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Beyond Barr – Biblical Hebrew Semantics at its Crossroads

James Barr (1924–2006) was without doubt one of the most influential Old Testament scholars of the 20th century. His ground-breaking monograph „The Semantics of Biblical Language"[1] challenged the scholarly community to review their linguistic methods. Barr's criticism of contemporary word studies as exemplified in the articles of the Theological Dictionary of the New Testament (TDNT)[2] was fuelled by linguistic structuralism. His call for a balanced linguistic methodology was widely accepted in the field of biblical studies. However, linguistic structuralism itself is being challenged by linguists nowadays.

Since Barr's influential work on semantics, published 60 years ago, linguistics, especially semantics, has developed further. For this reason, it seems promising to look at the different phases of biblical lexicology in the past and in the present before discussing current tendencies in linguistics that show a potential for being integrated into biblical studies. The principal part of this research review examines three time periods: the 19th century and the first half of the 20th century when biblical exegesis was shaped by the views of Wilhelm von Humboldt (§ 1), the time following the publication of Barr's book when linguistic structuralism had a growing impact on biblical studies (§ 2), and the present time which shows that a new linguistic paradigm is increasingly influencing biblical semantics and exegesis (§ 3). For the sake of consistency and because of the current author's research interests, this paper concentrates on the domain of biblical Hebrew.

1. Before Barr – the axioms of biblical philology

Before the rise of structuralism, the analysis of certain languages (and of the literature produced within them) fell almost exclusively within the purview of the field of philology. The intellectual climate of 19th century Europe was shaped by German new humanism and romanticism. Wilhelm von Humboldt (1767–1835) propagated ancient Greek culture as a prototype of humanity, thus elevating one single language above all others.[3] In his monumental comparative work "On the Diversity of Human Language Construction and Its Influence on the Mental Development of the Human Species", originally published in 1836, he presents philological data from a host of different languages, including not only Indo-European and Semitic languages but also, among others, Chinese and Delaware, an indigenous North American language. For Humboldt, comparative philological studies are cultural studies. The most influential statement in this book is perhaps this:[4]

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[1] Barr 1961.
[2] Kittel and Friedrich 1933-1978.
[3] von Humboldt 1903: 263-276.
[4] von Humboldt 1999: 46.

Language is, as it were, the outer appearance of the spirit of a people; the language is their spirit and the spirit their language; we can never think of them sufficiently as identical.

Hence, Humboldt emphasised the structural and semantic uniqueness of languages and concluded that this influenced the mentalities of the peoples using them.[5]

This intellectual framework was also brought to bear on the theory of translation. Friedrich Schleiermacher (1768–1834), Humboldt's contemporary and a renowned translator of Plato's works into German, reflected thoroughly "on the different methods of translating". In a landmark paper with this title, read at the Royal Academy of Sciences at Berlin in 1813, he claims a twofold alternative:[6]

Either the translator leaves the writer in peace as much as possible and moves the reader toward him; or he leaves the reader in peace as much as possible and moves the writer toward him.

In the course of his argument, it becomes clear that Schleiermacher prefers "moving the reader to the writer" which implies conserving the source language structures as much as possible. By contrast, expressing the message of the source text using the target language structures, the goal of a modern dynamic-equivalent translation,[7] seems an impossible task to him. Instead, the translator's task is to allow the reader to "grasp with confidence not only the spirit of the language but also the author's characteristic spirit".[8] It is obvious that Schleiermacher and Humboldt shared the assumption that a people's language and worldview are closely intertwined. This assumption became a leading paradigm for word studies in the field of biblical philology.

Among theologians, this mindset had a bearing on biblical semantics. The late 19th and early 20th centuries were heavily shaped by historical-critical exegesis. According to Barr, some biblical scholars viewed these methods and their outcomes as rather destructive and thus sought theologically profound meanings in the biblical texts. Their intentions had an impact on the compilation of the Theological Dictionary of the New Testament.[9] The editors and probably most contributors shared several assumptions. First, they thought that words represent theological concepts. From the outset, it was felt that TDNT should not provide its users with just a set of translation equivalents of a Greek lexeme, which they demeaned as mere "external lexicography". Rather, it should practice "internal lexicography" by identifying the theological concept behind the lexeme.[10] Second, it was assumed that there are Hebrew concepts

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[5] Humboldt's thoughts influenced the North-American linguists Edward Sapir and Benjamin L. Whorf whose theory of "linguistic relativity" subsequently became known as the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis (cf. Penn 1972).
[6] Schleiermacher 2012: 49.
[7] Cf. Nida and Taber 1969: 12-32.
[8] Schleiermacher 2012: 54-56.
[9] Barr 1999: 20.
[10] Kittel 1933: vi.

underlying the Greek lexemes. Since the New Testament writers used the language of the Septuagint, it was deemed necessary to ask what Hebrew lexeme lies behind a given Greek translation equivalent.[11] Hence, when investigating *logos*, one has to give attention to *dābar*.[12] Third, the editors assumed that etymological studies are an essential tool for investigating word meanings, most notably when formulating theological statements.[13] For instance, the TDNT article on *logos* takes */dbr/*, the consonantal root of the corresponding Hebrew lexeme *dābār*, into account. The article states that *dǝbîr*, a noun of the same root, denotes the inner sanctuary, the "back area" of the temple. Moreover, it is noted that Arabic *dubr*, which has the same root, means "back (of a person)". Hence, *dābār* (and thus *logos*, too) is construed as referring to the "background" of something, hence, to its "deeper meaning".[14]

The assumptions underlying these lines of thought were almost certainly influenced by Humboldt's ideas. Just as Humboldt elevated one single language, namely Greek, above all others, so the authors of the TDNT elevated the Hebrew language. Hence, it is deemed necessary to revert to Hebrew in order to investigate Greek words. Also, language and thought seem to be interconnected, particularly New Testament Greek and Hebrew thought, mediated by the Septuagint. Thus, starting with Greek words from New Testament texts, scholars arrive at theological statements by way of Hebrew words.

The impact of Humboldt's ideas was still felt in the 1950s and 1960s. In 1952, the Norwegian scholar Thorleif Boman published a dissertation entitled "Hebrew thought compared with Greek".[15] Boman strongly emphasised the connection between language and thought with reference to Humboldt. Following Adolf von Harnack, he states with apparent regret, that the Christian Gospel was hellenised. Hence, Boman advises Christian theology to focus on the Hebrew language in order to rediscover its underlying thought system, which he was convinced differed strikingly from that of Greek thought.[16] For the sake of illustration, it will suffice to mention just three of the differences Boman presumed: First, he viewed Hebrew thought as *dynamic* as opposed to *static* Greek thought. He drew this inference from the fact that Hebrew verbs expressing a state have a basic meaning denoting an action, e.g., *qûm* = "stand" and "stand up". Moreover, many Hebrew nouns are derived from verbs; hence, according to Boman, they essentially denote actions.[17] Second, Hebrew thought is considered *subjective* whereas Greek thought is considered *objective*. In Greek, time is expressed objectively by means of the categories past, present, and future whereas Hebrew, according to Boman, simply marks whether an action has been completed ("perfective") or not ("imperfective"), thus expressing merely the writer's subjective

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[11] Friedrich 1978: 49-50.
[12] Kittel et al. 1942: 91-92.
[13] Cf. Friedrich 1978: 51.
[14] Kittel et al. 1942: 90; cf. (critically) Barr 1961: 129-131.
[15] Engl. trans. Boman 1960.
[16] Boman 1960: 17-18, 23-24.
[17] Boman 1960: 28-29, 150-151.

assessment.[18] Third, Hebrew thought is considered *psychological* whereas Greek thought is considered *logical*. In Greek, truth is expressed by means of the adjective *alêthês* (and derivatives) which can purportedly be traced back to the etymology *a-lêthos* "un-concealed". In Hebrew, by contrast, "truth" is expressed by derivatives of the verb ʾ*mn* "to be firm, trustworthy". Hence, the Hebrews "do not ask what is true in the objective sense but what is subjectively certain, what is faithful in the existential sense".[19]

In evangelical circles, some of Boman's ideas were propagated by Haacker and Hempelmann in a 1989 book consisting of three independent contributions by the two authors.[20] Postulating that the Hebrew language possesses theological dignity, Hempelmann strongly encouraged theologians to existentially engage with the particular *gestalt* of the Hebrew language and, hence, thought system. This act of submission is considered necessary to truly understand and communicate the word of God.[21] Interestingly, Haacker and Hempelmann were familiar with Barr's criticism of Boman and argued against Barr.[22] However, Hempelmann's main arguments defending the idea that the particular features of the Hebrew language are theologically relevant, were based not on linguistics nor on empirical data but rather on the philosophy of language.[23] This approach was duly criticised by von Siebenthal from the perspective of linguistic struturalism.[24]

To summarise this section, in the era before James Barr, biblical scholars availed themselves of a linguistic methodology that is currently considered inadequate. More than a few researchers were influenced by Humboldt's ideas of linguistic diversity, presuming a uniqueness of Hebrew thought and striving primarily for theologically weighty results. Challenges to Barr arose not in the realm of linguistics, but rather in the realm of philosophy.

2. After Barr – the rise of structuralism in biblical studies

When Barr criticised the methods of biblical philology, he adopted the assumptions of linguistic structuralism articulated above all by Ferdinand de Saussure (1857–1913) and Leonard Bloomfield (1887–1949).[25] Structuralism regards a language as an autonomous system of signs. Each of these signs consists of an acoustic image and a concept, and the relation of these two aspects to one another is "arbitrary", i.e., conventional. Signs are defined by their relation to other signs within the system.

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[18] Boman 1960: 145-146.
[19] Boman 1960: 201-202.
[20] Haacker and Hempelmann 1989: 7-16, 17-38 (Haacker), 39-78 (Hempelmann).
[21] Haacker and Hempelmann 1989: 46-72, esp. 50, 58.
[22] Haacker and Hempelmann 1989: 17, 39-42.
[23] Haacker and Hempelmann 1989: 39-46.
[24] von Siebenthal 1991.
[25] Bussmann 1996: 51-52, 1132-1134.

Languages can only adequately be analysed with reference to a given point in time, which grounds a preference for synchronic analysis.

In the area of lexical semantics, several objects of investigation evolved from structuralism including[26]

- different levels of ambiguity, i.e., *polysemy* (one word with different meanings) and *homonymy* (several words with the same articulation and/or spelling);
- different aspects of word meaning, i.e., *denotation* (constant, independent of context), *connotation* (subjective, emotive), and *reference* (relation with an extra-linguistic object being referred to, context-dependent);
- *paradigmatic relations* like *synonymy* (equal or similar meaning), *antonymy* (opposite meaning), and *hyponymy* (subordination, specialisation);
- *syntagmatic relations* like *collocation* (distribution), *compatibility* within a context and *incompatibility*;
- *lexical fields* describing the relationship between lexemes and the differences between the lexemes' meaning components by means of *componential analysis* (see below).

Along these lines, Barr criticised the proponents of biblical philology for not sufficiently adhering to an adequate linguistic methodology. While a word's etymology may be interesting, it does not constitute its "proper" meaning. Likewise, the consonantal root of a Hebrew word is only an abstraction and should not be used as first-hand evidence to investigate the word's meaning ("root fallacy").[27] Furthermore, in case of polysemy it is not adequate to integrate different meanings of a word into a common principal meaning ("illegitimate totality transfer"), rather, the respective context determines what particular meaning is to be chosen.[28] Finally, "Hebrew thought" is not, according to Barr, a linguistic but rather a cultural issue, and theology is not to be obtained from words but from propositions, i.e., clause-like expressions.[29]

Barr deconstructed the methods applied by the TDNT, Boman, and others and challenged biblical scholars to employ a linguistically sound methodology. Unfortunately, he did not tell us how to explore Hebrew lexemes, much less how to obtain theological insights from biblical texts, as he himself later admitted.[30] The same is true for Old Testament scholars who followed in his footsteps. Of those who explicitly agreed with Barr's critique and who seem to represent the common mindset after Barr, three shall briefly be named: First, John Sawyer investigated Hebrew words for salvation using a comparative approach that is basically synchronic. In comparing various Hebrew lexemes, he also looked at paradigmatic and syntagmatic relations.[31] Secondly, Benjamin Kedar, who devoted a whole monograph to the semantics of

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[26] For all keywords in italics, cf. Bussmann 1996 (s.v.).
[27] Barr 1961: 100-110.
[28] Barr 1961: 217-218.
[29] Barr 1961: 18-20, 146, 159.
[30] Barr 1999: 236.
[31] Sawyer 1972: 27-33, 51-53, 69-72.

biblical Hebrew, introduced the fundamental concepts of semantics in the tradition of structuralism. When applying these concepts to Hebrew lexemes he explicitly repeated Barr's criticisms of linguistically dubious methods. His book is replete with instructive examples, however, it does not propose a coherent methodology for word studies.[32] Finally, Susan Groom presented a short introduction to structuralism as a framework for linguistic analysis of biblical Hebrew. In criticizing the improper use of etymologies, cognate terms and Semitic roots she explicitly followed Barr.[33] In an extensive analysis of an exemplary biblical text, she relied heavily on text linguistics,[34] in the process virtually abandoning lexical semantics as a practical means of analysis.[35] Comparing these approaches yields the following preliminary (and to some extent tentative) results: (1) Old Testament scholars have mainly accepted Barr's critique. (2) They believe that structuralism provides an appropriate framework for lexical studies. (3) An overall methodology for performing lexical studies is still lacking. (4) For this reason, some researchers have virtually abandoned lexical studies, applying text linguistic methods instead.[36]

That being said, there is indeed a method with roots in structuralism that fosters the investigation of the meaning of Biblical Hebrew words. Componential analysis presumes that for the lexemes within a lexical field the respective meaning can be segmented into minimal components which are called *semes*. The presence or absence of a seme is indicated by a notation with the symbols "+" and "−". Hence, when analyzing the English lexeme "brother" within the lexical field "Kinship", the semes [+human], [+directly related], [+same generation], and [+male] can be assigned to the lexeme, whereas for "sister" the same values apply with the exception of [+female] (or, [−male]) instead of [+male]. Thus, the semantic components of the lexemes "brother", "sister", and "cousin" can be compared as in table 1 (with "0" as a symbol for "unspecified"):[37]

	brother	sister	cousin
human	+	+	+
directly related	+	+	−
same generation	+	+	+
male	+	−	0

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[32] Kedar 1981: 49-50.

[33] Groom 2003: 47-49, 61-69, 103-113.

[34] *Text linguistics* is a linguistic discipline that extends the analysis of clauses and sentences, taking formal and functional relations between clauses into account; cf. Bussmann 1996: s.v.

[35] Groom 2003: 131-160.

[36] The situation is very similar in the domain of New Testament studies, see, e.g. as representatives of evangelical scholarship, Silva 1983, Carson 1984, Cotterell and Turner 1989, and von Siebenthal 2006.

[37] Bussmann 1996: 219-221; cf. Zanella 2013; Nida 1975: 32-67.

Table 1: Componential analysis for three English kinship terms

This method has been applied to Biblical Hebrew, e.g., for the investigation of idioms,[38] for the lexical field "Gift",[39] and for the presumptive near-synonyms *bətûlāh* and *ʿalmāh*.[40] Furthermore, Louw and Nida used componential analysis when compiling their Greek-English lexicon of the New Testament.[41] Ironically, though this concrete and practical method with origins in linguistic structuralism has widely been applied to biblical studies, it was not promulgated by James Barr. Barr did not promote a methodology for doing word studies – he merely told us what we should not do –, but his critique was constructive because it warned researchers of the risk of stepping into methodological pitfalls. Hence, the "linguistic turn" in biblical studies was indeed a fruitful one. In linguistics at least, its underlying paradigm is currently being replaced by a new one.

3. Beyond Barr – the new paradigm of cognitive linguistics

Cognitive linguistics came to the fore when linguists became skeptical of regarding language as an autonomous system that is detached from human cognition on the whole. Starting in the 1970s, researchers claimed that language cannot be investigated without taking extra-linguistic information into account.[42] Charles Fillmore, for instance, argued against componential analysis which he termed a "checklist theory of meaning".[43] Instead, he advocated the idea of prototypical "scenes" or "frames" that mirror extra-linguistic, social experiences of humans. These frames are available to the human mind whenever a linguistic utterance is being processed (cf. § 3.1).

In biblical studies, too, scholars have expressed reservations with regard to the paradigm of structuralism. Van Steenbergen regards componential analysis as a useful heuristic tool rather than a valid semantic theory. Taking some of the theoretical and practical shortcomings of componential analysis into account, he argues for extending it by means of concepts from cognitive linguistics, however, without specifying a concrete methodology.[44] Van der Merwe argues for a cognitive approach to Biblical Hebrew lexicography. According to him, it is not sufficient for a dictionary entry to merely list words that are in a syntagmatic relationship to a particular lexeme, as the Dictionary of Classical Hebrew (DCH) does. Rather, it is preferable to include

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[38] Babut 1995.
[39] Zanella (2010).
[40] Ziegert (2017).
[41] Louw and Nida (1989): xvi.
[42] Croft and Cruse 2004: 1-4.
[43] Fillmore 1975; Fillmore 1976: 20-24.
[44] Van Steenbergen 2002a: 30, 34; Van Steenbergen 2002b: 111-112, 121-124.

encyclopaedic information in dictionary entries.[45] Likewise, but with a greater focus on exegesis than on lexicography or semantics, van Wolde presents an approach to biblical studies that is based on concepts from cognitive linguistics, including cultural and social aspects of meaning.[46]

For a concrete application to Biblical Hebrew semantics, two branches of cognitive linguistics seem promising. The first one is the concept of frame semantics which was originally developed by the linguist Fillmore and the cognitive scientist Minsky.[47] The second branch that will be considered here is the theory of conceptual metaphors, as promulgated by Lakoff and Johnson.[48]

3.1. Frame semantics

The basic idea behind frame semantics is that language understanding is dependent on cognitive frames. According to Fillmore,[49] a frame is a cognitive structure which is present in language users' minds and which represents a prototypical real-life situation. For instance, if someone uses the English verb "to buy" which is part of a frame for commercial events, the whole frame will be activated in the recipient's mind. The fundamental elements of this frame are a "buyer", a "seller", "goods" and a "price". All information that is necessary for understanding the utterance or the text are provided by the frame, namely: (1) the "seller" delivers the "goods" to the "buyer" (2) in exchange for an amount of money as defined by the "price" in which (3) the "price" corresponds to the value of the "goods".

Two remarks are necessary at the outset. First, the example of a "commercial event" frame shows that the situations represented by frames are prototypical. It goes without saying that not every commercial event unfolds in exactly the same manner as described. The price need not at all correspond to the value of the item purchased, as we all know from positive or negative experience. Moreover, a commercial event can contain more than just the exchange of goods for money. In some cultures, extensive bargaining practices are an essential part of the event. Hence, frames are highly culture-dependent and mirror prototypical situations in a particular society. Secondly, it needs to be stressed that understanding an utterance is possible even if not all frame elements are made explicit in the speech act, which is generally the case in everyday language use. For instance, in processing the sentence "Yesterday, I bought a new car", the recipient will know without difficulty that apart from a buyer ("I") and goods ("a new car") a seller and a price exist, too. The reason for this is the fact that language

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[45] Van der Merwe 2006: 88-89, 94; cf. Van der Merwe 2004: 127.
[46] Van Wolde 2009: 51-60, 201-205.
[47] Fillmore 1976; Fillmore 2006; Minsky 1975.
[48] Lakoff and Johnson 2003.
[49] Fillmore 1976: 20-25.

users within a certain culture share the same frames as part of their cognitive environment.

In the domain of cognitive science, frames are defined more formally. Minsky, for instance, refers to the frame elements as "terminals", or "slots". They can be filled with specific data, called "fillers", as soon as the frame is activated in the language user's mind.[50] For the utterance "Yesterday, I bought a new car", e.g., only two of the four slots are filled.

To date frame semantics has rarely been applied to Biblical Hebrew semantics.[51] One noteworthy attempt is Stephen Shead's dissertation on the verb *ḥqr* and related lexemes. These are assigned to the frames for "exploring", "searching", and "seeking".[52] It seems to me, however, that this study, extensive though it is, does not exhaust the descriptive power of frame semantics. Instead of using predefined frames with a given number of slots, one should rather investigate the biblical texts from scratch and see what kind of slots and constraints evolve from their respective contexts. Since frames are cognitive structures representing prototypical situations, it can not only be expected that the linguistic surface but also the nearer and wider context of a passage will provide hints as for the frame's slots and constraints. If, for instance, a majority of texts in a narrative corpus show similarity with respect to the kind of persons and objects involved and the contextual conditions presumed, it seems reasonable to assume prototypicality, and a hypothetical frame can be reconstructed. For instance, Ziegert reconstructed a frame for "*ḥesed* events" from narrative texts, showing that the recipient of *ḥesed* is threatened by an element of danger in all relevant contexts whereas the agent of *ḥesed* is in a position to avert it.[53] Presuming that a "danger slot" which can be filled from the respective contexts is part of the frame, the frame can then be applied to other passages with less contextual information. Even if the context of a passage does not explicitly mention danger, as in Ex 34:6 (*ēl raḥûm wəḥannûn erek ʾappayim wərab-ḥesed weʾᵉmet*), we can assume that native speakers, under the influence of the noun's complete cognitive structure, couldn't help but presume that the agent of *ḥesed* repels or diverts a danger from the recipient. This assumption, of course, depends on the prerequisite that the reconstructed frame mirrors the original language users' cognitive reality.

Frame semantics seems to be a linguistic theory that can indeed be applied to the domain of Biblical Hebrew semantics. Once a frame for a Hebrew lexeme has been

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[50] Minsky 1975: 212.

[51] In the domain of New Testament studies, frame semantics has recently been used to show that the apostle Paul probably had a complete mental frame of the concept "Final Judgment", which can be reconstructed from the entirety of his letters (Stettler 2017).

[52] Shead 2011.

[53] Ziegert 2020.

reconstructed, it can be used to articulate a concise definition of the lexeme in question. Research of this kind is still sparse and should be pursued further.

3.2. Conceptual metaphors

In 1980, George Lakoff and Mark Johnson presented the hypothesis that metaphor is more than a stylistic device. They argued for the existence of metaphorical concepts that structure the way we understand, think, and act. For instance, our perception of arguing is structured by the conceptual metaphor ARGUMENT IS WAR which becomes manifest in linguistic expressions like "Your claims are indefensible", "His criticisms were right on target", and "He shot down all of my arguments".[54] These conceptual metaphors are dependent on culture, as is shown by TIME IS MONEY (e.g., "That flat tire cost me an hour"), a conceptualisation of time that is by no means common to all human cultures.[55] Hence, conceptual metaphors are not merely rhetoric ornamentation, instead, they are conceptualisations that are inherent in human thought and grounded in human experience. Linguistic utterances like the ones quoted above reflect the underlying conceptual metaphor, though their users normally do not perceive these utterances as metaphoric.

It could be argued against this hypothesis that lexemes like "to cost" as in "That flat tire cost me an hour" are polysemous. In regular use, "to cost" means "to command a price" or "to be priced", whereas in the example just mentioned, it means "to require to spend (some time)". This view accepts the assumption that the second sense evolved from the first one by metaphoric extension and that, since expressions based on the second sense became conventionalised, the metaphor is now "dead", i.e., it is no longer regarded as a metaphor by language users. This interpretation, however, fails to explain how polysemy could develop for different lexemes (e.g., "indefensible", "target", and "to shoot") whose derived meanings demonstrably belong to the same domain (e.g., the domain of arguing). Hence, it seems preferable to regard metaphor as a cognitive rather than a stylistic device.[56]

Of course metaphor in the Bible has been a topic of study for a long time, mainly under the purview of rhetoric and stylistics. Newer approaches to metaphor are slowly coming to the fore. For instance, Kipfer has argued that in the Hebrew Bible the concept of fear is conceptualised by means of metaphors like FEAR IS INTERNAL AND EXTERNAL PRESSURE, FEAR IS HEAT, and FEAR IS A BURDEN.[57] However, I do not yet see a systematic application of the insights formulated by Lakoff and Johnson, particularly to the domain of lexical semantics.

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[54] Lakoff and Johnson 2003: 3-6, 153-155.
[55] Lakoff and Johnson 2003: 7-9.
[56] Lakoff and Johnson 2003: 211-215.
[57] Kipfer 2016, 46-65.

Indeed, metaphorical polysemy in Biblical Hebrew is an area of research that would profit from further investigation. The following remarks are tentative and provide a first impression of what could be done by means of the theory of conceptual metaphor. Let us first consider the verb ʿbr (G-stem). In dictionaries like DCH, several senses are given, the basic one probably being „pass over, cross (a river, a boundary)".[58] In addition, there is the sense "overstep, transgress" which is most probably metaphoric. This sense designates the transgression of a command (pî yhwh, Nb 14:41; miṣwāh, Dt 26:13), a law (tôrāh, Isa 24:5), or a covenant (bərît, Dt 17:2). In DCH, both senses are, along with other sub-senses like "pass through", "pass by" etc., subsumed under a main heading "pass". Hence, DCH assumes polysemy, presenting the sense "transgress" which is most probably metaphoric in nature on an equal footing with the other sub-senses. If we assume, however, a conceptual metaphor like A LAW IS A BOUNDARY (or, A COVENANT IS A BOUNDARY) we will get a clearer picture of how this verb in combination with a respective noun may have been conceptualised in the minds of language users: A law (or, a covenant) given by God is similar to the border of a country insofar as it presupposes the idea of belonging and safety. As long as an Israelite lives according to the commandments, s/he is in a safe space and belongs to the covenant community. If s/he transgresses the commandments, s/he will be outside and endangered. Hence, taking conceptual metaphor for the verb ʿbr into account can help us to grasp the meaning of nouns like tôrāh or bərît, which possibly includes the idea of being „in" or being „out". Admittedly, this assumption is still hypothetical and demands more thorough analyses.

A second example starts with the observation that for the verb nśʾ (G-stem) DCH provides the senses "lift up, take up", "carry, bear", and "bear, suffer, endure (guilt, punishment)".[59] As for the last of these, the verb can be used with a noun like ʿāwon as a direct object (e.g., tiśʾû ʾet-ʿᵃwonotêkem ʾarbāʿîm šānāh, Nb 14:34). Obviously, a conceptual metaphor is at work here, and investigating it will yield theologically relevant results. "Sin" or "iniquity" (ʿāwon)[60] is conceptualised metaphorically as a burden that has to be carried: SIN IS A BURDEN. The meaning of passages like Ex 34:7, which asserts that God "carries" the people's sin (nośēʾ ʿāwon wāpešaʿ wəḥaṭṭāʾāh), must be reserved for further research.

4. Conclusion

Wilhelm von Humboldt's ideas of linguistic relativity have shaped the methodology of quite a few biblical scholars of the 20th century. The claim that language and thought are interrelated was the methodological backbone of TDNT and influenced scholars

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[58] Clines 1996-2003: s.v.
[59] Clines 1996-2003: s.v.
[60] Or, via metonymy (which is not our topic here), „guilt" (arising from sin), or „punishment" (for sin); cf. Clines 1996-2003: s.v. ʿāwon.

who were eager to produce not only philological results but also theological statements. However, scholars employing "biblical philology" were heavily criticised by James Barr for not adhering to sound linguistic methods. Barr's critique was fuelled by linguistic structualism and proved to be helpful in the course of time. In the era after Barr, the structuralistic inventory of linguistic tools was successfully applied to biblical studies. His call to methodological soundness enabled scholars to scrutinise their hermeneutic presuppositions, primarily in the domain of word studies.

Meanwhile, a new paradigm evolved in linguistics which has the potential to bring fresh insights to biblical studies. Cognitive linguistics, as opposed to structuralism, builds upon the assumption that language is indeed interconnected with human cognition, far from being an autonomous system that can be discretely investigated.

That being said, it is striking that this particular notion of language which is rejected by structuralism was already present in pre-structuralist philological semantics. Within the pre-structuralistic paradigm, researchers had a diachronic focus. Hence, they not only recorded polysemy synchronically but also inquired as to the processes of meaning change that cause polysemy, e.g., semantic change by means of metaphor or metonymy. The usefulness of the latter has been demonstrated by newer research in the realm of cognitive linguistics. Pre-structuralists actually worked empirically, taking large quantities of data into accout. However, since they restricted themselves mainly to historical dictionaries instead of actual texts, they had no access to data from real-life language use.[61] This kind of methodology, when applied to biblical studies, facilitated statements that were not free from speculation as can be seen in the TDNT and in Boman's work. Cognitive linguistics, on the other hand, was from the very beginning based on sound empirical research, bolstered by psycholinguistic experiments that were evaluated statistically.[62] Apart from differences in practical methodology, the pre-structuralist and the cognitive paradigm share a psychological and encyclopaedic conception of meaning, and cognitive linguists do appreciate the work of their pre-struturalist forefathers.[63] Hence, in linguistics, the pendulum has swung back.

As for biblical studies, the pendulum is still near the turning point, having just changed its direction and gaining slowly momentum. James Barr's criticism of doing word studies without a sound linguistic methodology was without doubt necessary. However, it has to be admitted that Barr threw the encyclopaedic baby out with the methodically dubious bath water. Biblical philology was on the right track to take encyclopaedic information into account, as is shown by the results of cognitive

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[61] Geeraerts 2010: 43-44.
[62] Cf. Ungerer and Schmidt 2006: 7-23.
[63] Geeraerts 2010: 203, 277.

linguistics. Biblical scholars are well advised to take these findings into account without ignoring Barr's helpful warnings.

There is good reason to assume that the framework of cognitive linguistics can be fruitfully applied to biblical studies, particularly to semantics, and thus shape our theological insights. It is, of course, advisable to build new hypotheses concerning the meaning of a particular word on a large corpus of texts. Although some of the examples presented in this paper lead only to tentative results, the first steps in the direction of applying the new paradigm seem promising.

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Summary

This survey article comments on the history of biblical semantics from the beginning of the 19th century to the present time. This time period of 200 years is structured into three phases with each of them being governed by a predominant paradigm: (1) The era of biblical philology was heavily influenced by the ideas of Wilhelm von Humboldt. (2) Linguistic structuralism was promulgated to biblical scholars by James Barr since the 1960s. (3) The present time, still being dominated by structuralism, nevertheless sees the rise of a new paradigm, namely, cognitive linguistics. Within this domain, particularly frame semantics and the theory of conceptual metaphors have the potential to bring fresh insights to biblical semantics, exegesis, and theology. This is illustrated by means of some examples from the field of biblical Hebrew.

Zusammenfassung

In diesem Überblicksartikel wird die Geschichte der biblischen Semantik vom Anfang des 19. Jahrhunderts bis in die Gegenwart nachgezeichnet. Dieser Zeitraum von 200 Jahren lässt sich in drei Phasen einteilen, in denen jeweils ein Paradigma maßgeblich ist: (1) Die Epoche der biblischen Philologie war stark von den Ideen Wilhelm von Humboldts geprägt. (2) Der linguistische Strukturalismus wurde in den

Bibelwissenschaften seit den 1960er Jahren durch James Barr vorherrschend. (3) In der Gegenwart, die immer noch vom Strukturalismus beherrscht wird, zeichnet sich die kognitive Linguistik als ein neues Paradigma ab. Vor allem die Frame-Semantik und die Theorie der konzeptuellen Metaphern haben das Potential, die biblische Semantik, Exegese und Theologie durch neue Erkenntnisse zu bereichern. Das wird durch einige Beispiele aus dem Bereich des biblischen Hebräisch veranschaulicht.