

Variations in Diction and Style

The Pentateuch covers a variety of subjects written in a variety of literary styles. This variety has produced differences in diction and style, which has been used to support the Documentary Hypothesis. Destructive critics presuppose that an author should write in a consistent manner, using the same vocabulary, words groups, and literary style. It is principally through this study of separating out the similar word groups, content, and styles that the various hypothetical sources Jahwist, Elohist, Deuteronomist, and Priestly were determined.

What exactly is diction and style? Briefly it is all the elements of a written document. The following are *some* brief examples and short explanation:

Sentence Structure – Do the sentences contain clauses or fragments? What is the word order?

Pace – Does the text focus on description or action and plot?

Expansive / Economical Diction – Is the text precise or elaborate? Does it have both? Why?

Vocabulary – Are the words technical, flowery, slang, colloquial, poetic, etc.?

Figures of Speech – Does the text use imagery, metaphors, similes, etc.?

Use of Dialog – Is dialog used to tell the story? What role does it play in the narrative?

Point of View – Is it first, second, or third person?

Character Development – How are characters introduced and developed? What is their function?

Tone – What is the author's intent and attitude? What does the mood reveal?

What diction and style clues did destructive critics find in the Pentateuch that led to their deduction of the hypothetical JEDP sources?

1. Vocabulary Differences. Vocabulary differences that destructive critics use to differentiate sources can take several forms. One form is the use of different words to name the same person, tribe, or location. The use of divine names, Yahweh and Elohim, is a prime example. Other examples include: Horeb / Sinai, Jacob / Israel, and Ishmaelites / Midianites.

Another form is found in word grouping or phrases; some words are only found in association with certain words. For example, in Genesis 1, the word "create" is found in association with "Elohim". In contrast, "create" is absent in Genesis 2 when the divine title "Yahweh" is employed.

Problems with this evidence

The problem for destructive critics has always been the subjective basis of their source determination. Their use of vocabulary differences for source determination has been inconsistent. For instance, the hypothetical Jahwist source, defined by its use of Yahweh, may have the divine name "Elohim" in parts of it, and the hypothetical Elohist, defined by its use of Elohim, may have the divine name "Yahweh" in parts of it. And there is the other problem when the term "Yahweh Elohim" is used together.

Variations in Diction and Style (page 2)

Furthermore, destructive critics fail to take into consideration the context of the passage, or synonyms of Ancient Near Eastern literature, or the presence of a literary device such as parallelism, which could easily account for differences in vocabulary (for example, see *The Significance of Divine Names* or *The Selling of Joseph*).

In another example using an ancient extrabiblical manuscript, the text of Merenptah's *Israel Stela* provides two additional names for Egypt: Kemit and Tameri, and five names for Memphis: Mennefer, Ineb-hedj, Inbu, Ineb-heqa, Hatkup-tah. Yet despite these multiple names for one location, not one scholar has suggested that the stela was created using multiple sources. (1)

Finally, the existence of vocabulary differences has been noted in extrabiblical texts whose single authorship is beyond doubt. (2)

2. Style and Content Differences. Difference in the literary style and its contents is another criterion that destructive critics have used to support their hypothetical source divisions. One example of stylistic differences is examining the literary style.

J is seen as a histo-biographical narrative of people and tribes; its theology focuses on man and describes God anthropomorphically.

E is seen also as a histo-biographical narrative but it presumes the division of the Israelites and focuses on Joseph and northern matters; its theology is on more religious and moralistic concerns.

D, essentially the book of Deuteronomy, is seen as comprised of speeches and sermons about the covenant with God; its theology is focused on the unique position of Israel chosen by God.

P, on the other hand, is seen as having a more technical content focused on chronology, temple regulations, record keeping, statistics, and genealogical lists and pertain more with issues of priesthood.

Redactors are the hypothetical editors that destructive critics use to explain how J, E, D, and P were creative integrated into the Pentateuch. Redactors are also used to explain the inconsistencies and problems with the Documentary Hypothesis.

Problems with this evidence

From a literary perspective, arguments based on style are not always conclusive. For instance archeology has found that variation in style was common in the Near East.

The Biography of Uni (Egypt 2400 BC) was a narrative with summary statements, a victory hymn, and two different refrains repeated at varying intervals. (3)

The royal inscriptions of Urartu kings (800-700 BC) contained a variety of writing styles: a fixed style when referring to the god Haldi, a different literary style when referring to the king, first person narrative of conquests, and statistical information about the Urartu forces, prisoners, and spoils of war. (4)

Differences in diction and style do not necessarily mean that there are different authors; they could easily reflect the natural differences between different subject matter and carry their own distinctive vocabulary and style.

3. Theological Differences.

Among content differences, destructive critics have used theological differences as another means to differentiate sources. Some have taken this further to suggest that the hypothetical JEDP sources, together with their hypothetical dating, reflect the changing socio-theological changes in Ancient Semitic culture. For instance Wellhausen saw three views of religion from the JEDP sources:

1. **J** and **E**: natural religion with primitive worship.
2. **D**: Prophetic religion with ethical consciousness.
3. **P**: Priestly religion with ceremonial ritual.

Wellhausen postulated that the Pentateuch pointed towards an origin of animism (the worship of inanimate objects and nature with the belief that they have a spiritual life or a living soul) to henotheism (the worship of one god without denying the existence of other gods) to monotheism (the worship of one god and denying the existence of others).

Problems with this evidence

Wide acceptance of the Documentary Hypothesis was due largely to Wellhausen's superb presentation of how Hebrew religion developed. However, the evolutionary development of the Jewish faith has no evidence or factual basis. Modern archeology and a comparative study of Ancient Near Eastern literature found that animism disappeared centuries before the patriarchs appeared. Furthermore anthropologic studies of pre-literate cultures essentially found that all cultures had a belief in a supreme god (among lesser gods); animism was a very rare exception.

Israel had always exhibited monotheism. But it is its government's embrace of monotheism and transforming into a theocracy that marks the Hebrew culture as very unique. This unusual theocracy existed while being surrounded by neighboring cultures who believed in polytheism and whose government was independent of theology. There is no evidence that the Hebrews invented, evolved, or borrowed monotheism.

Destructive Critics also see theological differences in hypothetical sources pointing to the evolution of worship from decentralization (J is unaware of centralization and D calls for centralization) to centralization (P assumes it).

Problems with this evidence

In view of Exodus 20, worship was indeed decentralized.

Exodus 20:22-24

22) Then the LORD said to Moses, "Thus you shall say to the sons of Israel, 'You yourselves have seen that I have spoken to you from heaven. 23) 'You shall not make other gods besides Me; gods of silver or gods of gold, you shall not make for yourselves. 24) 'You shall make an altar of earth for Me, and you shall sacrifice on it your burnt offerings and your peace offerings, your sheep and your oxen; in every place where I cause My name to be remembered, I will come to you and bless you.

Variations in Diction and Style (page 4)

However, when read in context, the call for centralization of worship in Deuteronomy 12 is not significant for evolution. Instead, as in Deut 12:10, centralization was to occur when the Israelites reached the Promised Land and achieved peace and security. (5)

Deuteronomy 12:1-14

1) "These are the statutes and the judgments which you shall carefully observe in the land which the LORD, the God of your fathers, has given you to possess as long as you live on the earth. 2) "You shall utterly destroy all the places where the nations whom you shall dispossess serve their gods, on the high mountains and on the hills and under every green tree. 3) "You shall tear down their altars and smash their sacred pillars and burn their Asherim with fire, and you shall cut down the engraved images of their gods and obliterate their name from that place. 4) "You shall not act like this toward the LORD your God. 5) "But you shall seek the LORD at the place which the LORD your God will choose from all your tribes, to establish His name there for His dwelling, and there you shall come. 6) "There you shall bring your burnt offerings, your sacrifices, your tithes, the contribution of your hand, your votive offerings, your freewill offerings, and the firstborn of your herd and of your flock. 7) "There also you and your households shall eat before the LORD your God, and rejoice in all your undertakings in which the LORD your God has blessed you. 8) "You shall not do at all what we are doing here today, every man doing whatever is right in his own eyes; 9) for you have not as yet come to the resting place and the inheritance which the LORD your God is giving you. 10) "When you cross the Jordan and live in the land which the LORD your God is giving you to inherit, and He gives you rest from all your enemies around you so that you live in security, 11) then it shall come about that the place in which the LORD your God will choose for His name to dwell, there you shall bring all that I command you: your burnt offerings and your sacrifices, your tithes and the contribution of your hand, and all your choice votive offerings which you will vow to the LORD. 12) "And you shall rejoice before the LORD your God, you and your sons and daughters, your male and female servants, and the Levite who is within your gates, since he has no portion or inheritance with you. 13) "Be careful that you do not offer your burnt offerings in every cultic place you see, 14) but in the place which the LORD chooses in one of your tribes, there you shall offer your burnt offerings, and there you shall do all that I command you.

As in most cases, the destructive critic's evidence supporting this evolution of worship was born from taking content out of its context.

Variations in Diction and Style (page 5)

The following is a table summarizing the differences in vocabulary, style, content, and theology between the hypothetical sources:

Source	Jahwist	Elohist	Deuteronomic	Priestly
Vocabulary	YHWH – the covenant name of God Sinai	Elohim – the generic name of God Horeb instead of Sinai	YHWH – the covenant name of God	Elohim – the generic name of God
Content	-Emphasis on Judah -Personal biographies -Interest in ethics and theology but not sacrifice or ritual	-Emphasis on Northern Israel -Objective approach in narration and interested in sacrifice and ritual	-Expounds on the covenant with God -Emphasis on centralization of worship: bring all sacrifices and contributions to Jerusalem	-Emphasis on Judah -Has lists, regulations, and genealogies
Literary Style	Narrative	Narrative	Narrative / Legal	Narrative / Legal
Theology	God is described with human attributes and communicates verbally with man	God communicates through dreams and visions		
Dating and Location (hypothetical)	Written about 850 BC in the Southern Kingdom	Written about 750 BC in the Northern Kingdom	Written about 625 BC	Written about 500-450 BC

In the process of understanding the Documentary Hypothesis and criticism by destructive critics, there are several facts that must be kept in mind:

1. There has been a failure among destructive critics to reach a consensus on the constitution of the hypothetical JEDP sources.
2. There are hundreds of ancient manuscript copies of the first five books of the Bible, which are in the form that we have today. However, there has been no copy or fragment of the hypothetical JEDP sources ever found.
3. There is no extrabiblical record or mention of the hypothetical JEDP sources, of redactors, or of the editorial process in the development of the Pentateuch as hypothesized by destructive critics.
4. The lack of the above evidence and the failure to consider the literary unity of the Pentateuch is another piece of evidence that higher criticism and the Documentary Hypothesis are based on subjective notions and without scientific basis.

References:

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3. Kitchen K, *Ancient Orient and Old Testament*, Chicago, IL:Inter-Varsity Press (1996), p.125.
4. Ibid.
5. Dillard RB, Longman III T, *An Introduction to the Old Testament*, Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan (1994), p.46.