

3. The role of culture in translation

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Understanding the influence of culture on the production, understanding and communication of the Scriptures is of course a fundamental concern of Bible translators. Books such as Nida (1954), Smalley (1967), Nida and Reyburn (1981), Wendland (1987) and van der Jagt (forthcoming) indicate the ongoing concern to understand the cultural dynamics of translation. Consultants with little background in cultural studies would benefit from reading through these works in the early stages of their training.

Works such as these indicate the pervasiveness and depth of implicit knowledge and values within a culture and how cultural frameworks influence the understanding of and communicating about materials originating from other cultures. The task of cross-cultural communication involved in Bible translation is especially daunting in view of the multiplicity of cultures involved. One translation project might involve:

- The culture of the text, different in different parts of the Bible, but more or less definable for any specific passage;
- The culture of translation consultants, often outsiders to the cultures they work with, and usually having had their attitudes toward and understanding of Scriptures filtered through western academic experience and training;
- The culture(s) of the language(s) used in communication between consultants and translators (for example, the Hispanic culture in Latin America);
- The culture(s) of the translator(s);
- Neighboring and national cultures of the translators that differ from those mentioned above.

In the first part of this chapter, we give an overview of David Katan's (1999) introduction to culture and translation and briefly discuss George Lakoff's (1987) study of psychological and cultural influences on the categorization of experience. In the second part of the chapter, we consider how various lexical items are framed within a culture and how the cognitive mapping of lexical relationships overlap and diverge between cultures. We look briefly at some examples from contemporary cultures, then, in more detail, at two basic biblical notions.

3.1 Katan's *Translating Cultures*

The relationship between language (and therefore, translation) and culture has been discussed at length by linguists, social scientists, and philosophers of language for many years now. The most famous of these earlier discussions was centered around the so-called Sapir-Whorf hypothesis, which claimed (in various versions and forms) that language was crucially culture-bound. An obvious implication of the strong version of this hypothesis is that nothing like real equivalence is possible in translation. But this idea has met with only limited acceptance among academics. In fact for a time the consensus

¹ I owe many thanks to those who have read and reviewed this chapter, especially Reinier de Blois and Ernst Wendland.

seemed to be building that linguistic expression could and did exist more or less independently of cultural considerations. But recently the pendulum of scholarly opinion seems to be swinging back to at least a weak version of the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis.

David Katan (1999) has documented this history and especially the recent shifts admirably in his book *Translating Cultures*. He organizes his discussion around the idea of cultural frames, and more importantly, around the concept of framing as an activity, important notions in the model of communication developed for our own book (see especially section 2.1.2). For Katan, culture itself is not simply a static frame, context or background against which linguistic expression must be understood. “Culture here is viewed as a dynamic process, constantly being negotiated by those involved” (p. 21). Linguists have long been used to the idea that words and their referents are matters negotiated by speakers within a given cultural frame. But students of culture are now saying the same thing about the frames themselves, and including linguistic expression itself as part of the activity of framing. This approach places culture (understood dynamically) at the center of any understanding of language and, thus, translation.

In the book’s first section (“Framing Culture: the Culture-Bound Mental Map of the World”), Katan uses several images from past discussion to describe various aspects of culture (layers, onion, iceberg). The point of each image is to distinguish the parts of culture that are readily visible (customs, behaviors, artifacts, etc.) from those which are hidden from view (values, norms, beliefs, etc). The latter presumably motivate the former, yet are precisely what is taken for granted by members of a society. The very unexamined nature of underlying values and beliefs is part of what makes them available for use as the underlying grid of culture. If these values, beliefs and norms were made explicit and debated, they could no longer be assumed when making culture-specific arguments. Thus a question such as “Is *that* any way to act?” loses its force as a reminder of accepted cultural boundaries if the participants treat it as the starting point for a discussion not of the behavior, but of the norm itself.

Of course norms, beliefs, and values are debatable and debated. But usually this kind of conflict happens indirectly, and often simply by means of establishing personal identity and group allegiance (pp. 62ff). Thus conflicting external behaviors are often not seen so much as arbitrary choices people make but rather as a matter of who they are and with whom they wish to associate. The bases of the cultural judgments made about behaviors are not likely to be subject to examination, nor are they likely to be made explicit. If someone does not agree with a judgment about a culture-specific behavior, it is assumed that either that person is ignorant of how to act properly, or flouting what “everyone” knows is the right way to act (“the rules”). In any case, such a person has placed himself outside the group, either by choice or by ignorance.

Katan (pp. 80ff) describes what he calls “lexical and conceptual gaps” mostly in terms of a mismatch between the differing cultural experiences of individuals. Either a specific term can be “missing” (such as a single specific term for “older sibling” which many languages have, but not English), or a concept itself (illustrated in my discussion of several Hebrew terms and their underlying concepts in section 3.5). The problems posed for translation in such cases are normally of a practical sort, since almost anything can be *explained* in another language, even if it cannot be “translated”, if translated means

saying the same thing in about the same space of words.² A more serious problem for translation is differing categorization/evaluation of the same or similar terms or concepts. Katan cites a study comparing what American college students associate with the term “United States” and what Mexican college students associate with “Estados Unidos”. The results indicated the problematic nature of using these terms as “equivalents” in translation:

For the North Americans, ‘United States’ has a fairly technical meaning in terms of ‘states’ and ‘America’; there is also a strong feeling of ... patriotism. For the Mexicans, ‘United States’ is anything but technical. The lexical item cues historic frames of exploitation and war, as well as comparative frames ... [representing] what Mexico does not have: ... wealth, power and development. (p.75)

Katan notes that these associations, while part of cultural patterns, are largely “out-of-awareness”, or part of the hidden aspects of culture, and therefore are difficult for translators coming from outside cultures to discover and take account of. It may be that a continuum of associations exists for linguistic expression from denotation (direct referent) through connotation and evocation (close associations with other referents, including feelings and values, and the stirring up of such feelings and values). As Katan states:

There are two points to be made here. First *how* languages convey meaning is related to the culture. Secondly, though languages *can* convey concepts from other cultures, people (including translators and interpreters) tend not to realize that their perception (through language) is, in fact, bound by their culture. (p. 86)

According to Katan (and those he cites), much of the cultural framework needed for understanding even everyday linguistic expressions is influenced by how humans tend to process sensory input. Research stemming from Gestalt theory indicates that frames and signs (including linguistic signs) interact dynamically in the creation of communication events. Signs evoke frames (“Ladies and gentlemen” signals a formal beginning to a public event), and frames are tried out provisionally (Is it a joke? Is he serious?) to interpret emerging signs. These processes take place very rapidly in communication, with incomplete data constantly being processed on the sensory side, and provisional frames constantly being constructed, discarded, and replaced on the cognitive side: “...sensory signals are encouraged to fit preconceptions, and our general strategy is to use the information gained from the sensory system as a cue for representation, rather than as the representation itself” (p. 91). Cloze tests (where every *nth* word is dropped from each sentence of a text to test comprehension) support this kind of hypothesis, as do various kinds of optical illusions. Katan refers to Brown and Yule’s (1983:64) “Principle of Analogy” operative in the processing of discourse, “suggesting that we interpret

² Not a definition we would want to argue for, but somewhat reflective of common expectations about translation. Two different suggestions for a definition of translation are given in section 2.2.3 and the conclusion to our book.

according to past experience of similar genres, and that we naturally expect things to conform to previous experience” (p. 91).

This happens at many different levels. For example, going through a fast-food drive-through window in the U.S. can be an unsettling experience the first time. What comes out of the speaker is usually nearly unintelligible, due to several factors (all-weather speaker system, second-language speaker of English taking the order, outside noise, etc.). But for those who have experienced the context before, the expectation is that the stream of sounds coming from the speaker will be “May I take your order?” or something very close to it. So we tend to hear and understand that, or at least pretend that we do. That “understanding” comes from knowing the context and what to expect, and *not* from actually hearing the linguistic components of the communication. But it is precisely that shared part of the semantic iceberg under the surface of verbal expression that is often lacking in cross-cultural communication. And it is a large part of what makes translation so difficult. Katan refers to the idea of mental maps or models which impose order on the raw data of the world we live in. These maps “to be useful ... must generalize, distort and delete what is real” (p. 92). This view of understanding and communication becomes crucial for his view of what happens in translation as well.

In the second section of his book (“Shifting Frames: Translation and Mediation in Theory and Practice”), Katan takes up the problem of cross-cultural translation directly, arguing that the notion of frames and framing (pp. 123-125) leads not only to an understanding of translation that moves beyond the “particularly influential” model of Nida and Taber (p. 123) but also to an understanding of the translator as a cultural mediator:

... an essential difference between a traditional translator and a mediator is the mediator’s ability to understand and create frames. The mediator will be able to understand the frames of interpretation in the source culture and will be able to produce a text which would create a similar set of interpretation frames to be accessed in the target reader’s mind. (p. 125)

In practical terms, Katan proposes to deal with the problem of cultural mediation in translation by various techniques, most of which have been employed by translators at some level for some time. He returns to his concepts of generalization, deletion and distortion at the perceptual level and applies them to translation. The crucial difference between Katan’s approach and that of earlier ones is that he includes and even foregrounds the context (frames) of culture with regard to what is being generalized, deleted, and distorted.³

In his third and final section (“The Array of Frames: Communication Orientations”), Katan portrays various aspects of cultural frames and attempts to classify them. He begins with the idea of cultural myths and their uses. He describes “real culture” as obscured by two layers of perception — one by natives of a culture about their own culture, and the other the perception by those same individuals of other cultures (pp. 161-167). Putting aside for a moment the difficulty in defining “real culture” from any objective point of view, Katan makes an important point. While U.S. citizens would by and large most likely classify their own culture as egalitarian, for example, an outsider might well classify it as hierarchically structured based on material wealth. Katan argues

³ The notion of translator as mediator is discussed in our book’s sections 2.1.1.1.2 and, linked to the notion of frames, 2.2.3.

that the role of a translator/cultural mediator is to correct these distortions, or to at least clearly communicate the differing points of view to the different parties involved in cross-cultural communication.

Katan claims that cultural myths are indirect expressions of cultural orientations and values. And it is these orientations that form the patterns of our perceptual maps and communicative frames. "It is our orientations which govern *how* perception is generalized, and deleted", Katan says, using the glass half-empty/half-full image as a well-known example of a basic orientation (p. 167). Again it is the part of the understanding or communication that is out-of-awareness, the part of the cultural iceberg that is underwater, which determines the explicit expression, and to which the explicit in fact refers.

Katan uses the ideas of Edward T. Hall⁴ and others to attempt to sort out some of the different kinds of cultural orientations of which he is aware (pp. 170ff). For the most part, Katan cites examples only from European-based cultures. But even there he finds many differences in orientation. Whether having to do with time, space, relations to others and the environment, or activity in general, cultures refer to the same data but with differing evaluations and associations. As most travelers well know, seemingly straightforward definitions of activities such as "being on time" or "standing in line" are anything but straightforward, and in fact are not activities as such at all, but evaluations of activities based on cultural orientations.

In attempting a preliminary taxonomy of cultures, Katan refers to a variety of continua (though he presents them as binary opposites) to describe differing cultural orientations. Thus such opposing orientations as high context/low context, formal/informal, implicit/explicit, polite/impolite, author/addressee, direct/indirect are discussed in terms of how they contribute to a culture's uniqueness and can make cross-cultural communication difficult. When attempting to produce irony, for example, different means are used in different cultures. In English the (Gricean) maxim of quality will be flouted (that is, the opposite of the truth will be said); but in Arabic the maxim of quantity (as well as quality) will be flouted for the same purpose, that is, the speaker will take a much longer time to say the opposite of the truth, and it is the length that gives away the irony (p. 212, referring to Hatim and Mason).

Katan ends his book with an attempt to deal with both non-verbal communication and cultural orientations to action. In so doing Katan recognizes that non-verbal communication is "...still not fully catalogued", and that it must mostly be related to linguistic expression to be analyzed in detail. As to the relation of non-verbal communication and action orientations to linguistic expression, he quotes Hasan's (1984) claim that "there is a culture-specific semiotic style ... a congruence, a parallelism between verbal and non-verbal behavior, both of which are informed by the same set of beliefs, values, and attitudes" (p. 235).

Katan ends his book by changing the question with which he began. He began by asking what the cultural *factor* looked like in the act of translation, and ends by suggesting that

culture is not a factor, but is the framework (the context) within which all communication takes place. However, the emphasis on the frame itself will depend on the level of the

⁴ See, for example, Hall 1990.

culture... the context of culture becomes more important as we move from technical to out-of-awareness uses of language. (p. 241)

This observation is critical for those involved in Bible translation, since the use of language in the Bible as well as about the Bible is so bound up with (cultural) values, beliefs and orientations.

3.2 Women, Fire, and Dangerous Things

In his groundbreaking book *Women, Fire, and Dangerous Things* (1987), George Lakoff uses concepts from cognitive psychology and linguistics to develop his own provocative approach to human thought and communication, beginning with the way in which people construct categories.

To begin with, he builds on the work of Eleanor Rosch and others concerning prototype effects. Researchers have noticed for some time that when humans categorize, there will often be a central member (or members) of the set that will be considered to be a better example than others, depending on the frame. He cites Wittgenstein: "Someone says to me: 'Show the children a game.' I teach them gaming with dice, and the other says 'I didn't mean that sort of a game'" (p. 17).

Lakoff goes on to state that "dice is not a very good example of a game". He seems to mean that dice is not a good example of a game that *one ought to teach to children*. Thus prototype effects are related directly to the frame one uses to categorize. An extension of the basic prototype idea is that of "centrality gradient", which means that the members of any (radial) set will fall along a line (or radiate) from "better" examples of the set to "worse" examples.

Another key to Lakoff's approach to categorization is the idea of "basic level structures": "a particular name, at a particular level of categorization, 'has superior status. While a dime *can* be called a *coin* or *money* or a *1952 dime*, we somehow feel that *dime* is its real name" (p. 31, citing Roger Brown). Other examples might include thinking first of *dog* rather than of *boxer* or *mammal*, or of *flower* instead of *petunia* or *plant*. These basic level structures seem to be a middle entry-level category, with room to move either up or down. Lakoff relates this phenomenon to human bodily experience with the world. That is, he believes that basic level structures have much to do with the human sensory interface with the natural environment (pp. 31-40). But again these structures are subject to frames, whether natural, cultural, or communicative.

One of the most counterintuitive notions Lakoff advances with regard to categorization has to do with family resemblances. Here he borrows his ideas from Wittgenstein and extends them.

Members of a family resemble one another in various ways: they may share the same build or the same facial features, the same hair color, eye color, or temperament, and the like. But there need be no single collection of properties shared by everyone in the family. Games, in this respect, are like families. Chess and go both involve competition, skill, and the use of long-term strategies. Chess and poker both involve competition. Poker and old maid are both card games. In short, games, like family members, are similar to one another in a wide variety of ways. That, and not a single, well-defined collection of common properties, is what makes *game* a category (p. 16).

Lakoff, developing notions such as Charles Fillmore's frame semantics, speaks of idealized cognitive models (ICMs). He uses the concept of the week as an example: "Our model of a week is idealized. Seven-day weeks do not exist objectively in nature. They are created by human beings. In fact, not all cultures have the same kinds of weeks" (p. 69). Lakoff proceeds to describe a very complex Balinese calendric system. But, he argues, ICMs also work at the basic level of lexical semantics. He takes up Fillmore's example of the term *bachelor*. He points out that while most people would think of this word as referring to an adult single man, it does not properly describe unmarried men in long-term live-in relationships, nor the (rare) case of an adult male raised outside of any contact with human society, or a Muslim man with three wives but not yet a (permitted) fourth, or the Pope: "In other words, *bachelor* is defined with respect to an ICM in which there is a human society with (typically monogamous) marriage, and a typical marriageable age" (p. 70). With this ICM (or cultural frame) in place, the idea of *bachelor* as an adult single man works rather well. It is the ICM itself that fits the world imperfectly, or more accurately, only fits well according to one set of cultural assumptions. Again, prototype effects (i.e. what is a good example of a *bachelor*?) are dependent on the frame within which a given concept is being considered.

But not all frames are such obvious cultural constructs as the ICMs Lakoff describes. Some are more basic to the way that humans interact with the world, though even here they tend to be culturally relative. Lakoff calls one such category of frame *image schemas*. One of his examples is the Japanese classifier *hon*. *Hon* is commonly used to classify long thin shapes, such as sticks, trees, rope, and so on. But it is also used to classify telephone calls, baseball hits, and ping-pong rallies. While one can easily see how the long-thin image can be extended to such cases (i.e. how the cases are *motivated*), it would be nearly impossible to predict such cases. Prototype effects combine with metonymic reasoning in unpredictable ways to form categories that make sense after the fact but which could never have been foreseen (pp. 104-105).

Lakoff finds other attempts to account for prototype effects lacking. In particular, he critiques theories based on *feature bundles*. These theories assign binary *properties* (symbolized as *features*) to words, for example, and attempt to map a semantic domain from the listing of such properties. A hierarchical ordering of the properties is what is supposed to explain prototype effects (some features are more salient than others). But as Lakoff notes:

Since they don't differentiate background from foreground, they cannot account for the Fillmore (1982a) *bachelor* examples...they cannot account for the effects that result from metonymic models...[they] cannot provide descriptions of the *types* of links...[finally] feature bundles cannot describe *motivated*, *conventional* extensions that have to be learned one by one, but are motivated by general linking principles (pp. 115-116).

Lakoff illustrates the main themes of his book with a case study of the word *over*. He uses diagrams to show the variability in the various components making up the meaning of *over*, such as *landmark* (shape, extent), *trajectory* (type of motion), and whether or not any *contact* is involved. These illustrations point out the similarities between as well as the distinctiveness of each of the various uses of the term (pp. 418-434). Some of his examples are:

The plane flew <i>over</i> .	The board is <i>over</i> the hole.
The bird flew <i>over</i> the yard.	The guards were posted all <i>over</i> the hill.
The plane flew <i>over</i> the hill.	I walked all <i>over</i> the hill.
The bird flew <i>over</i> the wall.	Roll the log <i>over</i> .
Sam drove <i>over</i> the bridge.	The fence fell <i>over</i> .
Sam walked <i>over</i> the hill.	The dog jumped <i>over</i> the fence.
Sam climbed <i>over</i> the wall.	The play is <i>over</i> .
Sam lives <i>over</i> the hill.	Do it <i>over</i> , but don't <i>overdo</i> it.
Sam is <i>over</i> the bridge.	Look <i>over</i> my corrections, and don't <i>overlook</i> any of them
Hang the painting <i>over</i> the fireplace.	You made <i>over</i> a hundred errors.
The power line stretches <i>over</i> the yard.	

It is hard to exaggerate the importance of the ideas presented in *Women, Fire, and Dangerous Things* and of their impact on research. Many of the problems discussed are due to the complex ways in which humans and cultures categorize, ways which Lakoff has helped us to begin to understand.

3.3 Night, sun and wine

Sentences such as the following indicate the difficulty of defining “night” in English.

1. She couldn't see a thing — it was night.
2. The meeting will be tomorrow night at eight.
3. The ringing of the phone woke me up in the middle of the night.

The first sentence above has dark — light in focus. The second focuses on time of day. And the focus of the third is awake — asleep. Any of these three foci could conceivably be listed as meaning number one in a dictionary, though usually the focus of sentence one is taken as representing the central meaning and the other meanings are taken as radial or secondary. But one only has to be in a place such as Alaska to recognize the limits of this approach.

A word by itself does not determine meaning, but rather the frames within which it is used. Just how strong these frames are can be shown by a rewrite of sentence 3:

4. The ringing of the phone woke me up in the middle of the night. In fact, it was two o'clock in the morning!

The simultaneous use of the a.m./p.m. system with “night” results in a *morning* which is still *night*. This would doubtless seem as strange to someone unfamiliar with these systems as does the ancient Israelite notion that a *day* begins in the *evening* to those outside that cultural framework. Further, the entire set of usages associated with time of day would have to be seriously reworked in cultures unacquainted with timepieces.

Going beyond denotation, “night” can and often does connote the other major meanings. Thus the meeting “tomorrow night at eight” may not be in the dark, but somehow the darkness is still in the background. Even in Alaska, “night” always has a bit of darkness in the background of its meaning: residents speak of the “long night” of winter and the “long day” of summer, for example. Nighttime is usually for sleeping; and even when it is light at 3 a.m., people working from 11 p.m. to 7 a.m. would say they

work at night, though one might wonder whether some of these associations are recent adaptations to the outside world.

Further, “night” can and does *evoke* a far wider set of meanings, though these are likely to be even more culture-specific than the more basic systems of organization outlined above. Thus feelings of loneliness or fear, or a spooky or ominous atmosphere can be evoked by the word “night”.⁵ Yet nights can also be balmy, tranquil, cool, quiet, peaceful, etc. For some cultures, night may be when spirits or wild animals are about, for good or for evil, and may evoke feelings and associations of which those outside that culture cannot even dream.⁶

Two other examples of the difficulty in mapping the cultural associations of what on the surface may seem to be uncomplicated terms are from Tzotzil. When the Spanish arrived in southern Mexico, the Mayan ancestors of the Tzotzil Indians were using the terms “holy father” (*ch’ul jto’tic*) and “holy mother” (*ch’ul jme’tic*) to refer to the sun and the moon, respectively. Catholic missionaries insisted that they drop the modifier “holy” (*ch’ul*) and simply use “father” and “mother” to refer to these heavenly bodies. Still many speakers continued to use the traditional full phrase.

Much later, in the 20th Century, Protestant missionaries arrived, and insisted on a further, more radical change. They introduced “day” (*ca’c’al*) for sun and “month” (*u*) for moon. As before, many speakers continued to use the former terms, both those introduced by the Catholics and the original traditional terms. Thus with the passage of time, there developed three distinct sociolinguistic usages:

Traditional terms for the sun and moon: “holy father”, “holy mother”;
Catholic terms: “father”, “mother”;
Protestant terms: “day”, “month”.

What was different about these terms was not what they referred to in the real world, but with which group the communication would be associated. In the end, Bible translators used notes to give recognition to the alternative expressions.

A different sort of cultural issue in Tzotzil involves the term for wine. The Tzotzils have always had a local drink (*pox*), but it is not made from grapes. Thus with the arrival of the Spaniards they borrowed the term *vino*. In time this borrowing came to mean any alcoholic drink, similar in usage to the English verb “to drink” without an object (“he drinks”). The problem for Bible translators came when they tried to translate the term as it appears in the Bible. In the local Tzotzil setting, social drinking was virtually unknown. If Tzotzils drink any sort of alcohol, it was and is widely assumed they do so to become intoxicated. Thus the use of *vino* would make all the passages in Scripture seem to be talking of situations in which the partakers were getting drunk. Yet no other terms seemed appropriate. One could use “juice of the grape”, but that had no

⁵ As in: the Gospel of John’s use of *en de nux* “And it was night”, nicely discussed by Gutt (1992:52-54) in terms of relevance theory and poetic effects; the infamous story-opener “It was a dark and stormy night”; or the idiomatic expression “work the graveyard shift” as a substitute for “... night shift”, meaning to work during the late night and early morning hours.

⁶ Even orthography can play a role in the connotations and evocations of words. Spelling “night” as “nite”, “nait”, “nayt” or “nīt”, etc., create different frames of interpretation, and depending on the rest of the context, can be used to mark various communication situations such as informal speech, dialect, idiosyncratic speech, or an academic paper.

alcoholic associations whatever. And the use of both terms would make it seem like there were two kinds of drink rather than two kinds of drinking. Again notes were needed to explain the cultural mismatch.

3.4 “Key”

Use of a term within a variety of frames makes discussion of its meaning complicated enough within a specific culture; how much more so when terms are compared across cultures. For most English speakers, the word “key” will most quickly be associated with the frame of entering a previously locked door. But this prototypical use of the word is extended to uses in other frames associated with, for example, pianos, computers, maps, codes, music, and problems. The relationship might be associated with size as well as access: a key is a small item enabling access to a relatively large one, such as a locked box or house, or by extension, a “small” detail enabling accessing to a “big” problem.

The frame for entering a house is of course shared by Spanish speakers and English speakers and it is easy to establish an intercultural link between “key” and “llave”. However, as always found out early in the process of learning a second language, a correspondence in meaning between terms of different languages in one situation does not entail their correspondence in other frames. *Llave*, but not “key”, can refer to the handle of a faucet or to a wrench. In more general terms, *llave* seems to be something you handle to open and shut things, or get them on and off. Unlike English, a different word (*tecla* “push-button”) is used to refer to piano or computer “keys”. There is a domain in Spanish having to do with access as such, but here the word is “*clave*” (related historically to *llave*, but now independent).

Figure 10 illustrates the problem. The prototypical use of “key” leads us to *llave* in Spanish, although the terms arguably belong to different domains: *llave* being an instrument for turning and “key” an instrument for enabling access. The place where a domain of use of “key” matches well with a domain in Spanish is where use of the English term is least prototypical — least like a key to a house or box: abstract tools of access. But Spanish uses a different term for this domain. Further, whereas key is both a striking tool and an access tool, Spanish uses two different terms for these domains.

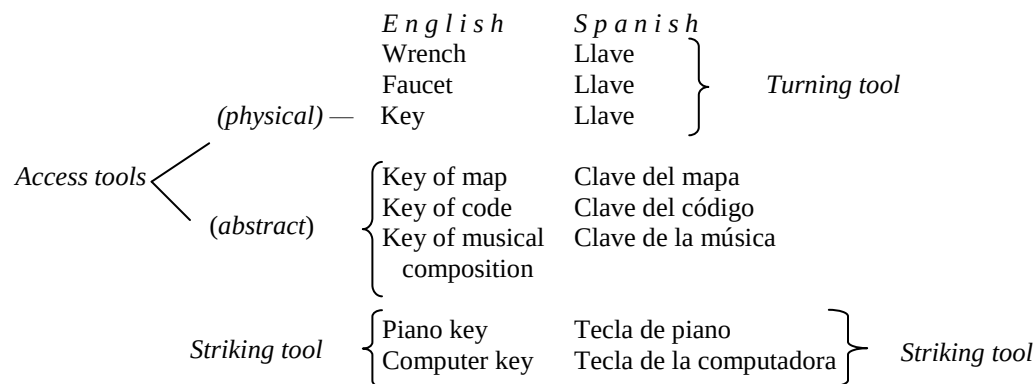


Figure 10. “Key” and “llave”: matches and mismatches.

These mismatches occur in European languages having many speakers in frequent contact with each other. The challenges to understanding how notions are related to each other can become even greater when cultures with relatively infrequent contact are involved:

For [the Osage Indians], the eagle is associated 'with lightning, lightning with fire, fire with coal, and coal with the earth. The eagle is thus one of the "masters of coal" that is, a land animal'. On the other hand, the chest of the turtle with a serrated tail represents the vault of the sky, and the gray line across it, the Milky Way, because 'the number thirteen has a mystical value for the Osage. The rising sun emits thirteen rays, which are divided into a group of six and a group of seven corresponding respectively to right and left, land and sky, summer and winter. The tail of this species of turtle is said to sometimes have six and sometimes seven serratures.' It was simple, but one had to be Osage to think of it. (Sperber 1975:25, citing Lévi-Strauss)

3.5 A map of some fundamental biblical notions

In the remainder of this paper, we shall consider how the notions of reciprocity and of frames and boundaries link a wide variety of biblical key terms, practices and perspectives.

3.5.1 Reciprocity

When someone utters the greeting "Hello!" in English, she will almost invariably receive "Hi!", "Hello!" or another expression from a limited and predictable set of responses. "How are you?" will likely receive a response like "Fine, and you?" This is an example of linguistic reciprocity. The principle of reciprocity extends through virtually all other areas of public and private communal life. The general structure of a given society, as conceived by members of it,⁷ will of course greatly affect the actual forms the principle of reciprocity take in any specific instance. Several key terms, and the textual frames of their occurrences, indicate how reciprocity was realized in biblical cultures.

3.5.1.1 *Tsedeq/tsedaqah*

Righteousness in the Bible has personal-dynamic aspects (doing right, being a right kind of person), but also legal-static aspects (state of "rightness" judged against an established norm). But what is central: the static or the dynamic? Or is there a center? A key text (though by no means the only one) in determining this question is Genesis 38.

In this text, Judah is seduced by his daughter-in-law Tamar, after refusing to give her his third son in marriage, in opposition to their cultural norms. Tamar dresses up like a prostitute, seduces her father-in-law, then makes off with his staff, cord and ring. As she had intended, she became pregnant from this encounter. When she is brought out to be stoned, Tamar shows everyone the items Judah had left her. When he realizes what has happened, Judah declares, "She is more righteous than I am." In other words, Tamar had fulfilled her obligation to Judah better than he had to her. In fact, she had done both things at once, as the point of their reciprocal relationship was to produce an heir in the lineage of Judah.

⁷ While it may not be possible to describe the structure of a society in objective terms, its members will have, to use Lakoff's expression, idealized cognitive models of the society. Members of some cultures may have an idealized model of egalitarian relationships, those of another may have idealized models of hierarchical or, more specifically, patriarchal relationships, as in biblical and many contemporary cultures.

This text is puzzling to many modern readers, whose ideas of what is “righteous” would by no means include the actions of Tamar, and for whom the obligations she felt she had to fulfill have no meaning. The fact that Tamar felt forced to carry out these obligations in a manner inconsistent with modern views of righteousness should not keep the biblical interpreter from understanding the term in its original contexts.

In Tzotzil of southern Mexico, translators struggled with the two terms in Spanish which had been used to translate *tsedaqah* and *tsedeq*. Neither *rectitud* “rightness, righteousness” nor *justicia* “justice” seemed to match well with Tzotzil lexical items or cultural notions.⁸ One could talk of being or doing good, but the idea of an abstract norm which rightness and justice bring to mind were simply not a part of the conceptual system of this language. What they did have was a term for someone who fulfilled his or her social obligations faithfully. This turned out to be a better match with the Hebrew notion than any terms we could provide from major languages.

This understanding of righteousness as moral obligation within a (hierarchically structured) cultural context of mutuality and reciprocity works extremely well in other biblical contexts also. And it interfaces with another important biblical concept: faith, trust, belief.

3.5.1.2 ‘emet/‘emunah/he’emin

In Genesis 15.6, Abram believes or trusts (*he’emin*) in God, and God considers it to be *tsedaqah*. “Belief” can refer to a static understanding of something. In the Genesis passage, “trust” better captures the reciprocal relation involved. God obligates himself to do something on Abram's behalf, that is, to give him a huge number of descendants. Abram reciprocates by trusting that God will do what he says, thereby indicating his respect for God's power and dependability. In other passages, a more active sense of ‘emet/ ‘emunah is evident: faithfulness, loyalty. This indicates another aspect of the reciprocity involved in the Genesis passage. In trusting God, Abram is implicitly loyal to him, and God recognizes Abram as having fulfilled his part of the reciprocal relationship in trusting and being loyal.

That loyalty is not merely obedience can be seen from the examples of Saul and David. The biblical writers depict David as often acting counter to prescribed norms, but as also being favored by God and by the people. Perhaps his continued and apparently genuine repentance after wrong-doing is what makes the difference.

Of course God is seen as always faithful or loyal. In this case it is not a matter of trust, since the more powerful one in the relationship does not *trust* the less powerful one, but rather lives up to his own commitments.

3.5.1.3 Go’el

This term is well understood by commentators but is often unsatisfactorily translated with an expression such as “near kinsman” or “close relative”. This indicates one part of the meaning, but not the relationship of power and responsibility evoked by the Hebrew term. A *go’el* at times will rescue an individual, or avenge him or her, or take restitution for a wrong done to someone under his protection (in a patriarchy, a *go’el* would certainly be a male). A *go’el* owed *tsedaqah* to the one under his protection, and

⁸ Cf. Stephen Voth's (2000) “Justice vs. Righteousness”, which develops the socio-cultural aspects of the terms in depth.

the protected one owed *emunah* to his or her *go'el*, as well as hoped for *emunah* from him. If a *go'el* showed *hesed* (translated as “kindness” in some languages), then one was truly fortunate.

3.5.1.4 *Hesed*

“Covenant love”, “relational faithfulness”, “commitment” are some of the many expressions used to translate this term. Sakenfeld (1985:131) defines it as involving:

1. Personal loyalty, not loyalty to a cause or idea;
2. Attitude manifested in action;
3. Offered to a person in need from someone able to fill the need;
4. No law against not showing loyalty of this sort, no coercion to show it.

However, its use in Isaiah 40.6 suggests that there may be a more basic meaning of “constancy” or “steadfastness”: “All people are grass, their *hesed* is like the flower of the field.” It is possible that the word means something like “commitment in a relationship” and that there is a sort of backwards metaphorical use here. But it is also possible that the basic lexical meaning is constancy, the usual Scriptural frame for its use being with regard to human relationships. In Isaiah 40.6, then, it has the same basic sense as in other passages but a different frame.

The above terms, frequently used to refer to God's special commitment to his people and to theirs to him, should be nearly always understood in the framework of reciprocal obligations, usually with the added component of hierarchy. They presume, as do many other biblical terms, contexts of social inequality. A person brought up in a culture teaching how to link idealized notions of egalitarianism and personal freedom may have a hard time processing the network of meanings suggested by the above terms, used in a society of hierarchy and social reciprocity. Hierarchical systems of mutual obligation are not what modern interpreters are used to, at least at an idealized or theoretical level. Recognizing mutual and reciprocal obligations where modern cultures are used to looking for and finding (only) rights takes practice. Experience with contemporary traditional cultures can help the interpreter of the Bible see various aspects of the biblical text which have tended heretofore to be overlooked.

3.5.2 Frames and Boundaries in Ancient Israelite Society: Holiness and Pollution in their Social and Religious Contexts⁹

When one tries to map the meanings of the concept “holy” (and “unholy”) in Scripture, two things become immediately clear: the underlying idea (separation) is quite simple, but the surface realizations (in the ritual, moral, and religious spheres) are many and seemingly varied.¹⁰ This leads one directly to the related semantic domain of clean and unclean.

⁹ The ideas in this section are based in general on Mary Douglas (1993, 1996a,b), Goffman (1974), Turner (1977) and van Gennep (1960).

¹⁰ One of the most obvious examples is that cult prostitutes (or perhaps “pagan” temple workers) can be called “holy ones”, as in Deu 23:17; 1Ki 14:24; 15:12; 22:46; 2Ki 23:7; Hos 4:14. More importantly, the subtle differences and underlying unity of such concepts of sanctification, consecration and purification point in the direction of a common mapping for these ideas at some level.

Most commentators have attempted to treat these as related but neatly categorized spheres of holy-profane-unclean, with rituals guiding the crossings between the different, contiguous spheres. The holy and unclean, in this interpretation, could never come in contact without disastrous results (for example, Nelson:1993:19). Although this kind of scheme seems to hold for much of the biblical material, it fails to account for such things as the biblical texts at Qumran being referred to as those “which defile the hands”. One would think it would be the other way around. Even in biblical material, there seems to be a general category of taboo which encompasses both the holy and the unclean, depending on the context. Thus for the purposes of this analysis, these various spheres will be treated together under the category of the preservation or violation of agreed-upon frames and boundaries, whether these frames and boundaries are considered symbolic or ontological.

Life in ancient Israel was understood as a strictly bounded existence, and these boundaries, whether at a social or religious level, were represented symbolically in a great number of different ways. The central thrust of these representations was the ritual preservation or, in the case of a “transgression”, restoration of the underlying religious-cultural frames and boundaries.¹¹ In the following sub-sections, a partial list of symbolic representations is given by category, following the general outline of the system as I understand it.

3.5.2.1 Time

The concepts of Primordial time and Eschatological time as opposed to historical time — or of cyclical versus linear time, form a boundary between the sacred and the profane. Some commentators have gone so far as to claim that in a significant sense God’s time (whether at the creation of the world or at its restoration/re-creation) is cyclical, human time is linear (Knierim1986:171-224; Nelson 1976). In the realm of human history, “Sacred time was manifested in the rhythmic cycles of holy Sabbath, new moons, the three annual festivals, and the ritual beginning of the new year ... ” (Nelson:1976:29). A good example of this conceptual duality with regard to time can be found in Genesis 1:14: “And God said, “Let there be lights in the firmament of the heavens to separate the day from the night; and let them be for signs and for seasons and for days and years.” Reflecting a notion of time more familiar to traditional cultures than to modern technological societies, the passage focuses first on the astrological, religious, *kairos*-timing of important events and only secondarily on the linear passage of time. The two concepts can be described as “historic” versus “historical”:

1. Historic
 - a. “signs”: portents, like the star of Bethlehem
 - b. “seasons”: religious festivals
2. Historical
 - a. “years” b. “days”.

¹¹ Yet at times the boundaries are intentionally violated. Van Gennep and Turner were the ones who popularized the idea that it was in the transitional states that both danger and the potential for gaining a new identity existed. Thus Jewish purification rites were to restore the old state/identity, but Christian baptism was a true “rite of passage” into a new state/identity (more analogous to the crossing of the Red Sea or the Jordan River).

3.5.2.2 Space

Horizontal boundaries such as River and Sea figure prominently in the biblical text. The boundaries of the tribes are also considered to be of great importance, as are the boundaries of Israel as a whole. Vertical boundaries such as high places, Sinai or Zion are repeated within the structure of the sanctuaries themselves, with altars and levels.

Sanctuaries represent the fundamental bounded space in religious terms. The fact that geographical landmarks (trees, rocks, mountains, etc.) are behind all the permanent sanctuaries reinforces the idea of a fixed boundary. The temple in Jerusalem was the idealized representation of the sanctuary.¹² The tabernacle, on the other hand, did not have the same spatial boundedness, yet was constructed so as to keep all areas carefully distinguished, and was ratified by the pillar of fire and the cloud. All these local representations were self-consciously referencing the distinction between heaven and earth, between God's dwelling and humanity's dwelling (cf. Exodus 15.17).

3.5.2.3 Creation

The idea of creation as the initial setting up of boundaries is pre-eminent in Genesis chapter 1. Chaos is the absence (Genesis 1.2) or destruction (e.g. the Flood) of order, or boundaries. These boundaries are not only physical (e.g. between water and land), but apply at every level. Thus Genesis 6.1-4 refers to the unnatural mixture, or boundary-crossing, of spiritual beings ("sons of God") and human beings ("daughters of humans"). An example of this boundary system in nature can be found in Deut 22.9: "Do not plant two kinds of seed in your vineyard; if you do, not only the crops you plant but also the fruit of the vineyard will be defiled"¹³.

3.5.2.4 Symbolic Numbers

Symbolic numbers may be viewed in terms of bounded systems. A brief outline of this system shows that for the most part it represents the conservation of the boundedness frame, though at times it also deals with its violation.

¹² A particularly striking example of the cultural distance of the biblical text from most receptor cultures is Deuteronomy's insistence in the worship of Yahweh in one place--Jerusalem. This is a major theme in Deuteronomy, but makes little sense outside the context of the symbolic use of space in ancient Israel. I owe the basis of this observation to Roger Omanson (personal communication).

¹³ *New International Version*.

<i>Number</i>	<i>Significance</i>
6	Incompleteness
7 / 70	Wholeness / completeness in a religious sense.
10 / 100 / 1000	Wholeness / completeness in a secular sense.
12 / 144,000	The ideal number of the people of God (tribes, disciples, apostles, saints).
40 / 400	Either a generation (or generations) or a time of testing and trial (rite of passage) . The number 40 (whether days or years) often represents what Victor Turner (1977:94ff) refers to as “liminality” — that space (or time) <i>between</i> bounded existence. Some examples are Noah in the ark, Moses on Sinai, the people of Israel in the wilderness, and Jesus in the desert. It is interesting to note that these are all rites of passage involving some <i>change</i> in identity. In such cases the boundaries are crossed intentionally, and the rituals do not restore the old boundaries, as they do in cases of purification.
3,4 / 7,8	In parallel structures, the passing over of certain boundaries.

3.5.2.5 State

Certain states are unclean, but again an examination of these states leads us back to the violation of boundaries. Death, birth, and menstruation were all considered unclean states. Death represents crossing the ultimate spiritual boundary into the unknown, the afterlife (cf. Jesus’ injunction that Mary Magdalene not “hold” — possibly touch — him in John 20.17). Birth and menstruation both involve life (and blood), but also the physical crossing of the boundary of the human body (see next section).

3.5.2.6 The human body

Mary Douglas ((1966:51-52,128,115)) has captured the essence of this important category as follows:

... the idea of holiness was given an external, physical expression in the wholeness of the body seen as a perfect container ... rituals work upon the body politic through the medium of the physical body ... The body is a model which can stand for any bounded system ... We cannot interpret rituals concerning excreta, breast milk, saliva and the rest unless we are prepared to see in the body a symbol of society.

One could add here that the body must be seen as an integral part of religious symbolism as well.

The Hebrew term often translated by “leprosy” refers to virtually any skin lesion, however minor, which compromises the integrity of the skin. This renders the person unclean until the lesion is healed and ritually purified. A skin blemish makes a person unclean, and an animal unfit for sacrifice. In the end, it seems that what is at issue is the maintenance of the wholeness or integrity of the body (“purity”) as opposed to its violation or disintegration. Corresponding to leprosy on the human body is mold or mildew in a house (Leviticus 14.34ff). It follows the same logic and form as leprosy, so is mentioned here as well.

Since everything inside the body which ends up outside the body pollutes, the primary structure seems to be that the sacred and the profane are represented by the inside and the outside respectively. Blood and semen have their own symbolic meaning (a direct connection with life), for example, and thus could be expected to carry their own power and danger.¹⁴ Blood especially carries a powerful pollution taboo in several different contexts (diet, sacrifice, sex), but can be used to purify as well in certain contexts of “dramatic reversal” (van Gennep 1960; Turner 1977:166ff.).¹⁵ This phenomenon, common to many traditional cultures, involves breaking the taboo while in the liminal state.

These reversals take place under special ritual circumstances or for persons of special character. Depending on the ritually bounded space and time, blood can be polluting or purifying, and depending on the context saliva can be polluting or healing. Thus the high priest sprinkles the people with animal blood in a sacrificial context, and Jesus heals the blind man by spitting on the ground and making a paste for his eyes.

The notion that the conservation of the body’s boundaries represents purity of various kinds does not lack support. Bodily extremities figure prominently in various rituals. Phylacteries are to be tied to wrists and foreheads, which are at the margins of the body (like doors for houses and gates for cities). Circumcision involves another extremity (where “wholeness” involves losing an “extra” part). Foot-washing involves yet another extremity. These last two examples have often been interpreted (along with dietary laws and other pollution laws) as a kind of early system of hygiene. It seems much more likely they are part of the pattern of the maintenance of boundaries within a system of pollution.¹⁶

3.5.2.7 Dietary Laws

As to regulating that which enters the body, the dietary laws are integrated into the system as a whole in a rather careful way. Thus blood and that which dies of itself is to be avoided. Also, again following Mary Douglas, that which does not belong wholly to its class (the concept of “wholeness” once more) is to be avoided.¹⁷ It is interesting to note how the various parts of the system interact, so that the list of unclean birds in Exodus seems to be based on the avoidance of blood (birds of prey) or contact with dead bodies/bodies with blood in them (carrion birds), while other unclean animals are classified as such due to other reasons (such as not belonging wholly to their class).¹⁸

¹⁴ Gen 9.4-6 clearly relates the life-blood system and the system of the holy. Only God owns life, blood represents life.

¹⁵ Krijn van der Jagt (personal communication) sees the symbolic systems as functioning in a more dynamic manner than outlined here, viewing them in terms of rules of discourse. He cites Dan Sperber (1975) for this idea. This may well be right. But if so, it makes the ever-shifting frames even more difficult to locate and map.

¹⁶ Symbolic elements can have more than one function, of course, as in the case of foot-washing, which has a practical side in a sandal-wearing culture.

¹⁷ Douglas adds: “... food is not likely to be polluting unless the external boundaries of the social system are under pressure” (Douglas: 1966:126-127).

¹⁸ The point about the unclean birds seems to have escaped most commentators, including Douglas.

3.5.2.8 Animal Sacrifice

Animal sacrifice represents the intentional transgression of a symbolic boundary (the body of the animal) within the ritual boundaries of temple and appointed time. Only an unblemished animal is permitted — that is, one with absolutely unbroken skin. Then, in a dramatic reversal, the animal's skin is cut, closing symbolically for a moment the distance between us and the Other. In another dramatic reversal, the blood of the animal, normally polluting, at least to eat (due to two symbolic unratified crossings of the boundary — the animal's body cut open and the human body taking it in), now (in some cases) is sprinkled on various objects and people in order to purify them. Blood has its own symbolic power and symbolic system, but works together with the basic idea of boundedness and reinforces it.

While Douglas understands these symbolic systems at the social level, there seems to be a religious component as well. Sacrifice represents the symbolic crossing of the fundamental boundary between God and humans within a ritually safe sphere. It is a point at which the people can make symbolic contact with their deity, if only for a ritual moment. Blood which normally pollutes now can be used for purification in a ritual reversal. The perfect container of the body of the sacrificial animal is intentionally violated, as if to indicate that the boundary between the profane and the holy, humans and God, has for a moment been obliterated.

3.5.2.9 Summary

An underlying symbolic system of the Old and New Testaments may be outlined as follows:

1. "Holy" refers to the spirit world, which is taboo for those in the profane world except for special people (priests) and under special circumstances (ceremonies carried out in special places — sanctuaries). The separation of the sacred and the profane symbolically establishes the radical distinction between us and the Other.
2. Various elements in the real world symbolically represent the distinction between the sacred and the profane. These include the human body, the bodies of animals to be used in sacrifice, houses and cities.
3. "Impure" refers to any unratified crossing of the boundary between the holy and profane (ratified crossings are those made by the proper people at the proper times and places). Unratified crossings can often be put right by various rituals, but not always (touching the ark of the covenant could bring immediate death). The symbolic contamination caused by the transgressing of the boundaries must be cleansed through purification. The two worlds should not be in direct contact with one another and must be cleansed of any material from the other world. Any crossing in either direction must be ratified, in part by ceremonial washings. These washings enable a safe crossing, that is, one which does not contaminate either world with the essence of the other. This is the essence of uncleanness — to be contaminated by the Other, or to contaminate the Other by human contact. That is also why the books "which defile the hands" at Qumran were the biblical books (and not some sectarian material, for example).

4. Ratified crossings often involve “dramatic reversals” such as happen in many rites of passage. Involving special people, places, and/or times, these reversals have as their major component the reversal of the normal rules of boundary crossing.

This outline (perhaps with a few adjustments), along with the basic concept of a symbolic world based on the idea of bounded existence, can be used to explain many aspects of the sacrificial, ritual and even moral systems of the Old Testament. “Transgression” is perhaps the most useful overall term in English (in spite of its archaic nature), since all unrati ed crossings in any sphere are transgressions. It is interesting that in the moral sphere there are not dramatic reversals in the biblical system as there are in other societies (Turner, Van Gennep, et. al.).

Mary Douglas is convinced that societies with highly developed pollution laws are societies under external pressure. She may well be right. After all, the community which considered itself to have descended from Abraham was under pressure for most of its existence. But there is a religious and theological component to the pollution framework as well. A fundamental concern of Scriptures is how impure humans can approach a pure God. The awareness of the existence of an absolute chasm between sinful humans and a holy God is evident in many of the writers of both Testaments. According to Christian belief, God enacted the ultimate sacrificial reversal by not just crossing the barrier temporarily (as symbolized in animal sacrifice), but by providing a permanent mediation (symbolized by the tearing of the temple veil). This new situation is discussed the most fully in the book of Hebrews (Nelson:1993:148-154). Jesus’ sacrifice opens a safe passage from the profane to the sacred — but only at that crossing point. The problem situation as described in the book of Hebrews is that of “drawing near to God”. But, says the writer of Hebrews, God in Christ has made the crossing, thus erasing the boundary at that point. Once the ultimate dramatic reversal has been enacted, the temple veil is torn and all who are profane have access to the Holy via Jesus. Even head coverings for men who are praying are no longer needed (1 Corinthians 11). All other crossings are still unrati ed.

3.5.3 Sickness and Healing in the New Testament

While the preceding section deals with examples mainly drawn from the Old Testament, the New Testament is not without examples of symbolic expression of cognitive models based on bounded existence. There it most often takes the form not of purity and holiness laws, but of sickness and healing stories. John Pilch has written extensively on the subject, drawing from the work of Bruce Malina and Mary Douglas, among others, as well as from his own insights concerning medical and Mediterranean anthropology.

Pilch’s (2000:24-25) first point is that modern ideas about disease and cure, or disability and rehabilitation, are not very helpful in the New Testament context. Pilch tries to clarify some issues by first defining his terms. He admits this is essentially an etic exercise (that is, an outsider’s analysis), but nonetheless can help us gain an emic perspective (an insider’s view). While sickness, according to Pilch, is an overarching term for both disease and illness, modern biomedicine has concentrated on the former. Thus modern medicine tries to find cures for diseases. This contrasts with perceptions of

illness in the New Testament era: illness was experienced as a far more encompassing physical, psychological and social state of not being whole, and/or not being a part of a whole. This unwholesome state required not so much a cure as a healing, to restore the individual to his or her former state of well-being. Finally, this state of well-being was seen not so much in terms of restoration of physical ability, but of personal and social reincorporation.

Thus in the New Testament, Pilch claims (pp. 4ff), whether healing had to do with “leprosy” or blindness (in modern terms a disease and a disability, respectively) or some other problem, modern categories of restoration of ability (to be able to *do* what one could not do while diseased or disabled) are not nearly so prominent as the restoration of the person within the community (to be able to *be* who one was not able to be while ill). This social restoration is a cause for conflict between Jesus and community leaders. Thus Jesus is able to equate healing with forgiveness of sins (Matthew 9.2ff), to direct lepers to priests who are to declare them fit to return to their places in the social structure (Luke 1.14), and to use physical blindness as a direct symbolic pointer to spiritual “blindness” (John 9). Jesus is not a first-century physician (and is only referred to as such metaphorically), but a *healer*. It was not the restoration of ability to the disabled that upset Jesus’ opponents, but the social reorganization implied in the ancient conception of healing. Restoring marginalized persons to communities challenges the existing structures of authority, unless carried out by those very authorities.

Pilch uses various schemata to shed light on the New Testament world as it pertains to sickness and healing. He borrows from Bruce Malina’s (1993:74ff) categories of the human body to make sense of the kinds of illness and healings which are presented in the New Testament. According to Malina, the Semitic authors of the New Testament made extensive use of the human body to metaphorically speak of the person as a whole. In this he has followed others, including Wolff (1974), who have made similar observations about the writers of the Old Testament. Malina specifically sees three zones corresponding to three areas of the human experience: eyes-heart (emotion-fused thought), mouth-ears (expression), and hands-feet (purposeful action). Thus all of the diseases presented to Jesus in the New Testament fall into one of these zones, and open up possibilities for social meaning in the healings which follow. When the blind see and the seeing become blind, and the deaf hear while those who hear become deaf (John 9.39; 12.41, Matthew 13.15), the holistic view of illness in the New Testament makes the social reversal which is implied in the healing stories far more than clever word-plays.

From Arthur Kleinman (1980), Pilch (25ff.) picks up and develops an analysis of healthcare systems, ancient and modern. In this analysis, there are three sectors to be considered: popular, professional, and folk. The popular sector exists in all societies, and relates to the everyday experience of sickness in any society and the immediate social networks (family, friends, etc.) which exist to deal with it. In ancient times the professional sector was underdeveloped to the point of irrelevance, at least by modern western standards of biomedicine. The same can be said of the professional healthcare sector in contemporary traditional cultures. The inverse is true for the folk sector.

In ancient times, the folk sector was the center of the healthcare structure. Thus, as noted above, it was not a doctor in the modern western sense that was called for in the ancient healthcare context, but a healer. The expectations placed on a healer were far different than those modern medicine places on a physician. While the ailment might

arguably be the same in the ancient or traditional as well as in the modern western contexts, even the descriptions of the problems vary widely as well as predictably. Whether in diagnosis (what is the ailment), etiology (what has caused the ailment), prognosis (what is likely to happen as a result of the ailment) or treatment (what we are to do about the ailment), the contrasting healthcare systems structure the situation in ways which only incidentally resemble each other.

To begin with, Pilch notes that most if not all instances of healing in the New Testament involve the spirit-world, either directly or indirectly. Thus a fever is treated as a demon (Luke 4.39), and what modern medicine would treat as epilepsy is also presented as demon possession (Matthew 17.14ff; Mark 9.20ff). Pilch cites George Foster (1976) in contrasting once again ancient-traditional and modern western world views on these matters. Foster contrasts personalistic (caused by personal agents such as spirits or other people) versus naturalistic (usually modern biomedical) explanations of illness. While there does seem to be some room for materialistic explanation of illness in traditional societies (e.g. a cold draft can make you sick), most if not all of these cases can be traced to personalistic origins (winds and spirits are often associated with each other, as are coldness and death). The personalistic terminology used in the New Testament is sometimes obscured in modern translations. Thus the “epileptic” boy from whom Jesus casts a demon is actually “moonstricken” according to Matthew 17.14 (in Mark 4, he is described as having an evil spirit).

Ultimately Pilch comes back to the idea of boundaries, as found in the work of Mary Douglas, as the most useful for describing the ways in which the ancient and modern healthcare systems differ at the cognitive level. Illness in the New Testament can nearly always be seen in terms of boundaries. For example, demon possession is presented as an invasion of the boundary of the body. When demons come out of people, the people become whole. As in the Old Testament, leprosy was any kind of skin lesion that would not heal, thus (symbolically as well as literally) breaking the boundary of the body. The woman with a menstrual flow (Mat 9.20ff) also falls into this category as do the blind, deaf and mute who all have ailments of entry/exit points of the body.¹⁹ Withered hands (e.g. Matthew 12.10) and crippled feet (e.g. Mark 2.34) both are symbolic of action, as noted above, and are extremities, or at the boundaries of the body; compare Old Testament rituals involving putting blood on the thumb and big toe in, for example, Leviticus 8.2., as well as the use of phylacteries given in Deuteronomy 6.8 and elsewhere. Finally, the poor, sinners and tax-collectors (e.g. Matthew 9.10), with whom Jesus associates and to whom he explicitly offers salvation using medical terminology (Mat 9.12), are at the margins of society.

Thus the highly symbolic world of the New Testament, coupled with ancient science, gives rise to multi-layered texts (at least from a modern perspective, the ancients probably saw the matter as a whole) where disease, disability and sin could be equated in a universe where reversals were seen as possible and classified as healing.

Another example of this kind of complex of relationships is in Jesus’ remark about the eye being the lamp of the body (Matthew 6.22; 11.34-36). This text, strange to modern readers, can be better understood in light of ancient notions about the eye. The ancient Greeks (Pilch cites Aristotle) considered the eye not as a receiver of light rays,

¹⁹ As L. William Countryman (1988:13) has noted in a related context: “what is consistent from one culture to another is that purity rules relate to the boundaries of the human body, especially to its orifices.”

but as a *transmitter*. Thus people either had light (or goodness) inside of them which came out via the eye and made them see,²⁰ or else they had darkness (evil) inside them and this darkness also came out through their eyes. This dark transmission was associated with the evil eye (Pilch:2000:132ff). These associations are not the modern ones of enlightenment and knowledge, but of moral darkness and light. Similarly, in the Old Testament, wisdom is associated with moral and spiritual commitment, rather than with knowledge (cf. Proverbs).

3.6 Conclusion

The consideration of how cultures vary in their framing of lexical references and in their mapping of relationships between notions is of course important for Bible translators. Some implications of the above discussions are:

1. All cultures give rise to highly developed and often similar (at times deceptively similar) mental maps of the world (including similar symbolic systems), which are to a large extent sub-conscious for the members of those cultures.
2. Mother-tongue speakers of the target language are the only ones who can be expected to have anything close to an adequate grasp of the implicit aspects of communication which lie below the surface of explicit expression.
3. The intermediate cultures to which those helping with Bible translation so often belong do not share many features of these conceptual mappings and symbolic systems.
4. As suggested in the discussion of contemporary trends in biblical studies (5.2.3; 5.2.5), many biblical texts can and will be understood by minority receptor cultures in ways that members of mediating Western (technologically developed, “modern”, non-traditional) cultures have not considered or appreciated. These interpretations may be at variance with or shed new light upon the original meaning of the text, while connecting with conceptual and symbolic systems in the original cultures which have been ignored by mainstream exegesis.
5. Translators must be trained to explicitly understand both source and receptor cultural maps, and help their intended audience (most likely through helps such as side-notes) to make relevant connections between the conceptual and symbolic worlds of the biblical text and their own. These helps will also have to be developed for the presentation of Scripture in non-print media.
6. Different kinds of translation, reflecting different kinds of similarity (at the grammatical, poetic, or cultural levels) should be not only accepted but actively promoted in different contexts.

²⁰ Ron Ross has pointed out to me that seeing in some languages is a transitive verb always requiring an object, supporting the idea that in some languages the eye is seen as active in the seeing process rather than passive.

7. Handbooks will have to be adapted to contain more of this culturally implicit information so that the translators will know it exists and be able to include it, either in the translation itself or in helps.
8. Cross-cultural studies should be a required area of training for translation officers.