Christology and Trinitarianism in John 1:1 via Grammatico-Historical

Exegesis Updated with Tools from Linguistics

Russell T. Booth

Abstract: Biblical exegesis conducted via the principles of the grammatico-historical hermeneutic has a long tradition in North American Evangelicalism. This approach focuses on understanding the meaning of a text within its historical setting. Since the establishment of this particular method in the nineteenth-century, linguistic science has contributed many advances to the study of texts. While not disregarding the insights from Greek grammarians and lexicographers of the era before linguistic science, the following study will appropriate insights from grammatical prominence, grammatical aspect, lexical aspect, and discourse grammar for a detailed analysis of John 1:1. The study will also consider the Old Testament and intertestamental developments that made space for the high Christology within the early church by Jewish writers of Scripture such as the Apostle John. After justifying John 1:1 as a propositional unit of thought and delineating the three clauses within it, a linguistically-influenced analysis of each clause that integrates the relevant historical considerations follows. The study concludes with a synthesis of the findings related to orthodox Christology and Trinitarianism.

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Introduction

Christological heresies are not new. There are the warnings to the first-century church by the Apostles Paul (2 Cor. 11:4) and John (1 John 1:1–3; 4:2; 2 John 7). The various permutations of the heresies of Arianism and Sabellianism have appeared from the fourth-century to the present day.[1] In addition to apologetic and evangelistic purposes, perhaps the chief reason for the Christian to form a more detailed, biblical Christology is out of love for the Savior. In keeping with the Reformation principle of *Sola Scriptura*, Christology must be defined by the Bible. The three terse clauses of John 1:1 contain a wealth of exegetical gems of immense theological value, and linguistic science has provided several precise tools for their mining.

Methodology

The hermeneutical framework of the study is grammatico-historical exegesis. This methodology, as it appears in North American evangelical scholarship, is shaped by the work of

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† All Hebrew Scripture quotations are taken from Rudolph Kittel, ed., *Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia*, 5th ed. (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1997). All Septuagint quotations are taken from Alfred Ralfs, ed., *Septuaginta with Logos Morphology* (1979; repr., Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 2019). All Greek Scripture quotations are taken from Kurt Aland, Barbara Aland, Johannes Karavidopoulos, Carlo M. Martini, and Bruce M. Metzger. *Novum Testamentum Graece*, 28th ed. (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 2012). All English Scripture quotations are taken from *The Holy Bible: English Standard Version* (Wheaton, IL: Standard Bible Society, 2016). All parenthetical original language translations are by the author.

[1] Arius's (AD 256–336) teaching that the Son was neither consubstantial nor coeternal with the Father sparked the Council of Nicaea (AD 325). M. Ovey, "Nicaea, Council of," in *New Dictionary of Theology: Historical and Systematic,* ed. Martin Davie *et al.* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2016), 618–619. Sabellianism is named after Sabellius (in Rome ca. 198–220) who taught the Son and Spirit are only temporary modes of the Father. This heresy was based in Monarchianism, an overreaction to polytheism that stressed unity at the expense of the distinctions within the Godhead. H. D. McDonald, "Monarchianism," in *New Dictionary of Theology*, 588–589.

Milton S. Terry (1840–1940). He sought to interpret Scripture as "required by the laws of grammar and the facts of history."[2] Terry's discussion of the grammatico-historical method, along with many subsequent treatments within evangelicalism, features two main foci of inquiry: (1) the written text of Scripture and (2) the setting of the original writer/recipient(s). For the contemporary exegete, some of the tools of comparative philology from Terry's day are outmoded. The present study seeks to retain the ethos of Terry's grammatico-historical interpretation through the use of traditional Greek grammar along with the incorporation of advances informed by linguistic science such as grammatical aspect, lexical aspect, and discourse grammar to study the written text. In keeping with the "historical" component of the hermeneutical framework, there also will be substantial investigation into a background study of John 1:1.

Definitions

The two concepts most important for understanding the Greek verb within the scope of the present study are (1) tense and (2) aspect. Tense refers to how a speaker/writer portrays an event as being "past, present, or future time."[3] Since the work of Constantine Lascaris (AD 1434–1501), the Greek verbal paradigm has been arranged in a way that seems to identify tense as the primary feature.[4] However, grammarians now understand the importance of grammatical aspect in the Greek verb. Grammatical aspect, or "viewpoint aspect," is "a speaker's adoption of

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[2]Milton S. Terry, *Biblical Hermeneutics: A Treatise on the Interpretation of the Old and New Testaments: New Ed., Thoroughly Revised*, ed. George R. Crooks and John F. Hurst, Library of Biblical and Theological Literature 2 (New York: Eaton & Mains, 1890), 101.

[3]Keith Brown and Jim Miller, *The Cambridge Dictionary of Linguistics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), 436.

[4]S. M. Kraeger, "Whence and Whither Greek Verbal Lexicography and Pedagogy: A Diachronic Review," *Biblical and Ancient Greek Linguistics* 3 (2014): 104.

a viewpoint in relation to situations."[5] In New Testament (NT) Greek, grammatical aspect is the

portrayal of "a situation's *internal structure*"[6] morphologically encoded in the verb via what have

been traditionally called tense stems. Two aspects are relevant to the present study: perfective

and imperfective. The perfective aspect portrays an event as self-contained, or bounded, whereas

the imperfective aspect portrays the event as open-ended, or unbounded.[7] Put another way, the

perfective aspect includes the endpoints of the action; the imperfective does not. The major

views on Greek grammatical aspect exclude or minimize tense outside of the indicative mood.

The point of debate concerns whether or not the indicative mood includes tense.[8]

Grammatical prominence is a theory employed by recent proposals to understand whether

or not Greek verbs grammaticalize time. This theory posits that "languages tend to emphasize . . .

tense, aspect, or mood."[9] It is important to note that the emphasized feature is not to the

exclusion of the others. Michael G. Aubrey, Nicholas J. Ellis, and Mark Dubis argue that Greek

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[5]Brown and Miller, *Cambridge Dictionary of Linguistics*, 437.

[6]Nicholas J. Ellis, "Aspect-Prominence, Morpho-Syntax, and a Cognitive-Linguistic Framework for the Greek Verb," in *The Greek Verb Revisited: A Fresh Approach for Biblical Exegesis*, ed. Steven E. Runge and Christopher J. Fresch (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2016), 125. This edited volume is subsequently abbreviated *GVR*.

[7]Ellis, "Aspect-Prominence, Morpho-Syntax, and a Cognitive-Linguistic Framework for the Greek Verb," in *GVR*, 126. Cf., Vyvyan Evans*, Cognitive Linguistics: A Complete Guide*, 2nd ed. (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2019), 250.

[8]The seminal English works are the published doctoral dissertations: Stanley E. Porter, *Verbal Aspect in the Greek of the New Testament with Reference to Tense and Mood*, Studies in Biblical Greek 1 (1989; repr., New York: Peter Lang Publishing, 2010); Buist M. Fanning, *Verbal Aspect in New Testament Greek* (1990; repr., Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2002). More accessible surveys include Constantine R. Campbell, *Advances in the Study of Greek: New Insights for Reading the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2015), 29–50, 105–133; Constantine R. Campbell, "Aspect and Tense in the New Testament," in *Linguistics and New Testament Greek: Key Issues in the Current Debate*, ed. David A. Black and Benjamin Merkle (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2020), 37–53. For a technical critique of the issues involved see: Christopher J. Thomson, "What is Aspect?: Contrasting Definitions in General Linguistics and New Testament Studies," in *GVR*, 13–80.

[9]Ellis, "Aspect-Prominence," in *GVR*, 124.

is an aspect-prominent language.[10] Viewed this way, it is not that nonindicative verbs lose their

tense but that tense is *gained* in the indicative.[11]

Lexical aspect also plays a critical role in the meaning of a text.[12] Where grammatical

aspect has to do with an author's choice of how to portray a certain situation, lexical aspect

concerns the inherent nature of certain verbs to be bounded or unbounded. This is also discussed

in terms of telicity. Telic verbs include the idea of an end point, whereas atelic verbs do not.[13]

The study will make use of Buist Fanning's contribution to NT Greek that considers how lexical

aspect and other contextual features work together to form meaning in a given context.[14]

Background Study

Connections in the Prologue to the Old Testament

Why did John use ὁ λόγος (the Word) and not simply *Jesus* or some other name/title? The

major positions on John's intended referent for ὁ λόγος in the Prologue are a Hellenistic or

Semitic background with a definite preference for either a Semitic source or, less frequently,

some synthesis of the two.[15] Given the strong support for a Semitic background related to ὁ

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[10]Michael G. Aubrey, Nicholas J. Ellis, and Mark Dubis, "The Greek Verbal System and Aspectual Prominence: Revising Our Taxonomy and Nomenclature," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 59, no. 1 (March 2016): 31–62; Ellis, "Aspect-Prominence," in *GVR*, 122–160.

[11]Ibid., 144.

[12]Benjamin Merkle critiques Stanley Porter for failing to adequately consider lexical semantics. Benjamin L. Merkle, "The Abused Aspect: Neglecting the Influence of a Verb's Lexical Meaning on Tense-Form Choice," *Bulletin for Biblical Research* 26, no. 1 (2016): 57–74. Thomson, supporting Fanning's use of procedural character as contributing to meaning in a given text in interaction with aspect and tense, also critiques Porter on this same issue. Thomson, "What is Aspect?," in *GVR*, 41, 69.

[13]Evans, *Cognitive Linguistics: A Complete Guide*, 251; Brown and Miller, *Cambridge Dictionary of Linguistics*, 40.

[14]Fanning, *Verbal Aspect*, 126–196.

[15]Raymond E. Brown, *The Gospel According to John* (*I–XII*): *Introduction, Translation, and Notes*, Anchor Yale Bible 29 (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2008), 519–525. While the sub-classifications of views vary,

λόγος in John 1:1, it is this source that will be of primary focus.[16]

The first Old Testament (OT) connection in the Prologue concerns the creation account of

Genesis 1–2, as seen by the opening prepositional phrase ἐν ἀρχῇ (in [the] beginning) in John1:1

that is identical to that of Genesis 1:1 (LXX). The prepositional phrase ἐν ἀρχῇ may seem to be a

thin link between John and Genesis. However, lexical priming recognizes that units as small as

"single words are likely employed to target larger bodies of literature, notable passages unified

by a single theme, or other more general referents."[17] Kyle Dunham argues that for the authors of

the NT, the OT "provided an authoritative linguistic map or 'canonical primer.'"[18] Thus, many of

the criteria used to identify lexical priming are satisfied for Genesis 1:1 and John 1:1.[19]

John 1:2–5 provides additional connections to the creation account in Genesis. Themes

common to both portions of Scripture include creation by God, God as the source of life, and the

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several scholars identify the debate between a Semitic or Greek background. E.g.: Stephen S. Kim, "The Literary and Theological Significance of the Johannine Prologue," *BibSac* 166, no. 664 (October–December 2009): 425–427; I. Howard Marshall, "Johannine Theology," in *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia,* ed. Geoffrey W. Bromiley, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1979–1988), 2:1085–1086; Leon Morris, *The Gospel According to John,* rev. ed., The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 102–111; Benjamin E. Reynolds, "Logos," in *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels,* ed. Joel B. Green, Jeannine K. Brown, and Nicholas Perrin, 2nd ed. (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2013), 523–526. One major exception is Ed Miller, who sees the Fourth Gospel as its own background for λόγος in the Prologue. However, he is not simply asserting that context determines meaning; his approach requires 1 John to be written before the Gospel with Ὃ ἦν ἀπ' ἀρχῆς (1 John 1:1) as a sort of preliminary form of the more eloquent, later-written Prologue. He also requires the Prologue to be written after the body of the Fourth Gospel. Ed L. Miller, "The Johannine Origins of the Johannine Logos," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 112, no. 3 (Fall 1993): 445–457. It is not that such conditions are impossible, but that Miller fails to prove these facts so vital to his thesis.

[16]In this section credit is given to the works cited in the preceding note for delineating the major issues involved. When the points discussed are those expressed by the authors in virtual unanimity, no further citation is given. The Targumim circumlocution מימרא for יהוה is not addressed since the dating of its original oral content is not accurately known. Philo's use of λόγος is not engaged since his occurrences, 1381, are far too diverse. Additionally, John's familiarity with Philo seems less likely than other concepts from the period.

[17]Gregory P. Fewster, "Testing the Intertextuality of Ματαιότης in the New Testament," *Biblical and Ancient Greek Linguistics* 1 (2012): 43.

[18]Kyle Dunham, "Challenges to Intertextuality and Christotelism: A New Model of Canonical-Linguistic Priming," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 64, no. 2 (June 2021): 296.

[19]Fewster, "Testing the Intertextuality of Ματαιότης in the New Testament," *BAGL*, 43–44.

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opposition of light to darkness. Another clear OT link involves John's testimony that the Incarnation included the seeing of "His glory . . . full of grace and truth" (v. 14 cf. Exod. 34:29–34) and how this "grace and truth [that] came through Jesus Christ" is contrasted with "the law given through Moses" (v. 18 cf. Exod. 20:1; 2 Chron. 33:8, 14; Neh. 10:29). The Prologue's statement about no one having seen God (v. 18) also connects to the OT (Gen. 33:20; Exod. 33:20; Deut. 5:24) and the hidden God who reveals Himself.

The Hebrew Testament and Intertestamental Developments in Divine Plurality

From the monotheism of OT Judaism, important theological developments during the OT and intertestamental periods pave the way toward an understanding of plurality within the one Hebrew Deity. A much more direct link between John 1:1 and the OT seems to be in the lexeme λόγος (word) itself. The noun λόγος does not appear in the creation account of Genesis, but its verbal cognate does appear as the means of creating.[20] Moreover, Psalm 33:6 says the heavens were made τῷ λόγῳ τοῦ κυρίου / דְּבַר יהוה (by the Word of the LORD). This is one of many occurrences of דָּבָר (word) that "contain only certain beginnings of hypostatization" found especially in the Psalms and prophets of the OT.[21] Leon Morris comments that "while nothing was said to compromise the basic monotheism of Judaism, attention was increasingly directed to passages where such entities are given an almost independent existence. Thus, throughout the

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[20]Εἶπεν is used within the formula "καὶ εἶπεν ὁ θεός (and God said)" in Genesis 1:3, 6, 9, 11, 14, 20, 24, 26, 29 (LXX). It is the third person singular aorist active indicative form of εἶπον, which is used as the second aorist of λέγω—the verbal cognate of λόγος.

[21]W. H. Schmidt, "דָּבָר," in *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament,* ed. G. Johannes Botterweck and Helmer Ringgren, trans. John T. Willis and Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1978), 3:121.

Old Testament the Word of the Lord is thought of as an effective agent for accomplishing the divine will."[22]

Another important OT development is the theology of the name of יהוה. Its use in many texts seems "in favor of some sort of divine hypostasis referred to as the Name of YHWH, something that was approximately YHWH, but not actually YHWH"[23] (e.g., 2 Sam. 6:1–2; 1 Kings 8:27–29). Next is מלך יהוה (Angel of YHWH) who first appears in Genesis 16 and later to Abraham (Gen. 22), as well as within the burning bush to Moses (Exod. 3:2), and to others in the OT. The Exodus 3:2 example is important because the figure seems to be identified as יהוה Himself (v. 4). This is quite a complex issue, but the argument can be made for this individual to share in the identity of יהוה yet also remain distinct in some respects.[24] Perhaps one of the best examples of some sort of hypostasis in the OT is the "Son of Man" in Daniel 7:9–14. Scholars such as Markus Zehnder note that this figure is distinct from human beings, angels, and any other possible members of the heavenly court.[25]

Along these lines, some see possible allusions in the Prologue to the personifications of wisdom in Proverbs (e.g., 8:1–30) that were further developed in the intertestamental period (e.g., Wis. 7:22; 9:2; Sir. 24:3–22). However, Andreas Köstenberger points out that Judaism (pre-

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[22]Morris, *John*, NICNT, 104.

[23]Michael S. Heiser, "Co-Regency in Ancient Israel's Divine Council as the Conceptual Backdrop to Ancient Jewish Binitarian Monotheism," *BBR* 26, no. 2 (2016): 210.

[24]René López argues מלך יהוה is not a theophany. René A. López, "Identifying the 'Angel of the Lord' in the Book of Judges: A Model for Reconsidering the Referent in Other Old Testament Loci," *BBR* 20, no. 1 (2010): 1–18. Andrew Malone critiques López's position suggesting the Angel is God. Andrew S. Malone, "Distinguishing the Angel of the Lord," *BBR* 21, no. 3 (2011): 297–314. John Walvoord gives a traditional argument for the angel as a Christophany. John F. Walvoord, "The Preincarnate Son of God," *BibSac* 104, no. 413 (January–March 1947): 415–425.

[25]Markus Zehnder, "Why the Danielic 'Son of Man' Is a Divine Being," *BBR* 24, no. 3 (2014): 336.

and post-exilic) was monotheistic and did not accept degrees of divinity.[26] His assessment may

be correct that the various Jewish wisdom traditions' personifications of divine attributes "never .

. . took on divine hypostases separate from God. Rather, those enabled Second Temple Jews to

speak of God's activity in the world without sacrificing the notion of His transcendence."[27] This

practice could also have been for evangelistic purposes to the Gentiles who were unreceptive to

OT anthropomorphisms so "Hellenistic Jews explained them using the Greek idea that God used

collaborators as instruments of creation."[28] It is important to keep in mind that these non-

canonical writings are not θεόπνευστος (God-breathed) (2 Tim. 3:16). Also, some of these non-

canonical writings antedate the writing of John, and while they may represent thoughts in

circulation at the time of John's writing available to serve as background for the Prologue, such

cannot be definitively known. Yet, the developments from the OT and intertestamental periods

seem to be a part of the providential means to prepare Jewish believers to accept the high

Christology and Trinitarianism of the early church exhibited in John and the NT, if they accepted

Jesus's identity as He presented Himself.

Divisions within the Opening of John

Concerning the beginning of the Gospel of John, J. Ramsey Michaels understands 1:1–5

as a "preamble" because the verses have "no narrative context" as do those that follow.[29] His

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[26]Andreas J. Köstenberger and Scott R. Swain, *Father, Son, and Spirit: The Trinity and John's Gospel*, New Studies in Biblical Theology 24 (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2008), 34.

[27]Ibid., 39.

[28]Robert M. Grant, *After the New Testament* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1967) referenced in Stuart E. Parsons, "Very Early Trinitarian Expressions," *Tyndale Bulletin* 65, no. 1 (2014): 149.

[29]J. Ramsey Michaels, *The Gospel of John*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010), 31.

comments are similar to a view that dates back to John Chrysostom (AD 347–407). The ancient

expositor begins his comments on John 1:6 by calling 1:1–5 "τὰ κατεπείγοντα (the

introduction)."[30] More contemporary scholars identify a Prologue ranging from 1:1–18.[31] The

textual unit to be studied is John 1:1, which, by either view, stands within a pericope preceding

the body of the Fourth Gospel. The identification of John 1:1 as a propositional unit of thought,

as well as the relationship of the clauses within it, is attained via discourse grammar.[32] The two

pertinent discourse features of John 1:1 are asyndeton and καί (and). Asyndeton "refers to the

linking of clauses or clause components without the use of a conjunction."[33] Daniel Wallace

observes that "asyndeton is a vivid stylistic feature that occurs often for emphasis, solemnity, or

rhetorical value (staccato effect), or when there is an abrupt change in topic."[34] However, Steven

Levinsohn and Steven Runge see asyndeton as the default way Koine Greek connects clauses in

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[30]John Chrysostom, "Homily VI," in *The Homilies of S. John Chrysostom, Archbishop of Constantinople, on the Gospel of St. John*, Library of Fathers of the Holy Catholic Church 1A (Oxford: John Henry Parker, 1848), 59.

[31]D. A. Carson, *The Gospel according to John*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: InterVarsity Press, 1991), 110–111; Ernst Haenchen, *John 1: A Commentary on the Gospel of John, Chapters 1–6*, ed. and trans. Robert W. Funk, Hermeneia—a Critical and Historical Commentary on the Bible (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984), 101–102; Colin G. Kruse, *John: An Introduction and Commentary*, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries 4 (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2003), 59–63; Morris, *John,* NICNT, 63–64. Raymond Brown sees the Prologue as ending at verse 17. Brown, *The Gospel According to John* (*I–XII*), AB, 4.

[32]Steven E. Runge, *Discourse Grammar of the Greek New Testament: A Practical Introduction for Teaching and Exegesis* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2010). Abbrev. *DGram*. A variety of Greek New Testaments punctuate John 1:1 the same e.g., *Nestle-Aland 28*, Constantin von Tischendorf, Caspar René Gregory, and Ezra Abbot, eds., *Novum Testamentum Graece* (Lipsiae: Giesecke & Devrient, 1869–1894); Brooke Foss Westcott and Fenton John Anthony Hort, *The New Testament in the Original Greek* (1881; repr., Bellingham: WA: Logos Bible Software, 2009); Zane Clark Hodges, Arthur L. Farstad, and William C. Dunkin, *The Greek New Testament According to the Majority Text*, 2nd ed. (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1985). However, punctuation within the Greek New Testament did not begin to be systematically employed until the eighth–ninth centuries. Bruce M. Metzger, "Persistent Problems Confronting Bible Translators," *BibSac* 150, no. 599 (July–September 1993): 278. The purpose of using discourse grammar is to do the exegetical work and employ an accepted but not yet commonly used approach to identify clausal relationships within the Greek New Testament.

[33]Runge, *DGram*, 20.

[34]Daniel B. Wallace, *Greek Grammar beyond the Basics: An Exegetical Syntax of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 658.

speeches within narratives—especially in John's Gospel.[35] The clause beginning verse two is

connected to those before it by asyndeton. This simply means that there is nothing marking the

relationship between the clause beginning verse 2 and what precedes it. By contrast, John 1:1b is

marked for close connection to 1:1a, and 1:1c is marked for close connection with 1:1b. The two

occurrences of καί within verse one mark these three clauses within it for close association with

one another.[36] This means that the clauses of verse 1 are coordinate and of equal status. Also,

although still related to verse 1, verse 2 is a thought not as closely connected to those within

verse 1. Therefore, verse 1 is both a complete thought, as well as discrete enough for analysis.

John 1:1a: Ἐν ἀρχῇ ἦν ὁ λόγος (In the Beginning Was the Word)

Although not first in word order, as an articular noun in the nominative case, ὁ λόγος (the

Word) in 1:1a is the subject of the clause drawing attention for first analysis. The close context

identifies ὁ λόγος as the same ὁ λόγος who "became flesh and dwelt among us" (v. 14). By this

connection, the reference to "Jesus Christ" (v. 17), and John's narrative that follows, the λόγος of

John 1:1 is identified as Jesus of Nazareth.

Grammatical and Syntactical Considerations in John 1:1a

Discourse grammar offers some insight into the phenomenon of how initial placement in

a clause with something other than a verb is generally intentional. In John 1:1a the prepositional

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[35]Runge clarifies that "default does not mean that it is the most commonly occurring option, but that it is the most basic ('unmarked') option." Runge, 20. While Steven Levinsohn sees asyndeton as the unmarked linkage in John's Gospel, he acknowledges that in the Fourth Gospel "it is found at both points of discontinuity . . . and when no discontinuity is indicated." Steven H. Levinsohn, *Discourse Features of New Testament Greek: A Coursebook on the Information Structure of New Testament Greek*, 2nd ed. (Dallas: SIL International, 2000), 82. There are some slightly different ways that asyndeton is used for "thematic development in non-narrative text." Ibid., 118–123.

[36]Ibid., 82.

phrase ἐν ἀρχή is a "temporal frame," setting the scene for the pericope "establishing an explicit frame of reference for the clause that follows."[37]

Further support for ἐν ἀρχῇ in John 1:1 relating to a definite event, a specific beginning— 'the beginning'—is found in the work of Jan Van der Watt and Chrys Caragounis who engage prominent Greek grammarians who, for various reasons, agree that the phrase is definite despite being anarthrous.[38] Their own research into the use of ἐν ἀρχῇ / ἐν τῇ ἀρχῇ "forced [them] to conclude that the Greeks had a predilection for using the anarthrous expression," yet the two were for semantic purposes interchangeable.[39] Their findings are diachronically consistent from the Classical through the Byzantine periods of Greek.[40] The most convincing of their arguments is the use of the articular expression in references to John 1:1 by early church writers.[41]

As a reference to Genesis 1:1, ἐν ἀρχῇ in John 1:1 is definite—"in *the* beginning." The beginning to which John refers is *the* creation. Yet, John's use of λόγος "would be widely recognized among the Greeks."[42] It should be kept in mind that John was a church elder (2 John 1:1; 3 John 1) aware of the ideas impacting the churches with which he had contact (e.g. the polemics in 1–3 John). Also, many of the narrative asides in his Gospel explain Jewish customs

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[37]Runge, *DGram*, 216. The Johannine collocation of ἀρχή with propositions does not shed any significant light on identifying the 'beginning' to which John refers in the Prologue. This is because, in spite of all occurrences of ἀρχή in a prepositional phrase being temporal markers, its only occurrence with ἐν in the dative case is within the Prologue. All other Johannine uses of ἀρχή as the object of a preposition are genitive case with the prepositions ἐκ (John 6:64; 16:4) and ἀπό (8:44; 15:27; 1 John 1:1; 2:7, 13, 14, 24; 3:8, 11; 2 John 5).

[38]Jan Van der Watt and Chrys Caragounis, "A Grammatical Analysis of John 1:1," *Filología Neotestamentaria* 21, no. 41 (2008): 95–97.

[39]Ibid., 97.

[40]Ibid., 97–100.

[41]Ibid., 99.

[42]Morris, *John,* NICNT, 103.

such as ceremonial washings (2:6), the disdain of the Samaritans by Jews (4:9), timing of the Feast of Dedication (10:22), issues related to ceremonial uncleanliness (18:28), and burial rites (19:40) that seem to be for the benefit of a Gentile readership.[43]

The genius of John seems to be to choose λόγος as a point of contact with both Jews and Greeks. He arrests their attention, piques their interest, and draws them into the Prologue. Also, as is the case with many NT writers and speakers, John associates new semantic content with this pre-existing Word.[44] For Jews, the OT ideas of דָּבָר / λόγος (word) are expanded and clarified, especially with "ὁ λόγος σὰρξ ἐγένετο καὶ ἐσκήνωσεν ἐν ἡμῖν (and the Word became flesh and dwelt among us)" (v. 14). However, this concept, as well as others associated with λόγος in the Prologue and portrayed in the ministry of Jesus in the Fourth Gospel, would have radically challenged many of the Greek concepts related to λόγος in the first-century AD.

Having identified John's intended meaning of ὁ λόγος and discovered the referent of ἐν ἀρχῇ (in [the] beginning), the activity or state of being of ὁ λόγος is considered via the clause's verb: ἦν. It is the third person singular imperfect tense-form indicative of εἰμί, the Greek verb to "be" or "exist."[45] Fanning identifies εἰμί within the verbal class of states.[46] When combined with the imperfective aspect, verbs of this class "denote the *continuing existence* of the subject in the condition indicated by the verb."[47]

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[43]These examples are from Andreas J. Köstenberger, *Encountering John: The Gospel in Historical, Literary, and Theological Perspective*, 2nd ed. (Nashville: Baker Academic, 2013), 232.

[44]Cf. Larry R. Helyer, *The Witness of Jesus, Paul and John: An Exploration in Biblical Theology* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2008), 338; Van der Watt and Caragounis, "John 1:1," *FN*, 130.

[45]Walter Bauer, ed., trans. and rev. by W. F. Arndt, F. W. Gingrich, and F. W. Danker, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 3rd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 282.

[46]Fanning, *Verbal Aspect*, 135–136.

[47]Ibid., 137, 137n26. Emphasis original.

While it was demonstrated above that the prepositional phrase ἐν ἀρχῇ (in [the] beginning) is a temporal marker, the verb ἦν (was) is as well. As noted in the brief introduction to the theory of grammatical prominence above, Greek verbs in the indicative mood do include time. In the case of John 1:1, the imperfect tense-form in the indicative mood is marked for past time. But, in keeping with grammatical prominence as outlined above, the feature of aspect still plays a role. Regarding ἦν in the text, this means that the imperfective aspect still factors into the semantics of the verb. The Prologue takes the reader back even further than Genesis 1:1—into eternity past. The text does not teach simple pre-existence, as Arianism would allow. "In the beginning" the λόγος in past time was in a state of *continual* existence. The Second Person of the Trinity is *eternally* pre-existent.[48]

John 1:1b: καὶ ὁ λόγος ἦν πρὸς τὸν θεόν

(And the Word Was with God)

As noted above, the conjunction beginning this clause identifies the first and second clauses as "two items of equal status."[49] This places John 1:1b ἐν ἀρχῇ (in [the] beginning) as well, and so the verb ἦν (was) again describes not just pre-temporally of a continuing past state of existence, but *eternally*. The location of the subject ὁ λόγος (the Word) marks its discourse function as a "topical frame" and marks the comment about the λόγος as "what is newly asserted and hence most important."[50] The new contribution of this clause is that ὁ λόγος is πρὸς τὸν θεόν (with God). The prepositional phrase features an accusative case articular θεός (God), which

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[48]Köstenberger and Swain, *Trinity and John*, 39; Morris, *John*, NICNT, 65; Van der Watt and Caragounis, "John 1:1," *FN*, 138.

[49]Runge, *DGram*, 24.

[50]Ibid., 210.

marks it as distinct from the nominative case, articular subject ὁ λόγος (the Word). The language presents the λόγος (Word) in company with the θεός (God).[51] Πρός with a personal accusative is a construction exclusive to the NT simply depicting the existence of interpersonal relationships. The theological importance of the expression is that it indicates a relationship between *distinct* Persons.[52] Given the context of the Prologue (esp. v. 14) and the Jewish monotheism from which Christianity sprang, the θεός is God the Father. This clause presents an *eternal* existence of, and distinction between, the First and Second Persons of the Trinity.

John 1:1c: καὶ θεὸς ἦν ὁ λόγος (And the Word Was God)

Once again John chooses καὶ (and) to signal the close connection of the third clause with the two preceding it. Is the articular λόγος (Word) the subject? What of the anarthrous θεός (God) that is also in the nominative case and prior in word order? Greek grammarians' understanding of this kind of construction and its application for exegesis has developed for almost two centuries.[53] Within the standard Greek grammars, Archibald Robertson notes the tendency of Greek predicate nouns to be anarthrous, and in cases where there is both an articular

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[51]The preposition "πρός with accusative . . . appears often also with 'to be' and the like instead of παρά τινι 'with, in the company of.'" BDF, 124. John 1:1 is listed as an example of this usage.

[52]Van der Watt and Caragounis, "John 1:1," *FN*, 105–110; 130–132.

[53]Aernie and Hartley identify "the essential works" on this issue as: Ernest C. Colwell, "A Definite Rule for the Use of the Article in the Greek New Testament," *JBL* 52 (1933); Philip B. Harner, "Qualitative Anarthrous Predicate Nouns: Mark 15:39 and John 1:1," *JBL* 92 (1973); Paul S. Dixon, "The Significance of the Anarthrous Predicate Nominative in John" (ThM thesis, Dallas Theological Seminary, 1975); Donald E. Hartley, "Criteria for Determining Qualitative Nouns with a Special View to Understanding the Colwell Construction" (ThM thesis, Dallas Theological Seminary, 1996); Donald E. Hartley, "Revisiting the Colwell Construction in Light of Mass/Count Nouns," Foundation for Biblical Studies, 1998, https://bible.org/article/revisiting-colwell-construction-light-masscountnouns; Donald E. Hartley, "John 1:1, Colwell, and Mass/Count Nouns in Recent Discussion" (Danvers, MA: paper presented at the 51st Annual Meeting of the Evangelical Theological Society, 1999). Matthew D. Aernie and Donald E. Hartley, *Essentials of Biblical Interpretation: From the Principles of Exegesis to the Practices of Exposition*, ed., June Gibbons (Dubuque, IA: Kendall/Hunt, forthcoming), n.p.n68.

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and anarthrous noun, the former is the subject regardless of word order.[54] Furthermore, he gives

John 1:1c as an example of λόγος (Word) and θεός (God) not being convertible terms due to θεός

(God) not being definite (not to imply it is *indefinite*—'a god').[55] BDF, invoking Colwell's Rule,

sees definite nouns preceding the verb as anarthrous, which would seem to identify θεός (God)

as definite in John 1:1c.[56] However, this is an instance of applying the *reverse* of Colwell's Rule,

a common error identified by Wallace.[57]

Informed by developments on this topic since Wallace's discussion, Matthew Aernie and

Donald Hartley give four steps for investigating the semantic possibilities of anarthrous pre-

verbal predicate nominatives in the Colwell construction.[58] The first two involve the lexical

semantics of nouns with respect to their mass/count distinction and number.[59] Mass entities are

perceived as a whole without boundaries between any constituent part and cannot be indefinite.[60]

They include nouns like dirt, rain, and air. By contrast, count entities are perceived as individual

things with boundaries separating and distinguishing the things and can be either definite or

indefinite.[61] Examples include nouns such as cat, car, and brick. There is one caveat to the ability

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[54]Archibald T. Robertson, *A Grammar of the Greek New Testament in the Light of Historical Research*, 4th ed. (1923; repr., Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software, 2006), 767–768.

[55]Ibid.

[56]BDF, 143.

[57]Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics*, 257–259.

[58]Aernie and Hartley, *Essentials of Biblical Interpretation*, n.p.

[59]Ibid.

[60]Vyvyan Evans, *The Crucible of Language: How Language and Mind Create Meaning* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 77. Cf. the terminology "continuous matter" and "mass." Evans, *Cognitive Linguistics: A Complete Guide*, 245.

[61]Evans, *The Crucible of Language*, 77. C.f. the terminology "discrete matter" and "objects." Evans, *Cognitive Linguistics: A Complete Guide*, 245.

of count nouns to be indefinite—plurality. Concerning number, plural count nouns cannot be indefinite.[62] The third step, the identification of adjuncts, specifically genitives, does not apply to John 1:1c. These first three steps conclude that, as a singular count noun absent of genitive adjuncts, θεὸς in John 1:1c is unmarked as definite or indefinite. The fourth factor considers the Johannine use of pre- and post-copulative anarthrous predicate nominatives. Of the Gospel of John's eighteen pre-copulative anarthrous predicate nominatives in the Colwell construction, more than half are qualitative.[63] The preceding factors do not present an air-tight case on the basis of grammar but show a preference in the Fourth Gospel for the qualitative nature of pre-copulative anarthrous predicate nominatives in the Colwell construction.[64] The purely qualitative view best fits the semantic situation and agrees with the content of 1:1a–b, the Prologue, Johannine, and biblical thought.

In John 1:1c the placement of θεός (God) is emphatic. Discourse grammar understands the location of θεὸς in the clause to mark it as "a nonestablished clause component."[65] θεός provides new information about the "topical frame" which is ὁ λόγος. This also confirms the purely qualitative view regarding the relationship of θεὸς (God) to ὁ λόγος (the Word) discussed above. The verb ἦν (was) again depicts a *continual* past existence set in the frame of ἐν ἀρχῇ (in [the] beginning). John 1:1c emphatically asserts that the Second Person eternally possessed the qualities of deity.

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[62] Aernie and Hartley, *Essentials of Biblical Interpretation*, n.p.

[63] Aernie and Hartley report the following statistics: "For the Colwell construction, the highest frequency based on 18 cases was 56% Q, 17% I-Q, 17% I, and 11% D." Ibid.

[64] "We would not argue that the translation, 'a god' is impossible from a grammatical point of view. We would suggest, however, that it is an unlikely nuance given Johannine usage of clear examples." Ibid.

[65] Runge, *DGram*, 191.

Conclusion

John 1:1 is a very important text for developing Christology with significant implications for theology proper as well. It guards against the ancient heresies of Arianism and Sabellianism, as well as their contemporary permutations. The text clearly supports the deity of Christ along with orthodox Trinitarianism by depicting the eternal pre-existence of the Second Person, while distinguishing Him from the First Person and simultaneously attributing qualitative equivalence between the two within the framework of biblical monotheism. Some updated exegetical tools provided by linguistic science have paved the path toward this interpretation. No one method can accomplish the task alone, and the journey is hardly complete.

The preceding study takes into consideration the likely background for John's use of λόγος in John 1:1. It has not, however, given a detailed accounting of how it connects with John's use of λόγος, especially in connection with θεός. Cognitive semantics has the potential to provide additional means to explore the intention of John in the Prologue by explaining how selective information from the biblical author's rich background knowledge of both θεός and λόγος is understood by context. Further research in this area could provide additional clarification that is helpful in making a cumulative case for the semantic situation of the text, supporting the theological conclusions of the present study.

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