Linguistic Stylistics
CHTH 6R1090

Winter Term 2026 | Mondays 2:00am – 3:50pm | Baptist Heritage Room

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The mission of McMaster Divinity College is to develop effective evangelical Christian leaders for the Church, academy, and society through graduate-level education, spiritual development, and vocational formation.

Course Description

This course focuses upon developing appropriate linguistic models and linguistically-based approaches to the study of the New Testament as a piece of Greek literature (and Hebrew Bible for those approaching it through Hebrew). Linguistics traditionally focuses upon occasional instances of natural language but has often neglected the study of literature. This course addresses this shortcoming by working to develop appropriate linguistic methods for the analysis of literature (note that this is not a Bible as literature course, but a linguistics course using linguistics to study the Bible considered as a collection of pieces of literature). Although students can utilize a range of discourse theories and linguistic approaches in this course, the professor will approach the topic from the perspective of Systemic Functional Linguistics. This course may be taken by those working in either Greek or Hebrew, and may be repeated in a new program with new content. This course will fulfill the expectations for Linguistic Modeling, with an added dimension addressed to literature. This course also may serve as an introduction to linguistics for study of the Bible.

Course Objectives

The general objectives of the course are as follows, although individual students will have personal objectives based upon their own linguistic and research interests.

Knowing
1. to develop the student's ability to formulate and analyze advanced linguistic methods and models appropriate to study of the Bible as a piece of written literature in its original languages
2. to master the pertinent secondary scholarly literature regarding such methods and models
3. to gain familiarity with a wide variety of linguistic models as applied to the study of literature

Being
1. to become a competent constructive critic of the linguistic models of others

2. to apply such methods or models in appropriate and interesting ways to enhance understanding of the Bible

3. to become an astute linguistic analyst of literature

Doing:

1. to be able to articulate the nature of the method or model chosen in dialogue with others

2. to become competent at devising and developing relevant linguistic models for biblical analysis

3. to utilize recent advances in supporting media, such as OpenText.org, in the development of such methods and models

Course Prerequisites

Prerequisites: Admission to the M.A. or Ph.D. programs of McMaster Divinity College with a focus upon biblical studies, at least two years of study of the appropriate ancient language(s), and knowledge of basic interpretive issues in biblical criticism.

Course Requirements

This is a graduate research-level course in biblical studies and will be taught in this way. Therefore, it is assumed that students will perform as research degree students to facilitate learning. This means that students will be expected to do suitable academic work outside of the classroom.

Successful completion of this class requires each of the following assignments to be completed satisfactorily. Failure to make a valid attempt to complete *each* of these requirements may constitute grounds for failure of the course.

1. Active participation in each session of the course, including the meeting on April 6 (the final week). Active participation includes reading all the assigned materials. The student is expected to come to each class, including the initial sessions led by the professor, having prepared sufficiently by means of primary and secondary reading and reflection to make a significant contribution to the topic of discussion for the course each day. A short bibliography is provided for further reference. Students will want to begin building their own, more extensive bibliographies on the subject.

2. Presentation and defense of two formal seminar papers, a critical response, and a final statement. The major requirements include demonstrated knowledge of an approach or issue in linguistic stylistics (as demonstrated in a single 6,000-word short paper), the critical discussion of a significant issue in linguistic stylistics applied to a significant biblical text (10,000 word major paper), written and oral critical responses to the work of other students, including one formal response to work introduced by a fellow student (2,500 words), and a final statement of definition of linguistic stylistics (1,000 words). The student is expected to distribute major seminar papers one week in advance and lead discussion of assigned seminar papers. The final statement of definition of linguistic stylistics is to be brought to class on the last day.

3. Reading of the Greek New Testament or Hebrew Bible. Each student is expected to read each passage treated in the seminar presentations and as much of the New Testament in Greek or Hebrew Bible as possible according to their primary area.

4. Completion of all written assignments. See below.

The student is to do new (for the student and the discipline) work that goes beyond summary of previous research and suggests and develops new ways of understanding (i.e. secondary literature surveys are to be kept to a minimum in the second major paper). Dates for discussion of topics and presentation of material will be set on the second meeting of the course (Monday, **January 12**). The expectation is that all students will be present for all meetings, and materials for discussion will be distributed in advance per the agreed schedule. For any paper submitted, the student must determine the total number of words in the draft and include that number on the title page. All final papers are to be submitted no later than 4:00 on the date due.

Course Textbooks

There is no set required reading in this course, but students are expected to gain sufficient knowledge in stylistics/literary analysis, as well as such areas as discourse analysis, Systemic Functional Linguistics, other pertinent linguistic theories, and any other necessary theories or approaches. I also include a short bibliography of some important works in the area I am calling linguistic stylistics. Students will want to ensure that they are familiar with the major issues in a significant number of these volumes.

It is recommended that students be familiar with the major issues in this book:

Anne H. Stevens. *Literary Theory and Criticism: An Introduction*. 2nd ed. Peterborough: Broadview, 2021, or an equivalent book. There are many. Literary theory has been very influential on many disciplines, including linguistics and linguistic stylistics.

The following volume is highly recommended for those students who wish to learn how to become publishing scholars, *as well as learning how to write their dissertations or theses*:

Stanley E. Porter. *Inking the Deal: A Guide for Successful Academic Publishing*. Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2010.

The student is required to have the following available for use in class on a regular basis: A standard edition of the Greek New Testament, such as the Nestle-Aland (26th, 27th, or 28th ed.), UBS (3rd or 4th or 5th ed.) or Westcott-Hort. Neither the Textus Receptus nor the British Bible Society 1st/2nd ed. is acceptable as a primary edition but should be consulted where pertinent; or The Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia, or equivalent Hebrew Bible. A literalistic English version of the New Testament, such as the New American Standard Bible or NRSV, but not the ESV, may prove useful in this course.

Bookstore

All required and recommended books for this class are available from the Hurlburt Family Bookstore located beside the entrance to the Nathaniel H. Parker Memorial Chapel of McMaster Divinity College. To purchase in advance, you may contact the bookstore manager, Bernice Quek, by phone at 416.620.2934 or 416.668.3434 (mobile); or by email at books@readon.ca. The Hurlburt Family Bookstore also carries other books and merchandise and is open throughout the academic year during posted hours.

Course Assessment

Each student is required to complete the following requirements, with the indicated weighting of value. Whereas some of the assignments do not garner points (i.e. they are worth 0%), failure to engage in these elements fully will result in the loss of points and final grade reduction of up to 10% of the final grade. Failure to make a good faith attempt at each assignment may result in failure in the course.

We will do much of the support work for this course, such as distribution of papers, by electronic means to be agreed upon in the class.

1. Participation and Reading (0%). Participation is required in all course meetings, including evidence of having read the paper(s) of the day and required reading, and active participation in discussion of the paper(s). Failure to participate adequately can result in reduction of the student's final grade. The student is expected to read in a range of linguistic books appropriate to the course and to produce a list of such readings (with full and specific bibliographical information, including page numbers) on the final day of the course. The student is also required to read any other assigned reading and the assigned reading to accompany each student presentation. Failure to demonstrate adequate quantity, depth, and breadth of reading can result in reduction of the student's final grade.

2. Short Paper (30%). Presentation and defense (6,000 words total, including notes and bibliography; with maximum of 2,500 words of notes and bibliography) of a particular approach to linguistic study of literature or of the history of discussion of a major topic in the linguistic study of literature. Some topics for such a paper might be: the influence of Russian formalism, the importance of the Prague School, point of view (or focalization), narrative theory, characterization, prominence, genre theory, and many others. This paper should involve a specific engagement of one linguistic model or topic. This paper is to be electronically distributed by the end of the previous Thursday. On March 2, all students will make a short presentation of their papers (two minutes maximum) followed by discussion. The written paper is due on **March 2**.

3. Presentation of a major research project (early version of the major paper) on an appropriate method for linguistic study of the literature of the Bible, with application to a selected text(s) (including electronic distribution of the paper by the previous Monday, with bibliography). The student is to distribute (subject to the laws of copyright) a suitable reading (around 6,000 words; 10,000 words absolute maximum, so count them!) for all students to read in advance of discussion. The presentation will be two minutes maximum, but discussion will take at least one hour. Date for presentation to be agreed. See number 4 below.

4. Major Paper (45%). Submission of a major research paper on an appropriate method for linguistic study of the literature of the Bible, with application to a selected text(s) (10,000 well-selected words including notes and bibliography; with maximum of 3,000 words of notes and bibliography). The research paper should chart new ground in the subject—both in terms of the student's own and previous work and in terms of the discipline. This is to be a revised form of the paper presented under par. 3 above, benefiting from the response, class discussion, and further reflection. The theory and application must be suitably balanced so as to contribute to both. The revised and final copy of the paper is due the last day we meet (**April 6**).

5. Presentation of a formal, critical response to the topic and material presented in one of the major research projects, not just a response to the particular paper. The presentation includes two minutes of formal presentation (as well as electronic distribution of the response paper two days in advance, with bibliography). This is the basis of the written critical response.

6. Written Critical Response (15%). A written critical response to the topic and material presented in one other student paper presented for the course (2,500 words). This documented written response, a revision of par. 5 above, is meant to be its own contribution to knowledge, not just a response to the particular paper. In other words, it needs a thesis and arguments. It is due the last day we meet and is to take into consideration the revisions to the originally presented paper, so far as this is possible (**April 6**).

7. Final Statement (10%). The student is asked to define the field of linguistic stylistics with reference to their own work and the work of others (in and outside of class) and be prepared to discuss this definition at the final course meeting (1,000 words) (**April 6**).

Papers 2 and 3, and the associated reading, are to be distributed (we will set up an electronic means to facilitate this process) to the entire class (at least) one week before the seminar presentations. Paper 5 is to be electronically distributed at least one week in advance of the presentation. The minimum paper to be submitted before presentation is 2,000 words. In the presentation, the student merely summarizes the paper (2 minutes maximum, perhaps less) and then leads discussion, in conjunction with any student who critically responds. The professor will attempt to return a marked electronic copy of each student's major paper to benefit the student in revisions.

The professor assumes that students already know how to research, write, and orally present papers. Content, clear thinking, and depth of analysis and research are the most important requirements, but clarity and consistency of presentation are also of high importance. Students *must* follow the *McMaster Divinity College Style Guide for Essays and Theses*, including for drafts sent out for discussion. Any paper that does *not* conform to the MDC Style Guide, whether a draft submission or final paper, will only be able to earn the highest mark of a C+.

Late papers (including late distribution of seminar papers—any paper submitted after midnight of the day due for submission) are decreased by half a full letter grade (5%) each day or portion of a day that they are late. Papers are due on the day assigned (including a suitable draft one week before presentation for both short and major papers). Do not ask for exceptions to this policy. Failure to submit a written statement of a paper topic, or failure to write on the assigned topic, will result in a failing grade on the assignment.

Learning Community Standards

This course attempts to create a learning community focused upon the sharing and growth of knowledge through critical presentation and discussion. This means that there may sometimes be critical opinions expressed. Opinions and statements are always to be courteous and constructive so that all may benefit from them. Some of your long-held critical theories may be called into question, and some of your favorite ideas or even scholars may be challenged. This is part of the process of learning.

The following guidelines are presented to encourage all students to participate together in this learning community and should be always kept in mind.

    1. Please do not hesitate to offer constructive criticism of the work of others in the class. Everyone is expected to do this. Be sure to offer serious arguments and do so in ways that address the issues and do not attack the person.

    2. Please do not be offended if criticism of your work is offered in the above spirit. Learning to give and accept criticism is part of scholarly development. Respect the right to disagree.

    3. Please respect the opinions of others, even if you do not agree with them. Extend courtesy by not ridiculing others' ideas, but feel free to respond to them logically and critically and in an orderly manner.

    4. Students should be on time to class or be prepared to offer an explanation after class to the professor.

    5. Students are expected to stay for the entire class session unless arranged in advance.

    6. Students may eat and drink in class so long as they do not distract others or leave the remains of such activities behind for others to clean up. Cleanliness may not be next to godliness but it is nevertheless important.

    7. Students are expected to devote their full attention to this course while in the classroom or livestreaming it and not be doing work on any other subject.

    8. Conversation and discussion are welcome, so long as all are able to participate. Students are not to carry on other conversations in class, especially with those seated immediately adjacent to them. If something being said or done in class is not clear, please ask the professor at an appropriate time and in an appropriate way.

    9. Cell phones are not to be used in class, and computers may only be used on immediate and direct course business.

Students who fail to respect these guidelines will be dismissed from the class, with all the consequences implied.

Course Schedule

This is a reasonable yet tentative outline of the content of each session's activities. The professor reserves the right to change the content of lectures, seminars, and topics and their order. The professor may unfortunately need to be away from class on MDC business on several occasions,

so alternative teaching arrangements may need to be made. Adjustments may be made in light of student presentations.

January 5—Introduction of Course: What Is Linguistic Stylistics?
    Discussion of objectives of course

January 12—Why Study Literature?
    Preliminary agreement of topics and schedule

January 19—A Brief History of Linguistics

January 26—Discourse Analysis and Other Linguistic Approaches to Literature

February 2—The History of and Major Influences on Linguistic Stylistics

February 9—The Major Features of Linguistic Stylistics

February 16—No class due to Reading Week

February 23—Developing Appropriate Tools for Linguistic Analysis of Literature
    Brief discussion of progress toward two presentations and papers

March 2—Presentation and Discussion of Short Paper
    All students should come to class having read the papers distributed by the end of the previous Thursday. They are to be prepared to discuss the topic in detail, responding in a creative and helpful way to the subject.
    Short Paper Due

March 9—The Relationship of Related Fields of Enquiry (Literary Criticism, Narratology, etc.)

March 16—Major Paper Presentations and Responses

March 23—Major Paper Presentations and Responses

March 30—Major Paper Presentations and Responses

April 6—Final Meeting to discuss general responses to topic and present final statement
    Major Paper Final Copy, Written Critical Response, and Final Statement due by 4:00 p.m.

College Style for Submission of Written Work

All stylistic considerations (including but not limited to questions of formatting, footnotes, and bibliographic references) must conform to the McMaster Divinity College Style Guidelines for Essays and Theses https://mcmasterdivinity.ca/resources-forms/mdc-style-guide/
Failure to observe appropriate form will result in grade reductions.

Note: Any paper in this course that does *not* conform to the MDC Style Guide, whether a draft submission or final paper, will only be able to earn the highest mark of a C+.

Academic Honesty
Academic dishonesty is not qualitatively different from other types of dishonesty. It consists of misrepresenting the ownership of written work by deception or by other fraudulent means. In an academic setting this may include any number of forms such as: copying or using unauthorized aids in tests, examinations; plagiarism, i.e., submitting work that is not one's own (regardless of the means of its production, including AI) but passing it off as if it is; submitting work for credit in a course for which credit is being or has already been given, unless the previously submitted work was presented as such to the instructor of the second course and has been deemed acceptable for credit by the instructor of that course; aiding and abetting another student's dishonesty; giving false information for the purposes of gaining admission or credit; giving false information for the purposes of obtaining deferred examinations or extension of deadlines; forging or falsifying McMaster University or McMaster Divinity College documents.

A special note about AI: You are expected to do your own thinking and to write your own papers, etc., and not to have AI do this work for you. There may be value in using an AI tool to help you locate and collate resources or to help you "tidy up" your English grammar, usage, and mechanics, especially if English is not your native language. However, using AI to create content for you and then submitting that content as if you created it is considered plagiarism (i.e. submitting work that is not one's own as if one's own) and is a violation of the academic honesty policy.

AODA
In accordance with the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA), the content of this course is intended to be accessible to all students who are enrolled in the course, including those with disabilities. If a student requires accommodation to participate fully in this course, that student is to contact SAS at McMaster University, who will then work directly with the McMaster Divinity College Registrar to negotiate reasonably appropriate accommodation for the student. The MDC Registrar will communicate with faculty regarding necessary accommodations. Please note that an accommodation is not retroactive and must be requested in advance to allow sufficient time for implementation.

Gender Inclusive Language
McMaster Divinity College uses inclusive language for human beings in worship services, student written materials, and all its publications. It is expected that inclusive language will be used in chapel services and all MDC assignments. In reference to biblical texts, the integrity of

the original expressions and the names of God should be respected, but you will need to use gender-inclusive language for humans, and you will need to quote from a gender-inclusive version such as, for example, the following: NRSV (1989), NCV (1991), TEV/GNB/GNT (1992), CEV (1995), NLT (1996), NIV (2011), and the CEB (2011).

This syllabus for this course is for information only and remains the property of the respective professor. This syllabus is prepared with the best information available, but the professor reserves the right to change the content and format of the course at any time.

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Linguistic Stylistics and Related

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