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The Semantics and Translation of Technical Terms: A Case Study on ἀπόστολος

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Abstract

Key biblical terms present one of the greatest challenges in Bible translation, due in part to their theological significance and deep integration with the biblical cultures in which they were used. This paper posits that a linguistic study of technical terms, a linguistic classification that has not received much focused attention, reveals useful insights that can be applied to the translation of key biblical terms. Drawing from both classical and cognitive models, it presents an overview of the semantic features of technical terms, namely their linkage to discrete categories and exclusivity to a particular cultural group. Important diachronic and pragmatic considerations are also discussed. A case study on the Greek word ἀπόστολος provides application to the theory presented, arguing that a diachronic study of the technical category's origins influences an understanding of the concept, and providing an overview of the category structure. Finally, some practical suggestions for the translation of this term are provided, positing that longer-term strategies are necessary for the fullest understanding of a technical term.

1. Introduction

Anyone who has spent time reading an academic book or article has encountered an unfamiliar word, or even more confusing, a familiar word that does not seem to mean what it would normally mean. An example of this comes from general and cognitive linguistics, fields relevant to this study. The literature frequently uses terms such as "frame," "domain," and "context." These terms often vary from their more general definitions, from their definition in a related subfield of linguistics, and even from the definition given by another author in the same field. This is just one manifestation of the flexibility and sometimes frustration of language. Any person or social group can select a word and use it for their own purposes, regardless of how others typically use it. The Bible is no exception to this phenomenon. The biblical authors used some words in technical or specialized ways, with the result that their meanings were in some way distinct from more general usages.

This paper explores the nature of technical terms from a semantic standpoint, gleaning insight from both classical and cognitive models. It also discusses this topic's relevance and application to the interpretation and translation of key biblical terms. Explanations and examples focus on New Testament terms, particularly those which developed after the advent of the church. Finally, a case study on the Greek word ἀπόστολος applies these principles.

2. The semantics of technical terms

"Technical term" is a commonly used label in a multitude of fields, including general linguistics and biblical studies, but there have been few attempts to define it. Roger Cowley investigated what many have called "technical terms" in Hebrew, but came to the conclusion that the term is used without much apparent consensus to its meaning, and that it "is not a defined term of linguistic science" (Cowley 1986:24,27). It is doubtful that everyone who uses the phrase means the same thing by it. Nevertheless, it would be helpful to explore a linguistic description or definition of "technicity" (Cowley's term) as its features are in some way related to biblical key terms. Furthermore, Barr and Silva emphasize an important distinction between

technical and nontechnical terms, to the effect that some of the exegetical methodologies they generally reject can in their view be legitimately used if a word has become technical. This section will summarize two basic features of technical terms, drawing from both classical and cognitive theories. It will also outline some important diachronic and pragmatic considerations.

2.1. First feature: specific to a cultural model

While "technical term" may not be a technical term itself, it does have a general meaning that most would agree with. The New Oxford American Dictionary (NOAD) defines the word "technical" in this way: "of or relating to a particular subject, art, or craft, or its techniques." Cowley states nearly the same idea in more linguistic terms, describing a technical term as "characteristic of a province/register/sphere/field/domain." Barr would also concur that technicity is linked to a particular domain. He gives the example of a term being technical *to* religious life (Barr 1961:249).

However, there is more to the definition. It is not just placement in a semantic field that makes a word technical. No one would say that "rain" is a term technical to the domain of "weather," because weather is a domain of which virtually every human has some experience and knowledge. Rather, technical terms occur in domains that only certain people have experienced, with the result that only those people can really understand what the term means. Another part of NOAD's entry for "technical" reflects this reality in its definition of the word in collocation with an article or book: "requiring special knowledge to be understood."

One way to explain this exclusivity is through the notion that our conceptualizations are informed by certain kinds of knowledge bases. Taylor says, "Any conceptualization or knowledge configuration, no matter how simple or complex, can serve as the cognitive domain for the characterization of meanings" (Taylor 1995:84). The knowledge bases most relevant to this study are cognitive models, defined by Ungerer and Schmid as knowledge bases which "cover all the stored cognitive representations that belong to a certain field" (Ungerer and Schmid 1996:47). These are very similar to what Taylor calls frames, "configurations of culture-based, conventionalized knowledge" (Taylor 1996:89).

By way of example, the cognitive model AT THE OFFICE might embed a number of contexts like 'writing emails' or 'board meetings,' in which sets of categories (concepts) interact. In the context 'board meeting,' the category TABLE may interact with the categories OFFICE and MEETING with the result that the prototypical table would be a long glossy table with high-backed swivel chairs all around it. Anyone without the cognitive model AT THE OFFICE will not pick up on the interactions between categories in contexts embedded within that model. Instead, they may try to understand them through models that do exist in their mind, even if they are inaccurate (Ungerer and Schmid 1996:49). In the office example, a person completely ignorant of an office setting may picture the table in an office scene as a dining table.

Cultural models are a closely related concept, described by Ungerer and Schmid as "cognitive models that are shared by people belonging to a social group or subgroup" (Ungerer and Schmid 1996:50). Technical terms are specific to cultural models. To give a biblical example, the early church would have developed a model like IN THE CHURCH, which embedded contexts like 'praying,' 'living in fellowship,' and 'submitting to authority.' In this third context, concepts like DEACON would have a unique meaning as they interacted with other categories in that context. However, those outside of the early church experience would not have understood this new meaning, and may have wrongly assumed διάκονος to refer to some kind of assistant or intermediary, a meaning more in line with their own cultural model.

NOAD rightly recognizes the exclusivity that exists in the use of technical terms. For this reason, it provides subsenses in its entries for such terms, labeling them as specific to domains (cultural or cognitive models) like computing, law, mathematics, philosophy, religion, sports, etc. (Stevenson and Lindberg 2010:x,xv,xvi). In fact, one of the primary aims of this dictionary is "to break down the barriers to understanding specialist vocabulary." Defining these types of terms requires access to the cognitive and more specifically, cultural models in which they are used.

2.2. Second feature: linked to a discrete category

Silva offers a concise summary of this feature: "Technical or semitechnical terms refer to or stand for defined concepts or ideas" (Silva 1994:107). This description goes against the grain of the current preference for prototypes, where categories are characterized by fuzzy boundaries, and whose members are related through family resemblances rather than through a set of necessary and sufficient conditions. A technical term points to an atypical category that *does* have clear boundaries, fitting better into a classical paradigm of discrete units defined by sets of necessary and sufficient conditions, or in Nida's terminology, diagnostic components (Nida 1979).

This is not unprecedented. Ungerer and Schmid remark, "In a mathematical or scientific context, the logical or classical view comes into its own. In such a context…categories can be established as clear-cut and homogenous categories by an act of definition. In other words, the classical paradigm of categorization has a wide field of application wherever there is a need for precise and rigid definitions…And there is no reason why the discrete categories of science and the everyday prototype categories should not coexist in the mental lexicon and even influence one another" (Ungerer and Schmid 1996:40).

Taylor describes discrete and prototype categories in terms of expert and folk categories, expert categories being "defined by the imposition of a set of criteria for category membership." He says, "Expert categories…have been specifically created…such that the relevant experts are competent to say whether, and on what grounds, any particular instance is or is not a member of the category…The definitions serve to eliminate the fuzzy edges from the categories, giving them the status of technical, rather than merely pre-theoretical constructs" (Taylor 1996:72).

Another helpful way to look at this is through the lens of hierarchical categories. Cognitive studies have revealed that in a taxonomic hierarchy, categories somewhere in the middle at the basic level, where we "achieve an ideal balance between internal similarity and external distinctiveness," are the most cognitively simple (Ungerer and Schmid 1996:67). This is also the level at which prototype effects are most noticeable (Ibid., 72). Something different happens at the superordinate and subordinate levels, where "generalization proceeds 'upward' from the basic level and specialization proceeds 'downward' (Lakoff 1990:13). Subordinate categories are the realm of technical terms. These categories have an expanded list of specific features with a specifying function (Ungerer and Schmid 1996:88,96). Such terms do not leave much room for prototypes, as their members have such a high degree of internal similarity.

2.3. Diachronic considerations

Technical terms are a result of two types of semantic change that fall under semantic conservatism, a type of change that is the result of nonlinguistic factors (Silva 1994:78–79). First, substitution occurs due to historical changes affecting the world of the speakers of a language. Silva quotes Stern in describing this type of change: "The causes of substitution lie in the fact that referents change and that we require new names for them; these we get, in the present case, not by coining a new word, but by placing the referent in some known category, denoting it by the same name" (Silva 1994:80). In cognitive terms, this is called prototype shift. Over time, the category structure remains unchanged, but changes in the world result in the prototype shifting (Ungerer and Schmid 1996:264). Second, specialization occurs, resulting in a subordinate category with clearer boundaries and lessened prototype effects. According to Silva, "These are the terms that become technically charged at times, so that they serve as 'shorthand' for considerable theological reflection" (Silva 1994:77).

There are two notable ways in which this type of semantic change occurred among Koine Greek speakers with a Jewish or Christian background. First, many terms came to substitute their general meaning with one corresponding with the meaning of an equivalent Hebrew word. This change was triggered by the LXX, as Hebrew words were translated into Greek. Over time, the meaning of the Greek words was replaced by the meaning of the Hebrew terms. Discovering the meaning of such terms, then, depends on a study of the Hebrew concept that became attached to that word, in addition to a lexicographical study of the word in Greek usage (Silva 1994:80). A particular word was chosen to carry a new meaning because the category it represented at the time probably had some key similarities to the Hebrew word.

Second, some technical categories developed within the first century, substituting pre-existing concepts with newer understandings. It should be noted that much scholarship within the last half century has turned against the idea that Christianity semantically altered the meaning of words, but this type of change is a valid exception. Even Barr, who spoke strongly against Christianity's influence on the Greek language, said, "The extent to which words received 'new content' is to a large extent related to the degree in which words became technical" (Barr 1961:249). As with words whose meanings were substituted with Hebrew concepts, these words also require a combination of lexicographical and historico-conceptual study in order to achieve the fullest understanding.

One obvious but important point to note is that semantic change does not occur overnight. A term becomes technical through a gradual process that we might call "technicalization," in which two aspects of the term slide on a continuum: the fuzziness of the category (specialization), and the extent to which nontechnical senses exist alongside the technical senses (substitution). Most technical terms used by the New Testament authors were still on their way toward full technicalization. In the middle of the first century, words like ἐκκλησία and ἀλήθεια were frequently used in a technical way, but there is still plenty of evidence of nontechnical uses.

2.4. Pragmatic considerations

Due to the gradual nature of technicalization, many Greek words were not technical in every occurrence. For this reason, it would be better to use the label "technical sense" when referring to specific examples of technicity. Barr agreed that "many of the most important words of the NT were not technical unambiguously, but only in certain syntactical combinations" (Barr 1961:249). At a particular time, a term may point to multiple cognitive categories, some with a degree of technicity, and others with a degree of fuzziness. These categories can even take the form of expert and folk definitions of the same entity (Taylor 1996:73). How would these two categories relate to one another, and how would one differentiate between a technical and a nontechnical usage? Answering these questions is of great importance in interpreting these terms.

"Context" in the framework of cognitive linguistics provides some helpful insights here. Ungerer and Schmid define context as "a cognitive representation of the interaction between…concepts" (i.e. cognitive categories within a model) (Ungerer and Schmid 1996:47). There is ample evidence that the structure and qualities of cognitive categories can shift when used together with other categories. This shift can take different forms. According to Ungerer and Schmid, "Context can change the weight of attributes that seem to be relevant for a certain category…The result is that previously peripheral examples are equipped with large bundles of heavily weighted attributes and turned into good examples or even prototypes, while well-established good examples are reduced to the status of marginal members" (Ungerer and Schmid 1996:45). Additionally, context may reduce the size of the category structure.

Lakoff illustrates the dependency of categories on pragmatics in his discussion on hedges, defined as "linguistic expressions which speakers have at their disposal to comment on the language they are using" (Taylor 1996:76). English expressions like "strictly speaking," "so-called," or even the use of quotation marks can function to shape category boundaries by including or excluding central members, removing the fuzziness for a category, etc. A particularly relevant hedge for this discussion is the word "technically," which serves to define a category by classical principles (Taylor 1996:80).

One strategy that is very common in the New Testament is the addition of a definite article to trigger the technical category linked to a word, instead of a more general counterpart. Words like βασιλεία, ἀλήθεια, and ἐυαγγέλιον are frequently used with the article to denote a well-defined category with clear boundaries, with the result that there is only one possible referent.

Sometimes instead of an article or a hedge triggering a technical sense, it is a broader aspect of the text, such as the social situation in which the word is used. Most occurrences of ἐκκλησία in the New Testament point to the Christian church (i.e. a community of believers), because the word is used in situations where the audience is a church, and the topic at hand recalls a church-related cultural model. In Acts 19:32, however, ἐκκλησία clearly points to a diverse assembly of people. We know this because it occurs in a situation in which the referent of ἐκκλησία is clearly not a Christian gathering (Acts 19:23–31). The situation alters the

cognitive category because it recalls a different cognitive model. It is only in the model of church life that the word takes on its technical sense.

Even when a technical sense is clearly triggered by pragmatic factors, there is another potential complication: there may be more than one possible technical sense. An example from linguistics is the word 'reference,' for which there are numerous definitions, many of them incompatible with one another.[1] In order to determine what an author means by this term, one must look for either an explicit definition, look to the context, or consider what is known about that author to piece together which definition is in mind. The same can be true for biblical technical terms. The same term could be used in different places, even by the same author, to refer to two distinct or overlapping categories. It would be a mistake to assume that whenever a term is used technically, it always points to the same technical sense. For example, the word γραφή, another word whose technical sense is often triggered by the definite article, most often refers exclusively to the Old Testament Scriptures, but there is evidence that the category in Peter's mind had shifted to include the writings of Paul (2 Peter 3:16). In such cases, even broader pragmatic considerations must be taken into account, and the exegete must be guarded against illegitimate totality transfer.

3. Significance for interpretation of NT technical terms

In summary, a technical term could be defined as a word that when used in certain contexts, links to a discrete cognitive category that is part of an exclusive cultural model. Barr and Silva's descriptions of technical terms differ somewhat from this conclusion in one significant way. In their view, technical terms are highly referential, almost to the degree of a proper name. As a result, the meaning of the term will be found by analyzing the referent, rather than through structural analysis, that is, looking at its place in a paradigmatic system. This referent will often be a conceptual entity, so the meaning of the term may consist of a definition of some sort, or a set of necessary and sufficient conditions. Silva summarizes his position in this way: "Insofar as a word can be brought into a one-to-one correspondence with an extralinguistic object or entity, to that extent the word may be subjected to the concordance-based, word-and-thing, historico-conceptual method typified by TDNT" (Silva 1994:107). Silva would go so far as to say that in rare cases where the word is completely technical, the "word-and-thing" method should entirely replace a structural study of the word (Silva 1994:108).

Silva's assessment is not perfect. What he describes as "reference" is better described as sense if he is talking about mental content, but his analysis still works on many levels. He is correct in his assessment that a technical term can be defined by a rigid definition, and he rightly emphasizes the important diachronic component underlying the technicalization of a term. He also rightly downplays the role of paradigmatic relations in determining the meaning of technical terms. The problem in the methodology he proposes is that it comes with the assumption that it is clear when a word is technical and when it is not. (At least, he does not suggest a method for making this determination.) This creates the false impression that context is not very important when dealing with technical terms. He says, "Once the semantic range of a term has been narrowed, we are less dependent on the context when we wish to grasp the meaning of the word. That is, the word becomes more precise: a more or less definite referent…is automatically associated with the word itself" (Silva 1994:77). What Silva seems to miss here is that unless the term has become completely technical, the narrowing of the semantic range is itself the result of the usage of the term in a particular context. Technical and non-technical senses often coexist, and context is the key to determining which sense is being recalled.

Langacker describes meanings as "emerging dynamically in discourse and social interaction. Rather than being predetermined, they are actively negotiated by interlocutors on the basis of the physical, linguistic, social, and cultural context" (Langacker 2008:28). One important implication of this is that the boundary between lexical and encyclopedic information is a blurry one. There are ways in which words are conventionalized. Otherwise, communication would be impossible. However, the final determination of a word's meaning lies in the context in which it is spoken and the cognitive models it triggers among the

[1] For example, Palmer defines reference as the aspect of meaning that links the linguistic form to something in the nonlinguistic world. Louw, on the other hand, calls this "referential meaning," defining reference as the aspect of meaning that links the linguistic form to another linguistic element in the text.

interlocutors. Technical terms are not exempt from this pattern. While their meanings may be "predetermined" to an extent by some act of definition, they are still subject to negotiation as the social and cultural context changes. One's exegetical method in determining the meanings of even the most technical terms needs to be done with a sensitivity to the entire context in which it was written, just as with any other word. It may be that this leads to some kind of rigid definition or a set of necessary and sufficient conditions, but sensitivity to context is what leads to that conclusion.

4. Application to key biblical terms

According to SIL's Key Terms of Biblical Hebrew Project, a key biblical term is "a word or phrase which occurs in the Bible and which points to a conceptual network of high cultural (often religious) significance. Such key concepts usually have a broad and complex network of relationships with other concepts. Because of cultural differences, these concepts are often difficult to communicate accurately and clearly in translation."[2] This section will outline some areas of overlap between this definition of key biblical terms and the above discussion of technical terms. It will also provide some thoughts on translation of terms that fit into both categories.

4.1. Importance

As stated above, a key biblical term "points to a conceptual network of high cultural (often religious) significance." This is also true of technical terms. Recall the words of Ungerer and Schmid quoted earlier: "The classical paradigm of categorization has a wide field of application wherever there is a need for precise and rigid definitions." The need for such definitions arises when the concept is of some significance or importance to a particular social group. One of the biggest challenges facing the early church was the task of protecting the truth that had been entrusted to them by Jesus. There is no doubt that some technical terms came into use in the early church as one way of defining and preserving concepts of great importance.

One of the most important concepts in the New Testament was that which linked to the term ἐυαγγέλιον. The concept GOSPEL was the heart of the Christian message, that which people needed to understand in order to truly obtain salvation. According to BDAG, this nominal exclusively points to "God's good news to humans," although people's understanding of this good news underwent change as the life and ministry of Jesus showed them its true nature. Jesus revealed it directly to Paul (Gal. 1:11), who labored to preserve its true and full meaning (Gal. 2:5). At times, Paul spoke of what he called a "different" gospel, which is really not another gospel at all, but a distortion of it (2 Cor. 11:4, Gal. 1:6-7). This word provided a concise and efficient way for people to speak of a very important category in their cultural model, but it also required effort to ensure that the category's boundaries remained firm.

ἀπόστολος was another important term that required a rigid definition. Because this word was used to refer to people to whom Jesus personally entrusted the gospel, it was important for clear criteria to be in place so that the wrong people could not distort the message. As with ἐυαγγέλιον, the definition of ἀπόστολος required defense. Paul had to defend his own apostleship. He also called out those who wrongly considered themselves apostles, labeling them ψευδαπόστολοι (2 Cor. 11:13). These are the kinds of terms whose definitions were extremely important to the message and mission of the early church.

4.2. Exclusivity

Paul's impassioned defenses of such key concepts are evidence that much effort was spent within the early church maintaining and preserving the category boundaries of certain words. It follows then, that anyone with no exposure to these people or their communications would not understand the rigid definitions they had established. If this was true of first century people outside of the church, then it is certainly even more true of people 2,000 years later who are even further removed from that culture. The difficulty of translating technical terms due to cultural differences between the original and receptor audience recalls the same difficulty described in SIL's definition of key terms.

[2] Andy Warren-Rothlin, personal communication.

4.3. Translation of technical key biblical terms

Due to the exclusive nature of technical terms, how can translations fully communicate these important concepts? The answer is that they cannot. Meaning exists in the mind, and when the necessary categories and cognitive models do not exist in people's minds, no word will suffice.

Therefore, a shift in expectations is necessary. While there is no instant solution, a longer term strategy can be adopted. Technicalization is a process. Some New Testament terms only developed their full technical meaning as the church grew and as new cognitive models and categories became established. Paul's writings are evidence of this process. His reason for writing was often to correct error, to set the record straight. For a receptor language group with no prior knowledge of these important concepts, a similar process needs to take place today.

The best starting point will be a rendering that already has as many of the necessary attributes as possible. In contexts where the church is well-established, that may be a word borrowed from a majority language. However, this will likely not be sufficient. Harmelink acknowledges that while the word and concept chosen to render a key biblical term may not include all of the encyclopedic information necessary for a full understanding of that concept, "missing contextual information can be supplied in a variety of ways to enrich the reader's encyclopedic information. For readers of the biblical text, exposure to the variety of contexts in which a word is used is one of the best ways to enrich the encyclopedic information" (Harmelink 2012:33). Supplementary helps like footnotes or glossary entries can also aid this process, as can preaching and teaching in a corporate environment.

Essentially, the language must undergo semantic change, to the extent that some words must become technical over time. In other words, people need to be brought into experience of the cultural model of Christianity. Only then can the fullest understanding take place.

5. Case study: ἀπόστολος

The Greek word ἀπόστολος is a good candidate for a case study on New Testament technical terms, because on the continuum of technicity it is considered "pretty nearly technical" (Barr 1961:249). Every explanation on the origins of the apostle concept requires some degree of hypothesizing. The simple reason for this is that the evidence is scant. Prior to the New Testament, attestation of ἀπόστολος is extremely rare, mostly occurring in classical Greek in the nautical domain. It occurs only once in the LXX (1 Kings 14:6), which may be a late variant reading. With this in mind, it is surprising to see that the word occurs 79 times in the NT, mostly in Acts and the Pauline epistles.

In light of the above discussion on technical terms, this case study will outline some of the challenges in identifying the cognitive model or models connected with the New Testament usages of the word. It will also outline the structure of the technical apostle category by outlining its primary components of meaning as evidenced in the New Testament and its conceptual origin. Finally, some practical suggestions for translation of this term will be provided.

5.1. Cultural models

Due to the important diachronic component to the development of technical terms, historico-conceptual study of a technical category can be insightful in determining which cultural models influenced its development. Because most of these terms do not come with a clear set of defining criteria, discovering the origins of the concept can provide important information regarding which components of meaning may or may not be present in its New Testament usage. The origin of the apostle concept has been debated in scholarly circles since the 1860's, but most of this debate can be summarized by outlining three cultural models that may have influenced the development of the concept: Christianity, Rabbinic Judaism, and Gnosticism.

5.1.1 Rabbinic Judaism

The longest and most widely held position in modern scholarship on the origin of the NT apostle concept dates back to an excursus in J.B. Lightfoot's 1865 commentary on Galatians. This position centers on an

institution found abundantly in rabbinic Judaism, that of the *šalîaḥ*, or 'sent-man.' The *šalîaḥ* has numerous similarities with the New Testament apostle: they both act with the authority of one who sent them, the focus for both was the relationship between sender and sent, and they involved religious duties. (*Šalîaḥ* was primarily a legal institution, but sometimes the nature of the commission was religious; see Agnew 1986:81).

This comparison is promising, but there is one major problem: there is no direct evidence for the *šalîaḥ* institution before the destruction of the Temple in A.D. 70. Because of this, scholars have attempted to trace indirect evidence of this institution to the New Testament, and even farther back. In the New Testament, the use of ἀποστέλλω and the nontechnical uses of ἀπόστολος preserve the connotation of commission present in *šalîaḥ*. The sudden appearance of the already well-developed apostle concept in the New Testament is cited as further evidence that the *šalîaḥ* institution predated the extant evidence (Agnew 1986:84). In the Old Testament, the substantive *šalîaḥ* is not present, but the verb *šlḥ* often includes a similar kind of commissioning. *Šlḥ* is also often used in relation to prophets, who some take to be a type of *šalîaḥ*.

More recent studies have shifted away from arguing a direct descent from *šalîaḥ* to ἀπόστολος. Rather, it is argued that both *šalîaḥ* and ἀπόστολος developed from the same Old Testament sending convention which used the *šlḥ*/ἀποστέλλω word group. They also argue that Paul would have been aware of a broader nontechnical sense of ἀπόστολος in addition to the technical sense (Agnew 1986:91,94).

This theory fits best with the position that Jesus himself founded the apostolic office. Lk. 6:13 and Mk 3:14, if an original reading, would seem to make this clear, as Jesus named or designated the twelve as "apostles." At this early stage, the apostle concept might have greatly resembled the *šalîaḥ* institution, and the concept would have evolved over the next several decades. Herron argues that there is an underlying unity underneath the varying conceptions of apostle in the New Testament, and he believes this is where it started (Herron 1983:106).

5.1.2 Gnosticism

Walter Schmithals has been one of the strongest voices in discussions about ἀπόστολος. Dissatisfied with other origin stories, he argues that there were gnostic communities in the time of the early church who had redeemer-figures, both heavenly and earthly types. He outlines numerous similarities between the earthly-redeemer and the New Testament apostle: they are members of a "spiritual community," their mission is global and eschatological, a sign of one's status is an ecstatic experience, and they have absolute authority (Agnew 1986:89). In addition to the similarities between the two figures, he also points out that the homeland of this redeemer figure is Syria, which is in his view where the apostolic office originated.

5.1.3 Christianity

Some argue that the apostle concept emerged independently from any previously existing office. It was a new office for a new institution (Agnew 1986:88). If this is true, then the foundation that does exist for this concept is the general meaning of ἀπόστολος evidenced only twice in Herodotus in the fifth century BC (Agnew 1986:77). In other words, only the components of envoy or messenger carried over to the New Testament usage of the word. The other components (authority, etc.) were inventions of the early church as that cultural model developed.

Most who hold to this view argue that the apostolic office was instituted after Easter, which necessitates a reading of the apostolic institution back into the Gospel accounts (Herron 1983:106). Brown seems to go along with this view: "The use of the term in all four gospels appears to be by the application of a term familiar at the time of writing but which was not necessarily current at the time when the incidents described happened" (Brown 1986:134–135). This does not necessarily mean that Jesus did not appoint his disciples as commissioning agents, but that he was not creating a new institution.

Alternative explanations for the institution's origins are many. Some argue that the addition of leaders outside of the Twelve required a new title. Some use Gal. 2:7–8 to argue for Peter's calling as the origin. Others argue that the term originated in Antioch, when Christian missionaries needed to authenticate their ministry (Herron 1983:107). Still others attribute the origin of the apostolate specifically to Paul. Most adherents of Pauline origin would argue a basic three-part progression. First, before Paul's conversion, the word

ἀπόστολος was only used in the general sense of messenger, and to refer to missionaries sent out by Christ. The Twelve would not have been considered apostles, as evidenced by 1 Cor. 15:3–9. Next, Paul altered this conception by branding himself as a special messenger, authorized by God himself to carry out his task. Later, by the second century, after the concept was more fully established under Pauline influence, it was transferred exclusively to the Twelve. In this view, Luke's influence played a large part in this later stage (Herron 1983:112).

5.1.4 Conclusions

The primary aim of this survey is not to determine which of these theories is correct. It is to point out that determining the cultural model the apostle concept came out of is important for the fullest understanding of the word in its technical sense. If the apostle concept was an entirely new invention of the early church, then the New Testament is the only source of evidence towards establishing the features of the category. However, if the concept evolved from a pre-existing institution, there is much to learn by comparing the two and charting its development over time.

One example that illustrates how historico-conceptual study can impact an understanding of this concept is the notion of apostolic succession, which fits much better within the framework of a Christian origin than it does with the *šalîaḥ* theory. If it is indeed the true origin of the apostle concept, the lack of succession in the *šalîaḥ* institution does not outright disprove apostolic succession, but it does cast doubts on whether the New Testament apostolate was intended to be passed down.

5.2. Defining criteria

In his assessment of ἀπόστολος, Herron (1983:119) comments, "It seems clear the early Christians were aware of an office or function of apostle which could be distinguished from an envoy in a general sense. The challenge to Paul's apostleship and his struggle to secure recognition for it is…good evidence that this circle was exclusive; and that it was possible, at least in principle, to identify an apostle on the basis of certain accepted criteria." This section will briefly summarize some of these defining criteria, or components of meaning, of ἀπόστολος in its technical sense.

A New Testament apostle was commissioned personally by Jesus (Romans 1:1, Galatians 1:1, Luke 6:13, Mark 3:14, 2 Timothy 1:11). He was a firsthand witness of Jesus (Acts 1:22–24, 1 Corinthians 9:1). He carried the full authority of Jesus (2 Peter 3:2). The authority component is bolstered if the *šalîaḥ* theory is correct, as the key component of the *šalîaḥ* figure was the dictum, "the one sent by a man is as the man himself" (Herron:1983:103). An apostle was authenticated by signs and wonders (Acts 5:12, 2 Corinthians 12:12). His commission was missional in nature, to witness to the gospel and the resurrection among certain people (Acts 4:33, Romans 11:13, Galatians 2:8). His job also included some administrative functions, including the distribution of resources to the needy within a Christian community (Acts 4:35–37, 5:2). Acts 1:25 suggests that apostleship was a recognized office, if διακονία is understood in that verse as a public service (BDAG). If one takes the *šalîaḥ* institution as the origin of the concept, it can be argued that apostleship was also an individual calling with a beginning and an end, not an office to be passed on to someone else when one's work was complete. Granted, Judas was replaced by Matthias as an apostle (Acts 1:20–26), but this was because the twelve apostles were symbolic of the twelve tribes, signaling that their message was the hope of Israel (Matthew 19:28). There is no other indication in Scripture that apostleship was to be passed on.

In some places, apostles were grouped together or contrasted with other offices, which provide more hints as to the nature of an apostle. Acts 15 groups the apostles together with the elders of the church in Jerusalem, suggesting that together they may have constituted some kind of authoritative, administrative body. Luke 11:49, referring to an unknown source, says, "I will send them prophets and apostles," contrasting with the "prophets and wise men and scribes" of Matthew 23:34. Here Luke is either using ἀπόστολος in a more general sense, or he is drawing a parallel between OT prophets and the Christian apostles as God's messengers. 1 Cor. 12:28–29 lists God's appointment of "first apostles, second prophets…" and other roles in the church. Paul appears to be identifying apostles as somehow preeminent over NT prophets, teachers, and those with other gifts. Paul also groups apostles and NT prophets together in Ephesians (2:20, 3:5, 4:11).

In these verses, the similarities between apostles and prophets are highlighted. They both function in some way as a foundation for the church, with only Christ as the cornerstone surpassing them in importance. They are recipients of revelation through the Spirit whose job it is to equip the church for ministry.

The criteria outlined above are very specific, and illustrate the kind of discrete category that is typical of technical terms. However, it should be noted that the technicity of the category structure varied between authors. For example, in almost all of Luke's usages of the word, he is referring specifically to the twelve apostles, those sent to the Jews, while the Pauline category is generally wider, including a larger group than the Twelve. The diachronic relationship between these two categories is debated. Some argue that the apostle category was first limited to the twelve from Jesus' initial establishment of the institution, then widened to include the emerging apostles to the Gentiles (Muller 1975:131, Rengstorf 1985:71). Others who argue that the apostolate originated at Antioch or that its origins were Gnostic would argue that the category narrowed over time to include only the Twelve (Ashcraft 1958:459, Agnew 1986:89). If true, Luke would have been a significant influence in that change.

5.3. Translation

It is difficult enough to wade through the uncertainties pertaining to this concept and its origins, but even if the answers were clear this would be a difficult term to translate. First, the category is very well defined, and it is unlikely that a word in a receptor language would even come close to communicating every component of meaning. Second, authorial and contextual differences influencing the category's structure must be considered. Third, renderings chosen for this concept have the potential to overlap significantly with other key terms, namely, ἄγγελος, προφήτης, and ἀπόστολος in its nontechnical sense.

In order to determine the best rendering, it should first be determined which components of meaning are not explicitly described in the text, which of them are, and which are most distinct from other related terms. Priority should be given to components that will not be as easily gleaned from the co-text, and those which will maximally contrast with related words, all while avoiding additional components that do not belong. In the case of ἀπόστολος, the most important components and those that would contrast well with related words would be that of being human, being sent on a mission, and representing Jesus with his full authority.

In practice, it can be difficult to find a rendering which communicates even these most basic components. Some ongoing New Testament projects in Nigeria illustrate this point. The Tangale West translation is currently using the word *anawutṭọn*, which is often glossed 'worker.' This kind of person is recognized as having an authoritative kind of role, and *Yesu* can easily be added where necessary to indicate the source of authority. However, the missiological component is missing. In Duya, a second project, translators initially used a similar rendering, *abi itser-Yesu*, 'worker of Jesus.' However, unlike the Tangale West rendering, this kind of worker does not carry any kind of authority. Therefore, the rendering was changed to *awe itser-Yesu*, 'messenger of Jesus.' While *awe* is more authoritative, the missiological element is still missing. In a third project, Akurumi translators have succeeded in communicating a missiological component with their rendering *atuma*, 'sent one.' However, *atuma* does not inherently carry any kind of authority.

Further complicating the matter, some renderings may distort the category by adding unwelcome components. In a fourth project, Gạmai, translators are considering the word *gạfaan* to render ἀπόστολος. They describe this type of person as someone close to a ruler, who carries out the orders of a king with the king's own authority. The authoritative component has much going for it here, but it appears to also include a political component. Differences between *gạfaan* and ἀπόστολος in their spheres of influence and the types of activities they engage in could present a problem in communicating the apostle concept precisely.

When compared to the narrow definition of ἀπόστολος in its technical sense, none of these renderings seem adequate. However, this does not mean they are poor choices. Taking into account the nature of technical terms, these renderings are likely good starting points for the fuller understanding that will come later. Over time, the renderings in biblical usage will likely take on a more technical meaning as people gain experience of the cultural model of early Christianity. In the Tangale West, Duya, and Gạmai languages, the chosen renderings may over time develop a missiological component. In Gạmai, the category associated with *gạfaan* may shift to include authoritative roles outside the political sphere. These renderings should not be evaluated on the basis of whether they communicate every component of meaning, but by their potential to accomodate

a more technical concept over time. If these renderings will facilitate the process of technicalization instead of hindering it, then they are good choices.

6. Conclusion

It is no surprise that some of the most important terms in the Bible are the most difficult to translate well. A look at the semantic nature of technical terms has revealed that their exclusivity to a particular cultural group and their linkage to very narrowly defined categories present significant challenges for their translation into other languages and cultures. Often, solutions to these challenges are short-sighted, operating under the assumption that a good rendering will result in an immediately clear and full understanding of the concept in question. Granted, a good rendering is a vital component of the translation process that will aid understanding and avoid unnecessary initial confusion. However, choosing a rendering is only a starting point. It should be chosen with an anticipation of how an understanding of the word or phrase might change over time. As people are exposed to it in its various biblical contexts, as they hear the relevant passages being preached in the church and study them on their own, and as they make use of any supplementary helps provided, their understanding of the cultural model of the early church will be expanded. Over time, the chosen rendering will take on a more narrow technical sense in its biblical usage, communicating more fully and accurately to people. In short, the challenges of technical terms can be overcome with historically informed exegesis, a carefully chosen rendering, and a longer-term view of communicating biblical truth through translation.

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