

**Johannes P. LOUW et Eugene A. NIDA (eds.) (1988) :**  
***Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament Based on***  
***Semantic Domains*, New York, United Bible Societies, vol. 1 :**  
**843 p., vol. 2 : 375 p.**

Robert Mackenzie et Michael Pettem

Volume 35, numéro 2, juin 1990

URI : <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/003830ar>

DOI : <https://doi.org/10.7202/003830ar>

[Aller au sommaire du numéro](#)

Éditeur(s)

Les Presses de l'Université de Montréal

ISSN

0026-0452 (imprimé)

1492-1421 (numérique)

[Découvrir la revue](#)

Citer ce compte rendu

Mackenzie, R. & Pettem, M. (1990). Compte rendu de [Johannes P. LOUW et Eugene A. NIDA (eds.) (1988) : *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament Based on Semantic Domains*, New York, United Bible Societies, vol. 1 : 843 p., vol. 2 : 375 p.] *Meta*, 35(2), 439–441. <https://doi.org/10.7202/003830ar>

- Johannes P. LOUW et Eugene A. NIDA (eds.) (1988): *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament Based on Semantic Domains*, New York, United Bible Societies, vol. 1: 843 p., vol. 2: 375 p.

This new lexicon (henceforth *GLex*), the result of the collaboration of J.P. Louw and E.A. Nida, is designed primarily to assist translators of the Greek New Testament. The authors intend it also to be of value for Biblical scholars, pastors and theological students. It is not a general lexicon of Hellenistic Greek, but does attempt to be complete in its treatment of the approximately 5,000 words in the United Bible Society's third edition of the Greek New Testament (text and critical apparatus).

The principal innovation of this work is that the words and phrases are not listed alphabetically, but are rather arranged in groups made up of lexical items which cover a similar area of meaning or function. The lexicon is divided into 93 such areas or "semantic domains." The first twelve semantic domains have to do with object referents such as plants (semantic domain 3), animals (4), parts of the body (8); domains 13 to 57 have to do with events, comprising learning (27), hostility (39), marine activities (54); domains 58 to 91 deal with abstracts such as value (65), time (67), space (80); domain 92 ("Discourse Referentials") deals with pronouns, while the last domain (93) deals with proper nouns. Each domain is divided into more specific subdomains, within which words and phrases are listed, insofar as possible, starting from the more general and working toward the more specific. Each entry is assigned a double number: the first is the number of the domain, the second is its place in the domain (subdomains are not considered

in the numbering system). Since a word can have several distinct meanings, most words appear more than once in the lexicon, frequently in different domains.

The second notable feature of this lexicon is that all the words are given full definitions rather than simple glosses. Glosses follow the definitions but they are meant only to be illustrative. Each entry includes a New Testament citation, and in appropriate cases, closes with notes for translators.

It would be virtually impossible to look up a word in a dictionary ordered by semantic domains without the aid of good indices. The second volume of the lexicon therefore provides three indices. The first is a mini-lexicon, listing all the Greek words with glosses. A reference number given with each gloss refers to the appropriate entry in the first volume. Volume two is completed by two shorter indices, one of English words and the other of the New Testament passages cited in volume one.

Classification according to semantic domains may be quite useful for translators and advanced students of New Testament Greek. In understanding a word or phrase, it is very useful to see a given word directly compared and contrasted with other words which are related in meaning. Particularly useful for translators is the practice of listing antonyms together. When a translator can see the precise contrast a pair of Greek antonyms expresses, she or he is in a better position to choose a pair of words in the target language which express the same opposition.

In grouping and distinguishing the meanings of words the authors show a laudable restraint. In a system such as theirs, it would have been tempting always to try to draw out subtle distinctions between words with similar meanings. This temptation is resisted. The authors frequently note that while two words may have had subtle differences of meaning for native speakers in the first century, present knowledge of the language does not permit the modern reader to grasp these subtleties. In a similar vein, they reject the various theories which see a real difference in meaning between *agapaō* and *phileō* in Jn 21:15-17, holding rather that this is merely "a rhetorical alternation designed to avoid undue repetition." (25.43)

Given the importance of semantic domains for this lexicon, however, there is a major error in the format of the book. The titles of the semantic domains and subdomains are given only as headings at the beginning of the appropriate sections. This being the case, most pages have no headings, and only by a long process of flipping back through the lexicon can one find out to which domain and subdomain a word belongs. The semantic domain and subdomain should have been printed at the top of each page.

The replacement of glosses by definitions is a clear improvement over traditional lexical practice. Except in the case of proper nouns, a gloss rarely covers the same semantic range as the original term. With most lexica, one must thus try to piece together the semantic range of the original term from a sometimes bewildering array of glosses. The careful definitions of this lexicon help the user to circumvent this problem quickly. The extensive material available for each and every word of the New Testament in other lexica and aids has made it possible for the researcher to gain a clear idea of the meaning of almost all New Testament lexical items; nevertheless, the definitions of *GLex* allow this type of understanding to be reached much more quickly and easily.

Although in its theoretical approach to the concept of a lexicon their work represents an advance on the accepted standard in the field, its actual definitions and discussions reveal several flaws. The rare word *chalkolibanon* (polished brass?), which appears only in the Revelation of John (1:15; 2:18, in the dative case) is said to be neuter or masculine in gender (2.57). That its gender could be feminine is not acknowledged, despite the fact that this is one way of making sense of the difficult Greek grammar of the verse (1:15) in which it occurs. Moreover, *GLex* confidently assigns a meaning to the term,

never alerting the reader to the fact that this is simply a guess based upon the word's "root" components. The standard New Testament lexicon (Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, trans. W.F. Arndt and F.W. Gingrich, henceforth "Baur") notes the various alternatives regarding gender as well as offering helpful comments on the problem of its definition.

The entry in *GLex* for *idou* (behold!) is also somewhat disappointing. It is correctly classed as a "marker of emphasis" (91.10) or "prompter of attention" (91.13). Baur, however, gives much more information on its actual usage, noting for example that in descriptions of visions it often is followed by nouns in the nominative case. The user of *GLex* would be better served if the lexicon indicated that *idou* is often found in particular contexts and that its significance in a sentence is sometimes as much grammatical as lexical.

The authors are strongly opposed to the idea that words have an underlying meaning which can be employed to explain the various other meanings in which a word is used. This may (or may not) be a valid theoretical point. If, however, all "underlying meaning" is to be avoided, and only meanings actually attested in the New Testament are to be given, then a lexicon must be very careful to be exhaustive and accurate in giving all the attested meanings. And these authors have not been quite careful enough. For the verb *kosmeō* the only definition they give is "to cause something to be beautiful by decorating" (79.12), which is its most frequent meaning in the New Testament. However, in the parable of the Ten Maidens (Mt 25:1-13), on hearing that the bridegroom was coming, the maidens *ekosmēsan* their lamps. Using this lexicon only, one would be led to the absurd image of the maidens decorating their lamps. Of course, what is meant here is that the maidens "put their lamps in order," an instance of what many would call the underlying meaning of *kosmeō*: "to order, to put in order."

Though helpful for translators, advanced students and pastors, the definitions in this volume are rendered useless for scholars by the lack of documentation. The reader rarely finds out on what basis the authors have adopted a given definition. Furthermore, *GLex* limits itself to New Testament examples of usage of the terms it defines, and offers only few of those. Bauer on the other hand cites relevant usage from Classical, secular, Septuagint and early Christian sources. In addition, Bauer provides bibliographic references for many entries. References to scholarly discussion are of great importance to the translator as well as the Biblical scholar, given that the meaning of many New Testament terms is tied inextricably to theological interpretation.

In view of its brevity, lack of bibliographic references, and its occasional unreliability, the *GLex* should only be used as a supplement to its more authoritative forebear. It is helpful mainly in that it often provides a more detailed definition and far more complete indication of related terms than does Bauer's lexicon.

ROBERT MACKENZIE AND MICHAEL PETTEM