HEART, SOUL, MIND AND STRENGTH: AN AUTHENTIC ENCOUNTER WITH

THE BIBLE IN ITS ORIGINAL LANGUAGES

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> The most obvious contrast lies in the fact that the Hebrew books are in black and white, whereas those for French or German and the like are filled with color. Nor is this liveliness of presentation solely a matter of ink, for most language texts sport endless numbers of illustrations, with drawings that support the content as well as photographs of the places where that language is used. But Hebrew texts are filled with just that — text, with descriptions and explanations of various linguistic features as well as charts listing a host of possible forms.[78]

As just one example of the kind of textbook that Greenspahn is talking about, an Italian textbook used at Portland State University has in its first unit colorful maps and photos of the various countries of origin of the students presented, photos and business cards of an engineer, auto mechanic and graphic artist, drawings of people conversing on trains and in the classroom, photos of famous Italian monuments (such as the Coliseum and the Tower of Pisa), and photos of various items (such as pizza, a cup of coffee, gelato and a ruler).[79] Such content and the look and feel of such a book (with a strong interest in Italian film, cuisine, travel and fashion, etc.) helps one imagine the possibilities.

In a project similar to mine, Rahel Halabe develops a Hebrew curriculum that she considers to be a more pragmatic way of meeting the objectives of an introductory Hebrew course.[80] She begins by noting the difficulties of the traditional approach, proceeds to survey several existing Biblical Hebrew textbooks, examines a few articles proposing new

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[78] Frederick E. Greenspahn, "Why Hebrew Textbooks Are Different From Those For Other Languages." Society of Biblical Literature Forum, http://www.sbl-site.org/Article.aspx?ArticleId=420 (accessed January 2, 2007).

[79] Alberto Mazzetti, Marina Falcinelli and Bianca Servadio, *Qui Italia: Corso elementare di lingua italiana per stanieri, Lingua e grammatica,* Nuova edizione (Florence, Italy: Le Monnier, 2002), 6-27.

[80] Rahel Halabe, "The Introduction to Biblical Hebrew The Practical Way" (major paper for Master of Education, University of British Columbia, Vancouver, Canada), 2005, http://www.hebrew-with-halabe.com/intro%20biblical_hebrew.htm. (accessed January 2, 2007).

approaches, and then develops her own approach, which is influenced by her education and

experience as a second language teacher and translator. She states her goal as:

> The description of the [Introduction to Biblical Hebrew the Practical Way] offered here is, therefore, an attempt to suggest a more efficient and effective way of teaching the basics of [Biblical Hebrew] and developing students' skills for reading a straightforward biblical text with comprehension and appreciation. At the same time, it suggests enlarging the scope of the introductory course from lexical and grammatical only, to a course infused with more meaningful experience by demonstrating what is learned through the authentic texts. These carefully chosen texts touching on formative stories and their protagonists, themes, ideas, literary style and more, can be relevant to the students who are looking forward to their actual biblical studies.[81]

Halabe reviews the following textbooks/programs: *Introduction to Biblical Hebrew*

by Lambdin,[82] *Biblical Hebrew: An Introductory Grammar* by Kelly,[83] *Biblical Hebrew: A*

Text and Wordbook by Kittel, Hoffer, and Wright,[84] *The First Hebrew Primer* by Simon,

Resnikoff and Motzkin,[85] and *L'shon Hatorah, prefix-suffix workbooks* by Widner.[86] The

latter is noteworthy in that 1) it is available in Yiddish as well as English, and 2) it uses an

innovative approach to teaching children, where they learn from the beginning to analyze

complex words by analyzing its prefixes and suffixes. Halabe adds that this approach is also

unusual for adults, noting that high frequency features such as pronominal suffixes are

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[81] Ibid., Chapter I (the online version does not preserve the page numbering, so references will be identified by chapter or section).

[82] Ibid., section 2.1.1. Reviews Lambdin, *Introduction.*

[83] Ibid., section 2.1.2. Reviews Page H. Kelly, *Biblical Hebrew: An Introductory Grammar* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: William B. Eerdmans, 1992).

[84] Ibid., section 2.1.3. Reviews Kittel, Hoffer and Wright, *Biblical Hebrew.*

[85] Ibid., section 2.1.4. Reviews Simon, Resnikoff and Motzkin, *The First Hebrew Primer.*

[86] Ibid., section 2.1.5. Reviews Rabbi Yehuda Widner, *L'Shon Hatorah, prefix-suffix workbooks* (Far Rockaway, New York: L'Shon Hatorah Publications, 1992).

typically not introduced early in textbooks, which is "a major obstacle in accessing even the simplest biblical text, whereas their early introduction allows the use of a much larger variety of verses, while demonstrating any other grammatical item or system."[87]

Halabe's work attempts to determine the best sequencing of the material for presentation to the student, based on linguistic research. It is perhaps best viewed within the context of other approaches, as seen in the following table.[88] The table presents how decisions were made about the sequencing of grammar, vocabulary, and biblical text. It highlights (in bold) decisions that were consciously made according to principles of linguistic research.

	Grammar	Vocabulary	Biblical text
Based on the whims of the author	*Author's judgment*	*Author's judgment*	*Author's judgment*
Henry Sweet - 1899[89]	**Increasing order of complexity**	*Author's judgment*	*Author's judgment*
Inductive – Harper 1910[90]	*Author's judgment, based on order grammar appears in biblical text*	*Author's judgment, based on order vocabulary appears in*	**Inductive method dictates that selection of biblical text is**

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[87] Ibid., section 2.1.5. Halabe therefore introduces the pronominal suffixes early in the first lesson. Walker-Jones also follows the principle of teaching grammatical concepts in reverse order of frequency (in addition to introducing vocabulary in reverse order of frequency, which practically all textbooks do), and thus the pronominal suffixes appear in chapter 5 (chapters 1 and 2 introduce the alphabet, and chapter 4 the concept of word studies). See Arthur Walker-Jones, *Hebrew for Biblical Interpretation* (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2003). I have used this textbook with success.

[88] The purpose of the table is to give an overview of the issues, and does not attempt to fully treat the historical development or all the explicit or implicit principles that may have been in play in areas labeled "author's judgment."

[89] Walker-Jones, *Hebrew,* 3.

[90] Harper, *Elements of Hebrew.*

	Grammar	Vocabulary	Biblical text
		biblical text	**starting point**
1950's and 60's[91]	*Author's judgment, probably based on increasing order of complexity*	**Decreasing order of frequency**	*Author's judgment, probably based on grammar and vocabulary the student has encountered*
Walker-Jones, 2003	**Decreasing order of frequency**	**Decreasing order of frequency**	*Author's judgment, based on grammar and vocabulary the student has encountered*
Halabe, 2005	**Grammar sequenced pedagogically**	**Decreasing order of frequency**	**"Meaningful input" selected for language acquisition**

Halabe's contributions are using linguistic and pedagogical research to sequence grammar for optimum learning; and considering the linguistic concept "meaningful input" for biblical text selection. Since properly balancing the three columns of the table is difficult (e.g., frequent grammatical constructs are not necessarily the most learnable), Halable looks for insight in the work of several scholars. MaryKate Morse turns to cognitive psychology and neuroscience and stresses giving the students the opportunity to learn through pattern-making associations, the affective aspects of learning, and the arrangement of the material according to themes.[92] One the whole, Halabe finds this approach and suggestions helpful, except for the arrangement of the material according to themes, which complicates the task of sequencing it pedagogically. She is open to experimenting with the Communicative approach of Paul Overland (mentioned above), and values Walter Maurer's Sanskrit textbook for the consideration given to the "linguistically naïve student" and the "presentation of grammatical topics based on their (subjective) degree of importance and on their frequency

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[91] Walker-Jones, *Hebrew*, 4.

[92] MaryKate Morse, "Enhancing the learning and retention of Biblical languages for adult students," *Teaching Theology and Religion.* Vol. 7 no. 1, 2004, 45-50.

of occurrence."[93] Additionally, she gives brief overviews of functional grammar,

pedagogical grammar, and mediated learning experience theory.

Drawing on the research surveyed above, Halabe develops her approach and

materials, with the following features:

- an intensive four week, 100 hour course format, with 3 hours daily homework
- course materials consist of 24 handouts (about 200 pages), mostly carefully
sequenced Bible verses, with a few artificial sentences, and visual organizers such as charts
- course materials supplemented with First Hebrew Primer (Simon et al., 1992) and
Biblical Hebrew Introductory Grammar (Kelley, 1992)
- relaxed and friendly atmosphere
- mediated learning experience that helps students learn independently
- grammar sequenced pedagogically by considering frequency, learnability,
teachability, and dependence of one grammatical system on others
- stress on reading Hebrew Bible text with comprehension[94]

Halabe offers an attractive approach that shows considerable awareness of the factors that

hinder or enhance student learning. It gains credibility because of the combination of

engagement with linguistic/pedagogical research and her experience as a language teacher.

See the following section for a summary of the themes of this section and their

significance for this project.

Summary and Moving Ahead

The narrative of opportunity has been pursued, as described in a previous chapter,

with both "an expansive, imaginative vision," and "an appropriately focused vision." In this

chapter, forays into areas such as general pedagogy, foreign language pedagogy and biblical

language pedagogy have expanded our view of possible ways to respond. At the same time,

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[93] Walter Maurer, *The Sanskrit Language: An Introductory Grammar and Reader* (New York: RutledgeCurzon, 2001).

[94] Halabe, Introduction and section 3.1.

the interviews of educators and students in the Portland area provide an appropriate focus for the project. As we move ahead, the insight gained from the various pedagogies will provide a background for the course development, while the results of the interviews will be brought more consciously to the foreground to serve as guiding principles for this work. The following sections express the principles that will guide course development in the next chapter.

Guidance from Society of Biblical Literature Meeting

Understand Student-Centered Education

Student-centered education fits the ambiance at Marylhurst, where students typically take responsibility for their own learning. Good course design should understand this, and alongside teaching students the language, they should also be taught how to learn a language, or how to teach themselves a language.[95]

Reconsider Approach

Probably no conference can go by without some call to reconsider one's basic approach to teaching. This conference presented significant challenges to the traditional grammar-translation method. Various living language (as opposed to dead language) approaches were offered up for consideration: the approaches and methods of Second Language Acquisition (SLA) and Communicative Language Teaching (CLT). When designing the courses, these are worth considering seriously.

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[95] See below for Parker Palmer's discussion of teacher-centered, learning-centered and subject-centered education.

Draw on Experience of Teachers

Theory, methods, and approaches can only go so far in preparing language teachers. At some point there's nothing like real world experience and learning from the real world experience of other teachers. Decades of teaching experience were reflected at the conference, related to issues such as what to emphasize when teaching, the use of technology, music and classroom management. Perhaps the best lesson for course development is that for any problem encountered, likely someone somewhere has attempted a solution.

Guidance from Interview Results

Relevance

This theme expresses the concern that students learn what is most relevant for their future ministry. This means focusing on the text of the Bible rather than grammar or the history of the languages, which can be accomplished by showing practical uses of reading the text in the original languages, such as devotional or theological uses. Students are then able to envision the relevance of this kind of work for their ministries.

Sustainability

This concern is based on a long term view of the students' study and use of the languages, and it motivates teachers to prepare students for life-long use of the languages. A number of strategies come into play here, such as teaching students how to continue their learning, and how to make use of tools, both old fashioned and computer based, that can refresh their memory of the language.

Realistic Goals

Because languages are inherently difficult to learn, and because only so much time can be devoted to language study, teachers feel external or internal pressure to cram as much material into the term as possible. Aware that these pressures often lead to expecting more from students than is reasonable, the concern is that teachers design their courses, and adjust the pace as necessary, to make the work achievable for the students.

Promoting Success

This has to do both with the original design of the course, and with the classroom ambiance fostered throughout the course. The difficult nature of language learning tends to highlights what the students can not do, and what they do not know, rather than what they can do, and what they do know. An awareness of how various students learn, using a variety of teaching approaches, including assigning study partners, and being alert to issues of motivation can help students have a sense that they are succeeding.

Fear Reduction

Teachers and students acknowledge that for a variety of reasons, many students fear language courses. The concern is that teachers need to respect this dynamic when designing courses and conducting the class sessions. At this point, it is worth noting that many of these themes are interrelated, because the fear can be reduced by addressing the previous two themes, Realistic Goals and Promoting Success.

Making it Fun

This calls on the teacher to use his/her professional judgment to find the appropriate level of "fun." For some, perhaps "enjoyment" or "excitement" fit better here. No matter what method is used, including the most sober rational grammar-translation approach criticized here, I believe that learning is enhanced when the instructor naturally or deliberately makes it enjoyable, exciting, or fun.

Guidance from Biblical Language Center

Fundamental Approach

The approach of the Biblical Language Center calls into question the fundamental approach of most biblical language instruction. Educators are right to be cautious, but it is clear that traditional approaches don't work well for many, if not most, students. The Center's approach has solid foundation in language acquisition theory and teaching methodology. This approach warrants further research and serious consideration for course adoption.

Language Learning versus Language Acquisition

The distinction between language learning and language acquisition is an intriguing one. For course design, it is worth considering whether the curriculum and classroom practices contribute to learning (knowing things about the language), acquisition (knowing the language), or both. The holistic notion of acquisition is also appealing from a theological point of view.

Ends and Means

Since biblical language students have different goals from students of modern languages, the received wisdom that "the ends justify the means" has meant that the teaching approach must also be different. Not so fast says the approach of the Biblical Language Center, as it challenges the implicit assumption of traditional approaches that biblical language competence requires only learning the language and not acquiring it. The interviews provide insight into how to focus on language acquisition for the goal of reading biblical languages. Course design and classroom practice should consider this.

Guidance from Literature Review

Seek Proper Center of Education

In addition to student-centered education, Parker Palmer adds teacher-centered and subject-centered to the mix. A number of the interview themes discussed above involve both teacher-centered and student-centered aspects. Palmer's model, which seeks to strike a proper balance among teacher-centered, learner-centered, and subject-centered education, can be helpful here. This project seeks to find a center within the creative interplay of subject, students, and teacher. It acknowledges the power of the subject to influence education, gives serious attention to the needs of the students within a particular context, and grants the teacher the role of making the ultimate decisions about the shape of the courses. This affects the initial design of the courses as well as the day to day classroom experience.

Teach Language as Language

This is a subject-centered aspect. The nature of the subject means that some methods work better than others, and teachers should take seriously the need to understand the

implications of this. The challenge of learning the Hebrew alphabet prompts some students to say, "That's too much math for me." Biblical languages are sometimes taught in ways that are better suited for mathematicians and computers than for theology students. A better way is to draw on the human gift of language to allow the languages and biblical text to "come alive."

Respect Learners as Human Beings

This is a student-centered aspect. An important insight is that students have various kinds of intelligence, which are often different from the kinds of intelligence of the teacher. A related area is consideration of different learning styles. Also, people are born to communicate, and so communicative language approaches take advantage of this.

Consider Recent Trends in Education

These include those presented by Hammon and Hollon and the history and trends of Second Language Acquisition techniques. There exists a wealth of knowledge that teachers can draw on to improve the design and implementation of their courses, including the conceptual framework provided by Richards and Rodgers. Within biblical language pedagogy, this includes giving careful attention to best sequencing of material, as explored by Halabe.

Incorporate Technology

Some teachers of Hebrew and Greek are more at home in the world of the scribe copying the pages of the Bible by hand in a dank or dusty library. Nevertheless, sensible adoption of technology has great potential for enhancing the learning of biblical languages.

Consider Postmodern and Net Generation Students

The notion of the "postmodern" is in flux, and the implications for teaching N-Gen students are still being sorted out. While some scholars report challenges such as short attention spans of these students, it is also appropriate to acknowledge the positive aspects of trends that have been labeled postmodern, and to teach in ways that take advantage of that. In addition, recent developments in education and society have profound implications for the classroom. Students are changing in ways that some call postmodern, and cutting-edge pedagogy, whether explicitly postmodern or not, seeks to address this change.