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Mark Wilson with Jason Oden. *Mastering New Testament Vocabulary through Semantic Domains*.
Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2003. 188 pgs. pbk. ISBN 0-8254-4115-3. \$13.99.

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This is an interesting, yet baffling book. It is interesting in conception and in the work invested. It is baffling in design and function. The concept of learning vocabulary in groups of related words (semantic domains) is an interesting one and may hold some promise. Using an existing semantic taxonomy rather than attempting to create a new one is prudent and may help leverage the value of an existing reference tool (Louw & Nida's *Lexicon of the Greek New Testament Based on Semantic Domains*, on which this book is based).

Unfortunately, the author does not appear to have thought much about how this tool might be used in a classroom setting. It is possible that some relatively simple matters of layout and design changes could produce a tool that is more useable in formal academic settings. (A suggestion in this regard is included below.) But as it stands, it is somewhat baffling. This reviewer is also slightly perplexed by the blurbs from several well-known NT scholars on the back cover, all of whom laud the pedagogical benefits of the book.

The book includes no structure or suggestions which suggest how this book might be used—not even in the two-page introductory section titled “How to Use This Guide.” It is said to be a valuable way to learn Greek vocabulary, but this is never demonstrated. The author apparently intends for it to be useful in formal instruction, for he refers to it being “used in various ways in the Greek curriculum.” But he never suggests how. He mentions “research” that demonstrates the value of this approach, but never identifies that research or describes the nature or relevance of it.

This reviewer is not sure how it could be used in any formal class/course structure. It is not useable in first year since there students need to develop the most basic vocabulary—which will not be accomplished effectively by tackling approximately 4,000 words arranged by domain. Nor does it fit into any other semester-long or year-long course at the second (or third) year level. The quantity is simply too great. The reviewer's experience in a dozen years teaching Greek suggests that about 20 words per week is the realistic maximum for most seminary students to learn. But even if we granted that some system based on semantic domains would be effective in learning more than that, with 15-week semesters at 25 words per week, that is only 375 words per semester or 750 per year. Even if required each semester in a 3-year seminary curriculum, the student would still learn less than 60% of the 3,911 words in this book. Even if the final list of 550 proper names are omitted, if the student began at the

beginning of this book, less than 70% can be covered, and this still omits very frequent and important words.

The author himself seems unsure exactly how this book is to be used, since he concludes his introductory comments with a request that professors send him suggestions for classroom use!

Perhaps the book could serve as an ongoing study tool after seminary for the diligent student of the New Testament (though one wonders how many pastors would actually do so!). Or perhaps it could be used as a review for those returning to graduate study after being away from academia for a time. But as an integrated part of a typical Greek curriculum, it does not seem to have a suitable place.

A few additional notes regarding problems in the book may be helpful. First, there is no index, which means that there is no way to find where any individual Greek word is located (something that Greek profs would certainly want to do if they tried to use it in a class setting). Second, there are several instances where a final sigma is printed as the English letter 's.' Third, and rather amazing, is the fact that there is no reference to the standard Greek lexicon (BDAG, Bauer's *Greek-English Lexicon of the NT*). Fourth, there is at least one duplicate listing (καταφεύγω is listed twice in the same domain on p. 49). Fifth, the entries can be misleading in that words are (apparently) listed only under one domain even though they occur in multiple domains in Louw and Nida. There are *some* cross references included, but not nearly enough. For example, κόσμος is listed under domain 1.A., universe, creation. There is no indication that this word often refers to people/humanity. Louw and Nida include κόσμος in eight different domains; this book lists it only in two.

Given the considerable amount of work that has gone into this book, it would be a shame if it floundered with no obvious place for curricular use. So a suggestion as to how this might be enabled may be in order. Perhaps the addition of a simple hierarchy in page layout would facilitate course use. To take one section as an example, domain 15.D. leave, etc., might be arranged as follows. (The use of symbols at the beginning of successive indents is intended to clarify the usage level. Symbols are suggested instead of numerals as an unobtrusive means to keep the focus on the Greek words rather than a numbering system. Here the words set flush left in bold occur 50 or more times in the NT; those indented one level in a normal font and marked with a + are used 25–49 times; the third level in italic uses an equals sign for words occurring 10–24 times; and the remaining words that occur less than 10 times are set in a smaller font and marked with a dash. The font formatting is also keyed to these usage levels.)

ἄγω

ὑπάγω

ἀπέρχομαι [ἔρχομαι]

ἐξέρχομαι

= μεταβαίνω [βαίνω]

- ἐκβαίνω

+ ἐκπορεύομαι [πορεύομαι]

ἐξέρχομαι

- ἐξοδος

ἀπολύω [λύω]

ἀφήμι

= χωρίζω

- διαχωρίζομαι

- ἀποχωρέω

- ἀναχωρέω

- ὑποχωρέω

= ἀφίσταμαι

= καταλείπω

+ φεύγω

- φυγή, ἦς, ἦ

- καταφεύγω

- ἐκφεύγω

πέμπω

- ἐκπέμπω

- συμπέμπω

- ἀναπέμπω

- προπέμπω

- μεταπέμπομαι

ἀποστέλλω

= ἐξαποστέλλω

ἐκβάλλω

An arrangement something like this would enable a multi-tiered approach including review of a basic first-year vocabulary as well as step-by-step, semester-by-semester (or year-by-year) expansion that is *both* frequency based *and* semantic domain oriented. Successive levels could be assigned each semester. Such an arrangement also moves the very infrequent words to the side where they may be absorbed by association, but are not assigned for formal memorization. (In the sample section above, there are four hapax legomena and twelve words used five or less times in the NT.)

One might argue that this could be done as the books is presently formatted by specifying that only words which occur greater than a certain frequency be learned—but that does not acknowledge the likelihood of confusion or the lack of clarity in such assignments! If it can be misunderstood or confused, some students are likely to do just that. It does not take many years in the classroom to discover that clarity in assignments, especially language assignments, is nonnegotiable.