

BLESSED BE THE TIES THAT BIND: SEMANTIC DOMAINS
AND COHESIVE CHAINS IN HEBREWS 1.1–2.4 AND 12.5-8

Cynthia Long Westfall

McMaster Divinity College, Hamilton, ON, Canada

Introduction to Semantic Domains

Semantic Domain Theory: Need for Explanation and Demonstration

Some time ago, a seminary student who was tutoring other students in Greek asked me to teach him and a student he was tutoring how to use Louw and Nida's Greek lexicon based on semantic domains.¹ Neither of them owned the lexicon, nor had the tutor attempted to use it at that point. I was surprised, because I thought that this omission was inconsistent with his proficiency in Greek and his interest in linguistics. However, it is apparent that the lexicon's usefulness had not been sufficiently explained or demonstrated. The question the tutor asked was, 'What is the practical payoff of understanding a Greek lexicon that is based on the related meanings of words?'

I told him that the lexicon's introduction explains the theory and principles that are employed, so that a thorough understanding of the introduction is imperative in order to know how to make the most effective use of the lexicon.² However, as we perused the introduction, I made it clear that the suggestions on how to use the lexicon are designed for translators and barely scratch the surface of the possibilities. For instance, I am interested in discourse analysis, and I understand that a reader must often recognize semantic domains in order to make sense of a text. If a reader fails to recognize the intended association between words, the text may appear to have digressions or the reader may create alternative associations in order to make sense of the

1. J.P. Louw and E.A. Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament Based on Semantic Domains* (2 vols.; New York: United Bible Societies, 2nd edn, 1989).

2. Louw and Nida, *Lexicon*, I, pp. vi-xx.

text. Perhaps the theory of semantic domains can provide at least a partial answer to some of our interpretive puzzles in the New Testament.

Semantic Domains and Interpretive Puzzles in Hebrews

The book of Hebrews presents just such an interpretive puzzle. As D.A. Black suggests, 'If the common man has found it difficult to follow the author's movement of thought in Hebrews, the NT specialist has not fared any better.'³ This is particularly true of the beginning of the discourse. While most analyses divide the discourse into Heb. 1.1-4, 1.5-13 and 2.1-4, there is little agreement on how the units relate to one another. The relationship between 1.1-4 and the list of verses in 1.5-13 is 'not immediately clear'.⁴ Consequently, a small number of scholars divide the text after 1.3,⁵ even though most scholars agree that the first four verses are one artistic periodic sentence. Furthermore, 2.1-4 is often labelled as a digression or the introduction of a second line of reasoning that is not continued in 2.5-18.⁶ The alleged problems with

3. D. Black, 'The Problem of the Literary Structure of Hebrews', *GTJ* 7 (1986), pp. 163-77 (164).

4. P. Ellingworth, *Commentary on Hebrews* (NIGTC; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993), p. 103. Ellingworth and Nida suggest: 'in deciding where to end this section, the translator must not be guided by grammar alone, but primarily by meaning' (P. Ellingworth and E.A. Nida, *A Translator's Handbook on the Letter to the Hebrews* [New York: United Bible Societies, 1983], p. 3). E. Grässer also tentatively describes 1.4 as both a conclusion and a transition in 'Hebräer 1,1-4: Ein exegetischer Versuch', in E. Grässer (ed.), *Text und Situation: Gesammelte Aufsätze zum Neuen Testament* (Gutersloh: Mohn, 1973), pp. 182-228 (187).

5. Some of the scholars who divide the text after v. 3 are Delitzsch, Ellingworth and Nida, Hughes, and Strobel. See F.J. Delitzsch, *Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews* (Minneapolis: Klock & Klock, 1978), I, p. 39; Ellingworth, and Nida, *Translator's Handbook*, p. 11; P.E. Hughes, *A Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1977), pp. 3, 50; and J. Jeremias and A. Strobel, *Die Briefe an Timotheus und Titus; Der Brief an die Hebräer* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1975), pp. 87, 90.

6. Swetnam observes: 'The relevance of the paraenetical section 2,1-4 with regard to the text on which it is presumably based, 1,5-14, is not immediately evident' (J. Swetnam, 'Form and Content in Hebrews 1-6', *Bib* 53 [1972], pp. 368-85 [62]). Brown sees it as parenthetical (J. Brown, *An Exposition of the Epistle of the Apostle Paul to the Hebrews* [London: Banner of Trust, 1862], p. 214). Guthrie claims a 'high-level' cohesion shift between 1.14 and 2.1. He dismisses the continuity of the semantic chain 'angels' in 2:1-4 as 'semantic borrowing', and sets it

coherence and cohesion at the beginning of the discourse are doubly ironic in view of its reputation as the only literary masterpiece in the New Testament. However, if the lexical items προφήτης and ἄγγελος are related to each other through a shared semantic domain, the cohesion and coherence of the point of departure of Hebrews may be established, and it would in turn affect the notion of the topics in the first chapter, particularly if one also analyses the semantic relationships among the verbs. Furthermore, the reading of the following text would be constrained by the semantic associations established in the first chapter, particularly through ch. 4.

Semantic Domains and Discourse Analysis

The theory of semantic domains relates directly to several core theories of discourse analysis, particularly *cohesion*, *coherence* and the recognition of *topics*. Before analyzing specific semantic domains in Hebrews, the relationship between semantic domains and discourse analysis theory and principles needs to be explained.

Semantic Domains and Cohesion

The use of semantic repetition and the associations between words is a primary factor in *cohesion*, which is the formal links within a passage or a discourse that make it ‘hang together’ internally and with its immediate co-text.⁷ It ‘refers to the range of possibilities that exist for linking something with what has gone before’.⁸ A single instance of cohesion involves a pair of related items in a text such as: ‘Wash and core *six cooking apples*. Put *them* in a fireproof dish.’ ‘Six cooking apples’ and ‘them’ are related items. This is an example of a cohesive ‘tie’.

apart in a separate group with other exhortation, saying, ‘The hortatory units... rather than being forced under the expositional outline, are set apart...and allowed to relate to other units to which they seem to correspond’ (G. Guthrie, *The Structure of Hebrews: A Text-Linguistic Analysis* [NovTSup, 73; repr., Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1998], pp. 61, 140, 145).

7. M.A.K. Halliday, and R. Hasan, *Cohesion in English* (English Language Series; London: Longman, 1976), pp. 4-5; Halliday and Hasan, *Language, Context and Text: Aspects of Language in a Social-Semiotic Perspective* (Geelong, Australia: Deakin University Press, 1985), p. 48; S.E. Porter and M.B. O’Donnell, *Discourse Analysis* (forthcoming), ch. 5.

8. Halliday and Hasan, *Cohesion*, p. 10.

Cohesion, Constraint and Semantic Domains. Cohesion involves the interpretation of some element in the text as depending on another element. That is, ‘the one presupposes the other’, or the preceding element *constrains* the meaning of the second element.⁹ The theory of semantic domains clarifies at least part of this process. Semantic domains are based on *shared* features, which are meanings that are held in common by a group of words.¹⁰ For example, in Louw and Nida’s domain 19, ‘Physical Impact’, κολφίζω (19.7), ῥαβίζω (19.8), and μαστίζω and μαστιγόω (19.9) all share the features of physical impact involving hitting or striking.¹¹ While each word has distinctive features that separate the meanings one from another, recognizing the shared semantic features of a set of lexical items can be the key to how a sentence relates to a previous sentence or how two discourse units relate to each other.

Most lexical items serve to designate a ‘cluster of related meanings’ or a semantic range.¹² Louw and Nida’s second basic principle of semantic analysis is ‘differences of meaning are marked by context, either textual or extratextual’.¹³ When two words that share a semantic domain occur in the same context, their meaning is constrained. For example, γένος and ῥίζα occur together in Rev. 22.16:

ἐγὼ εἰμι ἡ ῥίζα καὶ τὸ γένος Δαυίδ
I am the _____ and the _____ of David

The index in vol. 2 lists three glosses for γένος: (a) descendant (10.32); (b) nation (10.1); (c) kind (58.23).¹⁴ The occurrence of David with Jesus as the speaker provides a contextual constraint for γένος so that it selects ‘descendent’ as the closest gloss. However, even without David, the occurrence of γένος with ῥίζα constrains the selection to ‘descendant’.

The index in volume 2 lists three glosses for ῥίζα: (a) root (3.47); (b) descendant (10.33); (c) cause (89.17).¹⁵ While ῥίζα and γένος

9. Halliday and Hasan, *Cohesion*, p. 4.
10. Louw and Nida, *Lexicon*, I, p. vi.
11. These examples are taken from Louw and Nida, *Lexicon*, I, p. vi.
12. Louw and Nida, *Lexicon*, I, p. xv.
13. Louw and Nida, *Lexicon*, I, p. xvi.
14. Louw and Nida, *Lexicon*, II, p. 51.
15. Louw and Nida, *Lexicon*, I, pp. 113-18.

have a significantly different range of meaning, they share the features of the sub-domain of ‘Kinship Relations Involving Successive Generations’. The shared features constrain the meaning of the lexical items in Rev. 22.16.

Brand-New Entities Anchored by Semantic Domains. Discourse is processed in a linear manner. A brand-new entity in a text is one that has not been previously introduced or ‘known’ by the reader(s)/hearer(s). Brand-new entities may be *anchored* (i.e. linked to another discourse entity, therefore forming a cohesive tie with it) or *unanchored* (forming no cohesive tie).¹⁶ An author may exploit semantic domains to anchor a brand-new entity. For example, in Lk. 6.43-44, the hearer/reader is expected to understand the close semantic association between good fruit (3.33) and the brand-new entities of grapes (3.38) and figs (3.36), but also the more remote relationship between a tree (3.2) and the brand-new entities of thorn bushes (3.17) and briars (3.16) in order to make sense of the text:

No good tree bears bad *fruit*, nor does a bad tree bear good *fruit*. Each tree is recognized by its own *fruit*. People do not pick *figs* from thorn bushes, or *grapes* from briars.

The ability of a reader to make these semantic associations involves the concept of inferables. Inferables ‘are participants which the speaker believes the listener can *infer* from a discourse entity already introduced or from other inferables’.¹⁷ Grapes and figs are inferables from the introduction of the category of fruit, and thorn bushes and briars are inferables from trees because they belong to the same semantic domain of plants. As W. Chafe suggests, ‘When a particular instance of a category has been activated, all other instances of the category are simultaneously activated too.’¹⁸

16. J. Reed, *A Discourse Analysis of Philippians: Method and Rhetoric in the Debate over Literary Integrity* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1997), p. 105; see also Reed, ‘Modern Linguistics and the New Testament: A Basic Guide to Theory, Terminology and Literature’, in S.E. Porter and D. Tombs (eds.), *Approaches to New Testament Study* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995), pp. 222-65 (254).

17. Reed, ‘Modern Linguistics and the New Testament’, p. 255.

18. W. Chafe, ‘Cognitive Constraints on Information Flow’, in R.S. Tomlin (ed.), *Coherence and Grounding in Discourse* (Amsterdam: Benjamins, 1986), pp. 21-51 (28).

The Function of Cohesive Ties at the Discourse Level. Cohesive ties both make links with the preceding co-text across sentences, units and sections, and form the process and identity semantic chains that characterize a unit. Halliday describes such cohesive ties as

relations that may involve elements of any extent, both smaller and larger than clauses, from single words to lengthy passages of text; and that may hold across gaps of any extent, both within the clause and beyond it, without regard to the nature of whatever intervenes.¹⁹

The links and bonds formed by cohesive ties create texture in the discourse and contribute to the formation of units and subunits.

Cohesion and Repetition. Lexical chains are formed by the reiteration of a word, the use of words from the same semantic domain, and the use of reference. The various forms of repetition of lexis are widely recognized as a basis for cohesion.²⁰ The categories of cohesion include repetition (leave, leaving, left), synonymy (leave, depart), antonymy (leave, arrive), hyponymy (travel, departure), and meronymy (hand, finger) and also instantial ties that the author creates, such as equivalence (you are my friends), naming (a poor man named Lazarus) and semblance (everyone who hears these words...will be like a man who built his house on rock).²¹ Chains of cohesive ties often indicate the *topic* of a paragraph, but cohesive ties can also involve patterns of sound and the repetition of formulas. Lexical choice often appears to be the dominant means of cohesion, which creates ‘interrelated packages of information’ in the text.²²

Cohesion and Categorization. A writer or speaker may create non-lexical categories by placing things that do not necessarily belong to the same semantic domain or scenario in the same pile or calling them

19. M.A.K. Halliday, *An Introduction to Functional Grammar* (London: Arnold, 2nd edn, 1994), p. 309.

20. Hoey asserts: ‘Repetition serves to show the relatedness of sentences’ (M. Hoey, *Patterns of Lexis in Text* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991], p. 35). He analyzes repetition at the paragraph level and in longer texts.

21. See Hoey, *Patterns of Lexis*, pp. 8-9; Halliday and Hasan, *Language, Context and Text*, pp. 43-59; Reed, *Philippians*, pp. 98-99.

22. Hoey, *Patterns of Lexis*, p. 48.

by the same name.²³ This is tantamount to creating an ad hoc semantic domain. In 1 Tim. 3.2-7, a list of qualifications for the office of overseer combines things that would not necessarily be from the same semantic domain. In Rom. 8.35-39, Paul places a large number of items in a pile that could be labeled ‘things that will not separate us from the love of God’, a phrase that is repeated in vv. 35 and 39.

Semantic Repetition in Hebrews 12.5-8

Consider how the repetition of cognates, semantic repetition and word association (items in bold) functions in Heb. 12.5-8:

5 καὶ ἐκλέλησθε τῆς παρακλήσεως, ἣτις ὑμῖν ὡς υἱοῖς διαλέγεται,

Υἱέ μου, μὴ ὀλιγώρει **παιδείας** (38.4) κυρίου
μηδὲ ἐκλύου ὑπ’ αὐτοῦ **ἐλεγχόμενος** (33.417).
ὁ ὢν γὰρ ἀγαπᾷ κύριος **παιδεύει** (38.4),
μαστιγοῖ (38.11) δὲ πάντα υἱὸν ὃν παραδέχεται.

7 εἰς **παιδείαν** (38.4) ὑπομένετε, ὡς υἱοῖς ὑμῖν **προσφέρεται**
(15.192?) ὁ θεός. τίς γὰρ υἱὸς ὃν οὐ **παιδεύει** (38.4) πατήρ; 8 εἰ δὲ
χωρὶς ἐστε **παιδείας** (38.4) ἧς μέτοχοι γεγονάσιν πάντες, ἄρα
νόθοι καὶ οὐχ υἱοὶ ἐστε.

5 And have you completely forgotten this word of encouragement that addresses you as children? It says:

‘My son, do not make light of the Lord’s **discipline** (38.4),
and do not lose heart when he **rebukes** (33.417) you
6 Because the Lord **disciplines** (38.4) those he loves,
And he **chastens** (38.11) everyone he accepts as his child.’

7 Endure hardship as **discipline** (38.4); God is **treating** (41.7) you as his children. For what children are not **disciplined** (38.4) by their father?
8 If you are not **disciplined** (38.4)—and everyone undergoes [**discipline**, antecedent of the relative pronoun]—then you are not legitimate children at all. (TNIV)

The quotation is from Prov. 3.11-12 in the LXX. Note that the noun παιδεία and the verb παιδεύω are translated as ‘discipline’, and the

23. M. Overstreet and G. Yule, ‘Locally Contingent Categorization in Discourse’, *Discourse Processes* 23 (1997), pp. 83-98 (83).

verb *μαστιγῶω*, which is sometimes translated as ‘whip/scourge’, here is translated ‘chastens’. The three lexical items belong to the same semantic sub-domain and belong to the semantic domain of ‘Punish, Reward’. The author uses the two verbs interchangeably here, but the two lexical items are not synonymous. Yet, in this context, scourging is contextually positive, which probably accounts for the euphemistic English translation. The verb *ἐλέγχω*, translated as ‘rebuke’, is located in the semantic domain ‘Communication’, and in the sub-domain ‘Criticize’, but here it is used as if it belongs to the same semantic domain of ‘Punish, Reward’ and also has a positive association. The original author and LXX translator, in effect, have placed the verb in the same pile as *παιδεία*, *παιδεύω* and *μαστιγῶω*. Furthermore, the Hebrews author utilizes hyponymy because the actions of discipline, scourging and rebuking are associated with *προσφέρω* as specific instances of ‘treatment’, and are associated with the more generic semantic domain of ‘Behavior’. However, it is the meaning of *προσφέρω* that is constrained to refer specifically to the act of discipline, rather than every kind of possible treatment. The reader is expected to recognize that the lexical terms refer to the same kind of action, that is, to treat them as if they belonged to the same semantic domain. This is part of a passage that demonstrates a high level of cohesion through repetition, semantic repetition and associations that are formed in the text. Understanding the theory behind semantic domains helps us to recognize these associations between words in context that go beyond the classifications in the lexicon.

Semantic Domains and Coherence

If a text is coherent, it makes sense. Coherence involves both the nature of the text and the readers’/hearers’ ability to interpret the text coherently. Though texts will vary in the degree of coherence, according to Halliday and Hasan, a text must be coherent with the context of situation, and coherent with respect to itself.²⁴ The coherence of a text with respect to itself involves cohesion. Others view coherence as concerning the hearer’s or reader’s ability to process the discourse.²⁵ The

24. Halliday and Hasan, *Cohesion*, pp. 23, 54.

25. Dooley and Levinsohn state: ‘A text is said to be COHERENT if, for a certain hearer on a certain hearing/reading, he or she is able to fit its different elements into a single overall mental representation. When a text fails to cohere, the hearer in essence says, “I’m unable to construct an overall mental representation for

recipients understand a discourse not only through what is said, but also through their prior knowledge of the real world and by their expectations of what the speaker means to say. Dooley and Levinsohn suggest, 'Hearers may bring as much to their understanding of a discourse as they get from what the speaker actually says.'²⁶ If an author is presenting something as a text, relevance and coherence are generally assumed. Furthermore, as Halliday and Hasan assert, people 'will go to enormous lengths' to interpret something that ought to be a text as complete and intelligible.²⁷ In order to understand the intention of the author, Louw and Nida assert:

Since any differences of meaning are marked by context, it follows that the correct meaning of any term is that which fits the context best. In other words, this principle maximizes the coherence of meaning within the context.²⁸

We assume that the author was trying to convey something with the arrangement of the words, sentences and units, so that there is a reason why a given element occurs in a given place. In the sequencing, according to Brown and Yule, the beginning (theme) of the sentence or unit has two main functions: 'connecting back and linking in to the previous discourse, maintaining a coherent point of view', and 'serving as a point of departure for the further development of the discourse'.²⁹ Therefore, assuming and recognizing the function of 'connecting back' and 'linking' as the discourse progresses is an important part of the analysis of cohesion. Recognizing the constraint that the preceding

it at this time". Coherence is often spoken of as if it were a property of a text; more precisely, though, it concerns what a certain hearer is able to do with the text at a certain time. This allows a single text to cohere for some hearers but not for others, as often happens when there are differences in culture or other background' (R.A. Dooley and S.H. Levinsohn, *Analyzing Discourse: A Manual of Basic Concepts* [Dallas: SIL International, 2001], pp. 23-24).

26. Dooley and Levinsohn, *Analyzing Discourse*, p. 21.

27. Halliday and Hasan, *Cohesion*, p. 54. Brown and Yule state: 'The normal expectation is that the discourse will be coherent... Human beings do not require formal textual markers before they are prepared to interpret a text. They naturally assume coherence, and interpret the text in the light of that assumption. They assume, that is, that the principles of analogy and local interpretation constrain their experience' (G. Brown, and G. Yule, *Discourse Analysis* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983], p. 66).

28. Louw and Nida, *Lexicon*, I, p. xvi.

29. Brown and Yule, *Discourse Analysis*, p. 133.

co-text has placed on the meaning of a given entity or sentence is a very important part of the cohesion of sequencing.

Semantic Domains and Topic

The topic is what a given unit is about, whether it is a sentence, a paragraph or a section.³⁰ A topic above the sentence level is determined by one of the following or a combination of the following criteria: tracing the participant and process semantic chains and their interaction, the spatial and temporal circumstances of a situation or episode, central sentences, scenarios activated by roles and register, and logical patterns of organization. In the first chapter of Hebrews, the topic is determined by semantic chains similar to the semantic chain of discipline in Heb. 12.5-11.

Lexical chains are formed by various occurrences of repetition within a unit such as those described as cohesive ties above. Semantic chains are formed by lexis that shares the same semantic domains. Participant ties and chains are formed by noun phrases, pronouns and verbs that refer to the same person. Chains that have a high level of interaction with other chains are likely to be central to the topic.

For example, in Heb. 12.5-8 we can trace one semantic chain and two participant chains. We have already identified the semantic chain of discipline.

Participant Chains: Hebrews 12.5-8

The first participant chain refers to the readers, who are identified as children who receive discipline. References to the readers are in bold.

5 καὶ ἐκλέλησθε τῆς παρακλήσεως ἣτις ὑμῖν ὡς υἱοῖς διαλέγεται,

Υἱέ μου, μὴ ὀλιγώρει παιδείας (38.4) κυρίου
 μηδὲ ἐκλύου ὑπ' αὐτοῦ ἐλεγχόμενος (33.417).
 6 ὃν γὰρ ἀγαπᾷ κύριος παιδεύει (38.4),
 μαστιγοῖ (38.11) δὲ πάντα υἱὸν ὃν παραδέχεται.

30. Brown and Yule state: ‘The notion of “topic” is clearly an intuitively satisfactory way of describing the unifying principle which makes one stretch of discourse “about” something and the next stretch of discourse “about” something else’ (Brown and Yule, *Discourse Analysis*, p. 70). Brown and Yule prefer to speak of a “topic framework” that can “incorporate all reasonable judgments of what is being talked about” (p. 75).

7 εἰς παιδείαν (38.4) ὑπομένετε, ὡς υἱοῖς ὑμῖν προσφέρεται (15.192?) ὁ θεός. τίς γὰρ υἱὸς ὄν οὐ παιδεύει (38.4) πατῆρ; 8 εἰ δὲ χωρὶς ἐστε παιδείας (38.4) ἧς μέτοχοι γεγόνασιν πάντες, ἄρα νόθοι καὶ οὐχ υἱοὶ ἐστε.

The second participant is the Lord who disciplines. The items in the chain of references to him are in bold below:

5 καὶ ἐκλέλησθε τῆς **παρακλήσεως**, ἥτις ὑμῖν ὡς υἱοῖς **διαλέγεται**,

Υἱέ μου, μὴ ὀλιγώρει παιδείας (38.4) **κυρίου**
μηδὲ ἐκλύου ὑπ' **αὐτοῦ** ἐλεγχόμενος (33.417).
6 ὄν γὰρ **ἀγαπᾷ κύριος παιδεύει** (38.4),
μαστιγοῖ (38.11) δὲ πάντα υἱὸν ὄν **παραδέχεται**.

7 εἰς παιδείαν (38.4) ὑπομένετε, ὡς υἱοῖς ὑμῖν **προσφέρεται** (15.192?) ὁ θεός. τίς γὰρ υἱὸς ὄν οὐ **παιδεύει** (38.4) **πατῆρ**; 8 εἰ δὲ χωρὶς ἐστε παιδείας (38.4) ἧς μέτοχοι γεγόνασιν πάντες, ἄρα νόθοι καὶ οὐχ υἱοὶ ἐστε.

Therefore, in Heb. 12.5-8, we have significant interaction among three chains that need to be accounted for in the topic. The TNIV has titled the passage with a propositional statement about how God behaves: ‘God Disciplines His Children’. However, the lexical item ‘children’ is only a part of the semantic chain that refers to the readers, and that chain is more dominant than the participant chain that refers to God. Therefore, the best topic should have the readers as a focus, and may be best expressed in the central sentence in v. 7, which is a second person imperative: ‘Endure Hardship as God’s Discipline’.

Semantic Domains, Cohesion and Topic in Hebrews 1.1–2.4

The four opening verses of Hebrews are traditionally characterized as an introduction, a prologememon or an exordium.³¹ The passage’s

31. See, for example, H.W. Attridge, *The Epistle to the Hebrews* (Hermeneia; Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1989), pp. 35-36; G.W. Buchanan, *To the Hebrews* (AB, 36; Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1972), pp. 3, 9-19; F.F. Bruce, *The Epistle to the Hebrews* (NICNT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, revised, 1990), p. 45; L. Dussaut, *Synopse structurelle de l'Épître aux Hébreux: Approche d'analyse structurelle* (Paris: Les Éditions du Cerf, 1981), p. 19; Ellingworth, *Hebrews*, p. 89;

designation as an introduction to the entire discourse assigns too much semantic weight for the information it conveys. The material in 1.1-4 cannot account for everything in Hebrews. Many have recognized this and designate the first four verses as a prologemenon, which is a formal stylized opening. The result is a disassociation between the opening and the comparison of Jesus with the angels, which are considered to be only formally linked by the reference to angels in 1.4.

The assumption that the topic of 1.5-14 is Jesus' superiority to angels has been the main reason that the first four verses are labelled as a prologue, exordium or introduction,³² and 2.1-4 is commonly taken to be a digression, or is non-committally labelled a 'first exhortation'. The identification of the first topic of the discourse as the Son's superiority to the angels cannot account for 1.1-4 and 2.1-4.³³ The reference to ἄγγέλων in 1.4, followed by the series of quotations in 1.5-14, is generally taken as an unanchored brand-new entity that initiates a new topic. The suggestion that 'angels' in v. 4 introduces a new topic rests on two assumptions, the first concerning the topic or function of 1.1-4, and the second being that ἄγγελος has no cohesive tie with the preceding co-text. Certainly the best topic is that which can best account for all of the material and provide coherence for the point

Guthrie, *Structure of Hebrews*, p. 145; W.L. Lane, *Hebrews 1-8* (WBC, 47; Dallas: Word Books, 1991), p. 9; A. Vanhoye, *Structure and Message of the Epistle to the Hebrews* (Rome: Editrice Pontificio Istituto Biblico, 1989), p. 79.

32. C.R. Koester, *Hebrews: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (AB, 36; New York: Doubleday, 2001), p. 174; Lane, *Hebrews 1-8*, pp. 5-9; L. Wills, 'The Form of the Sermon in Hellenistic Judaism and Early Christianity', *HTR* 44 (1984), pp. 277-99 (281).

33. A broad spectrum of scholars accepts the superiority of the Son to the angels as the topic. See for example Ellingworth, *Hebrews*, p. 107. Guthrie also accepts this topic as a given (Guthrie, *Structure of Hebrews*, p. 61). Spicq labels 1.5-2.18: 'Le Fils est supérieur aux anges' (Ceslaus Spicq, *L'Épître aux Hébreux*, [2 vols.; Paris: Gabalda, 1952-1953], I, p. 14). In contrast, Swetnam suggest that the topic of chs. 1-2 is the divinity of Christ, which is found in the prologue in the references to Christ's pre-existence, and in his superiority to semi-divine angels (Swetnam, 'Hebrews 1-6', pp. 369-71). Swetnam, therefore, claims a topical connection between 1.1-4 and 1.5-2.4, but the link is still in 1.4, and does not include the central information in 1.1-3. Vanhoye suggests 'The Name of Christ' as the first topic, which has the same weaknesses (Vanhoye, *Structure and Message*, p. 23).

of departure of the discourse. The explicit cohesive links in the unit are the best indicators of the topic.

Semantic and Participant Chains in Hebrews 1.1–2.4

In determining what is being talked about in 1.1–2.4, we are assisted by three primary participant chains that interact through one semantic chain throughout the unit. The semantic chain is speech, from the semantic domain of ‘Communication’.

Semantic Chain of Speech in 1.1–2.4 (Old Testament quotations are deleted)

1.1 Πολυμερῶς καὶ πολυτρόπως πάλαι ὁ θεὸς **λαλήσας** τοῖς πατράσιν ἐν τοῖς προφήταις 2 ἐπ’ ἐσχάτου τῶν ἡμερῶν τούτων **ἐλάλησεν** ἡμῖν ἐν υἱῷ, ὃν ἔθηκεν κληρονόμον πάντων, δι’ οὗ καὶ ἐποίησεν τοὺς αἰῶνας· 3 ὃς ὢν ἀπαύγασμα τῆς δόξης καὶ χαρακτήρ τῆς ὑποστάσεως αὐτοῦ, φέρων τε τὰ πάντα τῷ ῥήματι τῆς δυνάμεως αὐτοῦ, καθαρισμόν τῶν ἀμαρτιῶν ποιησάμενος ἐκάθισεν ἐν δεξιᾷ τῆς μεγαλωσύνης ἐν ὑψηλοῖς, 4 τοσοῦτω κρείττων γενόμενος τῶν ἀγγέλων ὅσω διαφορώτερον παρ’ αὐτοὺς κεκληρονόμηκεν ὄνομα.

5 Τίτι γὰρ **εἶπέν** ποτε τῶν ἀγγέλων...καὶ πάλιν [**λέγει**]...

6 ὅταν δὲ πάλιν εἰσαγάγῃ τὸν πρωτότοκον εἰς τὴν οἰκουμένην, **λέγει**...

7 καὶ πρὸς μὲν τοὺς ἀγγέλους **λέγει**...

8 πρὸς δὲ τὸν υἱόν [**λέγει**]...

10-12 καὶ [**λέγει**]...

13 πρὸς τίνα δὲ τῶν ἀγγέλων **εἶρηκέν** ποτε,...

14 οὐχὶ πάντες εἰσὶν λειτουργικὰ πνεύματα εἰς διακονίαν ἀποστελλόμενα διὰ τοὺς μέλλοντας κληρονομεῖν σωτηρίαν;

2. 1 Διὰ τοῦτο δεῖ περισσοτέρως προσέχειν ἡμᾶς τοῖς **ἀκουσθεῖσιν**, μήποτε παραρυῶμεν. 2 εἰ γὰρ ὁ δι’ ἀγγέλων **λαληθεὶς** λόγος ἐγένετο βέβαιος καὶ πᾶσα παράβασις καὶ παρακοὴ ἔλαβεν ἔνδικον μισθαποδοσίαν, 3 πῶς ἡμεῖς ἐκφευξόμεθα τηλικαύτης ἀμελήσαντες σωτηρίας, ἥτις ἀρχὴν λαβοῦσα **λαλεῖσθαι** διὰ τοῦ κυρίου ὑπὸ τῶν **ἀκουσάντων** εἰς ἡμᾶς ἐβεβαιώθη, 4 **συνεπιμαρτυροῦντος** τοῦ θεοῦ σημείοις τε καὶ τέρασιν καὶ ποικίλαις δυνάμεσιν καὶ πνεύματος ἁγίου μερισμοῖς κατὰ τὴν αὐτοῦ θέλησιν;

The chain consists of four occurrences of λαλέω (speak 33.70), four occurrences of λέγω (speak 33.69), plus three occurrences of ellipsis of λέγω (= [λέγει]), and one occurrence of συνεπιμαρτυρέω (witness

with 33.268). In addition, ἀκούω (hear 24.52) occurs two times and is included in the chain as a complementary action to speech. Louw and Nida place positives and negatives in the same domain, and complementary actions also share semantic features in a way similar to the way antonyms do. The process chain of speech demonstrates a high level of cohesion among the three units. The first two occurrences are in the periodic sentence that is the discourse's point of departure.

The first participant chain is composed of lexical items that refer to God, who is the speaker in the first nine occurrences of the semantic chain of speech in ch. 1, and the last occurrence of the chain in 2.4. The other two participant chains refer to beneficiaries and intermediate agents of God's speech in 1.1–2.4. The focus of the first sentence is that God has spoken to us through the Son in these last days, and through the first chapter, God is depicted as interacting directly with the Son in speech in the Old Testament quotations in vv. 5, 8-9, 10-12 and 13, and speaks about him in vv. 5 and 6. The interaction between the semantic chain and the first two participant chains in 1.1-14 reflects the focus of the first sentence in Hebrews: God's ultimate messenger to us is his Son.³⁴ In 2.1-4, Jesus is the speaker and source of the 'things we have heard', which is this great salvation, to which we must pay attention. God 'testifies' to what Jesus says with signs, wonders, miracles and gifts of the Holy Spirit.

The third participant chain consists of the messengers that God used in the past. Every occurrence of the third participant chain provides a contrast with how God has spoken to and through the Son, which gives the reader information about the Son's identity as messenger, and demonstrates the importance of his message. In the third participant chain, the author places prophets and angels in the same semantic domain. However, Louw and Nida's classifications do not directly help

34. The continuity of the identity chain of angels leads many to base the unit on that chain alone, with the result that the unit is 1.5–2.18. Vanhoye states, 'the word "angels" is used 6 times in Chapter 1 and 5 times in Chapter 2 and thus is a word which characterizes the first part of Hebrews and indicates its boundaries' (Vanhoye, *Structure and Message*, p. 23). See also Guthrie, *Structure of Hebrews*, pp. 58, 71-96. However, the interaction of the semantic chain of angels undergoes significant shifts starting in 2.5, so that the continuity of the angel chain creates coherence between two units while the topic shifts. The consideration of semantic chains particularly assists the identification of topic, expanding the criteria rather than relying on an intuitive understanding of the repetition of one word.

us to make this association. The noun ἄγγελος is a derivative of ἀγγέλλω (to tell, to inform, 33.189)³⁵ and has a semantic range of messenger (33.195) and angel (12.28),³⁶ but the noun προφήτης (53.79) is placed in the semantic domain of ‘Religious Activities’ and in the sub-domain of ‘Roles and Functions’.³⁷ On the other hand, the cognates composed of prophetic actions and writings are all classified in the semantic domain of ‘Communication’ (33), and the function of the prophets as messengers in 1.1 is not disputed.

The initial clause ‘God spoke in various times and through various means’ constrains the frame of reference or narrows the relevant context, so that the reference to ἄγγελος in 1.3 would be constrained by the reader’s frame of reference to the various times and ways that God spoke to their ancestors (Israelites) through angels. This constrained frame of reference is confirmed by 2.2: ὁ δι’ ἀγγέλων λαληθεὶς λόγος (the message spoken through angels), which is a reference to a contemporary belief that angels delivered the Law to Moses at Mount Sinai, a part of their frame of reference about angels.³⁸ In addition, angelic mediation in prophetic revelation was a feature of apocalyptic literature. In this way, the reference to προφήτης in 1.1 introduces the category of messenger, and ἄγγελος is an inferable that belongs to that category.³⁹

35. Louw and Nida, *Lexicon*, I, pp. 410-11.

36. Louw and Nida, *Lexicon*, II, p. 2. The term is not restricted to divine messengers in the New Testament. For example, John the Baptist is referred to as an ἄγγελος in Mk 1.2.

37. Louw and Nida, *Lexicon*, I, p. 543.

38. As Bruce observes, ‘[In 2.1-4] the main reason why the Son’s superiority to angels has been so emphasized now begins to appear. The older revelation, the law of Sinai, was communicated by angelic intermediaries, but God’s final revelation was given in his Son and therefore demands correspondingly serious attention’ (Bruce, *Hebrews*, p. 66).

39. Justin Martyr reflects the close relationship of ἄγγελος and ἀπόστολος as messenger in *I Apol.* 63.5: ‘Now the Word of God is His Son, as we have said before. And he is called Angel and Apostle; for he declares whatever we ought to know, and is sent forth to declare whatever is revealed.’ See also Peter R. Carrell, *Jesus and the Angels: Angelology and the Christology of the Apocalypse of John* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997). Swetnam assumes that the shared information involves a belief that the angels were semi-divine: ‘For the Jews of the inter-testamental period and for the Jews and Christians of the first part of the Christian era angels were semi-divine figures. The author of Hebrews simply builds on this commonly accepted belief and shows that Christ is superior to these semi-

In 1.5-14, the contrast between the Son and the angels regarding the nature of the messengers and the messages they received is continued from 1.1-2. While God speaks directly and intimately to the Son, God is depicted as only speaking about the angels, using third person verbs and pronouns, and the passage makes as much a point of what was not said to angels as of what was said about them (vv. 5, 6, 7, 13). In 2.2, the Law is depicted as the message that was spoken by angels and is contrasted in an *a fortiori* comparison with the message spoken by the Son, as a motivation for the readers to pay attention to the Son's message.

Topic in Hebrews 1.1–2.4

The semantic chain of speech, the interaction of the three participant chains (God, the Son, former messengers), and the central sentences must be analysed to determine the topic. The focus of the periodic sentence that is the point of departure of the discourse is, 'in these last days God has spoken to us in his Son'. The contrast introduced in 1.1-2 between God's former messengers and the Son as God's messenger is extended through 1.5-14 and 2.1-4, but it serves to highlight the ultimate nature of God's communication to the Son, emphasize the identity of the Son who is the messenger, illustrate the intimacy of the Father's communication to the Son, and indicate the importance of the Son's message. The topic of 1.1–2.4 may be summarized: 'The Son is God's Ultimate Messenger'. However, there is an emphatic inferential relationship between 2.1-4 and the preceding co-text that is signalled by διὰ τοῦτο (therefore). Furthermore, 2.1-4 evidences semantic connections with all of the preceding semantic and participant chains, so that the previous text provides the grounds for the conclusion in 2.1, and indicates that it is the central sentence in the unit. It is summarized

divine figures, i.e. is fully divine. The supposition that angels are semi-divine is so important for the argumentation that, paradoxically, it is not explicated—a not unusual way of handling basic suppositions' (Swetnam, 'Hebrews 1–6', p. 370). While Swetnam is correct that basic suppositions (shared information) are often not articulated, in this case he is referring to the topic, not just shared information that supports the topic. Clearly, the author of Hebrews does not share the view that angels are semi-divine, according to 1.14. Even if we accept Swetnam's thesis that it was commonly believed that angels were semi-divine, the shared information of their role as covenant mediators and messengers is explicitly activated in the first unit.

as ‘We ought to pay attention to what the Son said’. The dominance of the process chain of speech ends with 2.4 and the topic shifts in 2.5.

The Relationship of Hebrews 1.1–2.4 to the Following Text

The first unit of Hebrews, Heb. 1.1–2.4, concludes in 2.1 with a primary theme in the book of Hebrews that is shown to be global by semantic restatement in 4.14 and 10.23: ‘Let us hold on to the confession’. However, it is not the only global theme, so we can only say that the author chose to begin the discourse in 1.1–4 by introducing the first theme concerning God’s ultimate messenger. This topic could hardly be controversial or surprising, but instead was motivational. The author began with a topic that would meet little resistance before he confronted the recipients and challenged their theology.

Besides introducing a global theme, Heb. 1.1–2.4 constrains the interpretation of the following text in 3.1–4.16. Primarily, it provides the grounds for the application of the title ‘apostle’ to Jesus in 3.1.⁴⁰ As noted above, the references to προφήτης (1.1) and ἄγγελος (1.4, 5, 7, 13; 2.2, 5, 7, 9, 16) activated the readers’ frame of reference of ‘messenger’. προφήτης, ἄγγελος and ἀπόστολος are all terms used for messengers who speak for God. The semantic domains for ἀπόστολος are 53.74 (apostle as an office) and 33.194 (messenger). The Son has been emphatically categorized as the ultimate messenger through whom God spoke in 1.1–2.4. The designation of him as an apostle is constrained by what has already been said about his function as a messenger, but his message would not be limited to just the confession. Furthermore, the description of Jesus as a high priest in 3.1 summarizes 2.5–18. Therefore, 3.1 summarizes the first two chapters of Hebrews and encourages the readers to focus on Jesus as an apostle/messenger and a high priest.

In turn, Heb. 3.1 constrains the following text. The author sets up a correlation between Moses’ house and Jesus’ house in 3.1–6, and on that basis applies Ps. 95.7–11 directly to the readers. Instead of being like the Israelites in the wilderness generation, the readers are to respond to their apostle’s voice and enter the rest. The refrain ‘today if you hear his voice’ is repeated three times (3.7, 15; 4.7) and is constrained by the point of departure of the discourse: the Son is God’s

40. It forms an ‘endophoric tie’, which is a general name for reference within a text (Halliday and Hasan, *Cohesion*, p. 33). Labelling it as an endophoric tie implies that the interpretation of 3.1 is not possible without recourse to chs. 1 and 2.

messenger in these last days. God is speaking through Jesus to them at this time. In 4.1, they must respond to God's word spoken through Jesus if they want to enter the rest, which serves as the goal of spiritual completion. This is why, when the command 'Let us enter the rest' is repeated in 4.11, it is powerfully supported by the description of the word of God in 4.12-13. In the climax of the discourse, in 12.24-25, Jesus is depicted as speaking to them from the middle of the festival assembly on Mount Zion. They are emphatically urged once again not to resist the one who is speaking. Jesus' identity as God's ultimate messenger or apostle is a global theme, but it unifies the first section of Hebrews in 1.1-4.16, as Jesus' identity as high priest unifies the second section of Hebrews in 5.1-10.25. Therefore, the author indicates the organization of his discourse in 3.1, where he commands the readers to think of Jesus as an apostle and high priest.

Conclusion

This study has provided neither a comprehensive picture of Semantic Domain theory nor a detailed model of how to use Louw and Nida's lexicon. It has, however, given a limited picture of how semantic domains can contribute to discourse analysis and bring new possibilities to light. This is not to suggest that an analysis of semantic domains and participant chains will inevitably shed light on all interpretive puzzles, but an analysis of semantic domains provides a vital lens through which we can view every text. At times, it seems that the lexicon does not do enough, and it is easy to find what appear to be shortcomings in the failure to place some words in certain semantic domains. For instance, the truncated classification of *προφήτης* under 'Religious Activities' does not remotely begin to describe the features that 'prophet' shares with other lexical items. In this case, the authors did not follow one of their guiding principles that a derivative (e.g. *προφήτης*) should be placed as close as possible to its semantic basis (e.g. *προφητεύω*).⁴¹ However, when the theory is understood, the reader realizes that the entries and glosses are suggestive, and the referential (meaning) range of any lexical unit can only be determined by a careful and, above all, a coherent reading of the surrounding context.

41. Louw and Nida, *Lexicon*, I, p. x.