, defending not only the elegance, but also the purity and dignity of the New Testament language (1641, 1642). Independently of this strife, D Heinsius (1643) and T Gataker (1648) came to the fore against the Purists. In particular, Gataker, an English scholar, wrote in *De Nove Instrumenti Stylo Disert* against the arrogant Pfochen and other purists. This was followed by J Vorst (1658, 1665) who published a well-arranged collection of NT Hebraisms, which was powerful but sometimes one-sided and extravagant. Bocler (1641) and Olearius (1668) took a middle course, separating more carefully the Greek from the Hebrew element.

C. Conclusion

By this time, the issue was regarded as settled; 'Hebraisms are a very prominent element in the language of the NT, and they give it a colouring, not indeed barbarous, but widely removed from the standard of Greek purity' (Winer 1870:14). Even people who originally defended the purity of the NT language, such as J H Michaelis (1707) and A Blackwall (1727), did not venture to deny the Hebraisms; Blackwall made this remark, 'we are so far from denying that there are Hebraisms in the NT, that we esteem it a great advantage and beauty to that sacred book that it abounds with them (*sic*)' (Winer 1870: 14). Although there were still El Palairet and others, who still wanted to vindicate their doctrines, these were but skirmishes, not taken seriously by anyone.

In short, the Purists lost their battle and were silenced; the controversy of the Purist-Hebraists, which flared up in the 16th century came to a halt. The Purists, motivated by their fundamental religious belief, tried to argue for this 'case-less' case, by defending the niceties and elegance of the New Testament Greek. Their writings were mainly collections of the passages from Greek authors, in which they could also find identical words and phrases which in the New Testament are explained by their opponents as Hebraisms. In general, as Winer remarks (1870: 15), 'no distinction was made between the rhetorical element and what properly belongs to language'. The major pitfalls in their arguments are also summarized by Winer (1870:16-19). For the Hebraists, they were in a much better position because Hebraisms, whatever they are, are undeniable facts. Biblical scholars like Casp Wyss in his *Dialectologia*

Sacra (1650),¹⁹ - George Pasor (1655) and others, were pioneers in researching the Hebraisms in the Greek of the New Testament.

However, the triumph of the Hebraists in this controversy also leads to another kind of controversy. It is almost a truth to admit the influence of the Old Testament on the New Testament, such as in style, diction, grammar, and theology. This kind of influence motivated, in one way or another, Bible students to focus once more on the unity of the Scriptures, and more importantly, the divine inspiration of the Scriptures. It is inevitable that a devoted Christian, while pondering the great influence of the Old Testament on the New Testament, should relate the language of the New Testament to his faith; and somehow he wonders whether this language, with all its uniqueness which scholars call 'Hebraisms', is a God-given gift as a special vehicle for the Gospel, just as the Jews are the chosen people, especially for the coming of Jesus Christ.²⁰ Whether this is really what happened, does not affect the fact that the undeniable Hebraistic features found in the Greek of the New Testament prompt people to think differently about the nature of the language. There was also another factor involved here, namely the comparative study of literatures from different periods of the same language. As a result, biblical scholars have found the language even more unique than at first thought, and this necessitated second thoughts on the Holy nature of the language.

3. Religious school

A. Comparative philology

One need not wait until the 19th century to see a radical change in the study of the Greek of the Bible. Even towards the end of the 19th century, classical philologists, greatly influenced by the Enlightenment, sought to engage in language study with a

¹⁹ According to Winer (1870:5) Sal Glass (early 1600), was the first who in some degree collected and explained the peculiarities of NT diction. However, it was Wyss, an unknown professor of Greek in the Gymnasium of Zurich, who gave a systematic treatment of the diction. He classified his findings under the heads, *Dialectus, Attica, Ionica, Dorica, Aeolica, Boeotica, Poetica, Hebraïzousa* (Gk translation). This division is so clear-cut that some kindred points between different headings are often omitted. After Pasor, the most systematic and scholarly treatment of Hebraism was that by Ph H Haab in 1815, who published his 'Hebrew-Greek Grammar of the New Testament'. Haab confined himself to grammatical Hebraisms. But the great defect of this work is that Haab could not accurately distinguish what is of pure Greek and what is Hebraistic in NT language; thus he often attributed the name Hebraism even to those construction which might also be found among Greek writers.

²⁰ Actually, a very similar situation existed in those days: Hebrew scholars tended to relate the Hebrew language in which the Holy Scriptures were written, to their special status as God's people. In fact some Jews at that time refused to teach the Christians Hebrew because they were afraid of being accused of destroying the faith of their pupils (viz the Christians). A monk of Freiburg, where Reuchlin (see note 16) received his training, said plainly in 1521, 'Those who speak this tongue are made Jews' (quoted in *CHB* 2:43).

totally new and rational method. Scholars were interested in searching for the cause of all the linguistic phenomena and were trying to examine 'language' as a whole with all its sub-languages put together. This was in fact stimulated by the introduction of Comparative Philology. As a result, the old method of studying each individual language separately in terms of its own governing principles, without attributing any relationship to any other related languages, was quickly abandoned.

The birth of this new science was already anticipated in the last decade of the 18th century, when Sir William Jones (1746-1794), while in India, discovered Sanskrit (1788). He noticed the remarkable similarity between this old language and many known European languages (e.g. Zend).²¹ However, his early death prevented his further research into the issue and it was for other scholars to continue. Franz Bopp (1791-1867) is traditionally honoured as the founder of the Comparative Study of languages. He painstakingly tried to demonstrate the similarity of the conjugational system of Sanskrit with that of Greek, Latin, Persian, and German. In fact, the origin of grammatical forms of the Indo-Germanic languages was the main objective of his enduring book, *Vergleichende Grammatik des Sanskrit, Send, Griechischen, Lateinischen, Götischen und Deutschen* (1833-52; 3rd and last edition, 1868).²² After him, there were scholars like Jacob Grimm,²³ August F Pott,²⁴ Horace H Wilson,

²¹ Jones received his education from Harrow and Oxford. In 1783, he was knighted as Judge of the High Court at Calcutta, and in the following year he founded the Asiatic Society of Bengal. He had passed from English and Attic law to the law of India, then turned to the language of Sanskrit. In 1786, he made this memorable declaration after the first glance at the language:

'The Sanscrit language, whatever may be its antiquity, is of a wonderful structure; more perfect than the Greek, more copious than the Latin, and more exquisitely refined than either, yet bearing to both of them a stronger affinity, both in the roots of verbs and in the forms of grammar; so strong that no philologist could examine the Sanscrit, Greek, and Latin, without believing them to have been (sic) sprung from some common source, which, perhaps, no longer exists. There is a similar reason, though not quite so forcible, for supposing that both the Gothic and Celtic had the same origin with the Sanscrit. The old Persian may be added to the same family.' (*Asiatic Researches*, i 1786 422; quoted from Sandys 1908: 438-39).

²² Bopp's earlier writing on Sanskrit is *Über das Konjugationssystem der Sanskritsprache* (1816). At first he held that the Sanskrit was the origin of most of the European languages, but later he changed his opinion, 'I do not believe that Greek, Latin and the other European languages are to be considered as derived from Sanskrit I feel rather inclined to consider them altogether as subsequent varieties of one original tongue, which Sanskrit has preserved more perfectly' This very statement became the foundation of comparative Indo-European grammar (Collison 1982: 127).

²³ It is a pity that we can mention Grimm only briefly. He laid the foundations for the comparative treatment of the Germanic languages as a whole, within which class Gothic plays a role similar to that of Sanskrit in the wider Indo-European family. The first edition of the (with his brother, Wilhelm) entire eighty-volume *Deutsches Wörterbuch* was not published till 1960, whereas the first four volumes were available in 1822, 1826, 1831, and 1937 (Collison 1982:125-127; Sandys 1908:85, 206, 329).

²⁵ and others who pursued the same goals. It was almost confirmed that there was once a common tongue, *Ur-Sprache*, from which Latin Greek and some other European languages as well as Sanskrit sprang. This *Ur-Sprache*, though only a hypothetical language, came to be known as the 'Proto-Indo-European language'. No less important than Jones' contribution to linguistic science, is the discovery of the Rosetta Stone during the same period, which was first studied by a British physicist, Thomas Young.²⁶ Thus the discoveries of Sanskrit and the Rosetta Stone share a common principle in the opening era of Comparative Philology.

B. Controversy

As one may expect, Comparative Philology did not remain a tool for deciphering or for inter-languages studies only. It gradually became a principle, or even a school of thought, by which one could investigate a language in the light of the various periods of its history (i.e. diachronic studies), and the linguistic relationship among different writers of the same period. At that time, many biblical scholars had tried to apply this comparative method into the study of the biblical languages, both Greek and Hebrew. In what follows we will look at a few biblical scholars who, under the influence of this atmosphere, have applied this methodology to study the language of the New Testament; as a result different scholars look at its nature differently.

1. Edwin Hatch

Being the pioneer of the Septuagintal study, Hatch gave the first attempt to establish the relationship between New Testament Greek and the Greek of the Septuagint, and with other secular writers of the same period of time (such as Polybius, Josephus, etc). That the Greek of the Septuagint is different from other secular writings is quite understandable because it is a translation. But when he came to NT Greek, because of the strong theological affiliation between the message of the New Testament and Old Testament, Hatch tended to play down the possible connection between NT Greek and that of other writings.²⁷ Consequently, with his eyes only on

²⁴ Pott, a brilliant student of Bopp, published his *Etymologische Forschungen*, and also provided a comparative etymological dictionary of 275 verb-roots common to the Sanskrit language and others of the chief languages of the family (Collison 1982: 127).

²⁵ Wilson (1786-1860), who was a surgeon practising in Bengal and subsequently became the Director of the Royal Asiatic Society in London, published the first Western *Sanskrit-English Dictionary* in 1819.

²⁶ The Rosetta Stone was discovered during Napoleon's invasion into Egypt (1798-1799). After many attempts, Young compared different scripts on the stone by employing the principles of comparative philology. He discovered that the three scripts in the inscription - Hieroglyphic, Egyptian, Demotic Egyptian, and Greek, showed a principle of homophony (Gordon 1968:28).

²⁷ In his *Essays in Biblical Greek*, Hatch complained that in his day there was very little concern with New Testament Greek as such, because people tended to identify New Testament idioms with those of Pericles or Plato (p 10). So he proposed that New Testament Greek should be studied along with the Septuagint. For a detailed appraisal of Hatch's approach to Septuagintal studies, see Silva 1983:57-66.

the Septuagint, Hatch totally isolated the language of the New Testament from all other non-biblical literatures:

"The difficulty of biblical Greek really begins when we remember that it was Greek as spoken not merely in a foreign country and under new circumstances, but also by an alien race The attitude of [the Jews] towards human life, towards nature, and towards God was so different that though Greek words were used they were the symbols of quite other than Greek ideas *Biblical Greek is thus a language which stands by itself* (1889: 10-11; my italics).

Consequently, in his study of lexical meaning,²⁸ even though some of the New Testament words did occur in contemporary secular writings, Hatch did not think that it necessarily followed that words were used there in the same sense in which they were used in the New Testament. To be fair to Hatch, there is no conclusive proof which could be set against his presuppositions. Above all, the decision of lexical meaning is often only a matter of choice; it is rather common for a lexicographer to play down certain evidences and exaggerate others. It is difficult to always keep a balanced attitude on every piece of evidence, and we certainly would not expect Hatch, with his piety, to have such an attitude. Actually Hatch was relatively mild in his approach in comparison with some his predecessors, whose approach was much more dogmatic.

2. K J Cremer and R Rothe

One striking example of Hatch's approach was Richard Rothe, who argued in 1863 (*Dogmatik*, p 238) for the appropriateness of the phrase, 'a language of the Holy Ghost':

We may appropriately speak of a *language of the Holy Ghost*. For in the Bible it is evident that the Holy Spirit has been at work, moulding for itself a distinctively religious mode of expression out of the language of the country which it has chosen as its sphere, and transforming the linguistic elements which it found ready to hand, and even conceptions already existing, into a shape and form appropriate to itself and all its own. (my italics; quoted from Cremer 1886: iv).

After citing these words, Cremer added, 'we have a very clear and striking proof of this in NT Greek' (1883: iv). This famous acknowledgement of Rothe's comment first appeared in the preface to Cremer's *Biblico-Theological Lexicon of the New Testament*, which is the 3rd English edition of the German work *Biblisch-Theologisches Wörterbuch der neutestamentlichen Gräcität* (Gotha, 1866). This *Wörterbuch* became the precursor to the famous *Theologisches Wörterbuch zum Neuen Testament (TWNT)*, co-edited by Gerhard Kittel and Gerhard Friedrich. The significance of Cremer's book should not be underestimated, because it represents a

²⁸ The entire controversy largely concentrated on the discussion of the meaning of words.

new merging of theology and philology (and lexicography) under the command of the phrase 'the language of the Holy Ghost'.²⁹

As the name of the book suggests, it is *Biblisch-Theologisches Wörterbuch*, rather than a *Wörterbuch*, understood in modern linguistics.³⁰ Cremer's rationale lay behind his approval of Rothe's statement. To Rothe, the peculiarity of the message of Christianity could only be explained by a strong 'language-moulding power' (*vide infra*): the Holy Spirit had chosen an already existing language and moulded it (especially the semantic structure), in such a way that it is almost unpredictable by the established laws of language; in the same way, its intelligibility is only accessible to a very special group. Thus, Rothe regarded biblical Greek as a 'Holy Ghost language' standing all by itself, which was clearly echoed by Hatch's statement quoted above.

3. F. Schleiermacher

Another German scholar who has exercised no less influence than Rothe, is Schleiermacher, the father of liberal theology.³¹ His philologico-theological approach to the Greek of the New Testament has substantially influenced Cremer's methodological principle of his Dictionary, as can be seen again at the beginning of the preface to his lexicon:

Lexical works upon New Testament Greek have hitherto lacked a thorough appreciation of what Schleiermacher calls 'the language-moulding power of Christianity'. A language so highly elaborated and widely used as was Greek having been chosen as the organ of the Spirit of Christ, it necessarily followed that as Christianity fulfilled the aspirations of truth, the expressions of that language received a new meaning, and terms hackneyed and worn out by the

²⁹ The best study of Hermann Cremer's influence in this area, is the doctoral thesis of R C Duncan, 'The contribution of Hermann Cremer (1834-1903) to Theological Hermeneutics' (Edinburgh University, 1958: unpublished).

³⁰ We must be careful not to overstate our argument (cf Barr's rather overstated criticism, (1961, ch 8), for there is basically nothing wrong with a title such as 'Theological Dictionary'. In fact, if there are so many different kinds of dictionaries, such as etymological dictionaries (E Partridge 1958; J Shipley 1984), dictionary of slang and unconventional English (P Beare, 8th ed 1984), a chronological English dictionary (Finkenstaedt-Leisi-Wolff 1970), and a pronunciation dictionary (M Onishi 1982; D Jones 13th ed 1967), even an encyclopedic dictionary of a particular discipline (Ducrot-Todorov's *Encyclopedic Dictionary of the Science of Language* 1979), one may wonder 'why not a "theological dictionary"?' I think that the major difference between these dictionaries and Cremer-Kittel's dictionaries is that the former dictionaries do not confuse 'word' and 'concept' (or 'information'), or 'lexical meaning' and 'encyclopedic information', whereas for Cremer and Kittel, they tend to import all the information that they have taken from the whole semantic domain into one single lexical item.

³¹ Duncan (1958: 18-22) maintains that 'while Cremer followed Schleiermacher in his methodology, he did not follow him in his theological appraisal of the results'.

current misuse of daily talk received a new impress and a fresh power
(Cremer 1886: iv).

In fact, the expression 'the language-moulding power of Christianity', itself is from Schleiermacher's work, *Hermeneutik und Kritik mit Besonderer Beziehung auf das Neue Testament* (Berlin: F Luecke, 1938), in which he argues that (to quote from Barr 1961:257) 'assembly of all the various elements in which the language-moulding power of Christianity manifests itself would be a sciagraphy to a dogmatic and ethic of the New Testament'

Barr (1961:257-262), in concluding his critique on some principles of Kittel's Dictionary, gives a prickly evaluation of Schleiermacher's (an 'idealist', as Barr called him) influence on Cremer. According to Barr, Schleiermacher, from the outset, distinguishes two aspects of the interpretative task, namely the 'grammatical' and the 'psychological', which Barr prefers to call 'outer' and 'inner' respectively. Schleiermacher ignored the former, the more objective one, as unimportant, and emphasized the subjectiveness of the latter. The heart of this 'grammatical-psychological' (or 'outer-inner') notion for our concern is that, although all the linguistic elements (e.g. grammatical, morphological, etc) are Greek, their meanings (particularly, of the lexical items), being so influenced by the Hebraic thought and background, carry 'new content'. As Barr summarizes this contention, 'the language of the NT was Greek while its thought was Hebrew' (p 259). Thus the correct interpretation of the NT lies in the psychologization of the grammatico-historical understanding of the text, by probing into the world of thought. From this philosophical framework, we find that it is almost impossible to understand the message of the New Testament objectively; rather, only through human experience can the New Testament be comprehended and read properly. One can easily see that Schleiermacher's view of New Testament interpretation is inherited and explicated more forcefully by Bultmann in our century.³²

This is Schleiermacher's 'New Hermeneutics', in which one finds an admixture of ideology, philosophy, theology, and even philology.³³ However, this New Hermeneutics is not as new as it sounds, for we can clearly see traces in two of his predecessors, Friedrich Ast³⁴ (1778-1841), and Friedrich Wolf³⁵ (1759-1824). It was

³² On pp 238f, Duncan also suggests that the heritage of Schleiermacher, in another and wholly *malignant* form, is to be found in Bultmann, transmitted through men like Dilthey and Wach.

³³ Hermeneutics, for Schleiermacher, is 're-experiencing of the mental processes of the text's author. It is the reverse of composition, for it starts with the fixed and finished expression and goes back to the mental life from which it arose Thus interpretation consists of two interacting moments: the "grammatical" and the "psychological" The principle upon which this reconstruction stands, whether grammatical or psychological, is that of the hermeneutical circle.' (Palmer 1969:86).

³⁴ In his *Grundlinien der Grammatik, Hermeneutik und Kritik* he makes clear the aims and objects of philological study. Palmer summarizes in this way: 'For Ast, the basic aim is grasping the *spirit* of antiquity, which is most clearly revealed in the literary heritage. The outer forms of antiquity all point to an inner form, and inner unity of being, harmonious in its parts, may be called the *Geist* of antiquity.'

a typical trend of thought of those days, when Romanticism, which stresses cultural uniqueness (such as Hebrew mind and Greek mind), was battling against Rationalism, with its assumption of a mathematical and transcultural model.³⁶ Now, in adopting Schleiermacher's methodological principles, Cremer was bound to suffer Barr's criticisms too. In his *Wörterbuch*, Cremer limited himself to the terms having biblico-theological import; in other words, he would only deal with 'that department of the linguistic store which is necessarily affected by the influence which we have described, i e ... the expressions of spiritual life, moral and religion' (Cremer 1886: iv). The total lexical items that Cremer deals with occupies only one fifth of the New Testament vocabulary (Duncan 1958:26f).

(1969:76). Accordingly, the task of hermeneutics can be divided into three levels according to their degree of importance: 1. 'historical', which is the general understanding in relation to the content of the literature; 2. 'grammatical', which is the understanding in relation to the language; 3. the 'geistige', which is the understanding of the literature in relation to the total view of the author and the total view (*Geist*) of the age.

³⁵ Wolf's hermeneutical system does not affect Schleiermacher as much as Äst does. His special contribution is his view towards the interpreters: he asserts that the interpreter must be 'temperamentally suited' to understanding the subject ... he must have a talent for empathizing with the thought of others, the 'foreign thoughts'. Without this, hermeneutics is impossible (Palmer 1967:81f).

³⁶ By this atmosphere, I think, the father of modern philosophy of language, W von Humboldt, was also heavily influenced. Humboldt stresses the moving force in language, which is the spiritual force, or *Geisteskraft* active in human life and culture. Within this framework, language should be viewed theologically, as a spiritual work particularly designed towards a specific aim. This kind of thought was inherited by B L Whorf in his *Language, Thought and Reality* (ed J B Carroll, New York: Scribner's Sons, 1956).

However, it is T Boman (*Das hebräische Denken im Vergleich mit dem Griechischen*, 2nd ed; Göttingen 1954; English translation, *Hebrew thought compared with Greek*. London, 1960), who introduced it into the world of biblical scholarship, and its effect can still be seen despite the detrimental criticism of Barr in his 1961 publication. As Barr said aptly, 'Boman has accepted the worse part and rejected the better part in the thinking of Humboldt' (1961:48).

4. J Kögel and G Kittel³⁷

Kittel, the follower of Cremer, even goes beyond that and deals fully with 'internal lexicography'. To be more accurate here, the terms such as 'internal lexicography' and 'external lexicography' were used only by Kögel, Cremer's student, who was responsible for the 10th edition of Cremer's *Wörterbuch* (1911-1915). Kögel holds the view that the word is only the external expression of the internal possession, and this internal possession is always the main content for research (Barr 1961:242). As a result, Kögel-Kittel's formulations marked a shift from Cremer's original idea; and the 'internal lexicography' that they dealt with is not lexicography at all, but rather the study of concept on the basis of terms used to express them. Silva even suggests that the Kögel-Kittel theory was not compatible with Cremer's original conception of the nature of his work (1983:24-25). In conclusion, Cremer being influenced both by Rothe and Schleiermacher, has brought confusion into the study of New Testament Greek, because he drew a direct link between concept (*Begriff*) and lexical item (*Wort*).³⁸

Hatch and Cremer's views on the unique nature of the Greek of the New Testament were very influential, and dominated most of the academic discussions of that period; at the same time, they attracted a lot of allies, such as W H Gillmard, D Schilling, C H Hoole, W H Simcox and Bishop J Viteau.

5. T K Abbott and H A A Kennedy

In spite of this situation, there were still outcries from the other side of the camp, and these were prophetic cries, which were brought to fulfilment by Deissmann's discoveries. Hatch's ideas were first severely criticized by T K Abbott, because 'expressions characterized as Hebraisms may in not a few instances be paralleled in classical writers, the difference being in their frequency' (Abbott 1891:66). This is also followed by H A A Kennedy, who was a student of Hatch, in his dissertation

³⁷ It is only for the sake of completion that we include G Kittel in this discussion. In his famous Cambridge lectures *Lexicographia Sacra* (1937), we see clearly that Kittel's view of the nature of New Testament Greek is very different from that of Hatch and even Cremer; with regard to Cremer's view of the nature of New Testament vocabulary, Kittel states explicitly:

'[Cremer] believed that he could point to many words to which the New Testament or Biblical language (i.e. the Septuagint) had given birth. But further research into contemporary Hellenistic vernacular speech, and above all the study of newly published papyri and inscriptions, revealed the fundamental error of this theory. By means of careful statistics all such hypotheses and theories were overthrown.' (1937:8-9).

He then goes on to point out that the number of exclusively biblical words in the New Testament and the Septuagint is exceedingly small. The problem of Kittel is his lexicographical principle behind his *Theologische Wörterbuch*, not his view on the nature of New Testament Greek.

³⁸ For a detailed discussion on the subject 'the lexical approach to theology', readers are referred to Barr (1961:206-262) and Silva (1983: 17-32).

Sources of New Testament Greek or the Influence of the Septuagint on the Vocabulary of the New Testament (1895). He states explicitly in the preface:

But while the writer began with a complete, though provisional, acceptance of Hatch's conclusions, the farther the inquiry was pushed, the more decidedly was he compelled to doubt those conclusions, and finally to seek to establish the connection between the language of the LXX and that of the New Testament on a totally different basis (1895:v).

His claim 'on a totally different basis' refers to a more careful and scientific approach. He provided figures prepared by a careful comparison between the language of the New Testament and that of the Septuagint appearing page after page throughout the 172-page work. His final conclusion deserves to be quoted in full:

The earliest Christian writers, in proclaiming the new faith, had to express in words deep theological ideas, unheard of in the old world. It was natural that, in making this attempt, they should take for their model a vocabulary already formed. These writers, moreover, were Jews. Their whole view of things was penetrated with Hebrew modes of thought. Accordingly, they could not fail to make copious use of a type of language already adapted to their special requirements.

But the influence of the LXX on the vocabulary of the New Testament must not be exaggerated. Caution is necessary in determining that which is to be regarded as usage in biblical Greek, seeing that the LXX is a translation done by unskilful hands, and that ignorance of Greek or ignorance of Hebrew is often responsible for phenomena of vocabulary which are peculiar to the biblical language. When we consider the exceptional importance of the Greek Bible to the New Testament writers, the astonishing fact is that its influence on their vocabulary is not incomparably greater than it is found to be. (1895: 164-65; Silva gives a very detailed review of Kennedy's work, 1983:61-64).

C. Conclusion

Another similar kind of research on Paul's vocabulary was done by Theodor Nägeli, *Der Wortschatz des Apostels Paulus. Beitrag zur sprachgeschichtlichen Erforschung des Neuen Testaments* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1905), whose thesis is that Pauline letters reflect a genuine example of the everyday language in his time. These and other writers,³⁹ including people like W Lindsay Alexander, and Masson (who also translated Winer's Grammar), hinted that, if our knowledge of the popular language were greater, many of the peculiarities of biblical Greek might prove to be instances of common speech. The most striking example in this group is the well-known 'prophecy' ascribed to Bishop J B Lightfoot in a Cambridge classroom in 1863,

³⁹ For a more detailed description of the scholars in this camp, see Moulton-Milligan's *Vocabulary* (1974:xii-xiii).

You are not to suppose that the word (some NT word which had its only classical authority in Herodotus) had fallen out of use in the interval, only that it had not been used in the books which remain to us: probably it had been part of the common speech all along. I will go further, and say that if we could only recover letters that ordinary people wrote to each other without any thought of being literary, we should have the greatest possible help for the understanding of the language of the NT generally (*Lightfoot of Durham*, ed G R Eden and F C MacDonald, Cambridge, 1930:xiii; and Moulton 1906:242).

Indeed all these prophetic insights came true at the turn of the century. Baskets and baskets of papyrus rolls were found in 1877 and 1887 in the area of Fayyum, and of the most significant finds was in 1877-98 in the regions of Oxyrhynchus. A decade later, Deissmann gave us this most vivid and lively descriptions of his discoveries,

they [papyri] suddenly rise again from the rubbish mounds of the ancient cities, little market towns, and villages. They plead so insistently to be heard that there is nothing for it but to yield them calm and dispassionate audience Peasants and artisans, soldiers and slaves and mothers belonging to the common people speak to us of their cares and labours. The unknown and the forgotten for whom there was no room in the pages of the annals, troop into the lofty halls of our museums, and in the libraries, volume on volume, are ranged the precious editions of the new texts (Deissmann 1928:7, 9-10).

Now Deissmann succeeded in disproving the extreme uniqueness of the Greek of the New Testament:⁴⁰ it was neither a 'Holy Ghost language' nor a strange Jewish-Greek dialect, but the common speech of Hellenistic times. But as Deissmann reviewed this controversy, the theory of 'Sacred Greek' (or 'language of the Holy Ghost') was acknowledged as a great power in exegesis: 'it is edifying and, what is more, it is convenient. But it is absurd' (Deissmann 1901:65). On the one hand, New Testament Greek was so peculiar that the readers could interpret the grammar and dictions with 'unbound arbitrariness' (Winer 1882:xxi), so long as their interpretations were theologically orthodox. This situation was foreseen in 1822 by Winer when he complained that scholars neglected the established laws of language, arbitrarily considered to the apostles in nearly every verse uses of the wrong form in place of the right. To be sure, Winer could rightly be called a forerunner of Deissmann. Being a grammarian and linguist in this time, he could not be as fanatic as Rothe or Schleiermacher; but since he did not share the advantage of Deissmann's Egyptian papyri, Winer could not but admit certain peculiarity of the language.⁴¹ Inasmuch as we congratulate Deissmann's discovery of those 'footprints

⁴⁰ At least among the majority of biblical scholars, with the exception of people like Nigel Turner.

⁴¹ Winer, commenting on the criteria of New Testament grammar, states these: 'As language in which the NT is written is a variety of Greek', the proper object of a NT grammar would be, first, 'fully accomplished by a systematic grammatical comparison of the NT language with the written Greek of the same age and of the same description', before one starts to 'point out the modifications which were introduced by the influence of the Hebrew-Aramean on the Greek'. (Winer 1870:2-3). It is amazing

which bear their silent testimony to the solemn march of the centuries' (Deissmann 1928:65-66), we should also appreciate Winer for all his insights; no less those of Kennedy, Abbott and Lightfoot.

4. After Deissmann?

No one is perfect, neither is any book. Moulton's *Prolegomena* proves itself a book for a new era for the study of the Greek of the New Testament. So are Deissmann's *Bibelstudien* (1895), *Neue Bibelstudien* (1897) and *Licht vom Osten* (1908), in spite of the fact that, just as in any pioneering work, there are always some places needing to be smoothed out.⁴² To call scholars like Turner (or even Black⁴³) retrogressive is certainly not fair, although their reaction certainly represents another extreme of the pendulum, and causes much unnecessary misunderstanding.⁴⁴ After Deissmann and Moulton, there are many people taking a more moderate stance toward the papyrological evidence. For instance, Milligan, who was probably the first one to realize the extreme conclusion of Moulton and Deissmann, gave us a better view of the situation in his early writings (1913:35-58 and 1923: 58f); L T Lefort in *Pour une Grammaire des LXX* (*Museon* LXI, 1928: 152-60), also argues that 'the presence of the same non-classical Greek construction could be caused in the New Testament by the influence of the Aramaic, and in the papyri by the influence of the Egyptian languages' (quoted by McKnight 1965: 90), which is very similar to Colwell's view (1962:479-487). C F D Moule also gives a word of caution: 'the pendulum has swung rather too far in the direction of equating Biblica with "secular" Greek and we must not allow these fascinating discoveries to blind us to the fact that Biblical Greek still does retain certain peculiarities, due in part to Semitic influences' (1959:3f). The

that, at this pre-Deissmann time, this biblical scholar could be so clear-minded; one wonders, if only Winer had possessed those Egyptian papyri, he could have written the best New Testament Grammar of all times.

⁴² Especially in C K Barrett's honest and objective review (1978) of Moulton's *Prolegomena*, and Silva's *Bilingualism* (p 200), where he draws our attention to the latter view of Deissmann on the nature of the NT Greek.

⁴³ His very first sentence on the nature of the Greek of the New Testament states clearly the distinction between what he calls 'a form of biblical Greek' and 'Koine'. He continues his discussion, and in the conclusion, quoting Turner's evaluation (1963:9) in regarding the NT Greek as a 'Holy Ghost Language', he comments that the language of the Greek-speaking synagogue, 'like the Hebrew of the Old Testament which moulded it, was a language apart from the beginning: Biblical Greek is a peculiar language, the language of a peculiar people' (CHB 1970 I:11).

⁴⁴ It should be pointed out that Turner himself also admits that calling many of the non-classical constructions in the New Testament 'Semitic' is a question 'bedeviled by the objection that nearly all them appear in the papyri' (1963:4). It seems that E V McKnight (1965:87-93) has convincingly shown Turner's reactionary attitude towards Deissmann and Moulton. McKnight's article primarily surveys 'some developments in the study of New Testament Greek which have led to this reaction to Deissmann's thesis', and also an evaluation of Turner's *Syntax*.

most interesting is given by Moulton's son Harold K Moulton, in commenting on Turner's *Syntax* that he is swinging the pendulum too far away from his father, said, 'Future scholarship may well adopt a more central position, willing to make greater allowance for the influence of the ordinary daily language of the people than Dr Turner will, while not perhaps going all the way with the claims of the early days of discovery.' (H K Moulton, *James Hope Moulton: 11th October 1863 - 7th April 1917*, 1963: 32).

It is not the purpose of this paper to go into all the technical discussion of the nature of New Testament Greek; the readers should consult the authorities in this field. Rather our aim is simply to delineate a short history of these debates - even so, I am afraid, the work is rather sketchy.

Since, even today, we still hear many lay people or even scholars laying heavy stress on the peculiarity of the New Testament language, we will try in the following paragraphs to point out two possible reasons for this situation, and at the same time to point out a new avenue for the study of New Testament Greek.

First, we see some obvious misunderstandings on certain linguistic concepts, especially the distinction between 'language' as an abstracted linguistic system in the subconsciousness of a community (what Saussure called *langue*) and 'speech' as an actual speech performance of individual speakers of the language (the so-called *parole*). The influence of the LXX on the NT writers does not affect the structure of the Greek language as a whole ⁴⁵ (such as phonology, accidence, syntax, word formation, and to a certain extent the semantic change), but rather, only in phraseology and in preferences when equivalent expressions were at hand. ⁴⁶ For a more technical and detailed discussion on this issue, the reader is referred to Silva's 'Bilingualism and the Character of Palestinian Greek' (*Biblica* 69, 1980:198-219); he also pointed out that most of this criticisms against Deissmann did not even understand his total presentation.

Another possible explanation that we would like to emphasize more is, as Deissmann has pointed out, that 'it is convenient' (Deissmann 1901:65). For those people who attribute some degrees of sacredness to the nature of NT Greek, it is no longer necessary to talk about any principle of interpretation; what counts is one's spiritual insight into the passage. On the other hand, as soon as one is committed to accepting the conclusions of Deissmann (as well as Moulton's and Milligan's), one's interpretation must be based, as Winer had already foreseen, on the laws of the language. And to this day, as Silva points out, besides a small number of people who

⁴⁵ Silva (1980:208) draws our attention to a very important comment by E Haugen in *The Norwegian Language in America: A Study in Bilingual Behavior* (Philadelphia 1953) II, 371:

'Those learners with whom we are most familiar in our foreign language classes or even adult immigrants, do maltreat the language they learn. In their case there is bilateral influence between the languages. *But the innovations they make in the language they learn do not spread to the native speakers of that language, while the innovations they make in their own language do spread*' (Silva's emphasis).

⁴⁶ Cf Albert Wifstrand (1947: 170-182).

have vigorously pursued the areas in modern linguistics that appear most promising as aids to biblical interpretation,⁴⁷ 'the majority of biblical scholars, although aware of the problems and wishing to handle the materials responsibly, can hardly be expected to master the results of modern linguistics'.⁴⁸ An even more pointed criticism is given by E Güttgemanns (1969:98),⁴⁹ who declares,

the exegete who turns from theological hermeneutics to the reading of international linguistics and literary criticism, encounters an absolutely puzzling and completely incomprehensible situation: Protestant theology, since Luther's discovery of the correlation of *promissio* and *fides* and above all since the rise of dialectical theology, has understood itself decidedly as a 'theology of the Word of God'; but still, right up to today, it has had no adequate understanding of the science of language and linguistic processes, that is, of general linguistics.

This very comment, in my opinion, also expresses the root problem underlying the mishandling of the linguistic concept, such as *langue* and *parole*, previously discussed. In 1975 Lars Rydbeck in his thought-provoking article 'What happened to New Testament Greek Grammar After Albert Debrunner?', suggests that the new direction to follow is 'a team effort ... along lines similar to those of Adolf Deissmann ... What remains to be done is an integration of the Jewish material now available to us to balance the earlier interest in the Greek background' (pp 424-27). But how far can we go if we simply work with Deissmann to compare the language of the New Testament and that of those papyri; rather, should we not build on his conclusion that NT language is only an ordinary spoken language, and put it on the

⁴⁷ I have particularly in mind the post-Barrian contribution, like the relatively new journals such as *Linguistica Biblica* and *Semeia*; also scholars like G Downing ('Meaning', in *What about the New Testament?*, ed M Hooker and C Hickling, London: SCM, 1975) who first draws our attention to different kinds of meanings in exegesis; J F A Sawyer's *Semantics in Biblical Research* (London: SCM, 1972); C R Taber's article on 'Semantics' in the Supplement Volume to *The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1976); A C Thiselton's 'Semantics and New Testament Interpretation' in *New Testament Interpretation: Essays on Principles and Methods* (ed I H Marshall, Exeter: Paternoster Press, 1977); J P Louw's *Semantics of New Testament Greek* (*Semeia* Studies; Philadelphia: Fortress 1982), which is an English translation of the Afrikaans original of 1976.

⁴⁸ Silva (1983:21) draws our attention particularly to David Hill, who, though taking direct account to Barr's criticisms, refers to linguistic authorities almost exclusively in the introduction to his book, but reflects no linguistic awareness in his actual exegesis. The same situation happens to the 'remedial' work of *TWNT*, the *New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, see his review in *WTJ* 43 1981: 395-99.

⁴⁹ E Güttgemanns, 'Sprache des Glaubens-sprache der Menschen: Probleme einer theologischen Linguistik', *Verkündigung und Forschung* 14 (1969) 98. I am very indebted to Richard J Erickson for giving this quotation; in fact his article 'Linguistics and Biblical Language: a wide-open field' is a very well-written article, which deserves more attention than it has had.

agenda of 20th century linguistics? ⁵⁰ In the conclusion of C K Barrett's recent review of Moulton's *Grammar* (1978:68-71), he summarizes his evaluation of Moulton's contribution to the study of New Testament Greek, and points out that after the lapse of almost a century, 'in the study of NT language, "Moulton" has not been replaced'. Inasmuch as this is a compliment to Moulton, it is also a comment about the present state of the art; and probably, one can safely apply the same statement to 'Deissmann' too.

Thus, for a new generation engaged in the study of New Testament Greek, biblical scholars must not be content with the traditional philological approach, but must be able fully to integrate the knowledge of modern linguistic study into the study of the biblical languages. The latter 'deals with those things which are common to all texts in a given language', whereas the former 'deals with those things which are peculiar to specific texts' (Gleason 1974: 199-200). Inasmuch as there is a close relation between the two approaches in the determination of semantic value for the linguistic units, whether they are on the lexical, sentence, or discourse level, the interest of biblical scholars and exegetes should focus on the understanding of the meaning of the text - from here, they may go further to their own systematization. For this kind of integration, we may as well coin a hybrid designation: the 'philologico-linguistic' approach. Biblical scholarship can not afford, any longer, a simple 'pursuing the goal of reconstructing and interpreting an historical situation for distinctively religious purposes', we must also make ourselves interested in the linguistic description of the text, since a text is above all a cultural-linguistic product, a prototype of a human phenomenon (Sawyer 1967: 137-38). ⁵¹ The field is wide open, and there is much

⁵⁰ Actually, within the last two decades, we do have a few competent scholars who actively integrate linguistic research into the study of New Testament Greek. Just to mention a few: the tagmemic practitioners of discourse analysis associated particularly with the Summer Institute of Linguistics, with leading figures like Kenneth Pike, Robert Longacre (esp his recent editing journal, *Occasional Papers in Translation and Textlinguistics* (OPTAT)). In the Generative-Transformational tradition, we have Paul Karleen, in his dissertation 'The Syntax of the Participle in the Greek New Testament' (University of Pennsylvania, 1980), who employs Zellig Harris' Structuralist theory; Daryl Schmidt, in *Hellenistic Greek Grammar and Noam Chomsky: Nominalizing Transformations* (SBLDS 62, Chico: Scholars Press, 1981), and also T Mueller's small scale attempt, 'Observations on some New Testament Texts Based on Generative-Transformational Grammar' (BT 29, 1978: 117-29); Veneeta Acson's generative, but non-transformational approach, 'A Diachronic View of Case-Marking Systems in Greek: A Localistic-Lexicase Analysis' (University of Hawaii, 1979); for an attempt (not too impressive) of the use of Fillmore's Case Theory, we have T Mueller's 'An Application of Case Grammar to Two NT Passages' (Concordia Theological Quarterly 43, 1976:320-35). A recent monograph by David Black, *Linguistics for Students of New Testament Greek* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1988).

⁵¹ The primary objective of Sawyer's article, 'Context of Situation and Sitz im Leben: Some Questions concerning Meaning in Classical Hebrew'(Proceedings of the University of Newcastle upon Tyne Philosophical Society 1976:137-147) is to point out the remarkable but long neglected similarity between

work to be done in re-evaluating and re-interpreting the biblical languages and literature from a linguistic point of view.

H Gunkel's concept of 'Sitz im Leben'(1906) and J R Firth's contextual theory (or 'context of situation'). In fact, not only is this similarity ignored, but even his article has drawn little attention.

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