

# **Reversing the Roles of Lexis & Grammar?**

## **By Randall Tan & Rick Brannan**

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### **Introduction**

#### ***Reversing Course?***

This paper proposal was originally inspired by Michael Hoey's *Lexical Priming: A New Theory of Words and Meaning*. The idea was to test this theory in multiple ways with the OpenText.org and the Lexham syntactically-tagged texts of the Greek New Testament that are uniquely available on the Logos Bible Software Libronix platform.

However, this presentation will have a narrower focus than the initial proposal that you see in the abstract. There are basically two reasons for this: (1) we underestimated the extent of work involved in giving a thorough account of the different phenomena; and (2) we overestimated the availability of my co-presenter to create the variety of new electronic tools needed.

#### ***Actually One Small Step!***

We are not so much reversing course, however, as actually taking one small step towards our goal. For now, we focus on the so-called adjectival/adnominal genitive. For those of you familiar with the OpenText.org Syntactically Analyzed Greek New Testament, this type of construction would be identified, under that framework, as involving a genitive qualifier modifying another word in the same word group, whether the modified word is the head term or another modifier. To carry out our original intention to engage in dialog with the Lexham Syntactic Greek New Testament, we focused on the book of Hebrews as our initial corpus for examination, since only the Catholic Epistles is currently available and Hebrews is the longest continuous discourse in that group.

### **Orientation**

#### ***Confusing Genitives?***

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Within Greek grammar, there is perhaps no structure that is as bewildering to both scholars and students of the Greek New Testament alike. Stan Porter observed in his **Idioms** grammar that the number of schemes for classifying genitives is almost as many as the number of categories suggested for the genitive. Given how many categories of genitives we see in a grammar like Wallace's *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics*, that is saying a lot! Generally speaking, we see two main types of models competing for influence, with many people in the middle, preferring to pick and choose what fits their own purposes and remaining uncommitted. One model is either more interested in or as interested in how the Greek language should be described in consistent linguistic categories as it is in the interpretation of the Greek text. Porter typifies this kind of approach and his suggestion of a three tiered analysis of the genitive is exemplary of his concerns.

One way to understand this type of approach is to visualize it as an inverted pyramid. At the bottom, with the narrowest meaning would be the proper meaning of the grammatical construction, in this case the meaning of the genitive. The next level up involves the relations of the genitive construction with the other words nearby (the syntax). At the top level, we have the meaning of the genitive form and the syntactical relations in light of their role and function in the larger linguistic context of the larger discourse. It is when our analysis has reached this top level that we have fully appreciate both the distinctive contributions of the various elements of language and the overall picture of meaning that they have contributed.

### *Another Popular Approach (Wallace)*

The other popular approach is well-represented the pedagogical approach in Wallace's grammar, even though Wallace himself is probably as interested in language description as he is about exegesis. The various distinctive categories in the grammar are promoted as paying big dividends in terms of the exegesis of particular New Testament texts.

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One way to understand the Wallace's approach in his grammar is to visualize it as a pyramid. At the base level, Wallace assumes the Noun-Noun<sub>gen.</sub> constructions compresses different sentence types and can potentially express the full range of meanings that we typically associate with clauses and sentences. When used in a particular text, this range of meaning is constrained by the context. So the middle level of the pyramid involves testing for possible senses of the genitive in a particular instance and coming up with the narrowest sense possible. The top level represents this narrowest sense that you determine best fits the context, which you cap off by applying a genitive category to summarize your findings. There is a tension in Wallace's emphasis that the interpretation of the genitive case "typically requires a rather nuanced examination of context, lexical meanings of the words involved . . . and other grammatical features" and his common practice of telling readers that the "key to identification" is to substitute an English gloss!

### ***What If Lexis Precedes Grammar?***

If Hoey is right that lexis precedes grammar, i.e., that the grammatical categories are derived from common patterns in the meaning interactions of words, we suggest that our approach to the modified-genitive modifier construction would differ from both Porter and Wallace. One way to illustrate this difference is to visualize it a tabletop held up by three building blocks. The textual referent of the modified word is bind together with the textual referent of the genitive modifier to create a new resultant textual referent: let's call it the modified-genitive group or the modified-genitive combo.

### ***What's Different about This Proposal?***

In a way, we are trying to have our cake and eat it too. We agree with Wallace that study of grammar in text cannot be isolated from context, lexeme, and other grammatical features. We also agree with Porter on need for tiered analysis according to sound linguistic principles. By

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shifting analysis to the “textual referent” from the unaffected meaning of the words enables us to both carry out a linguistically-sound tiered analysis and to take practical steps to identify affected meaning in context, without using risky appeals to English as Wallace seems to teach his readers to do. The advantage of this model over Porter’s and Wallace’s models is that implicit in the terms used is, as we shall see, a developed, consistent procedure to determine which specific elements of the context are relevant to understanding the resultant meaning of the Modified-Genitive Modifier combo. By placing the Textual Referent of the Modified-Genitive Modifier group on top of all three building blocks, the model also indicates that it is this group, and not the building blocks, that enters into syntactical relations at the clause level and higher level relations at the discourse level. Over against Wallace’s proposal, there is no need to assume that the embedded kernels in the N-N<sub>g</sub> construction, which is a debatable theory from transformational grammar. From beginning to end, we rely on empirical data from biblical text.

### **Model**

#### ***Simple Unaffected Meaning for the Genitive***

One of the building blocks of our model is the proper meaning of the genitive. We suggest that the unaffected meaning of the genitive is simply: X (the modified word) is associated/related to Y (the genitive modifier). Even though this paper focuses on only what Wallace calls N-N<sub>g</sub> constructions, this unaffected meaning works for all uses of the genitive (e.g., associate the process expressed in the main verb with a lexical item with a space, time, value textual referent).

#### ***Principled Way to Determine Affected Meaning (3 Questions)***

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We propose a principled way to determine the affected meaning of the modified-genitive group. The first two questions involve the other two building blocks:

1. What is the textual referent of the modified word?
2. What is the textual referent of the genitive modifier?

The third question is to ask how this modified-genitive group might function in the syntax of the clause and in the larger flow of the discourse. By asking how the whole group might function, we actually get clues as to its meaning & how the two building blocks related to one another to form that overall meaning. So, the question is this: 3. How could the textual referent of the genitive be associated with the textual referent of the modified word in the textual world depicted in the discourse (with lessening confidence in the linguistic context, the cultural context, and then purported universal human experience)? The reason cultural context and universal human experience are brought in is that language is used to perform a social function and language users often leave common social assumptions and things regarded as clear from universal human experience unexpressed. Once we leave the world depicted by the language of the text, we are on more uncertain ground. That is why we say “with lessening confidence in the linguistic context, the cultural context, and then purported universal human experience.”

### ***Linguistic Context: Priority & Lessening Degrees of Confidence***

The degree of priority that something in a text has contributing to the meaning follows a certain hierarchy embedded in the grammar of the language. For the modified-genitive modifier group in the Greek of the New Testament, we propose that the fundamental building blocks are the modified word and the genitive modifier, with the genitive function of association binding them together. Then we can visualize a scale of other factors with lessening priority the further you go away from the immediate context to the environment of the whole text. For immediate context in terms of lessening priority may be spelled out as involving:

1. Other modifiers in the same word group

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2. Other constituents in the same clause
3. Immediately preceding/subsequent clauses
4. Previous/subsequent uses of same modified & genitive modifier group in same discourse
5. Previous/subsequent uses of either word

### ***Word Group Example: Hebrews 4:3***

The concept of a word group is basically that the building blocks of a clause are groups of words that depict participants, processes, and circumstances. Sometimes it is a one-to-one correlation between a word and a participant, process, or circumstance. Often it is a group of words to one participant, process, or circumstance. For instance, in ἀπὸ καταβολῆς κόσμου in Hebrews 4:3, the modified word καταβολῆς is associated with the genitive modifier κόσμου. The whole modified-genitive modifier group καταβολῆς κόσμου is specified by the preposition ἀπὸ. While καταβολῆς might be interpreted as referring to the activity of founding or the time of founding of the world, the ἀπὸ, which here seems to be functioning to indicate beginning point of time, points to ἀπὸ καταβολῆς κόσμου as referring to from the time of the world's founding.

### ***Clause Example: Hebrews 4:3***

In terms of constituents in the same clause, we have conj/A [ καίτοι ] S [ τῶν ἔργων ] A [ ἀπὸ καταβολῆς κόσμου ] P [ γενηθέντων ] (see [LDLS](#)). The textual referent of Γενηθέντων here is that of an existential process, with the morphology indicating activity previously completed: “even though the works have been completed since the founding of the world.” The clause constitutes then reinforce the identification of ἀπὸ καταβολῆς κόσμου as a circumstance of time.

### ***Immediately Preceding/Subsequent Clauses: Hebrews 4:3 Example***

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In terms of immediately preceding/subsequent clauses, the immediately subsequent clause also confirms that ἀπό καταβολῆς κόσμου is a circumstance of time because of its reference to the time of creation. In Heb 4:4, we have: εἶρηκεν γάρ που περι τῆς ἐβδόμης οὕτως, Καὶ κατέπαυσεν ὁ θεὸς ἐν τῇ ἡμέρᾳ τῇ ἐβδόμῃ ἀπὸ πάντων τῶν ἔργων αὐτοῦ (4:4) “For he has spoken somewhere concerning the seventh day in this way: ‘And God rested on the seventh day from all his works.’”

### ***Previous/Subsequent Uses of Same Modified-Genitive Modifier Group***

ἀπὸ καταβολῆς κόσμου recurs in Heb 9:26: ἐπεὶ ἔδει αὐτὸν πολλάκις παθεῖν ἀπὸ καταβολῆς κόσμου “since he would have to suffer many times since the founding of the world.” This subsequent use of the same modified-genitive modifier group as a circumstance of time supports the identification of ἀπὸ καταβολῆς κόσμου as a circumstance of time also in Heb 4:3.

### ***Previous/Subsequent Uses of Either Word***

Besides Heb 4:3 & Heb 9:26, καταβολῆ also occurs in Heb 11:11: Πίστει καὶ αὐτὴ Σάρρα στεῖρα δύναμιν εἰς καταβολὴν σπέρματος ἔλαβεν “By faith Sarah herself, who was barren, received power towards the founding of seed. “ This is a different use of the word, however, with a focus on the activity rather than the time of founding.

κόσμος also occurs Heb 10:5; 11:7; & 11:38. Each of these likewise reflect different uses. The inapplicability of the uses of these words on their own illustrates why this last step has the least priority, as it is most likely to produce irrelevant information.

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### **Answering Objections**

#### ***Not Doing Away with Categories, but Add More Science to Interpretation***

Before we look at the theory and more examples, let's answer some objections. You may ask, "Are we not rejecting the work of previous interpreters by rejecting the categories they have proposed?" We would answer an emphatic, "No!" Many categories interpreters previously suggested do summarize common patterns of how the textual referent of the genitive modifier associates with the textual referent of the modified word. What we are emphasizing is the need to develop replicable, verifiable steps. With the ability to create electronic annotated texts in our day, we propose that we spell out our procedures & reasons for each interpretation of a genitive so that those who come after us have more valuable reusable & revisable information at their fingertips.

#### ***Not Each Genitive for Its Own***

You may ask, "By emphasizing the priority of the words, are we not saying that we have to analyze each genitive construction separately & not categorize because each constructive is unique?" We would have the problem that it is each genitive for its own! Our answer is again no. We propose that the common patterns of how the textual referent of genitive modifiers associate with the textual referent of the modified words are based on common semantic domains. To avoid atomistic interpretation, a prerequisite is to articulate a small, manageable group of common semantic domains. This we begin to provide by refining Louw-Nida through Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) and inductive study of 380 cases of modified and genitive modifiers groups in Hebrews.

### **Linguistic Theory behind the Proposed Model**

#### ***SFL=Systemic Functional Linguistics***

According to Halliday, we construe our experience of world in a figure involving:



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1. a process unfolding through time
2. the participants involved in the process
3. Circumstances associated with the process

The major process types are existential, material, behavioral, mental, verbal, and relational.

### ***Overlap of Louw-Nida with Halliday***

There is significant overlap between Louw and Nida and Halliday. Louw and Nida see (1) objects or entities (Domains 1-12), (2) events (Domains 13-57), and (3) abstracts (Domains 58-92) as the 3 principal classes of semantic domains.

Weaknesses in Louw and Nida are: (1) Objects involved in events are classed in one or the other semantic domain, so that you do not see that they belong in more than one at the same time; and (2) abstracts are divorced from their origins as metaphors from concrete object-event relations.

### ***Tentative Revisions for Participants***

We propose some tentative revisions of Halliday and Louw and Nida for a working start. We propose 3 core domains:

1. Participants
2. Processes
3. Circumstances

You see on the right of the PowerPoint the main domains for analysis of Participants (note that I used short forms on the handout because I could not fit everything on a single page otherwise). I am basically saying that for the purpose of analysis, we would start with the main domains of persons, borderline (entities that are sometimes portrayed as personal, sometimes portrayed as non-personal), and non-persons. Within persons, simple identification of persons

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(with proper name, pronoun, or implied in the verb) would be the prototypical case. Nominals indicating human relations, including but not restricted to kinship relations, would fall under persons, but also another domain dealing with the human relations involved. Then, we have nominals with other semantic domains explicitly, apart from positing a relationship with another person. With the borderline category, the two main groups are words referring to psychological faculties and body and body parts. With non-persons, we have non-person animate beings like animals and plant life. We also have created substances (the elements like water, earth, fire, wind as well as power), created structures (from the whole cosmos to parts of creation like mountains, rivers, etc.), and human structures (e.g., constructions and artifacts).

### ***Tentative Revisions for Processes***

Because nominals in genitive relations are explored, verbal processes are not well-examined for this paper. On your handout, I often moved from activity to specific sub-domains again because of space constraints.

The basic distinctions are between activity and relating things in the world, with types in between that could involve relating things prior to acting out of that prior foundation. Under Activity we would class Halliday's material and behavioral processes. The borderline include the mental, verbal, and existential processes. The relational (which include relating other activity) include attributive and identifying subdivisions.

### ***Tentative Revisions for Circumstances***

With circumstances, we mean more than what Halliday includes. We are including both circumstances of processes (typically adverbs) & features of participants (typically adjectives). We also distinguished among personal qualities (with persons), relational status (between persons), & non-personal status (with non-persons). For features of participants, the categories include form, non-personal status, personal qualities/behavior, and relational status.

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Extent/Measure could be used for both features of participants or circumstances of processes. Circumstances of processes would encompass location (space/time), manner, cause, and contingency.

### Examples from Hebrews Handout

Besides looking on as I highlight some examples, the handout is for you to carefully examine all the examples yourself later. I propose that something similar be done for the whole Greek New Testament: To examine genitive modifiers through a discourse, as with Hebrews in the handout, and to annotate this construction more expansively than has been done thus far. At the same time, I propose that we examine genitive modifiers according to individual lexis (show Qualifier [Tool](#))

### *Patterns Needing No Further Analysis*

- **Person to Person:** Indicating Human Relations (including kinship) or Person Name (whether with nominal, pronoun, or implied)=**Relational**
- **Psychological Faculties, Body, Non-Persons** (anything that can be considered possession in culture of audience of Hebrews) & **Features of Participants to Person = Possessive**
- Comparative word as **modified = Comparative**
- Word indicating part as **modified = Partitive**

### *Step by Step Analysis*

The type of step by step analysis that we propose is summarized in the PowerPoint diagram. First, we distinguish between steps taken to figure out the semantic range of the modified word and the genitive modifier, the steps that pertain to figuring out the textual

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referent of the modified & the genitive modifier, and the textual referent of the resultant modified-genitive modifier.

Semantic Range of Modified	Semantic Range of Genitive Modifier
How: Analyze all GNT evidence in dialog with lexicons (esp. Louw-Nida)	How: Analysis of all GNT evidence & dialog with lexicons (esp. Louw-Nida)
Textual Referent of Modified	Textual Referent of Genitive Modifier
1 <sup>st</sup> Priority = other word group modifiers	1 <sup>st</sup> Priority = other word group modifiers
2 <sup>nd</sup> Priority = immediately preceding & following clauses (skipping clause constituents because they usually relate to resultant modified-genitive modifier)	2 <sup>nd</sup> Priority = immediately preceding & following clauses (skipping clause constituents because they usually relate to resultant modified-genitive modifier)
Least Helpful = examine all occurrences of the modified in the discourse	Least Helpful = examine all occurrences of the genitive modifier in the discourse
Textual Referent of resultant modified-genitive modifier	
1 <sup>st</sup> Priority = other word group modifiers (that modify both modified & gen. modifier)	
2 <sup>nd</sup> Priority = clause constituents (clause representation of partic., process, & circum.)	
3 <sup>rd</sup> Priority = immediately preceding & following clauses (that refer to resultant comb.)	
4 <sup>th</sup> Priority = examine any lexical repetitions of resultant combination in the discourse	

*Example 1: κληρονόμον πάντων (1\_2)*

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Semantic Range of κληρονόμον	Semantic Range of πάντων
Person: Receive Inheritance	Thing: Extent/Measure
Textual Referent of κληρονόμον in 1_2	Textual Referent of πάντων in 1_2
No other word group modifiers	No other word group modifiers
(Clause constituents & immediately preceding & following clauses shed light on resultant κληρονόμον πάντων )	Perhaps linked to creating the ages (1_2): basically everything in the present age & the age to come = the referent of πάντων
6_17: τοῖς κληρονόμοις τῆς ἐπαγγελίας 11_7: τῆς κατὰ πίστιν δικαιοσύνης ἐγένετο κληρονόμος (different persons)	Word of frequent occurrence with shifting referents, unlikely to be helpful to look at all instances
Textual Referent of resultant κληρονόμον πάντων in 1_2	
ὃν ἔθηκεν κληρονόμον πάντων: <b>Appoint the Son to a role (one to whom all belongs)</b>	
Person Referent of ὃν = God's Son (1:1_2) Perhaps linked to having sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high (1_4)	
No other repetition of κληρονόμον πάντων in Hebrews	

*Example. 2: τῷ θρόνῳ τῆς χάριτος (Heb 4\_16)*

Semantic Range of θρόνῳ	Semantic Range of χάριτος
Place (Occupied by the Ruler): Structure	Psychological Faculty (Attitude): Activity

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(Artifact): Symbolizing (Ruling) Power: Ruler Exercising that Power (Relation of Place/Thing to Person = symbolize Power)	(Material, including giving tokens, or Verbal to express attitude): Status (of person related to person with attitude)
<b>Textual Referent of θρόνῳ in 4_16</b>	<b>Textual Referent of χάριτος in 4_16</b>
Article no help	Article no help
Clause constituents & immediately prec. & foll. clauses shed light on resultant comb.	
1_8 : Ὁ θρόνος σου (the Son's Rule) 8_1 & 12_2 God's Place of Rule	Whole semantic range attested in 2_9; 4_16; 10_29; 12_15; 12_28; 13_9
<b>Textual Referent of resultant κληρονόμον πάντων in 1_2</b>	
προσερχώμεθα οὖν μετὰ παρησίας τῷ θρόνῳ τῆς χάριτος; "Approach" narrows to place or person; since place can't be gracious=God who exercises gracious rule (Qual.)	
Great high priest "who has been tested in every way as we are yet without sin" (4_15) Result: "we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need" (4_16)	
No other repetition of θρόνῳ χάριτος in Hebrews	

*Example. 3: ἐπιζομένων ὑπόστασις (Heb 11\_1)*

<b>Semantic Range of ὑπόστασις</b>	<b>Semantic Range of ἐπιζομένων</b>
Substance (Underlying): Confidence inspired by that underlying substance	Psychological Faculty (Attitude &/or Mental Activity): Future Expectation
<b>Textual Referent of ὑπόστασις in 11_1</b>	<b>Textual Referent of ἐπιζομένων in 11_1</b>

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ἔλεγχος (hapax)=Substance: Underlying (Proof): Confidence inspired by that proof? (Parallel seems confidence or not for both)	Πραγμάτων οὐ βλεπομένων= Things: Things Done or Happening (defined here by “not seen”)
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Clause constituents & immediately prec. & foll. clauses shed light on resultant comb.

2 Cor 9:4; 11:17; Heb 3:14: “confidence”; vs  
Heb 1:3 “exact imprint of God’s nature”

31 occurrences (too many to list)

### Textual Referent of resultant ἐπιζόμενων ὑπόστασις in 11\_1

Ἔστιν δὲ πίστις ἐπιζόμενων ὑπόστασις, πραγμάτων ἔλεγχος οὐ βλεπομένων: Since faith is a Psychological Faculty (Attitude &/or Mental Activity), it being related to ἐπιζόμενων ὑπόστασις points towards “confidence in the things hoped for” (Obj.)

Concrete examples of faith in rest of ch. 11 point to confidence in God’s word/promise

No other repetition of ἐπιζόμενων ὑπόστασις (**Attitude as a comb.**) in Hebrews

### Conclusion

#### *Can Retain Main Categories; but Not Without Work*

In the end, the main categories like relational, possessive, comparative, partitive, subjective, objective, qualitative can be retained

However, we need to:

1. Systematically analyze & show the evidence behind conclusions
2. Clearly distinguish between the affected meaning (or textual referent) relationship, and the meaning of the genitive proper

#### *How Did This Paper Show Priority of Lexis over Grammar?*

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We suggest that common patterns of interaction between the textual referents of the two lexemes involved are foundational to the grammatical categories that accurately describe the N-N<sub>g</sub> relation. We propose that renewed lexical study with refined semantic domain analysis is one way to empirically reexamine & refine our understanding of Greek grammar.