Guide to Word Studies

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D. A. Carson devotes one third of his helpful book, *Exegetical Fallacies* (Baker, 1984) to the issue of word study fallacies. This is "must" reading for anyone intent on carefully handling the biblical text. Among the mistakes commonly made, Carson identifies the following:

NOTES:

1. Root fallacy: supposing that meaning is determined by etymology.

2. Semantic anachronism: reading late usage back into earlier literature.

3. Semantic obsolescence: reading an earlier but discontinued usage into a later text.

4. Appeal to unknown or unlikely meanings.

5. Careless appeal to background material.

6. Verbal "parallelomania": a penchant for adducing verbal parallels in some other literature to demonstrate conceptual links and / or dependency.

7. Linkage of language and mentality.

8. False assumptions about technical meaning: assuming a term always or nearly always carries a technical meaning.

9. Problems surrounding synonyms and componential analysis: the unwarranted belief that "synonyms" are identical in more ways than the evidence allows.

10. Selective and prejudicial use of evidence.

11. Unwarranted semantic disjunctions and restrictions: a forced either / or decision.

12. Unwarranted restriction of the semantic field.

13. Unwarranted adoption of expanded semantic field.

14. Problems relating to the Semitic background of the Greek N.T.

15. Unwarranted neglect of distinguishing peculiarities of a corpus.

16. Unwarranted linking of sense (meaning or connotation) and reference (denotation).

Taking care to avoid these fallacies, identify significant terms or expressions in the passage, especially those that might function as "technical terms." Then work through the following questions for each term or expression.

1 What is the frequency and distribution of the term?

   1.1 How frequently is the term used in Scripture?

   1.2 In how many different types of contexts (both situational, literary and syntactical) is the term found? Where, by whom and when?

2 What are the different ways is the term translated?

3 How may these different usages be grouped?

   3.1 Is there a basic meaning apparent?

   3.2 Is the term used with multiple referents? If so, how does this usage affect the semantic range of the term?

4 Which usage most adequately reflects the meaning as used in the specific text under study and how do similar contexts illustrate and verify this usage?

5 What does this information contribute to one's understanding of the theme(s) being developed in the passage?

Additional helps:

Paul Ferris. *Guide to the Use of Even-Shoshan's New Concordance.*

James Barr. *The Semantics of Biblical Language.* Oxford: Oxford Univ., 1961.

_____. *Comparative Philology and the Text of the Old Testament*. Oxford: Oxford Univ., 1968.

John F. A. Sawyer. *Semantics in Biblical Research: New Methods of Defining Hebrew for Salvation*. London: SCM, 1972.

Moises Silva. *Biblical Words and Their Meaning*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1983.

Stephen Ullmann. Semantics: *An Introduction to the Science of Meaning*. Oxford:Blackwell, 1972.