

THE PERSPICUITY OF ROMANS 10:9

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ABSTRACT

Even clauses that seem to be clear in the New Testament (like those of Rom 10:9) still show little perspicuity and much room for alternative interpretations. In this verse alone there are 12 instances of uncertainty regarding categories of quantification (“all/some” categories of graduation). That might be due to the highly economic nature of human languages. This paper suggests two things. First, that the more indeterminacy one finds in a text, the more careful, methodical, and thorough they should be when writing commentaries or articles on it. Second, that a larger study of every verse written by Paul, or by all New Testament writers as a whole, could prove useful for showing if such indeterminacy occurs throughout the corpus.

Keywords: indeterminacy, vagueness, perspicuity, quantification, corpus.

RESUMO

Mesmo cláusulas que parecem ser claras no Novo Testamento (como as de Rom 10:9) ainda demonstram pouca perspicuidade e muito espaço para interpretações alternativas. Apenas neste versículo existem 12 instâncias de incerteza em relação a categorias de quantificação (categorias de gradação “todo[a]/algum[a]”). Isso pode ser devido à natureza altamente econômica das línguas humanas. Este artigo faz duas sugestões. Primeiro: quanto mais indeterminação há em um texto, mais cuidadosa, metódica e minuciosa a pessoa deve ser ao escrever comentários ou artigos sobre ele. Segundo: um estudo mais amplo de cada versículo escrito por Paulo, ou por todos os escritores do Novo Testamento como um todo, poderia ser útil para mostrar se tal indeterminação ocorre em todo o corpus.

Palavras-chave: indeterminação, vagueza, perspicuidade, quantificação, corpus.

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1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 This Preliminary Study

This paper is a linguistic investigation of New Testament perspicuity. It takes Ebeling's view that "The language of Scripture is not a ghetto language, immune from a general appraisal of language," and that "Scripture's language and the clarity of its message are inseparable."²

I have narrowed narrow down my linguistic investigation to one NT verse that is imbued with much doctrinal weight and seems to convey a notably simple and clear cause-consequence-type message, namely, Romans 10:9: ὅτι ἐὰν ὁμολογήσῃς ἐν τῷ στόματί σου κύριον Ἰησοῦν καὶ πιστεύσῃς ἐν τῇ καρδίᾳ σου ὅτι ὁ θεὸς αὐτὸν ἤγειρεν ἐκ νεκρῶν, σωθήσῃ.³

The linguistic theory of choice will be Appraisal Theory within Systemic Functional Linguistics,⁴ and the method used to evaluate perspicuity will be what I call "Peppered Questioning" at the force-focus level within the graduation stratum of lexis. My thesis is that the language of Romans 10:9 shows little perspicuity and much room for alternative interpretations regarding graduation. This evidence suggests that relevant interpretive options in the New Testament might often be overlooked by scholars when reading the text in natural language.

1.2 Choosing a Sample

The task of finding a single verse that might prove appropriate for a discussion on the perspicuity of a whole ancient language is challenging because the language in the NT shows major differences between genres and kinds of "language variety," as shown in the table below by Pang.⁵ Should I pick a passage within a more "obscure," symbolic genre such as apocalypse, or one with more explanatory goals, such as letter? I chose the latter, not because of the explanatory nature of letters, but because the majority of NT epistles are Pauline, and the majority of the NT is made of epistles. Regarding language variety, should I pick a passage that

² Ebeling, Gerhard. *Theological Theory of Language*. London: Collins, 1976. p. 10.

³ THGNT (all Greek quotations henceforth), emphasis mine. The terms ὁμολογήσῃς-σωθήσῃ form a cause-consequence pair.

⁴ Dvorak explains the use of the theory succinctly: "A model based on SFL-grounded appraisal theory" provides a way to identify evaluations "that are realized in [the NT] text." Dvorak, James. "To Incline Another's Heart: The Role of Attitude in Reader Positioning." In: Dow, L.K.; Fuller et al (Ed.). *The Language and Literature of the New Testament: Essays in Honor of Stanley E. Porter's 60th Birthday*. Leiden: Brill, 2017. p. 620.

⁵ Pang, Francis G.H. *Revisiting Aspect and Aktionsart: A Corpus Approach to Koine Greek Event Typology*. Leiden: Brill, 2016. p. 219.

shows more “vulgar” vocabulary, or one that is more “literary”? In this case I chose a middle-term between those two options, landing, thus, on the “non-literary” epistle options. Since the Pauline epistles are more numerous, and since Romans is the largest of them (and notably explanatory regarding the Christian faith), I chose a pericope in it about gospel faith,⁶ and focused on a verse that is short, assertive, declarative, and seems to convey an evident cause-consequence-type message (with the terms *ὁμολογήσης-σωθήσῃ* forming a cause-consequence pair), namely, Rom 10:9.

GENRE	LANGUAGE VARIETY			
	Vulgar	Non-Literary	Literary	Atticistic
Letter	Johannine Epistles	Pauline Epistles, 2 Peter, Jude	1 Peter, Hebrews, James	
Biography	Mark, John	Matthew, Luke		
History		Acts		
Apocalypse	Revelation			

Table 1: New Testament Language Variety. Source: Pang, Francis G.H. *Revisiting Aspect and Aktionsart: A Corpus Approach to Koine Greek Event Typology*. Leiden: Brill, 2016. p. 219.

1.3 Choosing a Theory

Rom 10:9: ὅτι ἐὰν ὁμολογήσῃς ἐν τῷ στόματί σου κύριον Ἰησοῦν καὶ πιστεύσῃς ἐν τῇ καρδίᾳ σου ὅτι ὁ θεὸς αὐτὸν ἤγειρεν ἐκ νεκρῶν, σωθήσῃ.

In order to investigate how much clarity one should expect to gain from a linguistic analysis of this verse, I will interact with the work of Stanley Porter, a Romans commentator who is both a Koine linguistics specialist and who has written specifically on linguistic vagueness and ambiguity.⁷ Porter’s clause-by-clause translation in his literary and linguistic commentary of Romans is: “that if you confess in your mouth ‘Lord Jesus’ and [if] you believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, [you] can expect to be saved.”⁸ Porter sees this verse as a clarification about the nature of the word of faith, which is about proclaiming something and holding it in one’s heart.⁹ It is a short creed which Porter thinks was “*very likely* an early creedal formulation that contains the faith confession that Christians were expected to

⁶ For the pericope, see the full quote from Rom 10:6–10 in the section “First Century Tradition” above.

⁷ Gotteri, Nigel; Stanley E. “*Ambiguity, Vagueness and the Working Systemic Linguist*.” Sheffield Working Papers in Language and Linguistics v. 2 p. 105–19. Sheffield: Sheffield University Press, 1985.

⁸ Carson, D.A. “*Is the Doctrine of ‘Claritas Scripturae’ Still Relevant Today?*.” In: *Collected Writings on Scripture*, p. 198–9. Wheaton: Crossway, 1997.

⁹ Porter, Stanley E. *The Letter to the Romans: A Linguistic and Literary Commentary*. Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix, 2015. p. 198.

make.”¹⁰ This confession, however, in Porter’s view, is individual—neither corporate nor “made by someone on behalf of others.”¹¹ From Porter’s comment on κύριον Ἰησοῦν I infer that Porter does not think the wordgroup itself is perspicuous. He says it has been understood in different ways, either meaning that “one confesses the Lord Jesus, . . . [or] an equative construction that requires a form of the verb ‘be’ in English.”¹² That the construction means “Jesus is Lord” is, to Porter, *not a certainty*, but a probability—the most likely one in his view and in the view of D. A. Carson.¹³

This instance of uncertainty arises mostly from κύριον (regarding the kind of authority Jesus is said to have—human and/or divine), which, to Porter, “could indicate a position of authority, but it is *probably* closer to the use in the Septuagint . . . used to translate . . . Yahweh.”¹⁴ It seems clear enough to Porter, however, that the second part of the verse ὅτι ὁ θεὸς αὐτὸν ἤγειρεν ἐκ νεκρῶν, σωθήσῃ means that the *human* Jesus is the one whom God raised “from the realm of the dead,” and that whoever confessed the divine-related declaration and proclaimed the human-related declaration in their heart “could expect to be saved.”¹⁵

Thus, Porter’s linguistic commentary of Romans notes two instances of semantic uncertainty¹⁶ in this verse, namely, one about the identity of Jesus, and one about whether or not the Greek clause refers to an earlier Christian creed—connected to the terms ὅτι ἐὰν ὁμολογήσῃς . . . κύριον Ἰησοῦν καὶ πιστεύσῃς . . . ὅτι ὁ θεὸς αὐτὸν ἤγειρεν . . . ; In other

¹⁰ Idem. Emphasis mine. Porter simply asserts this view of high likelihood, which makes me curious about how he came to this estimation, and how such likelihood compares to, for example, the likelihood that Paul wrote from his individual stream of conscience. Ibidem, 198.

¹¹ Pang, G.H.; Porter, Stanley E. *The Letter to the Romans: Exegesis and Application*. Waterdown, ON: Pickwick, 2018. p. 44.

¹² Op. cit., p. 198.

¹³ Idem, p. 199.

¹⁴ Ibidem. Emphasis mine. This time, Porter does give some basis for his calculation of likelihood, namely, the “co-text”: “In cotexts such as these, the proper name is the probable subject.” Ibidem, p. 199. Cotexts are like linguistic environments where lexemes appear at the clause level, used to determine the field of discourse of Romans, for example. Questions about transitivity (how do processes and entities, and people interact) are asked of Rom 10:9 and its surrounding clauses and paragraphs, and Porter considers the investigation of co-texts to be an effective approach to determine what the verses are *about*, meaning, “who does what to whom and how.” Pang, G.H.; Porter, Stanley E., 51.

I agree with Porter that a verse can be clear enough with regards to these parameters of “who/what/to whom/how,” but I believe Greek and the other languages I have studied (Portuguese, English, Spanish, German, French, Hebrew) all still lack clarity regarding the “where, when, and to what degree” (space, time, and quantities).

¹⁵ Idem, 199. Porter concludes from Rom 5:9 (. . . πίστευσον ἐπὶ τὸν κύριον Ἰησοῦν, καὶ σωθήσῃ . . .) and Acts 16:31 (πολλῶ οὖν μᾶλλον . . . σωθησόμεθα δι’ αὐτοῦ ἀπὸ τῆς ὀργῆς.) that such a declaration was “the standard for proclamation in the early Church.” Porter, Stanley E., op. cit., p. 198. These verses seem to me, however, to say less about the declaration as standard (and even less about what the exact content of the declaration was) and more about the *telos* of the declaration, namely, salvation.

¹⁶ I say this because “equivalence” already presupposes uncertainty.

words, when one comes to Rom 10:9,¹⁷ the perspicuity of this instance of Paul's teaching is already compromised by two reasonable questions: 1. What kind of "Lord" is Jesus here? And 2. Is this teaching originally from Paul's own pen or is Paul quoting an earlier creed?

Such uncertainty might be resolved by investigating the letter as a whole, or Paul's and the epistle's literary and historical contexts. It is not the focus of this paper to attempt to answer these two questions, but rather to point to *more* questions, other instances of uncertainty, uncovering vagueness or indeterminacy that might be hidden in the text when performing a focused linguistic investigation.

Besides these two instances of *con*-textual uncertainty, might Rom 10:9 also present *co*-textual uncertainty (to use Porter's term)?¹⁸ Co-texts operate under logical rules of transitivity to convey basic meanings about how processes and entities interact. In other words, the questions "who does what to whom and how" are transitivity questions answered by co-text.¹⁹ Here is my attempt at a translation that preserves most of the form and all of the co-text transitivity logic of Rom 10:9: "that if (you) confess in the mouth (of you): 'Lord Jesus'; and believe in the heart (of) you that the [well known]²⁰ God raised him from (the) dead, (you will be) saved."²¹

In a simple diagram:

if (you) confess...

in the mouth (of you):

'Lord Jesus';

and believe...

in the heart (of) you

that the [well known] God raised him from (the) dead,

... ([then] you will be) saved.

Louw's colon analysis organizes this verse logically in the same way:²²

¹⁷ In this case, the Tyndale version (THGNT).

¹⁸ Pang, G.H.; Porter, Stanley E., loc. Cit.

¹⁹ Ibidem.

²⁰ I.e., ὁ θεὸς.

²¹ I render ὁ θεὸς as "the [well known] God" to both preserve, formally, the article (ὁ/the), and specify its use (a definite, particular object: not just *any* god, nor simply "a god that just happens to have been cited earlier").

²² Louw, J.P. . Semantic Discourse Analysis of Romans . Pretoria : University of Pretoria, 1987. p . 24. Louw seems to think that this verse is perspicuous regarding transitivity, with which I agree.

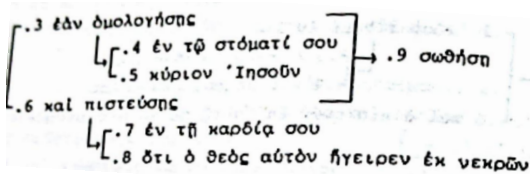


Diagram 1: Colon Analysis Diagram of Romans 10:9. Source: Louw, J.P. . Semantic Discourse Analysis of Romans . Pretoria : University of Pretoria, 1987. p . 24.

These diagrams make the “who does what to whom and how” even clearer:

The reader is saved by confessing ‘Lord Jesus’ (*who / does what / how*); and believing God (*how / who*); who resurrected Jesus (*does what / to whom*). Following the lead of NT linguists like Porter and Louw, much clarity can indeed be achieved in biblical interpretation—via lexicogrammar, syntax, semantic, and discourse analyses—with some need for further contextual clarification.²³ Fewster and Hoyle also at points asked more questions of Paul’s language than simply “who does what to whom and how”: they asked “how much” (of creation in Rom 8:18–23)²⁴ and “how many” (parts of the body—see list below—in 1 Cor 12:12–27).²⁵

GENERIC CATEGORY

(juxtaposition) μέλος, πούς, χεῖρ “bodily part ... foot ... hand” (14, 15)

(juxtaposition) οὖς, ὀφθαλμός “ear ... eye” (16)

πάντα “all” πάντα τὰ μέλη “all the parts” (20)

ἕκαστος “each” ἐν ἕκαστον αὐτῶν “each one of them” (18)

ἀλλήλος “one another” ὑπὲρ ἀλλήλων “for one another” (25)

PART-WHOLE RELATIONS

(genitive) τὰ μέλη τοῦ σώματος “the parts of the body” (12)

ἐκ “from” ἐκ τοῦ σώματος “part of the body” (15)

μέρος “part” ἐκ μέρους “individually” (27)

πολλά, ἓν “many, one” πολλά μὲν μέλη, ἓν δὲ σῶμα “many parts, one body” (20)

συν “together” συνεκέρεσαν “blended together” (24)

List 1: Quantities in Scenario Theory. Source: Hoyle, Richard A. “*Scenarios, Discourse and Translation*.” PhD thesis in Applied Linguistics and Language Studies by University of Surrey Roehampton, 2001. p. 18.

²³ In this case, for example, the two questions mentioned earlier still stand unless answered by contextual analysis: 1. What kind of “Lord” is Jesus here? And 2. Is this teaching originally from Paul’s own pen or is Paul quoting an earlier creed?

²⁴ On two particular uses of πᾶς and τις in Romans regarding “creation,” Fewster says:

The adjective πᾶς (and its various inflections) is the most frequent collocate of κτίσις. Its primary function is to provide specificity. That is, it helps to answer the question, “which creation?” On the other hand, πᾶς is a resource that signifies that the entirety of κτίσις (whatever it may be) is in view, as opposed to only a portion. . . . Further modifiers and other constraining features are usually present to provide specificity in addition to πᾶς, which indicates that πᾶς simply grammaticalizes [+quantity]. Consider [two] examples . . . [one] seems to encompass everything that is created, whereas the example from T. Naph. 2 is more specifically concerned with people.

Thus, πᾶς can modify (and contribute to) both modulations.

. . . Many modern translations that gloss the phrase τις κτίσις ἑτέρα as ‘anything else in all creation’ have taken some liberties. The phrase ‘all creation’ may be borrowed from Rom 8:22, where Paul speaks of πᾶσα ἡ κτίσις—a collocation that is not present here. . . . Thus, τις κτίσις ἑτέρα rounds out the list of ‘things that will not separate us from the love of God’ as a sort of catch-all phrase.

Fewster, Gregory P. “Towards a Model of Functional Monosemy: A Study of Creation Language in Romans.” In: *Modeling Biblical Language* 13 (2016) p. 267, 275.

²⁵ Hoyle explains the chart: “Cases and syntactic devices are given in parenthesis, and only verse numbers are quoted, unless the reference is elsewhere in the New Testament.” Hoyle, Richard A. “*Scenarios, Discourse and Translation*.” PhD thesis in Applied Linguistics and Language Studies by University of Surrey Roehampton, 2001. p. 18.

These questions went beyond basic transitivity, yet were still satisfactorily answered by the co-text of the pericope (via textual clues regarding quantity/degree). Questions of quantity/degree (henceforth called questions of “graduation”), however, are not clear from the co-text or context of a pericope in *every* case: Rom 10:9 is a case in point. Graduation is a term in Systemic Functional Linguistics for counting, weighing, and framing quantities, among other things. It is a term specifically used within the system of Appraisal Theory (see first chart below from Dvorak).²⁶ Oteíza explains that “graduation has to do with the fact that the value . . . can be raised or lowered in the discourse . . . to intensify or diminish our meanings (Force), or . . . ‘sharpen’ or ‘soften’ the boundaries of categorical meanings . . . (Focus).”²⁷ Hood—see second chart below—adds that “resources of Focus enable graduation as degrees of authenticity (real, truly, pseudo) and specificity (general, particularly).”²⁸

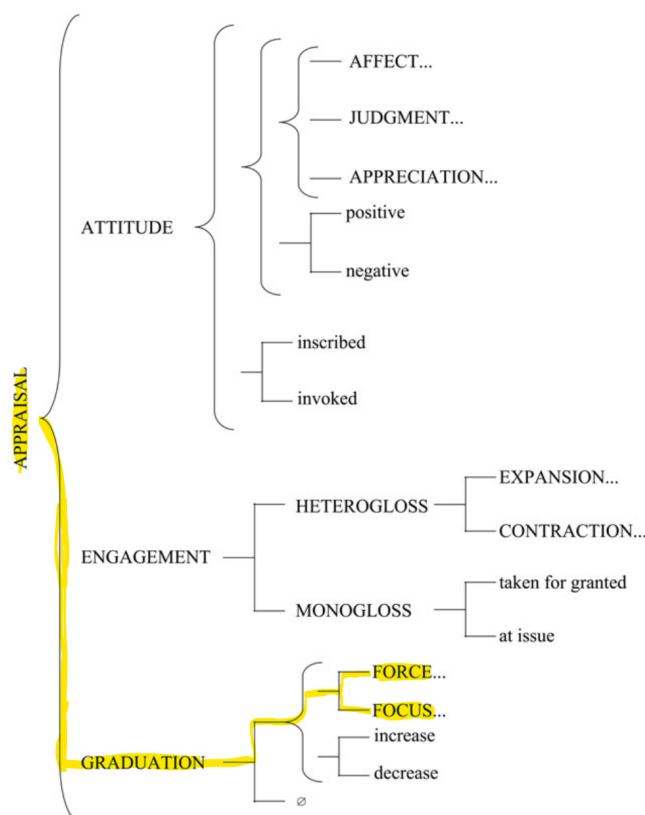


Diagram 2: Quantifiers in Appraisal Theory Highlighted. Source: Oteíza, Teresa. “*The Appraisal Framework and Discourse Analysis*.” In: Bartlett, Tom; O’ Grady, Gerard (Ed.). *The Routledge Handbook of Systemic Functional Linguistics*. Oxford: Routledge, 2017. p. 463.

²⁶ Dvorak, James. “*To Incline Another’s Heart : The Role of Attitude in Reader Positioning*.” In: Dow, L.K.; Fuller et al (Ed .). *The Language and Literature of the New Testament: Essays in Honor of Stanley E . Porter’s 60th Birthday*. Leiden: Brill, 2017. p. 608.

²⁷ Oteíza, Teresa. “*The Appraisal Framework and Discourse Analysis*.” In: Bartlett, Tom; O’ Grady, Gerard (Ed.). *The Routledge Handbook of Systemic Functional Linguistics*. Oxford: Routledge, 2017. p. 463.

²⁸ Hood, S. *Appraising Research: Evaluation in Academic Writing*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010. p. 2, 105 (citation and chart, respectively).

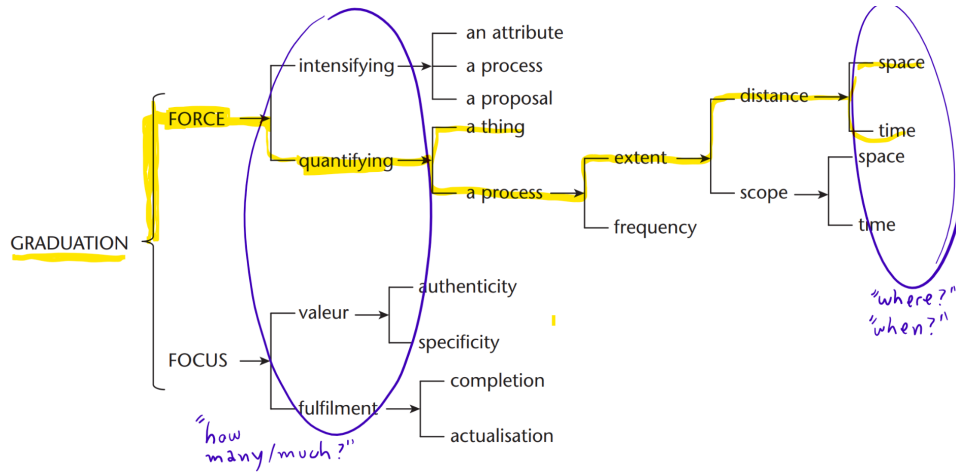


Diagram 3: Quantifiers in the Graduation Category within Appraisal Theory, and its subcategories of Force, Highlighted. Source: Hood, S. *Appraising Research: Evaluation in Academic Writing*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010. p. 2, 105 (citation and chart, respectively).

In this next section I will argue that Paul's Greek in Rom 10:9 suffers from lack of clarity regarding graduation.

1.4 Finding a Method

Since SFL and Appraisal are theories, not methods, I have developed my own method for the purposes of this study and called it "Grammatical Logic Appraisal." Grammatical Logic is the SFL label for "The evolved logic of natural language."²⁹ This logic of natural language differs from classical propositional logic in that it has a much greater range of logical connectives and of logico-semantic relations.³⁰ Grammatical logic also differs from the artificial semiotic systems of modern symbolic and formal logic because it is "evolved" rather than designed, and it embodies indeterminacy "as a positive characteristic."³¹ On the indeterminacy of written human language, Halliday comments that saying that a natural language is an indeterminate system means that "the generalized categories that constitute language as a system—as 'order' . . . are . . . 'fuzzy,' in the sense in which this term is used in fuzzy logic, fuzzy computing, etc."³² The closest overlap with formal logic is found within Lotfi Zadeh's (e.g. 1987) fuzzy logic, "as in the work by Michio Sugeno, Ichiro Kobayashi and other researchers drawing on Sugeno's work."³³ In this study, grammatical logic has, thus, also been used to "explore and

²⁹ Matthiessen, Christian M.I.M. "Key Terms in Systemic Functional Linguistics." In: Halliday, M.A.K.; Matthiessen, Christian M.I.M (Eds). *Continuum Companion to Systemic Functional Linguistics* London: Continuum International Publishing Group Ltd, 2009. P.109.

³⁰ Idem, p.110.

³¹ Ibidem.

³² Halliday, M.A.K.; Matthiessen, Christian M.I.M; Webster, Jonathan J (Eds). *Construing Experience Through Meaning: A Language-Based Approach to Cognition*. London: Bloomsbury Publishing Plc, 2006.

³³ Matthiessen, Christian M.I.M, op.cit., p.232.

analyze everyday unselfconscious reasoning,” as in Teruya (2006).³⁴ However, since fuzzy logic works with graduations in a continuum/spectrum ranging from “nothing” all the way to “total,” it works with infinite levels of graduation, and I do not have infinite space to provide that many examples of graduation within Rom 10:9. Thus, I will use the simplified logical quantifiers of Aristotle for “some” and “all”: τις and πᾶς, which has the added advantage of using Greek terminology (albeit from classical Greek and classical propositional logic).³⁵

2 A GRAMMATICAL LOGIC APPRAISAL OF ROM 10:9

There are many “indefinite” sections of propositions in Rom 10:9—neither universal (which use the logical quantifier of the πᾶς type, as in “*all* of the heart”), nor particular (which use the logical quantifiers of the τις type, as in “*some* of the heart”), but simply indefinite, as in “the heart.” The verse in Greek, thus, presents a variety of possible interpretations, as illustrated by the words in parentheses:

ὅτι ἐὰν (πᾶς/τις) ὁμολογήσῃς (πᾶς/τις) [σύ]
ἐν (πᾶς/τις) τῷ στόματί σου (πᾶς/τις) κύριον (πᾶς/τις) Ἰησοῦν
καὶ (πᾶς/τις) πιστεύσῃς (πᾶς/τις) [σύ] ἐν (πᾶς/τις) τῇ καρδίᾳ (πᾶς/τις) σου
ὅτι (πᾶς/τις) ὁ θεὸς (πᾶς/τις) αὐτὸν (πᾶς/τις) ἤγειρεν ἐκ (πᾶς/τις) νεκρῶν,
(πᾶς/τις) σωθήσῃ (πᾶς/τις) [σύ].

In plain NIV English, with minor modifications:

If you declare with your mouth: “Jesus is Lord,” and believe in your heart—the heart of you—that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.³⁶

Now with possible quantifiers in parentheses, the verse might read as follows:

If (all of / a part of) you (fully/partially) declare with (all of / a part of) your mouth:
(the full being of / a part of) “Jesus (only / among others) is (fully the / almost a) Lord,”
and (fully / partially) believe in your heart—the (full / part of the) heart of (the whole / a part of) you—that
(the whole being of / a part of) God (fully/partially) raised (all of / some of) him
from the (totally / as good as) dead (holistically / physically only), (all of / a part of) you will be (completely/partially) saved.

³⁴ Teruya, Kazuhiro. “Grammar as a Resource for the Construction of Language Logic for Advanced Language Learning in Japanese.” In: BYRNES, Heidi (Ed.). *Advanced Language Learning: the Contribution of Halliday and Vygotsky*. London: Continuum, 2006. p. 109–33.; also cited in Matthiessen, Christian M.I.M. “Key Terms in Systemic Functional Linguistics” In: Halliday, M.A.K.; Matthiessen, Christian M.I.M (Eds). *Continuum Companion to Systemic Functional Linguistics* London: Continuum International Publishing Group Ltd, 2009. p. 109.

³⁵ “... ἄνθρωπος, οὐ πᾶς ἄνθρωπος οὐδὲ τις ἄνθρωπος, ἀλλ’ ἀπλῶς ἄνθρωπος.” Aristotle, *Categories*, translated by Harold P. Cook. London: William Heinemann, 1949. p. 2b lines 18–25.

³⁶ I can further simplify this sentence to fit the Appraisal theory framework of attitude, an attitude of judgment (which involves either praise or condemnation) regarding whoever confesses and believes in Jesus: the Jesus-confessor/believer is *not condemned*. For further details on attitude in Appraisal theory, see Oteiza, Teresa. “The Appraisal Framework and Discourse Analysis.” In: Barlett, Tom; O’Grady, Gerard (Ed.). *The Routledge Handbook of Systemic Functional Linguistics*. Oxford: Routledge, 2017. p. 462.

Some of these quantifications would sound forced to natural language users, and some would sound more common and natural, based on the common sense of ordinary language (Greek or English). Much like Porter assumes it is appropriate to ask the NT text some simple transitivity questions (“who does what to whom and how”—which are basic, common-sense questions in ordinary language), I assume that it is also appropriate to ask *other* transitivity-related questions that come up in ordinary language, such as “when,” “where,” and “how many/much” (quantifying questions of *force* under the SFL-Appraisal system of *graduation*).³⁷ For the sake of space, I will ask only questions of the “how many/much” kind (meaning: questions of *force* and *focus*—see Hood’s graph above) of each section of the verse.³⁸

3 CONCLUSION

By asking questions as basic as those of transitivity and as simple as “how many / how much” questions common in ordinary speech, the language of this New Testament passage (as well as the English translation) shows little perspicuity and much room for alternative interpretations. I imagine that few who read Rom 10:9 would imagine that there are 4,096 ways of interpreting it by simply adding the nuance of “all” and “some” to each clause within the verse. That is 2^{12} , which means there are 12 instances of uncertainty regarding “all/some” categories in this one verse (see graph below). That is due in my view, however, to the highly economic nature of human languages: it would be too burdensome to add twelve points of qualification into a sentence when the main, general idea is that “if someone does something, they will be saved.” Furthermore, the majority of these alternative interpretations would not make much sense when taking co-text and context into account—but some would. The final section “(all of / a part of) you will be (completely/partially) saved,” for example, could contain two instances of uncertainty regarding quantities.³⁹ Would both body and spirit/mind be saved? If so, “body and spirit” can be represented with the logical quantifier “all,” and “spirit only,” with the quantifier “some.” And is salvation partially given (and later completed by good works, as some have understood it (Gal 5:4; Phil 2:12; Heb 6:5–6; Jas 2:24), or fully⁴⁰ given (as some interpreters have

³⁷ Hood, S. *Appraising Research: Evaluation in Academic Writing*. Nova York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010. p. 105. Modifications mine.

³⁸ The verse above was modified from the NIV to correspond more formally to the Greek text and to more clearly show its logical indeterminacies.

³⁹ Ordinary readers might question which part of the believer is saved, and how much safety/salvation may be attained. Jesus talked about losing one kind of life in order to gain another (Mtt 16:25–26). Paul, speaking of resurrection and salvation, differentiates perishable from non-perishable bodies (1 Cor 15:2, 12–58), flesh from spirit (1 Cor 5:5), and flesh from mind (Rom 7:9–24, especially v. 25).

⁴⁰ Within this partial/full salvation category one can also find an instance of logical ambiguity in Rom 10:9, namely, about whether or not heart-belief and mouth-confession *must* go together to result in salvation, or if salvation can be achieved by doing only one of the two. The latter is akin to affirming: “if

understood Rom 3:27–28; Eph 2:8–9)? Thus, two instances of uncertainty yield *four* alternative readings (shown in the red circles in my graph):

- “Your body and spirit will be fully saved”;
- “Your body and spirit will be partially saved”;
- “Your spirit alone will be fully saved”;
- “Your spirit alone will be partially saved”

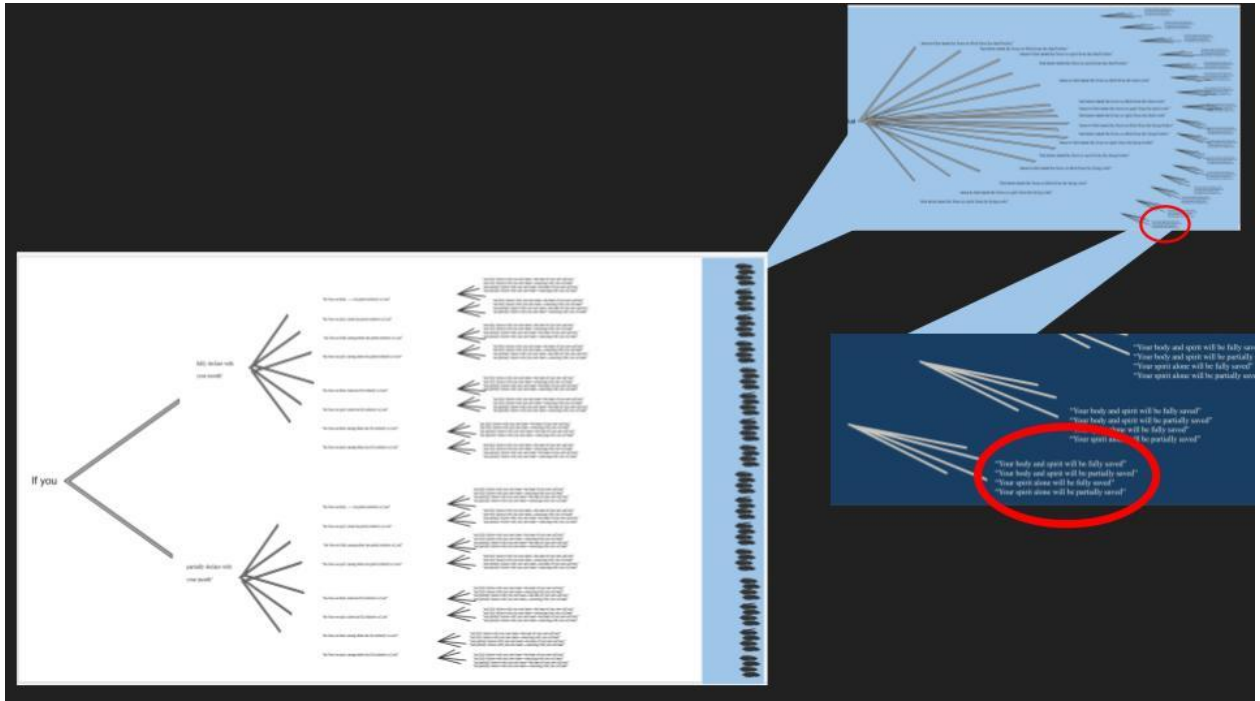


Diagram 4: Alternative Rom 10:9 Readings: A Decision Tree between “All/Some” Branching Out from “If you” up until “will be saved.”

But even if 99% of these interpretations could be discarded, that still leaves at least 40 viable alternatives. Out of those, maybe a dozen are both viable *and* relevant variants. And even if we only take only half of that, holding six interpretive alternatives in mind for a single verse is too hard of a task: it is a higher number of options than our natural language brains can process at the moment of reading or writing, but perhaps it is a small enough sample for our brains to process via rigorous academic study of Romans 10. This paper seeks to lay the groundwork for such a study.

I will end this section with four examples (out of the 4,096) of how Rom 10:9 might be interpreted if the writer were to make those 12 clarifications. If every quantifier was the same: “all.”

“If you fully declare with your mouth ‘the Jesus-as-flesh alone has full authority as Lord’ and fully believe with your new-and-old-self-heart that the Jesus-in-God raised the Jesus-as-flesh from the dead bodies, then your body and spirit will be fully saved.”⁴¹

If every quantifier was the same: “some.”

you eat eggs *and* cheese, then you’re not vegan,” since either one of these two activities on its own would be sufficient to classify a person as not-vegan.

⁴¹ Using a style that is even more common in ordinary English, Rom 10:9 might read: “If you *declare* this whole thing out loud: ‘only the human Jesus has full authority as Lord’ and, as a sinner-saint, you wholeheartedly *believe* that the Godhead physically raised Jesus from the dead, then your body and spirit will be totally *saved*.”

“If you partially declare with your mouth ‘the Jesus-as-spirit among others has partial authority as Lord’ and partially believe with your new-heart alone that God alone raised the Jesus-as-spirit from the dying souls, then your body alone will be partially saved.”⁴²

If every quantifier was alternated, starting with “all.”

“If you fully declare with your mouth ‘the Jesus-as-spirit alone has partial authority as Lord’ and fully believe with your new-heart alone that the Jesus-in-God raised the Jesus-as-spirit from the dead bodies, then your body alone will be fully saved.”⁴³

If every quantifier was alternated, starting with “some.”

“If you partially declare with your mouth ‘the Jesus-as-flesh among others has partial authority as Lord’ and partially believe with your new-and-old-self-heart that God alone raised the Jesus-as-flesh from the dying souls, then your body and spirit will be partially saved.”⁴⁴

4 IMPLICATION FOR FUTURE STUDIES

I have argued in this paper that the Greek of Rom 10:9 is highly indeterminate, at least with regards to graduation. A larger study of every verse or clause in chapter 10 could prove useful for showing if such indeterminacy occurs throughout the chapter—a project that could be scaled up to encompass the whole letter of Romans, or all the Pauline corpus, epistolary corpus, or New Testament corpus. The more indeterminacy one finds in a text, the more careful, methodical, and thorough they should be when writing commentaries or articles on it. I have never come across a commentary or article that systematically presents *every* plausible alternative (regarding graduation), which could mean that relevant interpretive options are often overlooked.

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⁴² Using a style that is even more common in ordinary English, Rom 10:9 might read: “If you *declare* some of this aloud: ‘the spiritual Jesus, like others, has some authority as Lord’ and, as a saint, you kinda *believe* that God alone raised Jesus’s spirit from among the dying souls, then your body alone will be partially *saved*.”

⁴³ Using a style that is even more common in ordinary English, Rom 10:9 might read: “If you *declare* this whole thing out loud: only ‘the spiritual Jesus has some authority as Lord’ and as a saint alone you wholeheartedly *believe* that Godhead raised Jesus’s spirit from the dead, then your body alone will be totally *saved*.”

⁴⁴ Using a style that is even more common in ordinary English, Rom 10:9 might read: “If you *declare* some of this aloud: ‘the human Jesus, like others, has some authority as Lord’ and, as a sinner-saint, you kinda *believe* partially that God alone physically raised Jesus from among the dying souls, then your body and spirit will be partially *saved*.”

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