

Title - Tension over Terms: Root, Stem, and Affix in Greek and Hebrew

Program of Study – Biblical Studies, Modern Languages

Presentation Type – Choose one of the following: Physical Poster

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Abstract: This poster seeks to reconcile the conventional linguistic understanding of root and stem with the traditional definitions used in instructing biblical Hebrew and Greek. As the latter disciplines predate linguistics by centuries, each is deeply entrenched with terminology that differs from contemporary language studies. While Hebrew and Greek have rich academic heritages, modern students of these disciplines would benefit from subtle term alterations that match the consensus among language scholars. Hebrew, because of its triconsonantal root structure, provides a unique challenge in defining and differentiating root, stem, and conjugation. The seven binyanim (‘buildings’) form the basis of the Hebrew verbal system but opinions differ as to whether they should be considered stems or conjugations. This is compounded by the use of terms “preformative” and “sufformative,” which are generally unrecognized outside of biblical Hebrew instruction. The definition of root and stem in Greek is substantially less controversial. However, instructional textbooks discuss these terms minimally and thus miss the opportunity to demonstrate their usefulness in understanding the language’s highly inflectional morphology and prevalent use of compounding. We contend that progression toward standard linguistic definitions and use of the terms root and stem would ultimately benefit both teachers and learners of the biblical languages.