



Research article

STRUCTURAL CRITICISM AND THE NEW TESTAMENT

Lian Muan Kham Suante

Candidate of Doctor of Theology (NT), Union Biblical Seminary, Pune, India

Email: kpsuante@gmail.com

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received 29 Jan. 2020

Accepted 17 Mar. 2020

Available online: 30 Apr. 2020



ABSTRACT

structuralism begins, at least in part, with the so called Geneva school of linguistics and the work of Swiss linguist Ferdinand de Saussure (1857-1913), *Course in General Linguistics* which was first published in 1916 on the basis of his lecture notes collected by his students, which is now seen as the beginning (*the magna carta*) of modern structural linguistics. Attempt will be made in the following lines to discuss select proponents of structuralism who have contributed much towards New Testament studies, apart from highlighting its presuppositions and a critical evaluation of the same method.

Keywords:

Structuralism, New Testament, Criticism, Linguistics



Introduction

Attempt will be made in the following lines to discuss select proponents of structuralism¹ who have contributed much towards New Testament studies, apart from highlighting its presuppositions and a critical evaluation of the same method. Discussion will therefore skip issues related to the historical development of structuralism and what it holds for in the present as well as in the future. It must be mentioned that structuralism begins, at least in part, with the so called Geneva school of linguistics and the work of Swiss linguist Ferdinand de Saussure (1857-1913), *Course in General Linguistics* which was first published in 1916 on the basis of his lecture notes collected by his students, which is now seen as the beginning (*the magna carta*) of modern structural linguistics.² Unlike his predecessors, Saussure emphasized on the importance of synchronism over diachronic analysis to linguistic study which had become the watershed for revolution. However, literary structuralism becomes a major school only in 1960s.³ Its main

concern was (and still is) to see and hear the biblical text in its fullness.⁴

1.1. Presuppositions

The following points include some of the important presuppositions of structural criticism in biblical studies.

1.1.1. Structuralism comes in part as a reaction and supplementary but not in opposition to a traditional approach to analyzing biblical texts. Structuralists claimed that traditional approach was –

(i) Highly “speculative” when trying to find what lies behind the text,⁵ or in retrieving the historical process of how the text came into being;⁶

(ii) Over-reliance on the author over the text for the meaning (of the text) whose real intention, however, none is capable of knowing it.⁷

1.1.2. As such, synchronic analysis over diachronic analysis is vital to structuralism in the sense that synchronic analysis predominates.⁸ The author and his world

¹ Terms like ‘structuralism’ and ‘structural criticism’ are interchangeably used. They denote the same thing.

² Ferdinand de Saussure, “Preface” to *Course in General Linguistics*, translated by Wade Baskin, edited by Perry Meisel and Haun Saussy (New York: Columbia University Press, 1983), ix.

³ H. Felperin dated the beginning of literary structuralism to 1966 when Roland Barthes published *Critique et vérité* in which he advanced the importance of “science of literature,” which was basically concerned with the “conditions of meaning” and not with the interpretation of a particular works. H. Felperin, *Beyond Deconstruction* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1985), 74, cited in Tremper Longman III, *Literary Approaches to Biblical Interpretation*, vol. 3 (Michigan: Zondervan, 1987), 29.

⁴ Peter W. Macky, “The Coming Revolution: The New Literary Approach to New Testament Interpretation,” in *A Guide to Contemporary Hermeneutics: Major Trends in Biblical Interpretation*, edited by Donald K. McKim (Michigan: Eerdmans, 198), 268.

⁵ Macky, “New Literary Approach,” 267.

⁶ Cf. Macky, “New Literary Approach,” 268.

⁷ Cf. William W. Klein, Craig L. Blomberg, and Robert L. Hubbard, Jr., *Introduction of Biblical Interpretation* (Dallas: Word Publishing, 1993), 429.

⁸ Bernard C. Lategun, “Directions in Contemporary Exegesis: Between Historicism and Structuralism,” *Journal of Theology for Southern Africa* (December 1978): 23; cf. Richard R. Melick, Jr., “Literary Criticism of the New Testament,” in *Foundations for Biblical Interpretation: A Complete Library of Tools and Resources*, edited by David S. Dockery, Kenneth A. Mathews & Robert B. Sloan



play no roles in the understanding of the text. Rather, it claims for the sovereignty of the text over (the idiosyncrasies of) the author and his world.⁹

1.1.3. Meaning resides not with the author but in the texts and its structure,¹⁰ especially in the deep structure of the text. ‘Deep structure’ here can refer to “the underlying functions, motives, and interaction among the main characters and objects in narrative, and most notably, the types of oppositions and their resolutions that develop as the text unfolds,”¹¹ while ‘surface structure’ includes issues related to “plot, theme, motifs, characterization; or, in poetry: meter, rhyme, parallelism, and so on.”¹² As such, meaning does not come from above (e.g., God, revelation, or from oneself/being) but is the product of the underlying and hidden structures called “deep and preconscious structure,” that is, socio-economical, cultural and psychological, which is non-historical and may even be unknown to the author.¹³ The surface structure is therefore deemed

insignificant in discovering the meaning of the text.¹⁴

1.1.4. Besides, structuralists think that meaning emerges within systems of difference or of words in opposition to one another. A word by itself is meaningless unless it relates to others words in a system of difference and contrast.¹⁵

1.1.5. All that matters in structuralism is “language.”¹⁶ Language, whether written or spoken, is not something that is created or determined, but is the product of structures that shape or determine one’s thinking. For instance, structuralists hold the view that one learns “how to think within structures of language, religion, culture, etc.”¹⁷

1.1.6. Structuralism also claims that “a word or sign is composed of a concept or meaning (signified) together with a sound or image (signifier).”¹⁸ Changes can take place in the relationship between the ‘signified’ and ‘signifier’ because most structuralists do not approach a text with the purpose of locating the authorial intent or desire, but to a deep and unconscious structure that produces the text.¹⁹

1.1.7. Structuralism also encompasses many disciplines (polyvalent) including linguistics, anthropology, law, philosophy, psychology, literature, sociology and biblical studies.²⁰

(Tennessee: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1994), 450.

⁹ Lategun, “Directions in Contemporary Exegesis,” 23; cf. Vern S. Poythress, “Structuralism and Biblical Studies,” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 21/3 (September 1978): 236.

¹⁰ Wilburn T. Stancil, “Structuralism and New Testament Studies,” *Southwestern Journal of Theology* 22/2 (1980): 43; cf. Melick, “Literary Criticism,” 447; Lategun, “Directions in Contemporary Exegesis,” 23.

¹¹ Klein, Blomberg and Hubbard, *Introduction to Biblical*, 428.

¹² Klein, Blomberg and Hubbard, *Introduction to Biblical*, 428.

¹³ Stanley E. Porter & Jason C. Robinson, *Hermeneutics: An Introduction to Interpretive Theory* (Michigan: Eerdmans, 2011), 196.

¹⁴ Klein, Blomberg and Hubbard, *Introduction to Biblical*, 428.

¹⁵ For example, right versus wrong, presence versus absence, good versus evil, soul versus body, none of which are linked to any definite and final meaning. Porter and Robinson, *Hermeneutics*, 196.

¹⁶ Stancil, “Structuralism,” 55.

¹⁷ Porter and Robinson, *Hermeneutics*, 196.

¹⁸ Porter and Robinson, *Hermeneutics*, 197.

¹⁹ Porter and Robinson, *Hermeneutics*, 197.

²⁰ Stancil, “Structuralism,” 43



However, literary structuralism is basically derived from the field of linguistics,²¹ in whose view the Bible is also merely a “written literature.”²²

1.1.8. Structuralism is far more than a method of literary study but a methodology and an ideological (philosophical) reality.²³ As a philosophy, it looks out for “reality not in individual things but in relationships among them;”²⁴ and as a methodology, it functions as a “set of rules or regulations which describes and prescribes the operations to be performed upon any matter . . . with the purpose of ordering it and understanding it’s working.”²⁵

1.2. Select Proponents: Theory and Practice

A limited space does not permit the writer to delve into delineating all the prominent proponents of structural criticism in relation to New Testament studies. Only few names

who truly deserve a mention are selected for discussion:

1.2.1. Ferdinand de Saussure: His Linguistic Theory

It was mentioned earlier that literary structuralism is much indebted to the structural linguistics of Saussure. There are important elements which are being worth noted in relation to his linguistic theory are cited as below.

1.2.1.1. Paradigmatic and Syntagmatic Analysis

‘Paradigmatic analysis’ is a vertical, associative level of language which looks at each word separately and which identifies that each word bears “associative” or “relative” meanings.²⁶ Each word is studied according to the ‘slot’ (place) it occupies in a sentence where any given word may be related to the other. In ‘paradigmatic analysis,’ then, “a word is defined largely by its relationship to words which are not used in the sentence.”²⁷ Such analysis is considered important in structural criticism. On the other hand, ‘syntagmatic analysis’ refers to the arrangement or order of words which are interdependent to each other (i.e., associative relations). It is a ‘linear sequence of words’ or the horizontal spacing in which the sequence of words helps define the relationships of the words in a sentence.²⁸ In

²¹ L. D. Hawk, “Literary/Narrative Criticism,” *Dictionary of the Old Testament Pentateuch*, edited by T. Desmond Alexander and David W. Baker (Illinois: IVP, 2003), 537; cf. Longman, *Literary Approaches*, 28, 30.

²² Mark Allan Powell, “Literary Approaches and the Gospel of Matthew,” in *Methods for Matthew*, edited by Mark Allan Powell (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 44.

²³ Stancil, “Structuralism,” 42; cf. Kenneth A. Mathews, “Literary Criticism of the Old Testament,” in *A Complete Foundations for Biblical Interpretation* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1994), 213.

²⁴ Robert Scholes, *Structuralism in Literature: An Introduction* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1974), cited in Elizabeth Struthers Malbon, “Structuralism, Hermeneutics, and Contextual Meaning,” *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 51/2 (1983): 209-10.

²⁵ Michael Lane, “Introduction” to *Introduction to Structuralism*, edited by Michael Lane (New York: Basic Books, 1970), 13, quoted in Malbon, “Structuralism, Hermeneutics,” 210.

²⁶ Mathews, “Literary Criticism of the Old Testament,” 214.

²⁷ For example, in the phrase ‘a brown dog,’ ‘dog’ is defined by its relationship to other animal forms such as ‘cat’ or ‘sheep.’ Melick, “Literary Criticism,” 449.

²⁸ For instance, ‘painful’ can have meaning only when it is orderly arranged. It does not have meaning when it is not arranged in sequence like ‘ful-pain.’ Saussure, *General Linguistics*, 123-28, 138.



such relationships of different words, the whole context shapes and determines the meaning. The paragraph becomes the basic unit for understanding a word(s) in the sentence.²⁹

1.2.1.2. Langue and Parole

The synchronic representation of ‘langue’ (i.e., system or code in language), for Saussure, refers to the analysis of linguistic system.³⁰ It is the underlying structure of a language which finds expression in conventional words (parole, i.e., speech).³¹ The primary concern for structuralism in this system is to study language as a “code or system” (langue) within which code itself exist linguistic possibilities.³² Meaning is found in the structure or the arrangement of the systems of signs (langue).³³

1.2.1.3. Signifier and Signified

‘Signifier’ can refer to a sound, a gesture, or even a written pattern, while the ‘signified’ refers to a conceptual component referring to the mental representation or concept of the thing.³⁴ The relation between the ‘signifier’ and its referent is considered “arbitrary” because different sounds can refer to the same object depending on the language one chooses to use (tree, arbre, baum, dendron, ‘ets).³⁵ Meaning is discovered as a result of the interaction between the two by way of their contrast with other signs within a

language system.³⁶ For instance, the sound ‘tree’ (signifier) is intelligible to English speaker because of what it is not (‘three,’ ‘thee,’ ‘the,’ ‘tee,’ and the like) rather than what it is (since there is no resemblance between sound and the object tree).³⁷

1.2.2. Practice of Structuralism

Structuralism has found extensive application in the work of anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss,³⁸ the French linguist A. J. Greimas who has established an “Actantial analysis,”³⁹ and D. Patte⁴⁰ who has largely influenced biblical scholars experimenting in structural exegesis.⁴¹ They can be subdivided into two groups:

- (i) Those who move towards a more philosophical direction (e.g., Edgar McKnight and Daniel Patte);
- (ii) Those who excel as professional linguists (e.g., A. J. Greimas, A. Eugene Nida, J. P. Louw, and Robert Longacre).⁴² Of these scholars, two of the most widely used models in the interpretation of the New Testament are discussed.

²⁹ Melick, “Literary Criticism,” 449

³⁰ Saussure, *General Linguistics*, xxv.

³¹ Gerald Bray, *Biblical Interpretation: Past and Present* (Illinois: IVP, 1996), 486.

³² Stancil, “Structuralism”, 44.

³³ Bray, *Biblical Interpretation*, 486.

³⁴ Saussure, *General Linguistics*, 68-9, 74.

³⁵ Elizabeth A. Castelli, et. al., eds., *The Postmodern Bible: The Bible and Culture Collective* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995), 124.

³⁶ Mathews, “Literary Criticism,” 214.

³⁷ Castelli, *The Postmodern Bible*, 124.

³⁸ Claude Lévi-Strauss, *Structural Anthropology*, translated by Claire Jacobson and Brooke Grundfest Schoepf (New York: Basic Books, 1963).

³⁹ A. J. Greimas, *Structural Semantics: An Attempt at a Method*, translated by Daniele McDowell, Ronald Schleifer, and Alan Velie (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1983).

⁴⁰ D. Patte, *What is Structural Exegesis?* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1976).

⁴¹ Cf. Edgar V. Mcknight, “Structure and Meaning in Biblical Narrative,” *Perspectives in Religious Studies* 3 (1976): 4.

⁴² Melick, “Literary Criticism,” 447.



1.2.2.1. Claude Lévi-Strauss' Paradigmatic Analysis

Lévi-Strauss, who is considered one of the champions of 'paradigmatic analysis,'⁴³ has successfully utilized the 'paradigmatic analysis' of Saussure in the study of myths in various cultures. When it is applied to the study of a myth, the mythical thought is always seen as progressing from the awareness of oppositions toward the resolution.⁴⁴ For example, Coyote (a carrion-eater) acts as 'mediators' between "herbivorous and carnivorous just as mist between Sky and Earth ... as garments between 'nature' and 'culture,' as refuse between village and outside ..."⁴⁵ Accordingly Klein, Blomberg and Hubbard argue that Lévi-Strauss' thought process move towards the understanding that all religious myths are representations of an attempt to mediate opposition. Like the way hunters turned farmers in order to domesticate the land, "Christianity recounts how Jesus mediates salvation to humanity, overcoming alienation from God produced by the Fall."⁴⁶ When such two opposing realities appear to have worked together in a sentence, then they form a deep structure reality.⁴⁷ The task of an interpreter then is to

⁴³ Malbon, "Structuralism, Hermeneutics," 209.

⁴⁴ Lévi-Strauss, *Structural Anthropology*, 224.

⁴⁵ Lévi-Strauss, *Structural Anthropology*, 225-26.

⁴⁶ Klein, Blomberg, and Hubbard, *Biblical Interpretation*, 431; cf. Lévi-Strauss, *Structural Anthropology*, 224-26.

⁴⁷ Bray, *Biblical Interpretation*, 487. Patte, commenting on Lévi-Strauss' definition of mythical system, states that "a simple narrative manifests only two opposition of mythical system, one opposition being mediated by the other opposition." Patte, *Structural Analysis*, 13.

uncover the fundamental oppositions present in the text/sentence.⁴⁸ One of such paradigmatic analyses can be cited as Christ's work of salvation which paves a way out for one's opposition to God.⁴⁹ Similarly, paradigmatic analysis tells that in the healing of the man with withered hand (Mk. 3:1-6) can be found "a deep-seated opposition between Jesus and the Pharisees," which in turn demonstrates how the story is more than just the power of Jesus' healing but Jesus' relationship to the Law.⁵⁰

1.2.2.2. A. J. Greimas' Actantial Analysis

Greimas own model of actantial analysis is developed from V. Propp's pioneer work in *Morphology of the Folktale*.⁵¹ For Greimas, as stated in his book *Structural Semantics: An Attempt at a Method*,⁵² the earlier

⁴⁸ Stancil, "Structuralism," 47. See also Patte, *Structural Analysis*, 75-83.

⁴⁹ Klein, Blomberg and Hubbard, *Biblical Interpretation*, 431.

⁵⁰ Bray, *Biblical Interpretation*, 487.

⁵¹ V. Propp, *Morphology of the Folktale*, second edition (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2003), 25-65. McKnight has nicely summarized Propp's analysis of Russian tales and its outcome in this way: "He[Propp] intends to describe the tale according to its component parts and to show the relationship of these component parts to each other and to the whole. Propp analyzed a corpus of one hundred Russian tales and discovered in them only thirty-one functions or types of moves viewed abstractly. The function or move is an action of an actor that advances the plot, and therefore, functions can only be defined in light of their place in the narrative. For Propp, the sequence of functions is the important matter in the definition of the tales, for some functions do not occur in a given tale, but the sequence of functions which do occur is (with minor exceptions) always the same." McKnight, "Structure and Meaning," 6.

⁵² The reprinted article of A. J. Greimas on "Reflections on Actantial Models," in *Structural Semantics* is found in the chapter 10 of the book *Narratology: An Introduction*, edited by Susana



New Testament are found in the person of Dan O. Via⁶⁰ and D. Patte,⁶¹ so as to name a few.

⁶⁰ Dan Otto Via, Jr., *The Parables, their Literary and Existential Dimension* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1967), 110 & 145. Via works mainly with the parables of Jesus and understands them in terms of a *plot*: A *plot* which moves downward towards a tragedy in isolating the protagonist is called “tragedy,” while a *plot* moving upward towards the welfare of the protagonist is called “comedy.” Via, *The Parables*, 110 & 145. He found the parables of “Talents” and “Ten Maidens” (Mt. 25:1-30) as a tragic plot; while parables of “Prodigal Son” (Lk. 15:11-32) represents a comic plot. Via seems to incline more towards the diachronic approach to synchronic approach. This is visible when he criticizes Michel Foucault for presenting “an excessively anti-historical point of view” in the interpretation of the scripture. Cf. Dan Otto Via, *Kerygma and Comedy in the New Testament: A Structuralist Approach to Hermeneutic* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1975), 4, quoted in Thiselton, *New Horizons*, 492.

⁶¹ Patte, *Structural Analysis*, 14-6. Patte gives more weightage to synchronism, insisting that historical exegesis does not serve the purpose of hermeneutics. Patte, *Structural Analysis*, 14-6. Porter and Robinson have nicely summarized Patte’s structural exegesis which “endorses a synchronic exegetical approach that ‘uncovers’ the various structures of the text, i.e., its linguistic, narrative, or mythological underlying structures. These complex underlying structures – arguably unknown by the author – are what determine the meaning of the text, not the author’s intention.” Porter & Robinson, *Hermeneutics*, 174. However, Patte appears to have combined two structural models for analyzing biblical text (but from which he later appears to have withdrawn). For instance, using Greimasian actantial model, he reads the parable of the “Good Samaritan” in which the traveler was identified as the *receiver*, and the *object* as health, the *subject* as the Samaritan, and the *helper* with what he provided for the traveler, as opposed to the opponent robbers. Porter & Robinson, *Hermeneutics*, 174. On the other hand, he utilizes Lévi-Strauss’ mythical structural exegesis as a potential tool for rediscovering the mythical structures of Hellenism and Judaism in Galatians 1:1-10. Cf. Porter and Robinson, *Hermeneutics*, 175.

1.3. Critical Evaluation of Structural Criticism

In the following sentences, the paper highlights the points of strength and weakness of structural criticism in the interpretation of the New Testament, so that, whoever applies this method must do so carefully and by having foreknowledge of below points.

1.3.1. Contributions

1.3.1.1. Unlike a strictly historical approach, structuralism, as a synchronic approach, is opened to many “fruitful possibilities for analysis.”⁶² This synchronism also becomes a plus point especially when it helps to expose the meaning of the text with “completeness, rigor and depth,” states Poythress.⁶³

1.3.1.2. Besides, structuralism as a synchronic approach is not time bound. It enables the interpreter to work freely “with several texts that are unrelated by time, since he [she] is concerned with the structure and not with the question of time relationships.”⁶⁴

1.3.1.3. Structuralism also enables biblical interpreters to see different parts of biblical texts in closer relation to one another by pointing out their common deep structure. This, in turn, helps one to “appreciate the unity and coherence of various books. It can also encourage us to explore Biblical doctrines more in their interrelations to one another rather than in isolation,” like the way

⁶² Melick, “Literary Criticism,” 452.

⁶³ Poythress, “Structuralism,” 236.

⁶⁴ Stancil, “Structuralism,” 48, 52.



overcoming of death and preserving of life is interwoven through the Old Testament.⁶⁵

1.3.1.4. Structuralism, unlike traditional approach, is also not speculative. Even the data with which it deals are not speculative because “the text is there for all to inspect.”⁶⁶

1.3.1.5. Structuralism is also considered to be more scientific in its approach as it strictly follows a set of rules in the application of the theory; hence, precise and exact in finding the meaning of the text.

1.3.1.6. One of the positive results of Levi-Strauss’ application of structuralism in mythical study (i.e., binary opposition) is the possibility of seeing relationships among biblical texts which were formerly overlooked; for example, like the way life and death is related to light and darkness, of which Christ (the life and light) comes as a mediator between these two oppositions.⁶⁷

1.3.1.7. Last but not the least, structuralism “provides tools for understanding language and its functions.”⁶⁸

1.3.2. Limitations

1.3.2.1. If one’s understanding about the ‘meaning’ of the text refers to the authorial intent and the reader’s interaction with the text, the task of hermeneutics then is a complete failure in structuralism. Because, structuralists believe that meaning lies in the deep structure of the text which the author himself/herself might not be aware of.⁶⁹ Similarly, when a text is interpreted apart from its historical context, meaning is

limited to “the arrangement or structure of the linguistic signs in the text” or to the “aesthetic” work of the author.⁷⁰

1.3.2.2. Hence, the advantage in terms of synchronism which helps open up many possibilities of giving meaning to the text paradoxically become the weakness of structuralism on the other. It can result in complete denial of the importance of history⁷¹ as well as the author’s intended meaning whereby the text is liable to misinterpretation.

1.3.2.3. According to Longman, one of the disadvantages of structuralism is “its high level of complexity, its almost esoteric terminology, and its (thus far) very limited help toward understanding the text (which for many structuralists is not even a concern) have and likely will prevent the vast majority of biblical scholars from actively participating in the endeavor.”⁷²

1.3.2.4. There is no common procedure or content as to the application of structuralism in biblical studies. Different practitioners use differently and at their own whims. They also seem to be in conflict with one another not merely with regard to the details (theories) but also with regard to the overall framework.⁷³ For example, while Poythress considered in terms of a “diverse collection of methods, paradigms and personal preferences than it is a ‘system,’ a theory or a well-formulated thesis,”⁷⁴ Stancil expresses in terms of a methodology and an ideology (or philosophy) which searches for “reality

⁶⁵ Poythress, “Structuralism,” 233-34.

⁶⁶ Poythress, “Structuralism,” 235.

⁶⁷ Poythress, “Structuralism,” 233.

⁶⁸ Melick, “Literary Criticism,” 452.

⁶⁹ Stancil, “Structuralism,” 48-49.

⁷⁰ Stancil, “Structuralism,” 55.

⁷¹ Poythress, “Structuralism,” 233.

⁷² Longman, *Literary Approaches*, 37; cf. Stancil, “Structuralism,” 59.

⁷³ Poythress, “Structuralism,” 221.

⁷⁴ Poythress, “Structuralism,” 221.



not in individual things but in relationships among them.”⁷⁵ Listen to what Melick has to say in this regard: “The term [structuralism] describes more a movement than a specific form of exegesis. Those who apply the basic principles often differ with each other, so there seems to be no clear result to the study. Structuralism, therefore, implies more of a statement regarding a perspective of reality than an organized system or method.”⁷⁶

1.3.2.5. While the ‘deep structure’ is the focus of structural criticism, Klein, Blomberg and Hubbard state that some of the most valuable results of structuralism appear to have resulted from the analysis of ‘surface structural’ features.⁷⁷

1.3.2.6. While structuralism is opposed to reductionism in its search for multiple meanings; paradoxically, it becomes ‘reductionistic’ in its search to find meaning in terms of the relation of words (binary oppositions), or in finding “information only at one particular predetermined layer of meaning.”⁷⁸ Therefore, it is expressed that method of exegesis in structuralism is “applicable only to narrative texts.”⁷⁹ And its purpose can be limited to giving meaning only to what it is designed for.

Conclusion

Dealing with only two theorists does not mean that structuralism is limited to two theorists alone. There are many other proponents especially when studied together

with the Old Testament structuralists (e.g. Roland Barthes) but limited space gives no room for such detail exploration. As a way of summary to the approach, it must be stated that there is no common consensus among biblical structuralists to the application of the method in biblical studies. For instance, Greimas works differently from his predecessor Propp in the sense that he does not work deductively to one particular genre but as well takes into account the thematic element in the narrative; while Lévi-Strauss works primarily along the line of myths through which he has attempted to understand the biblical narratives (text) using binary opposition. However, one must also mention that most of the structuralists hold the common view that structuralism is concerned with synchronism. Besides, seeing biblical texts from the perspective of a binary opposition also helps one to understand some of the overlooked meanings in the narrative text.

Bibliography

- Bray, Gerald. *Biblical Interpretation: Past and Present*. Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 1996.
- Castelli, Elizabeth A. et. al. Eds. *The Postmodern Bible: The Bible and Culture Collective*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995.
- De Saussure, Ferdinand. *Course in General Linguistics*. Translated by Wade Baskin. Edited by Perry Meisel and Haun Saussy. New York: Columbia University Press, 1983.
- Greimas, A. J. “Structural Semantics.” *Narratology: An Introduction*. Edited by Susana Onega, Jose Angel Garcia Landa. London and New York: Routledge, 2014.
- Greimas, A. J. *Structural Semantics: An Attempt at a Method*. Translated by Daniele McDowell, Ronald Schleifer, and Alan Velie. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1983.

⁷⁵ Scholes, “Structuralism in Literature,” cited in Malbon, “Structuralism, Hermeneutics,” 209-10.

⁷⁶ Melick, “Literary Criticism,” 448.

⁷⁷ Klein, Blomberg and Hubbard, *Biblical Interpretation*, 432.

⁷⁸ Poythress, “Structuralism,” 234.

⁷⁹ Patte, *Structural Exegesis*, 12.



- Hawk, L. D. "Literary/Narrative Criticism." *Dictionary of the Old Testament Pentateuch*. Edited by T. Desmond Alexander and David W. Baker. Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 2003, 536-44.
- Jacobson, Richard. "The Structuralists and the Bible." In *A Guide to Contemporary Hermeneutics: Major Trends in Biblical Interpretation*. Edited by Donald K. McKim. Michigan: Eerdmans, 1986.
- Klein, William W., Craig L. Blomberg and Robert L. Hubbard, Jr. *Introduction of Biblical Interpretation*. Dallas: Word Publishing, 1993.
- Lategun, Bernard C. "Directions in Contemporary Exegesis: Between Historicism and Structuralism." *Journal of Theology for Southern Africa* (December 1978): 18-30.
- Levi-Strauss, Claude. *Structural Anthropology*. Translated by Claire Jacobson and Brooke Grundfest Schoepf. New York: Basic Books, 1963.
- Longman III, Tremper. *Literary Approaches to Biblical Interpretation*, vol. 3. Michigan: Zondervan, 1987.
- Macky, Peter W. "The Coming Revolution: The New Literary Approach to New Testament Interpretation." In *A Guide to Contemporary Hermeneutics: Major Trends in Biblical Interpretation*. Edited by Donald K. McKim. Michigan: Eerdmans, 198.
- Malbon, Elizabeth Struthers. "Structuralism, Hermeneutics, and Contextual Meaning." *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 51/2 (1983): 207-30.
- Mathews, Kenneth A. "Literary Criticism of the Old Testament." In *A Complete Foundations for Biblical Interpretation*. Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1994.
- Mcknight, Edgar V. "Structure and Meaning in Biblical Narrative." *Perspectives in Religious Studies* 3 (1976): 3-19.
- Melick, Jr., Richard R. "Literary Criticism of the New Testament." In *Foundations for Biblical Interpretation: A Complete Library of Tools and Resources*. Edited by David S. Dockery, Kenneth A. Mathews & Robert B. Sloan. Tennessee: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1994.
- Patte, D. *What is Structural Exegesis?* Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1976.
- Porter, Stanley E., and Jason C. Robinson. *Hermeneutics: An Introduction to Interpretive Theory*. Michigan: Eerdmans, 2011.
- Powell, Mark Allan. "Literary Approaches and the Gospel of Matthew." In *Methods for Matthew*. Edited by Mark Allan Powell. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009.
- Poythress, Vern S. "Structuralism and Biblical Studies." *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 21/3 (September 1978): 221-37.
- Propp, V. *Morphology of the Folktale*. Second edition. Austin: University of Texas Press, 2003.
- Stancil, Wilburn T. "Structuralism and New Testament Studies." *Southwestern Journal of Theology* 22/2 (1980): 41-59.
- Thiselton, Anthony C. *New Horizons in Hermeneutics: The Theory and Practice of Transforming Biblical Reading*. Michigan: Zondervan, 1992.
- Via, Jr., Dan Otto. *The Parables, their Literary and Existential Dimension*. Philadelphia: Fortress, 1967.