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# RECONSTRUCTING RHETORICAL STRATEGIES FROM THE TEXT OF GALATIANS — SYNTAX-BASED DISCOURSE ANALYSIS AS A MONITORING DEVICE

## ABSTRACT

This paper focuses on areas of overlap between linguistic and rhetorical analyses of Paul's Letter to the Galatians. The question is raised whether and to what extent conclusions drawn from a text immanent linguistic approach, on the one hand, and those drawn from rhetorical analyses, on the other, are compatible and mutually supportive. Using Galatians as sample text, the author compares three different approaches: analysis presupposing a rhetorical scheme (as proposed by Hans Dieter Betz), the reconstruction of a rhetorical strategy from the text itself (as advocated by Francois Tolmie), and the so-called semantic (though ultimately syntactic) discourse analysis of Galatians published by a group of South African New Testament scholars. By means of this comparison, the author illustrates the value of a syntactically based method of discourse analysis for verifying conclusions regarding rhetorical strategies.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Almost simultaneous with the publication of Hans Dieter Betz's well-known commentary on Galatians, in which he analysed the letter according to categories pertaining to Greco-Roman rhetoric, J.P. Louw published a two-volume analysis of the letter to the Romans (Louw 1979). As far as I know, this was the first full-scale application of the principles of semantic discourse analysis to a book of the New Testament. Discourse analysis — also known as text grammar — was then a relatively new discipline within linguistics generally, and very new within New Testament studies. In South Africa the pioneering work of Louw was hailed with enthusiasm, and it would not be a gross exaggeration to assert that some adherents regarded discourse analysis as a wonder technique that would solve all exegetical problems (cf. Du Toit 2004:208). Almost three decades of refinement and reconsideration has brought a more realistic evaluation of the worth and the limits of this approach. Sadly, it seems that

the popularity of discourse analysis has been waning in recent years — perhaps a natural reaction to the over-eagerness with which the approach was welcomed initially, but carrying in itself the potential to destroy much of the benefit that could still be gained by the responsible and balanced application of the principles and methods developed within this approach.

The aim of the present paper is to introduce discourse analysis into the current debate which centres on the rhetorical analysis of Galatians. I do not intend to claim that discourse analysis is a better method than rhetorical analysis, nor that it constitutes a totally independent alternative method of analysis. On the contrary, I hope to demonstrate that the findings of rhetorical analysis are largely corroborated by the results of discourse analysis, and that the two methods are mutually supportive rather than contradictory. For the purpose of this discussion, frequent reference will be made to the analysis of Galatians published in an addendum to *Neotestamentica* by G.M.M. Pelser, A.B. du Toit, M.A. Kruger, J.H. Roberts, and the late H.R. Lemmer (Pelser *et al.* 1992). The *preface* to that analysis states that it “is based on the principles of the so-called Semantic Discourse Analysis, developed by various South African scholars.” The analysis closely resembles the schematic presentation of the text of Romans in volume I (Louw 1979), but is not accompanied by a detailed exposition like the *commentary* that Louw provides in volume II.

## 2. THE LINGUISTIC BASIS, PURPOSE, AND SCOPE OF DISCOURSE ANALYSIS

Du Toit (2004:215-218) requires of well-considered and self-critical New Testament discourse analysis that it should:

- clearly define its purpose
- avoid formalising reductionism and terminological idiosyncracies
- take the whole unit as decisive point of observation
- consider the right functional relation between input and output
- be founded upon a linguistically justified theoretical base
- be conducted within a systematic framework
- avoid isolation by seeking international collaboration.

Regarding the first requirement, Du Toit (2004:215) sees the purpose of discourse analysis as analysing New Testament discourses as such — opening up the main contours of a discourse, of its main theme and its possible sub-themes, of the course of the argument with a view to detailed analyses that will follow. Discourse analysis thus has a modest but very important role in relation to the rest of the exegetical process.

Regarding the third requirement (taking the whole discourse as decisive point of observation), Du Toit (2004:217) pleads for a continuous movement from the whole to its constituent parts and from the parts to the whole. The whole should be regarded as the decisive indicator of meaning, just as a sentence is considered to be more than the sum of its constituent elements.

In the context of the present debate, it may be observed that Tolmie's rhetorical analysis also displays a to-and-fro movement between the whole and its constituent parts — but note that the letter as a whole is approached with the assumption that Paul wrote it trying to persuade the Galatians to accept his point of view. This assumption characterises the analysis as rhetorical. Thus the whole is defined in terms of “Paul's attempt to persuade his audience ...” (2004:37), while the individual sections/phases are described in terms of different “dominant rhetorical strategies”. In Part 3, where the “organisation of the argument in the letter as a whole” (2004:38) is discussed, Tolmie identifies “six basic rhetorical objectives” (2004:215). These “objectives” represent an intermediate level between the whole and its smaller parts: the eighteen phases, each with its own distinctive dominant rhetorical strategy, combine to attain six rhetorical objectives, which in turn are organised towards the overall objective of persuading the audience to accept, or adhere to, a particular point of view.

Perhaps a few words are necessary to clarify the relation between semantic discourse analysis and its syntactical basis. Louw (1979:II.24) defines the *colon* as “syntactically a stretch of language having a matrix which consists of a nominal and a verbal element.” *Cola*, as the basic syntactical units of linguistic expression, constitute the “surface structure” of sentences as the basic units of meaning. Therefore the *colon* “is the basic unit for both syntactic and semantic analysis” (Louw 1979:II.29).

The term ‘analysis’ should be used with caution, since it is, strictly speaking, a misnomer: ‘Analysis’ might suggest an undue emphasis on the dissection of texts/discourses, while in the practice of New Testament discourse analysis as I know it, the process of dissection is balanced by that of synthesis (or “clustering”, to use a favourite term of Louw — cf. also the Preface to Pelser *et al.* [1992]: “the configuration of the different cola into units [*clusters*], in their turn combining to form yet larger units [*pericopes*], which again as independent units of meaning, together constitute an entire discourse.”) The important point to remember, however, is that the analyst's synthesis is not the re-creation of the discourse, but an effort to “map” (Louw's term — cf. Louw 1979:II.1) the discourse as produced (spoken or written) by the original author. It is a representation which intends to facilitate understanding of the original text itself — not another text meant to replace the original.

The above observations seem to apply equally to the rhetorical analysis of Tolmie: After “dividing” the letter into eighteen sections or phases and “demarkating the sections” (2004:38) in Part 2 of his dissertation, Tolmie proceeds in Part 3 to describe “the overall organisation of the argument as a whole” (2004:213, 215) — a process that consists primarily of identifying interrelationships among the various phases.

To return to the type of discourse analysis which is the concern of this paper — the following features of texts are considered to fall within its scope of investigation:

- clustering
- themes
- cohesion
- textual strategies.

In the words of Louw, a single *colon* “rarely forms a complete discourse. It generally combines with other colons in clusters to form a thematic unit” (1979:II.29). Thus a paragraph (for which Louw prefers the term ‘pericope’) consists of a series of *cola* that explicate a single theme, or concern a single topic. The term ‘theme’ may be regarded as roughly equivalent to ‘topic’.

Discourse analysis necessarily considers cohesion among the constituent elements of texts. For the purposes of this discussion, it should be noted that cohesion is not regarded as a requirement to prove the unity and integrity of New Testament documents, but is assumed as one of the defining features of a text as text (that is, as more than merely a series of unrelated linguistic utterances).

Text strategy is concerned with the communicative functions of texts/discourses and the ways in which authors attempt to maximise these functions. Rhetorical strategies (the features by which Tolmie, for instance, distinguishes between different sections of Galatians) are textual strategies of a particular type — those belonging primarily to the art of oratory. As such they fall within the scope of discourse analysis, without, however, being the object of its primary focus. On the other hand, it seems that a strictly rhetorical analysis of a discourse like Galatians may run the risk of disregarding the occurrence and significance of other textual strategies, such as narrative and phatic strategies (‘phatic’ referring specifically to those textual elements that have no other communicative function than to establish and sustain the communicative event itself).

### 3. COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF GALATIANS

After these preliminary observations, let us now consider the Letter to the Galatians, and compare the 'results' of rhetorical analyses (Betz and Tolmie) with those of discourse analysis (Pelser *et al.*).

A common feature of all these analyses is that they regard the letter as an integrated whole, consisting of epistolary elements (sections of text that characterise it as a letter) and other discourse elements (variously defined, but contained and held together, as it were, within an epistolary frame). Tolmie's characterisation of Phase One, for instance, identifies a distinct rhetorical strategy, but does so on the basis of recognising the epistolary element of salutation.

There is also agreement between the various analyses with regard to many of the discourse elements, but not all. The greatest degree of disagreement seems to occur with regard to the divisions and transitions between discourse sections. The following examples may be noted:

- 1:10 — Pelser: Part of first argument (following introduction) clustered with vv. 11-12; Betz: Part of *exordium* (clustered with vv. 6-9 and v. 11 but separated from v. 12, which is part of *narratio*); Tolmie: Part of Phase Two (clustered with vv. 6-9 but separated from vv. 11ff.) (Note: UBS<sup>4</sup> separates v. 10 from vv. 6-9 and also from vv. 11-12 by indentation — not to mention the section headings, which complicate the issue even further.)
- 2:11-14 — Pelser as well as Tolmie: Part of section starting at v. 11 and ending at v. 21; Betz: Concluding part of *narratio* (starting at 1:12 and ending at 2:14)
- 3:19-29 — Note the subdivisions: Pelser divides between v. 22 and v. 23; Betz divides after v. 25 (but then clusters vv. 26ff. together with following main section); Tolmie also divides after v. 25 (but has another division after v. 29, demarcating vv. 26-29 as Phase 10). (Note: UBS<sup>4</sup> indicates no break before 3:19, but presents vv. 15-20 as a single pericope, indenting at v. 21.)
- 5:1 — Pelser and Betz take v. 1 as the beginning of a new section (vv. 1-12), while Tolmie takes it as the concluding statement of the allegorical argument (Phase 14) beginning at 4:21. (Note: UBS<sup>4</sup> does not indent at 5:1, thus indicating a division that coincides with that of Tolmie.)
- 5:7-12 — Pelser: Cluster C-D of pericope 16; Tolmie: Independent argument (Phase 16) – thus Pelser divides in both more and less detail than Tolmie. (Note: UBS<sup>4</sup> indents at v. 7 and at v. 13, thus suggesting a division that coincides with Tolmie's analysis.)

The following discussion will focus on two of these instances of disagreement between the various analytical approaches: 2:11-14 and 5:7-12.

### 3.1 Galatians 2:11-14

When one considers Betz's exposition of the *narratio*, it seems to follow logically that 2:11-14 constitutes the fourth and final element of that section of the "apologetic letter" (Betz 1979:14). Betz subdivides the *narratio* as follows (1979:16-18):

- A. Thesis to be demonstrated in the "statement of facts" (1:12)
- B. First part: From Paul's birth to the mission in Asia Minor (1:13-24)
- C. Second part: Paul's second visit in Jerusalem (2:1-10)
- D. Third part: the conflict at Antioch (2:11-14)

Note that this fourth element is termed "third part" — reflecting Betz's understanding of the relation between the thesis and the truly narrative elements in the *narratio*. The thesis is formulated first in 1:12 and is subsequently demonstrated by the series of narrated incidents, which Betz divides into three "parts". The subdivisions presented by Betz clearly seem to reflect his understanding of Paul's argumentative strategy: The first part confirms that Paul's understanding of the gospel was formed by divine influence ("revelation") long before being sanctioned/recognised by the church in Jerusalem; the second part confirms that Paul's preaching of the gospel to the gentiles was approved by the church in Jerusalem; and the third part confirms that Paul firmly stood for the preservation of the truth of that gospel.

The fact remains, however, that the series of narrated events may also be differently construed. In the analysis of Pelser *et al.* (1992:2) the pericopes are outlined as follows:

- |            |   |
|------------|---|
| Pericope 3 | (1:10-12): In obedience I proclaim the gospel God has revealed to me.   |
| Pericope 4 | (1:13-24): I received my gospel and my calling from God, not from man.  |
| Pericope 5 | (2:1-10): The leaders in Jerusalem acknowledged my gospel and my calling to the Gentile mission.  |
| Pericope 6 | (2:11-21): In Antioch I upheld, against Peter and others, that which remains valid: Man is saved, not by upholding the law, but by faith. |

Note that pericopes 4 and 5, as demarcated by Pelser *et al.*, correspond exactly to Betz's sections B and C. Pericope 6 differs from Betz's section D in that Pelser *et al.* (1992:11-14) include vv. 15-21 with vv. 11-14.

Betz's exclusion of vv. 15-21 from the "account of the episode at Antioch" reflects his opinion (1979:113-114) that this passage formally and functionally represents the *propositio* that ancient rhetoricians used to insert between the *narratio* and the *probatio*. This opinion is a natural result of Betz's approach to the letter as a whole, namely, to analyse it according to Greco-Roman rhetoric. Yet Tolmie, who also approaches the analysis of the letter from a rhetorical perspective, includes vv. 15-21 in the section (Phase 5) starting at v. 11. Tolmie's motivation for this choice is based on the fact that he does not observe a change of rhetorical strategy at v. 15.

Since these analysts differ, and since the difference between them also affects the question whether 2:15-21 is to be regarded either as an address to Cephas at Antioch being reported to the Galatians, or as an argument addressed directly to the Galatians, it seems worth while to ask what light may be shed on this question by a different approach such as discourse analysis. Pelsler *et al.* (1992:11-14) seem to indicate (by their clustering of elements — see the lines on the left hand side in Figure 1 below) that v. 11 briefly states the main facts about the incident at Antioch, while vv. 12-13 (Note: v. 14 is excluded) relate the events in order.

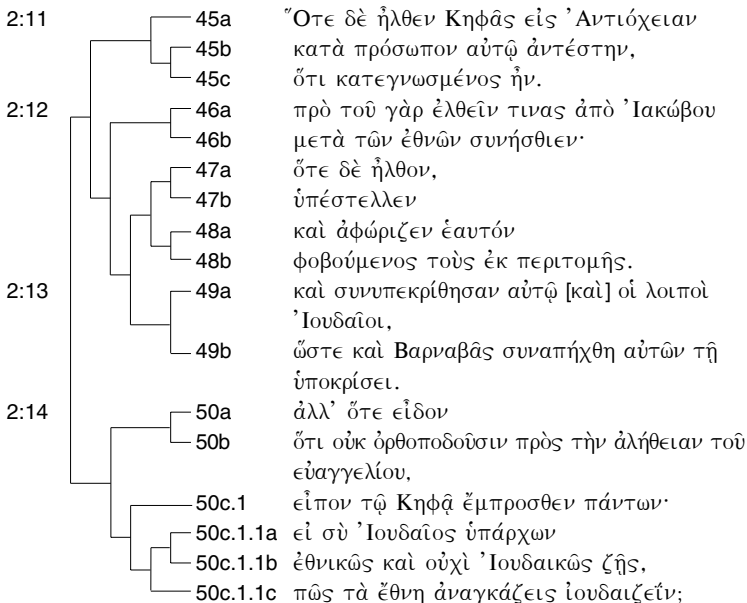


Figure 1: Colon analysis of Galatians 2:11-14 by Pelsler *et al.* (1992:11-12)

Thus:

- V. 11 (Colon 45a, b, c) stands in a one-to-one relation to vv. 12-13 (cola 46a-49b);
- V. 12a (colon 46a, b) stands in a one-to-one relation to v. 12b-13 (cola 47a-49b);
- V. 12b (cola 47a-48b) stands in a one-to-one relation to v. 13 (colon 49a, b); and
- Within v. 12b, colon 47a, b stands in a one-to-one relation to colon 48a, b.

This configuration seems to take due account of the syntactic markers γάρ (v. 12a), δέ (v. 12b) and καί (v. 13), but also of the syntactical relations expressed by a combination of various means, such as the temporal antithesis πρὸ τοῦ γὰρ ἐλθεῖν τινὰς ἀπὸ Ἰακώβου μετὰ τῶν ἐθνῶν συνήσθιεν· ὅτε δὲ ἦλθον, ὑπέστελλεν καὶ ἀφώριζεν ἑαυτὸν φοβούμενος τοὺς ἐκ περιτομῆς. I emphasise this because the same “marker” may function differently at two occurrences, even in close proximity in the same passage: ὅτε δὲ ἦλθεν ὅτε δὲ ἦλθον (v. 11) and ὅτε δὲ ἦλθον (v. 12b) are identical in syntactic function — constituting temporal clauses — but differ in terms of anaphoric reference: The second refers back only as far as πρὸ τοῦ γὰρ ἐλθεῖν τινὰς (v. 12a), whereas the first refers back beyond the boundaries of the pericope, even as far as 1:15.

Having said this, I must express my disagreement with the configuration presented by Pelser *et al.* (1992:11-14) at the next level of their analysis — the clustering of vv. 11-13 as a whole with v. 14. Their schematic presentation at this level may be formulated as follows:

- Vv. 11-13 (cola 45a-49b) stand in a one-to-one relation to v. 14 (colon 50a, b, c); and
- Within v. 14, colon 50a, b stands in a one-to-one relation to colon 50c.

It seems that they placed undue emphasis on ἀλλά (ἀλλ’ — v. 14a), by reading ἀλλ’ ὅτε εἶδον ... as if it introduced a next item in the series of events marked by ὅτε δὲ ἦλθεν Κηφᾶς (v. 11) and the earlier occurrence of ὅτε δὲ εὐδόκησεν ... (at 1:15). The objection to that interpretation is that Paul’s words to Cephas form part and parcel of his opposing Cephas to his face (κατὰ πρόσωπον αὐτῷ ἀντέστην — v. 11) and should thus be subsumed under the “heading” of v. 11. Therefore I would suggest the following alternative reading:

- V. 11 stands in a one-to-one relation to vv. 12-14; and



- Within vv. 12-14, vv. 12-13 stand in a one-to-one relation to v. 14 (rhetorically, as Cephas' conduct and its consequences versus Paul's disapproval and attempted correction of that conduct).

On the syntactic level, γάρ (v. 12a) is given more emphasis as introducing the demonstration of the thesis presented in v. 11 — and this demonstration does not end at v. 13. Does it end at v. 14?

The schematic representation of v. 14b (colon 50c) by Pelsler *et al.* (1992) may be formulated as follows:

- Colon 50c.1 stands in a one-to-one relation to colon 50c.1.1a, 1b, 1c;
- Colon 50c.1.1a, 1b stands in a one-to-one relation to colon 50c.1.1c.

Apart from the fact that their numeric scheme here introduces a non-functional level (c.1.1 — without any 1.2 from which 1.1 needs to be distinguished), their representation correctly reflects the relation of Paul's direct words (50c.1.1a, 1b, 1c) to the quotation formula (50c.1). But this does not solve the problem: Where does the quotation end?

We seem to have reached a point where rhetorical analysis would suggest one answer, discourse analysis another. The former — or, at least, Betz's version of it — would invoke traditional rhetorical categories and suggest a break after v. 14. The latter would consider discourse features such as cohesion, and probably note continuity in the use of second and first person, singular and plural forms — a progression from direct address to inclusive language to example, while the topic remains the same (cf. v. 14 ζῆς, ἀναγκάζεις; v. 15 ἡμεῖς; v. 16 εἰδότες, ἐπιστεύσαμεν, δικαιωθῶμεν; v. 17 ζητοῦντες, εὔρέθημεν; v. 18 κατέλυσα, οἰκοδομῶ, συνιστάνω; v. 19 ἀπέθανον, ζήσω, συνεσταύρωμαι; v. 20 ζῶ — 3 times; v. 21 ἄθετῶ).

However, these differences of opinion result from the complexity of the texts being analysed, as well as the complexity of the markers and the way they function at different levels of the analysis. No wonder scholars are divided in their interpretation of vv. 15-21, with many taking a “middle position” (cf. Betz 1979:114).

### 3.2 Galatians 5:7-12

Here I disagree with Pelsler *et al.* (1992:33): As a first observation, their summary of pericope 16 reads: “Be steadfast in your Christ-given freedom: do not become slaves again by being circumcised.” This hardly covers the semantic content of all four the clusters they distinguish:

- A: You are free — do not become slaves again.  
B: Pursuing righteousness by the law severs you from Christ and his grace; the righteousness which we expect through the Spirit, is by faith.  
C: I am convinced that you remain loyal to the truth in spite of being enticed to disobey it.  
D: May those who beguile you into circumcision be condemned; they nullify the cross.

One has to consider, though, whether the internal structure of the pericope (that is, the hierarchical relationship among the different clusters) justifies their presentation. By the lines on the right hand side of the page they seem to indicate the following:

- Cluster A announces the theme of the pericope, while clusters B-C-D give the exposition of that theme;
- Cluster B stands in a meaningful one-to-one relationship to clusters C-D;
- Cluster C stands in a meaningful one-to-one relationship to cluster D.

One should keep in mind that Pelsler *et al.* (1992) do not explicitly motivate this cluster configuration; it is merely to be inferred from the lines in their schematic representation. Yet the binary principle of clustering is evident throughout — from the microstructural representation of subsections of cola to their “explication of the macrostructural relationships in Galatians” (1992:1) — and the lines on the right hand side of pages 32-33 also reflect this binary principle. Of course, this principle is linguistically based in that a colon is defined — from both a semantical and syntactical perspective — as a unit consisting of a noun phrase plus a verb phrase.

Thus we are entitled to expect that the clusters in their various combinations would form meaningful units that relate to the clusters with which they combine on every next level of analysis. From this perspective, cluster B seems to relate more directly to cluster A (as a rational motivation of the appeal expressed in A) than via an intermediate combination with C-D (which combine two seemingly antithetical, but in fact mutually supportive motifs: praise of the Galatians and condemnation of the opponents).

Tolmie’s analysis of this passage supports my preference for separating vv. 7-12 from vv. 1-6 — but, of course, on a quite different basis, namely, the identification of a change of rhetorical strategy at 5:7.

#### 4. CONCLUSION

I hope to have demonstrated, by this comparative analysis, that the findings of rhetorical analysis are largely corroborated by the results of discourse analysis, and that the two methods are indeed mutually supportive rather than contradictory. Since the present debate centres on the Letter to the Galatians, I have mainly referred to the discourse analysis of this letter by Pelsler *et al.* (1992), though I do not agree with their analysis in every respect. In retrospect, the following deficiencies of discourse analysis as represented by (Pelsler *et al.* 1992) may be noted:

- It is not really open to discussion in that relations among cola and clusters are not made explicit (being marked by lines only).
- It presents units smaller than the colon (which they define in the preface as “the smallest semantic unit of discourse, consisting of a noun phrase and a verb phrase which can either be explicitly or implicitly present in the surface structure”) on the same level of analysis as cola, without always noting the difference.
- It tends, by its schematic presentation of the discourse “structure”, to become detached from the linear presentation that characterises all linguistic expression, regardless of the medium of expression, either speech or writing.

Nevertheless, discourse analysis has proven its worth as an exegetical tool — one among many — for New Testament studies, and is likely to gain rather than lose popularity among serious New Testament scholars in years to come.

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*Keywords*

Rhetorical analysis

Pauline Letters

Letter to the Galatians

Discourse Analysis

*Trefwoorde*

Retoriese analise

Pauliniese briewe

Brief aan die Galasiërs

Diskoersanalise