

TEXTUAL SIGNPOSTS IN THE
ARGUMENT OF ROMANS

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TEXTUAL SIGNPOSTS IN THE ARGUMENT OF ROMANS

A Relevance-Theory Approach

Sarah H. Casson

SBL Press



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In memory of Trevor Patterson, 1960–2017

evangelist, pastor, and friend

Romans 5:5

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Foreword

I have long been convinced that linguistics has a great deal to offer New Testament scholarship. The field of Bible translation has been particularly receptive to new developments in linguistics, rather more so than has been New Testament studies. A recent development within linguistics and pragmatics that has had quite an influence in Bible translation circles but is less known to New Testament scholars is relevance theory—a broad framework for explaining how human communication works and why it is (usually) successful. The theory posits that communication is based on a shared understanding between a communicator and her addressees that the message being communicated will be relevant to the latter. Addressees will process the message, within a particular context, in order to arrive at the most relevant, which is to say the most readily accessible, interpretation of it. That interpretation will often enough coincide with the interpretation intended by the communicator. Languages tend to be equipped with expressions that a speaker may employ to direct her hearers toward inferences to be drawn in interpretation (in English, expressions such as “you see,” “indeed”). These words do not convey conceptual meaning; rather they serve as “procedural markers,” giving guidance to hearers as to how to construe a given utterance. Sarah Casson, the author of this volume, is experienced in the field of Bible translation in minority languages, and has found relevance theory helpful for her translation work. In this book, she applies the theoretical framework, and in particular the notion of procedural meaning, to the Greek word *γάρ* in Paul’s Letter to the Romans.

The lexeme *γάρ* is one of the most frequently occurring words in the New Testament. It occurs in every book of the New Testament, in some books more than others (just once each in 2 John and Jude). Romans has the highest concentration of instances (144). The word is found in verses widely regarded as theologically significant or pivotal in Paul’s argument (Rom 1:16, 17, 18, etc.). Traditionally, *γάρ* is regarded as a

causal or explanatory particle, and thus rendered “for” in English, but in many cases, in both Romans and more widely, the causal and explanatory senses do not seem to fit. In an effort to accommodate the diversity of actual usage, lexical entries on *γάρ* are often complex, adding a host of subdefinitions to the primary causal and explanatory meanings. Commentators on the Greek text of Romans exhibit one of two tendencies as they deal with *γάρ*: either they treat it as a particle with a fixed causal or explanatory meaning; or, swayed by lists of subclassifications in standard lexicons, they view it as a malleable word whose meaning varies from context to context. Both tendencies are problematic: the former struggles to account for seemingly irregular uses; the latter misses the potential importance of *γάρ* as a consistent discourse signal. Taking up and extending a hypothesis first mooted by the linguist and Bible translation scholar Regina Blass, and working through a range of examples in Romans, Sarah makes a compelling case that *γάρ* is best understood as a procedural cue, guiding towards particular inferences to be drawn, thus reducing ambiguity. In giving a procedural account of *γάρ* in Romans, she is able to attribute to the word a single and stable communicative function, while satisfactorily explaining all the variations in usage.

This is a significant achievement on its own, but Sarah goes further. She shows that a procedural view of *γάρ* is a valuable aid to the interpretation of Romans, whether at the close-up level of the exegesis of individual verses or the wider horizon of the letter’s larger argument. On an exegetical level, it helps to constrain interpretation, permitting some readings of a verse while excluding others. On a wider plane, it helps interpreters to track the flow and coherence of Paul’s argument and discern his main points and concerns. Sarah thus intervenes in scholarly disputes about the interpretation of particular verses, such as 1:18, 4:2 and 10:4, showing how some influential readings are rendered unlikely by a procedural view of *γάρ*. She also offers fresh insight into the much-debated structure of Rom 1–4 and makes a distinctive contribution to the Romans Debate, the discussion about Paul’s purpose in writing the letter.

So, then, this volume is not just about a tiny Greek connecting word; it is about how to read Romans, Paul’s most influential letter, indeed the most influential letter ever written. I am confident that Sarah’s book will become a standard reference point for exegetes of Romans. The book is an example of the merits of interdisciplinary research for New Testament studies, showing how developments in related fields can shed fresh light on the interpretation of the biblical text. It is to be hoped that the book

will help to foster greater dialogue between the often-separate worlds of Bible translation studies and New Testament studies, based on a mutual recognition of the value of linguistics for illuminating the biblical text.

Edward Adams

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Acknowledgments

The seeds of this project were sown while grappling with γάρ as I worked with Congolese translators of the Bible into minority languages in the Democratic Republic of Congo. Searching for the best way to render γάρ in fresh languages threw up fundamental questions about its communicative role.

I owe a particular debt of gratitude to Eddie Adams, without whose encouragement I would never have embarked on this research, nor stayed the course. I am tremendously grateful for his incisive criticism, thorough reading of my copious drafts, and openness to debating all kinds of perspectives. I am also thankful to John Barclay and Sarah Whittle for their rigorous criticism, and their encouragement to publish my work, and for John Barclay's gracious and meticulous correction of errors in my manuscript. Many thanks also go to David Horrell for reading the manuscript and accepting it for publication in the *Early Christianity and Its Literature* series of SBL Press. I have greatly appreciated his painstaking engagement with my manuscript, his detailed suggestions for improvements, and his encouragement. All remaining errors are my own responsibility. I am also grateful to Nicole Tilford of SBL Press for her patient and invaluable guidance in the editing process.

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larly grateful to Holy Trinity Church, Richmond, and to our former vicar, Trevor Patterson, so greatly missed. His last words to me were an enthusiastic exhortation to publish this research as a book.

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Abbreviations

AB	Anchor Bible Commentary
ASCP	Amsterdam Studies in Classical Philology
BDAG	Danker, Fredrick W., Walter Bauer, William F. Arndt, and F. Wilbur Gingrich. <i>A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature</i> . 3rd ed. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000.
BDF	Blass, Friedrich, Albert Debrunner, and Robert W. Funk. <i>A Greek Grammar of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature</i> . Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1961.
BHL	Blackwell Handbooks in Linguistics
<i>B.J.</i>	Josephus, <i>Bellum judaicum</i>
BLG	Biblical Languages: Greek
BNTC	Black's New Testament Commentaries
<i>BSac</i>	<i>Biblia Sacra</i>
BZNW	Beiheft zur Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft und die Kunde der älteren Kirche
<i>C. Ap.</i>	Josephus, <i>Contra Apionem</i>
CBET	Contributions to Biblical Exegesis and Theology
CBQ	<i>Catholic Biblical Quarterly</i>
ConBNT	Coniectanea Biblica New Testament
CSCO	Corpus scriptorum Christianorum orientalium
CSEL	Corpus scriptorum ecclesiasticorum latinorum
CSL	Cambridge Studies in Linguistics
<i>CurBR</i>	<i>Currents in Biblical Research</i>
<i>Disc.</i>	Epictetus, <i>Discourses</i>
EBib	Etudes bibliques
EKKNT	Evangelisch-katholischer Kommentar zum Neuen Testament
<i>Ep.</i>	Seneca, <i>Epistulae morales</i>

ESV	English Standard Version
FC	<i>La Bible Ancien et Nouveau Testament en français courant</i> . Pierrefitte: Société biblique française, 1982.
GBS	Guides to Biblical Scholarship
GN	<i>Die Bibel in heutigem Deutsch: Die Gute Nachricht des Alten und Neuen Testaments</i> . Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1984.
HDC	High Definition Commentary
HNT	Handbuch zum Neuen Testament
HThKNT	Herders theologischer Kommentar zum Neuen Testament
IBC	Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching
ICC	International Critical Commentary
JBL	<i>Journal of Biblical Literature</i>
JSNT	<i>Journal for the Study of the New Testament</i>
JSNTSup	Journal for the Study of the New Testament Supplement Series
KEK	Kritisch-exegetischer Kommentar über das Neue Testament
KJV	King James Version
KNT	Kommentar zum Neuen Testament
LCC	Library of Christian Classics
LCL	Loeb Classical Library
LNTS	Library of New Testament Studies
LSJ	Liddell, Henry G., Robert Scott, and Henry S. Jones. <i>A Greek-English Lexicon</i> . 9th ed. with revised supplement. Oxford: Clarendon, 1996.
LXX	Rahlfs, Alfred. <i>Septuaginta: Id est Vetus Testamentum Graece iuxta LXX interpretes</i> . Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1935.
Metam.	Ovid, <i>Metamorphoses</i>
MNTC	Moffatt New Testament Commentary
MS	Mnemosyne Supplementum
NA ²⁸	Aland, Barbara, Kurt Aland, Johannes Karavidopoulos, Carlo M. Martini, and Bruce M. Metzger, eds. <i>Novum Testamentum Graece</i> . 28th ed. Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 2012.
NBS	<i>La nouvelle Bible Segond</i> . Société biblique française, 2002.

NET	New English Translation
NICNT	New International Commentary on the New Testament
NIV	New International Version, 1984.
NLT	New Living Translation
<i>Notes</i>	<i>Notes on Translation</i>
<i>NovT</i>	<i>Novum Testamentum</i>
NRSV	New Revised Standard Version
NTL	New Testament Library
NTS	<i>New Testament Studies</i>
NTTS	New Testament Tools and Studies
PdV	<i>Bible Parole de Vie</i> . Société biblique française, 2000.
PTSDSSP	Princeton Theological Seminary Dead Sea Scrolls Project
RBS	Resources for Biblical Study
REB	Revised English Bible
<i>Rhet.</i>	Aristotle, <i>Rhetoric</i>
RSV	Revised Standard Version
SBLDS	Society of Biblical Literature Dissertation Series
SBLMS	Society of Biblical Literature Monograph Series
SBT	Studies in Biblical Theology
<i>ScEs</i>	<i>Science et Esprit</i>
SD	Studies and Documents
Semeur	<i>La Bible Version du Semeur</i> . Société biblique internationale, 2000.
SIGC	Studien zur interkulturellen Geschichte des Christentums
SNTSMS	Society for New Testament Studies Monograph Series
SubBi	Subsidia Biblica
SymS	Symposium Series
TB	Theologische Bücherei
UBS ⁵	Aland, Barbara, Kurt Aland, Johannes Karavidopoulos, Carlo M. Martini, and Bruce M. Metzger, eds. <i>The Greek New Testament</i> . 5th ed. Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft; United Bible Societies, 2014.
WMANT	Wissenschaftliche Monographien zum Alten und Neuen Testament
WUNT	Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament