

2018 Research Week Proposal 3MT Proposal

Title: Why Jokes are Funny and the Language of the New Testament

Program of Study: Theology (New Testament Linguistics)

Presentation Type: PowerPoint

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Category: Textual/Investigative

Proposal:

The goal of this Three Minute Thesis (3MT) presentation is to show that all languages have rules for implication (the act of implying), there are rules for when and how this happens, and these principles can be applied to the New Testament.

Every language has rules. There are rules concerning spelling and grammar that set the outer limits for how language works. One must follow these rules (at least somewhat closely) to be able to communicate in that language. There are rules for sentence structure that determine style, which help determine what is “proper English” and what is “slang”. There are also rules for emphasis and implication, which give nuances to someone’s ideas. Jokes are a common example of this. A joke is funny because someone communicates part of the joke explicitly, while part of it is implicit. The implications of the joke are funny, not the explications.

In the study of language, implication is the act of implying. An observant linguist can see patterns emerge for implication, and extract rules for implication from those patterns. For instance, in the New Testament, Paul uses the term *apostolos* (apostle) to introduce himself quite a few times. In all of those instances, he is not speaking of his office within the church (one of the apostles who were the foundation of the church). Instead, he uses the term *apostolos* to refer to his Damascus road experience, when God sent him to the Gentiles with the message of the Gospel.

One can tell this because of the rules of implication. In Acts 26, when Paul recalls his Damascus road experience, he says that Jesus sent him (*apostellō*) to the Gentiles for the sake of the gospel message. *Apostellō*, the Greek word meaning “to send”, and *apostolos* are built from the same stem. Further, when Paul uses *apostolos*, he almost always (12/13 times) refers to one of the other parts of his Damascus road experience. Either he says, “I’m an apostle from Jesus” (i.e. “I am sent by Jesus”), “I’m an apostle to the Gentiles” (i.e. “I am sent to the Gentiles”), or “I’m an apostle for the gospel message” (i.e. “I am sent to spread the gospel”). Due to the use of a word with the same stem, the same contextual indicators, and the consistency with which he uses this, Paul’s use of *apostolos* satisfies the rules of implication. Therefore one can confidently say that, when Paul uses *apostolos*, he uses it in reference to when Jesus sent him to the Gentiles with the gospel message on the way to Damascus.