

Pauline Language and the Pastoral Epistles: A Study of Linguistic Variation in the Corpus Paulinum. By Jermo van Nes. Linguistic Biblical Studies 16. Leiden: Brill, 2018, xxii + 532 pp., \$182.00.

Van Nes's doctoral dissertation, written under the supervision of Armin D. Baum and P. H. R. van Houwelingen (ETF Leuven and Theologische Universiteit Kampen, 2017), is a significant contribution to the study of the Pastoral Epistles. As the title indicates, van Nes explores the variation in language between the Pastoral Epistles and the other letters attributed to Paul. Specifically, he contrasts modern interpretations of this linguistic variation with explanatory models offered by classicists and linguists studying other Indo-European text corpora. He asks, "What might we learn from classicists and linguists concerning how they have analyzed linguistic variation in other bodies of texts?" This is another in a helpful stream of works that seek to bring NT study into conversation with modern linguistic studies.

One of the strengths of this book is its clear and user-friendly layout. At 532 pages, it could appear daunting. However, a little more than half of the pages are given to appendices. These are not tangential compilations of extraneous data, however. The appendices are the crucial data from which everything else arises. Yet keeping this data in clear appendices allows the text of the chapters to flow smoothly with the use of a few tables. Many detailed studies are almost impossible to read because the data is mixed with the analysis. Van Nes is to be commended for making such a dense study more accessible by this arrangement of material.

The 224 pages of analysis are divided into two roughly equal parts. Part 1 (chaps. 1–3) lays out the problem and state of study, while part 2 (chaps. 4–6) argues for a fresh answer to the problem. Chapter 1 is a thorough chronological overview of the scholarly discussion of the "problem" of linguistic variation in the Pastoral Epistles. This chapter is a valuable resource that corrects some commonly assumed points along the way. Van Nes demonstrates that the question of the language in the Pastoral Epistles has been stated in both quantitative (e.g. the number of missing or unique words) and qualitative ("just doesn't sound like Paul") terms. Chapter 2 focuses on the quantitative aspect with a comprehensive and up-to-date assessment of the lexical, semantic, and syntactic variations in the Pastoral Epistles. Van Nes notes the subjectivity of various assessments and surveys the attempts to categorize these variations. Chapter 3 details the different ways scholars have sought to account for this linguistic variation. All scholars admit that there is some sort of linguistic variation, but how we account for this dissimilarity in a body of literature that claims to be from the same author is the issue. The majority of scholars believe that significant linguistic variation can only be explained by different authors of the corpus in question.

Part 2 contains van Nes's arguments for a fresh approach to the linguistic variation of the Pastoral Epistles. Chapter 4 critiques the typical ways this problem has been "solved," demonstrating difficulties that arise in scholars' explanations of Paul's interpolations. Most significantly, van Nes draws from statistical linguistics to suggest a simple linear regression analysis for investigating Paul's linguistic variation. While this will likely be one of the more complicated aspects of the book for

NT scholars, this method holds significant promise. Van Nes does not assume that language can be reduced to numbers, but his analysis does help us to summarize data and draw inferences without mere subjective impression. While linear regression has rarely, if ever, been used in Pauline studies before, it is commonly used in science. It is an insightful application to compare the variation of language between different writings. This is a key part of the analysis in the following chapters.

Chapter 5 examines the broader vocabulary of Paul and particularly the Pastorals while chapter 6 scrutinizes the syntax. In each case, van Nes executes linear regression analyses and consults the work of modern classicists when considering linguistic variation. In general, the linear regression analyses show that the language of the Pastorals does not deviate from the other Paulines as much as is often thought. Furthermore, he shows that modern classicists and linguists, when studying other languages, typically do not consider linguistic variation as evidence of different authors. Rather, they see lexical richness to be caused by emotion, topic, or age. As van Nes states, “The scatter diagrams [linear regression analysis] showed that there is no significant linguistic variation in the *Corpus Paulinum* except for a significantly high number of *hapaxes* in the Timothy correspondence and a significantly low number of ellipses in Ephesians” (p. 221).

This study is the most thorough investigation of linguistic variation between the Pastorals and other Pauline letters to date. It is comprehensive, up-to-date, and linguistically sophisticated. I know of nothing else close to it. It demonstrates that “even though the language of the Pastorals differs from that of the other Paulines in some respects, it is quite similar in many more respects” (p. 222). While it does not settle the question of the authorship of the Pastoral Epistles (and did not set out to do so), it does seriously dampen the casual consensus that has suggested a radical difference between the language and style of the Pastorals and the other letters attributed to Paul. It is on this point that van Nes concludes his study: “the vocabulary and syntax of the PE do not seem as peculiar as [others] have claimed” (p. 224).

It would be difficult to overstate the significance of this contribution to the study of the Pastoral Epistles. Any future work on the language of the Pastoral Epistles or the authorship question will have to reckon with this study. The work is careful and judicious. The presentation is clear and helpfully delineated. Future work might interact with the linear regression analysis, either to pursue other areas where it might be useful or to argue how it should be used. I find van Nes’s methodology sensible and compelling. It will be interesting to see others with greater linguistic training than I have interact with it.

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