

An analysis of the literary structure of the book of Revelation according to textlinguistic methods.

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FACULTY DISSERTATION

An Analysis of the Literary Structure of the Book of Revelation according to Textlinguistic Methods

[Steven L. Waechter](#), *Liberty University*

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Abstract

The purpose of this dissertation is to apply discourse analysis (textlinguistics) to the Book of Revelation. This research has two outcomes. It adds to the body of literature validating discourse analysis as a viable and useful tool for biblical studies. It also suggests a literary framework for the Book of Revelation, with particular attention to discourse segmentation and peak. The procedure used in this dissertation has five steps.

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First, notional type is evaluated on the basis of speech-act theory and a combination of contingent temporal succession and agent orientation. Second, the surface text is analyzed for recurring semantic domains, verb patterns, word order, and sentence structure. Third, the discourse is segmented into paragraphs on the basis of boundary features and internal cohesion. Fourth, paragraphs are joined into episodes on the basis of coherence devices, such as participant reference. Fifth, climax and denouement are identified by disruptions in the typical surface structure. Applying a textlinguistic method to the Book of Revelation primarily yields information pertinent to the overall literary framework. The underlying notional type is hortatory. The preponderance of aorist indicative verbs puts the book in a narrative framework. The surface text exhibits a marked concentration of verbs from the semantic domain for "control, rule." Paragraph segmentation and episode grouping coincide with shifts in participant reference. The discourse follows an episode-sequel literary pattern. The discourse macrostructure is the tenet of God's sovereign rule. Discourse peak (climax) occurs at 19:1-10; peak' (denouement) occurs at 21:1-22:7. Both segments display crowded stage, semantic quantity-based highlighting, and role reversal. A textlinguistic analysis of the Book of Revelation revealed a distinct semantic network and macrostructure. The analysis also gave credence to the idea that the occasion behind the book was incipient heresy rather than persecution. The intent, therefore, was exhortation rather than comfort. The analysis had little bearing on authorship or date and found no correlation between the literary design of the book and the use of symbols or peculiarities of grammar. The results of the analysis favored literary progression rather than reiteration. Textlinguistics is an objective tool for studying discourse segmentation and peak, which in turn helps the reader to determine authorial intent and macrostructure. The method was not particularly helpful for interpreting problem passages in the Book of Revelation. The primary value of textlinguistics is focusing attention on the whole discourse as the true object of literary study. The approach is also a useful tool for combating reader-centered hermeneutics.

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