

This determination is usually made by:

- derivation, including etymology and verb root (when)
- usus loquendi, the study of the occurrence of a word in all places of its usage.
- understanding...the consideration of how the word has been translated into other languages

To a large extent we rely on the Dictionary-Concordance to do these things for us as few of us become sufficiently adept at research to learn all this for ourselves.

--When we have determined the "basic meaning" we seek out the various shades or aspects of meaning. In particular we look for the following:

477

Figurative, symbolic or technical usage of the term. Any occurrence of these may color our understanding of the word. The word "arm" is a good example. In 1 Sam. 2:31 there is a figurative usage in which the arm represents the family or the line of Eli ("I will cut off thine arm") while in Exodus 6:6 there appears to be a symbolic usage ("redeemed you with an outstretched arm") and in Psalm 44:3 a technical usage ("neither did their own arm save them"). Sometimes it is not easy to distinguish these but in all these occurrences a literal arm is obviously not the point in view. Therefore we learn something of the meaning of the word "arm" that extends the ideas connected with it beyond the literal stage.

We are naturally concerned with the context in which a word is used and must be careful to ascertain how it is used in consistent contexts.

And finally we must try to understand the intent of the writer in the selection of a word since we do not think he chose them in random or haphazard fashion.

All of which may lead you to join in the idea that words are not created with complexity but complexity is developed with them.

Pursuit of this sort of disciplined study will keep one from making wild schemes on the force of a word or a group of words and produce a better ordered concept of what a term means and how it is used.

3. Some cautionary remarks

- Avoid over-simplification. This is the tendency to make words fixed in meaning to the degree where variety of concept is not allowed. The standard idea is to insist that any one word always has the same meaning in every context. Some examples of this done to the harm of the understanding may be seen in Young's LITERAL TRANSLATION.
- Be careful with synonyms. There is quite a movement today to suggest that all synonyms are used merely for the sake of variety but be careful in both directions. I think there are very few true synonyms and words used for variety may have more force in the background of their usage than some would allow.