Creativity at the Boundary: Features of the Linguistic and Conceptual Construction of Outsiders in the Pauline Corpus*

PAUL TREBILCO
Department of Theology and Religion, University of Otago, Dunedin, New Zealand.
email: paul.trebilco@otago.ac.nz

One facet of group identity is the construction and description of 'the outsider'. A key dimension of this is the way outsiders are labelled. οἱ ἄπιστοι and τὰ ἔθνη, two outsider-designations used in Pauline texts, are examined here to determine what their use and function indicate about group identity. In these cases, we see the creation of a new designation and linguistic innovation in the way a designation is used, which includes the alteration of the referent of an established term. Defining and understanding 'the outsider', grappling with how to represent outsiders to 'ourselves' and negotiating across group boundaries were key undertakings that led to linguistic creativity, change and transformation. That such linguistic creativity can be seen as going on 'at the boundary', to create and define the boundaries of the movement, shows how important such boundaries were.

Keywords: οἱ ἄπιστοι, τὰ ἔθνη, unbelievers, Gentiles, outsiders

1. The Ingroup–Outgroup Distinction and Social Dialects

Any society is made up of a number of social categories which reflect the way people can be grouped together on the basis of ethnicity, sex, class, religion and so on. Importantly, 'categories do not exist in isolation. A category is only such in contrast with another.'[1] Hence we have contrasting and mutually exclusive socially constructed categories such as medical doctor and carpenter, and so on. Michael Hogg notes:

---

* A Main Paper read at the 68th General Meeting of the Society for New Testament Studies held in Perth, 23–6 July 2013. My thanks to Professor John Barclay for his very helpful comments on a draft of this paper.

1 M. A. Hogg and D. Abrams, *Social Identifications: A Social Psychology of Intergroup Relations and Group Processes* (London: Routledge, 1988) 14.

> Groups exist by virtue of there being outgroups. For a collection of people to be a group there must, logically, be other people who are not in the group (a diffuse non-ingroup, e.g., academics vs. non-academics) or people who are in a specific outgroup (e.g., academics vs. politicians). In this sense, social groups are categories of people; and just like other categories, a social category acquires its meaning by contrast with other categories. The social world is patterned by social discontinuities that mark the boundaries of social groups in terms of perceived and/or actual differences in what people think, feel, and do.[2]

Accordingly, one element that enhances our understanding of the 'ingroups' of early Christ-followers is an understanding of the 'outgroups' to which they related and the nature of relations between these ingroups and outgroups. Important dimensions of these relations are the nature of the labels ingroups used for outsiders and the way these labels contributed to group identity and to inter-group differentiation.

Sociolinguistics informs us that different groups develop their own 'social dialect' or 'shared language repertoire'.[3] As part of their common life, groups come to share words, stories, symbols and concepts, elements that have been produced by the community and have become part of their linguistic practice.[4] This includes technical language, abbreviations and specialised use of otherwise common language, as well as the development of new language.[5] Particular linguistic practices become one crucial dimension in the construction of a community.

A number of New Testament scholars have argued that the early communities of Christ-followers did indeed have a social dialect.[6] I hope to show that one dimension of this dialect is the language used for outsiders, language that marked off clear boundaries between ingroups and outgroups and contributed to the construction of identity in these groups of Christ-followers.

By considering three of the terms that were used as outsider-designations, I will discuss the ways that outsiders were constructed linguistically and what this indicates about group identity. My focus is not so much on who the outgroups actually were, as on how they were defined as being 'outgroups' and on what sort of boundaries were created and represented in this process of definition. I hope to show that a variety of creative and innovative linguistic moves were at work.

---

2 M. A. Hogg, 'Social Categorization, Depersonalization, and Group Behavior', *Blackwell Handbook of Social Psychology: Group Processes* (ed. M. A. Hogg and R. S. Tindale; Oxford: Blackwell, 2001) 56.

3 See M. A. K. Halliday, *Language as Social Semiotic: The Social Interpretation of Language and Meaning* (London: Edward Arnold, 1978) 66; see also 154-92.

4 E. Wenger, *Communities of Practice: Learning, Meaning and Identity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998) 82–3.

5 Wenger, *Communities of Practice,* 125–6.

6 See the discussion of this work in P. Trebilco, *Self-Designations and Group Identity in the New Testament* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012) 11–13.

2. Language Innovation or Creativity: οἱ ἄπιστοι

In the NT, ἄπιστος means 'unbelievable, incredible' and 'without faith, disbelieving, unbelieving';[7] Paul uses it as a designation with the meaning of 'unbelievers' fourteen times, eleven times in 1 Corinthians and three times in 2 Corinthians.[8] ἄπιστος is also found as a designation for outsiders twice in the Pastorals (1 Tim 5.8; Titus 1.15).[9]

2.1 *Boundary Construction and Definition*

When Paul uses ἄπιστοι as a designation, he often (though not always) draws a contrast with those who are οἱ πιστεύοντες (e.g. 1 Cor 14.22) or with οἱ ἀδελφοί used of members of the group (e.g. 1 Cor 7.12). In 1 Cor 14.22 the clear and repeated contrast between οἱ πιστεύοντες and οἱ ἄπιστοι shows that the latter term means 'unbelievers'.[10] Those who are ἄπιστοι are all those who are not 'the believing ones' and so do not have πίστις. Being 'in' is designated as being 'a believer' or 'a brother or sister', and all those who are not 'in' are 'out'; there is no middle ground. The boundary is constructed around πίστις, so those who are out are defined as ἄπιστοι, a term that is comprehensive and includes all outsiders.

2.2 *Context*

In the Greco-Roman world, ἄπιστος is used in the active sense of 'mistrust-ful, incredulous … disobedient, disloyal' and in the passive sense with the meaning of 'not to be trusted', 'faithless', 'incredible'.[11] Herodotus writes of words 'which to some Greeks seem incredible (ἄπιστοι)',[12] and in a discussion about God, who is called a 'handicraftsman' who made all things, Plato's interlocutor doubts what has been said, to which the reply is given, 'Are you incredulous? (ἀπιστεῖς;)'.[13] Of interest also is an inscription from Epidaurus, to be dated in the latter half of the fourth century BCE, about a man with paralysed fingers who went to the temple of Asclepius, but did not believe the inscriptions detailing cures found there. However, in a vision he was cured and the god said to him: 'Therefore, since you doubted them [the inscriptions] before, though they were not unbelievable, from now on … your name shall be "Unbeliever

---

7 BDAG 103.

8 See 1 Cor 6.6; 7.12, 13, 14 (2x), 15; 10.27; 14.22 (2x), 23, 24; 2 Cor 4.4; 6.14, 15.

9 In Luke 12.46 and Rev 21.8 it has the meaning of 'the unfaithful'. It is also used as an adjective in Matt 17.17; Mark 9.19; Luke 9.41; John 20.27; Acts 26.8.

10 2 Cor 4.4 is also a very clear example. Given the contrast between πιστός and ἄπιστος, the terms here clearly have the technical sense of 'believer' and 'unbeliever'. See for example, M. E. Thrall, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on The Second Epistle to the Corinthians* (2 vols; ICC; Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1994) I.475.

11 LSJ s.v.

12 Herodotus 3.80; see also 8.22.3; Thucydides 1.120.4.

13 Plato, *Resp.* 596d; see also *Resp.* 450d; 576a; Herodotus 3.80.1; 1.8.2; Demosthenes 19.27.

(ἄπιστος)”.'[14] However, this is a form of curse on one who doubts, rather than a designation for all outsiders.[15]

In Jewish texts, the predominant sense of ἄπιστος is 'unfaithful' or 'incredible'.[16] In only three texts is ἄπιστος used as a label.[17] Prov 17.6a reads: 'The faithful (τοῦ πιστοῦ) has the whole world full of money, but *the faithless* not even a farthing (τοῦ δὲ ἀπίστου οὐδὲ ὀβολός).'[18] Note also *Liv. Pro.* 3.14: 'He [Ezekiel] was snatched up from there and he went to Jerusalem to rebuke *those who were faithless*' (οὗτος ἡρπάγη ἐκεῖθεν καὶ ἦλθεν εἰς Ἰερουσαλὴμ εἰς ἔλεγχον τῶν ἀπίστων). This relates to Ezek 8.3, and 'the faithless' are those in the house of Israel who were committing what Ezekiel calls abominations. The third use as a designation is found in Philo. In *Mos.* 2.275–87, he writes of the revolt of Korah, Dathan and Abiram, described in Numbers 16. Philo has Moses say (*Mos.* 2.280) 'Disbelief falls hardly on *the disbelievers* only. Such are schooled by facts alone, and not by words' (χαλεπὸν ἀπιστία πρᾶγμα τοῖς ἀπίστοις μόνοις· τούτους οὐ λόγος ἀλλ᾽ ἔργα παιδεύει). Here Philo is writing about people within Israel who by their actions of rebellion have shown themselves to be 'disbelievers', 'faithless', unfaithful to Yahweh.

But in these three texts ἄπιστος is not used as a designation with the meaning of 'all outsiders', for in each case it is a sub-group within Israel that is in view. These people are 'unfaithful', 'disbelievers', 'disloyal'. Pauline usage where 'the unbelievers' is a label for *all outsiders*, and refers to a social group which *continues to exist*, is quite distinct.

As far as we know then, οἱ ἄπιστοι is not used in a Jewish or Greco-Roman context in the way that Paul uses it, that is, as a designation for all outsiders in general.[19]

2.3 *The Origin of* οἱ *ἄπιστοι as a Designation*

Given this lack of use of οἱ ἄπιστοι as an outsider-designation, what is the origin of Paul's usage? Paul uses οἱ πιστεύοντες – the believers – as a

---

14 See L. R. LiDonnici, *The Epidaurian Miracle Inscriptions: Text, Translation and Commentary* (SBLTT Graeco-Roman Religion Series 11; Atlanta: Scholars, 1995) 86–7 for the text (which is *SIG* 1168, see lines 31–3) and translation; for dating, see p. 17.

15 See J. W. Taylor, 'Paul's Understanding of Faith' (PhD Thesis, University of Cambridge, 2004) 123.

16 See e.g. *Sib. Or.* Prologue.81; 2.143; 3.388; 11.182, 225; *Let. Aris.* 296; *Ps.-Phoc.* 119; Josephus, *AJ* 2.169; 6.198; 14.31; 18.76; *BJ* 1.255; 5.536; Philo, *Opif.* 114; *Abr.* 111; *Ebr.* 205.

17 It also occurs twice in Isa 17.10 with the sense of 'not inspiring trust'; see T. Muraoka, *A Greek–English Lexicon of the Septuagint* (Leuven: Peeters, 2009) 69.

18 Verse 6a is an addition to the Hebrew, only found in the LXX^A; see further D.-M. D'Hamonville, *La Bible d'Alexandrie: les proverbes* (Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 2000) 259–60, who comments on the Stoic character of this addition. ἄπιστος is a variant in Prov 28.25, but is almost certainly not original there.

19 See Taylor, 'Paul's Understanding', 123; G. Barth in *EDNT* I.123.

self-designation seventeen times;[20] I suggest that the use of this self-designation for insiders has led to the development of 'its own logical opposite'[21] – οἱ ἄπιστοι – for outsiders. This seems clear from 1 Cor 14.22–4, where οἱ πιστεύοντες and οἱ ἄπιστοι are contrasted, and 1 Cor 6.6 and 7.12–15, where the contrast is between ὁ ἀδελφός and ὁ ἄπιστος or οἱ ἄπιστοι.

This suggestion is in keeping with the use of insider and outsider labels in 1 Thessalonians and 1 Corinthians. In 1 Thessalonians, probably our earliest Pauline letter, written in 50 CE from Corinth shortly after Paul had arrived in that city,[22] οἱ πιστεύοντες is used on three occasions.[23] In 1 Thessalonians outsiders are *not* called οἱ ἄπιστοι; rather they are called 'Gentiles' (2.16), 'the Gentiles who do not know God' (τὰ ἔθνη τὰ μὴ εἰδότα τὸν θεόν) (4.5), 'outsiders' (οἱ ἔξω, 4.12), 'your own compatriots' (τῶν ἰδίων συμφυλετῶν, 2.14), 'all' (πάντας, 3.12; 5.15) and 'others' (οἱ λοιποί, 4.13; 5.6).[24] There were a number of occasions then when Paul could have called outsiders οἱ ἄπιστοι in this letter but does not.

But then in 1 Corinthians, written from Ephesus in early 54 CE[25] and perhaps Paul's next letter,[26] οἱ πιστεύοντες is used three times (1 Cor 1.21; 14.22 (2x)), *and* οἱ ἄπιστοι eleven times.[27] I suggest that between writing 1 Thessalonians and 1 Corinthians Paul, or someone else in the Pauline circle, created the new usage of οἱ ἄπιστοι as a label for all those the group wished to designate as outsiders.[28] It is not as if the terminology was unavailable – it simply had not been used with this sense before in a *written* text as far as we are aware. This seems

---

20 A participle of πιστεύω is used as a designation in Rom 1.16; 3.22; 4.5, 11, 24; 9.33; 10.4, 11; 1 Cor 1.21; 14.22 (twice); Gal 3.22; 1 Thess 1.7; 2.10, 13; 2 Thess 1.10; 2.12. πιστός is used as a self-designation in 2 Cor 6.15 and Gal 3.9; cf. Col 1.2. See further Trebilco, *Self-Designations*, 72–90.

21 Taylor, 'Paul's Understanding', 124; see also Thrall, *Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, I.475.

22 See A. J. Malherbe, *The Letters to the Thessalonians: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (AB; New York: Doubleday, 2000) 71–4; J. D. G. Dunn, *Beginning From Jerusalem: Christianity in the Making*, vol. II (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2009) 509, 703–5.

23 See 1 Thess 1.7; 2.10, 13.

24 Note also 1 Thess 5.3.

25 See A. C. Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians: A Commentary on the Greek Text* (NIGTC; Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2000) 29–32.

26 See U. Schnelle, *Apostle Paul: His Life and Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2005), 6, 269–71. If Galatians was written between 1 Thessalonians and 1 Corinthians (see Dunn, *Beginning From Jerusalem,* 509, who dates Galatians to 51 CE), then we note that οἱ πιστεύοντες is only used in Gal 3.22 and οἱ ἄπιστοι not at all.

27 οἱ πιστεύοντες in 1 Cor 1.21; 14.22 (2x); οἱ ἄπιστοι in 1 Cor 6.6; 7.12, 13, 14 (2x), 15; 10.27; 14.22 (2x), 23, 24. Sometimes the article is omitted.

28 Paul uses a considerable range of outsider-labels in 1 Cor; see 'those who are perishing' (1.18); 'Gentiles' (1.23; 5.1; 12.2); 'the immoral of this world' (5.10); 'those outside' (οἱ ἔξω) (5.13); 'the unrighteous' (6.1, 9); 'the world' (6.2; 7.31; 11.32); 'Jews' (1.23; 10.32); 'Greeks' (1.22; 10.32); 'outsider' (ἰδιώτης) (14.16, 23, 24); 'adversaries' (16.9).

to have been an entirely natural development, but a development nonetheless. Of course, the designation may have been coined and used orally earlier than this, but we have no record of it.

The occurrence of 'the unbelievers' as an outsider-designation thus seems to be a new and innovative use of language. The lack of prior usage of οἱ ἄπιστοι means that we can suggest that this innovation is directly a result of theological reflection on what to call 'outsiders', reflection springing from the significance of the concepts indicated by the πιστ- word group. The importance of this word group is clear in 1 Thessalonians, where it is used fourteen times,[29] as well as in the whole Pauline corpus of course. Gerhard Barth comments that the use of οἱ ἄπιστοι as a designation 'is evidence not only of the powerful influence early Christianity exerted on the formation of language, but also the degree to which one perceived the essence of one's own religion to be determined by πίστις'.[30] Paul was not simply content to use generic labels for outsiders – οἱ ἔξω, ἰδιῶται and οἱ λοιποί, for example. He did use these terms, but they were also used by a range of groups and simply outlined the fact that some people are 'outsiders' or 'not us'. But the significance of the πιστ- word group for the Pauline groups themselves led to the creative development of οἱ ἄπιστοι as a designation, a development which is theologically driven by the fact that πίστις has become an essential definition of what it is to be an insider. Unbelief – the *absence* of πίστις – becomes what Howard Becker calls a 'master status',[31] whereby this single trait greatly contributes to the group's perception of their particular outsiders, with this one *essential* characteristic summing up a good deal that readers need to know about outsiders. Other factors – gender, ethnicity, age and so on – are irrelevant. This then is a recategorisation of these outsiders from a distinctive, indeed a unique, Christ-believing perspective. In fact, this can become a case of 'othering the unothered', for in some cases one's closest family members might become ἄπιστοι.

It has often been shown that one of the key issues that Paul faced as he wrote 1 Corinthians related to what he considered were the 'weak social and ideological

---

29 See R. F. Collins, 'The Faith of the Thessalonians', *Studies on the First Letter to the Thessalonians* (BETL 66; Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1984) 209–29.

30 Barth in *EDNT* I.123. W. Deeming, *Paul on Marriage and Celibacy: The Hellenistic Background of 1 Corinthians 7* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2004²) 141–3 suggests that Stoic use of πιστός and ἄπιστος in discussions relating to friendship and with the sense of 'trustworthy' and 'untrustworthy' has led to the use of these terms by Paul to distinguish insiders and outsiders. He suggests that the development was made by the Corinthians themselves and then adopted by Paul. However, it seems much more likely that the importance of πίστις and the related οἱ πιστεύοντες for Paul has led to the development of οἱ ἄπιστοι, rather than the use of πιστός and ἄπιστος in a quite different sense and context among the Stoics.

31 H. S. Becker, *Outsiders: Studies in the Sociology of Deviance* (London: Free Press of Glencoe, 1963) 33.

boundaries'[32] of the Corinthian believers as a group. This is an issue he comes back to time and again in 1 Corinthians.[33] Perhaps it is precisely this issue that has led to the creation of 'unbelievers' as an outsider-designation. In any case, from Paul's perspective, the necessity for stronger group boundaries has led to the *use* of οἱ ἄπιστοι in 1 Corinthians. One way in which he creates this stronger boundary is through this label.

2.4 *Positive Attitudes towards οἱ ἄπιστοι*

οἱ ἄπιστοι is a strongly negative way to designate outsiders – they do not have *our* key salient and distinguishing feature of πίστις; we define 'our' outsiders by something they lack, rather than by something they possess or according to some way that they act. They are 'defined out' by a very strong boundary. However, despite this, the contexts in which Paul uses οἱ ἄπιστοι in 1 Corinthians are often surprisingly positive, demonstrating a prominent degree of openness to these outsiders who are so labelled.

Firstly, in 1 Cor 7.12–15 Paul presupposes that believers and unbelievers will remain married; there were highly significant, on-going familial relationships between some who were labelled as 'unbelievers', and insiders.

Secondly, in 1 Cor 10.27–9 Paul expresses a willingness for a believer to accept an invitation to dinner from an unbeliever, and generally (but not always – vv. 28–9) for the believer to eat what is set before them.[34]

Thirdly, in 1 Cor 14.22–5 Paul takes it for granted that '*outsiders or unbelievers*' (ἰδιῶται ἢ ἄπιστοι) will enter the assembly when members are speaking in tongues or prophesying.[35] Perhaps the assembly met in rented space such as a public restaurant,[36] or the unbelievers may have been family members of believers since as we have noted in 1 Cor 7.12–15 it is clearly presupposed that whole households did not always convert and that a 'believer' should continue to be married to an 'unbeliever'.[37] In any case, these gatherings of the whole church

---

32 E. Adams, *Constructing the World: A Study in Paul's Cosmological Language* (SNTW; Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 2000) 93.

33 Adams, *Constructing the World*, 87–93, 243.

34 See Taylor, 'Paul's Understanding', 131–2.

35 See K. O. Sandnes, 'Prophecy: A Sign for Believers (1 Cor 14,20–25)', *Biblica* 77 (1996) 13–14. For a discussion of the much-debated ἰδιῶται, see A. D. Clarke, 'Church Membership and the ἰδιώτης in the Early Corinthian Community', *New Testament Theology in Light of the Church's Mission: Essays in Honor of I. Howard Marshall* (ed. J. C. Laansma, G. Osborne, R. van Neste; Eugene: Cascade, 2011) 197–211.

36 See E. Adams, 'Placing the Corinthian Communal Meal', *Text, Image, and Christians in the Graeco-Roman World: A Festschrift in Honor of David Lee Balch* (ed. A. C. Niang and C. Osiek; Eugene: Pickwick, 2012) 28–9.

37 See G. D. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians* (NICNT; Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1987) 681 n. 33. Fee (685) also writes (on 14.23): 'Paul may very well have in mind an unbelieving spouse accompanying the believer to his or her place of worship.'

were *accessible* to unbelievers, so although 'unbelievers' are *not* members of the group, they are not thereby excluded from meetings.

Fourthly, what Paul says in 1 Corinthians 14 shows a strong sense of openness to unbelievers. In 1 Cor 14.22 Paul says that tongues are 'a sign (σημεῖον) not for believers but for unbelievers, while prophecy is not for unbelievers but for believers'. The most likely meaning of this much-debated verse is that tongues are a *negative* sign *against* unbelievers, a sign that testifies against them, or a sign of judgement.[38] For this is how 'strange tongues' are presented in the quotation that Paul gives in 1 Cor 14.21.[39] In 14.23–5, Paul goes on to describe the *effect* of tongues and prophecy on unbelievers or outsiders. 1 Cor 14.23 is particularly important: 'If, therefore, the whole church comes together and all speak in tongues, and outsiders or unbelievers enter, will they not say that you are out of your mind (εἰσέλθωσιν δὲ ἰδιῶται ἢ ἄπιστοι, οὐκ ἐροῦσιν ὅτι μαίνεσθε)?' On the other hand, prophecy reveals the hidden thoughts of the outsider, and leads to repentance (1 Cor 14.24–5).

Paul suggests then that the views and sensibilities of 'unbelievers' and 'outsiders' should be carefully taken into account. He argues that the probable reaction of the unbeliever to what is happening in the assembly should be *the key factor in deciding what actually takes place* in the assembly. As Joop Smit writes: 'These relative outsiders determine the perspective from which the examples [of vv. 23–4] are told. Paul compels the glossolalic Corinthians to look at themselves through the eyes of outsiders. His intention is to show them what glossolalists and prophets look like in the eyes of ordinary people.'[40] Paul's argument then concerns the impact of tongues and prophecy on the unbeliever, and uses this impact to convince the Corinthians about which gifts to prioritise.

Paul is here applying the same principle to the 'unbeliever' – that of 'other-regard' – that he applies elsewhere to the 'weaker brother or sister'.[41] An activity of the believer should be curbed if its impact on the unbeliever who is present is deleterious, just as the activity of the strong (believer) should be curbed if it has an adverse impact on the weaker believer. This is to accord a very significant status to

---

38 See Fee, *First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 681–3; C. Forbes, *Prophecy and Inspired Speech in Early Christianity and Its Hellenistic Environment* (WUNT II.75; Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck), 1995) 178–81; Sandnes, 'Prophecy', 12.

39 Here Paul is citing Isa 28.11–12 but in a form that diverges substantially from the Septuagint. For discussions of 14.22, see also Sandnes, 'Prophecy', 10–13; Thiselton, *First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 1082, 1123–6; W. Schrage, *Der erste Brief an die Korinther: 3. Teilband. 1 Kor 11,17–14,40* (EKK VII/3; Zürich: Benziger, 1999) 406–9.

40 J. F. M. Smit, 'Tongues and Prophecy: Deciphering 1 Cor 14,22,' *Biblica* 75 (1994) 183; see also Sandnes, 'Prophecy', 5.

41 See 1 Cor 8.7–13; Rom 14.1–15.1; for other-regard in general, see Phil 2.1–4; Rom 15.2, 7; 1 Cor 13.5. Paul states this principle in 1 Cor 14.17: 'For you may give thanks well enough, but the other person is not built up'; in vv. 20–5 he applies this principle to the unbeliever.

the ἄπιστοι, and to apply the overarching principle of 'the love of the brother or sister'[42] to 'the love of the unbeliever', even if Paul does not state it in these terms. The overarching principle used to decide between two activities (whether to speak in tongues or to prophesy) is the impact of each action on the unbeliever.[43]

Finally, I cannot go into 2 Cor 6.14–7.1 in detail here.[44] Suffice to note that the issue in this passage concerns the *limits* to relationships with ἄπιστοι: entering into some form of covenant-like commitment or relationship is to go too far.[45] Accordingly, this passage does not undermine the four points we have made from 1 Corinthians, but rather shows that there are limits to the openness and social engagement that Paul is advocating towards unbelievers.

What is in fact said about unbelievers, then, belies the negativity that seems to be inherent in the designation. They are spoken of negatively in that they lack an essential feature that is salient within the group – πίστις. But what is said about unbelievers is not negative in such a way as to vilify or demean outsiders, nor are they spoken of in such a way as to encourage social exclusion, and 'other-regard' for these unbelievers should direct some key features of worship. While in 1 Corinthians Paul *does* want to differentiate the Corinthians much more strongly from their wider society,[46] he does *not* want to divorce them from that society (1 Cor 5.10).[47] He encourages social differentiation from these clearly labelled 'outsiders' but without a corresponding social distance.

2.5 *Summary*

The importance of the πιστ- word group has generated a new outsider-designation. 'Our outsiders' can be called οἱ ἄπιστοι, which seems to have been a creative and innovative use of language. But while these outsiders are defined negatively – they are outside the boundary which is constructed by 'believing' – what is said about those who are designated as οἱ ἄπιστοι is surprisingly positive. This is not to deny that Paul and other NT authors can use outsider-designations

---

42 See, for example, Rom 14.15.

43 Thiselton, *First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 1127 notes that here Paul is applying his 'evangelistic maxim' expressed in 1 Cor 9.20–3: 'that he would gladly restrain whatever "rights" or "freedoms" were theoretically his, if thereby he could win for Christ the varieties of "other," be they social elite or socially deprived, or of any specific cultural prejudice'.

44 On this passage, see D. Starling, 'The ἄπιστοι of 2 Cor 6.14: Beyond the Impasse', *NovT* 55 (2013) 45–60, who argues convincingly that it is not an interpolation and that the ἄπιστοι are 'outsiders' rather than the 'false apostles' of 2 Cor 10–13.

45 See W. J. Webb, *Returning Home: New Covenant and Second Exodus as the Context for 2 Corinthians 6.14–7.1* (JSNTSup 85; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1993) 201.

46 A range of designations is at work in this; for example 'those who are perishing' (1.18), 'those outside' (5.12–13), 'unrighteous' (6.1); see Adams, *Constructing the World*, 98. He notes on p. 126 that Paul wishes to stress the *social* and *ethical* distinctiveness of the Corinthian believers.

47 See Adams, *Constructing the World*, 97.

with strong pejorative overtones. But 'unbelievers' is not a term Paul uses in this way.

3. Changing the Referent of a Term: τὰ ἔθνη

3.1 *Usage of τὰ ἔθνη*

τὰ ἔθνη is of course a term regularly used for 'outsiders' in the New Testament. There has been much debate about whether ἔθνη is best translated in various texts as 'Gentiles' or 'nations', the latter taken to include Israel.[48] Here my concern is with Paul's usage. Note 1 Cor 1.23: 'but we proclaim Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles (ἔθνεσιν δὲ μωρίαν)'. Paul is using ἔθνη here as an ethnic label to refer to 'non-Jewish outsiders',[49] and is simply taking over the ideological map of the Septuagint, adopting its standard contrast between 'insiders' and 'outsiders', between 'Israel' or 'Jews' (or λαός and γένος) and τὰ ἔθνη, 'everyone else'.[50] Other groups defined themselves and 'outsiders' in very similar ways. 'Greeks' and 'Barbarians' comes immediately to mind.

4 Reigns 17.7–8 is an example of the ideological map of the Septuagint; here 'the sons of Israel' (οἱ υἱοὶ Ισραηλ) are said to have 'walked in the statutes of *the nations* (καὶ ἐπορεύθησαν τοῖς δικαιώμασιν τῶν ἐθνῶν) whom the Lord drove out from before the sons of Israel'.[51] Within Jewish literature, τὰ ἔθνη regularly has negative connotations and is particularly associated with idolatry and sexual immorality;[52] in the New Testament these connotations often remain (e.g. 1 Cor 5.1; 12.2; 1 Pet 4.3).

---

48 See, for example, R. Jewett, *Romans: A Commentary* (Hermeneia; Minneapolis: Fortress, 2007) 332–3 on Rom 4.17.

49 Other very clear examples of ἔθνη for non-Jewish outsiders are 2 Cor 11.26; Gal 2.9, 15; Rom 3.29; 9.24; 1 Thess 4.5. Gal 2.15 (ἐξ ἐθνῶν ἁμαρτωλοί) is also part of this Jewish–Gentile map – on which, see below.

50 See U. Heckel, 'Das Bild der Heiden und die Identität der Christen bei Paulus', *Die Heiden: Juden, Christen und das Problem des Fremden* (ed. R. Feldmeier and U. Heckel; Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck), 1994) 270–2; J. M. Scott, *Paul and the Nations: The Old Testament and Jewish Background of Paul's Mission to the Nations with Special Reference to the Destination of Galatians* (WUNT I.84; Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck), 1995) 121–34; C. Johnson Hodge, *If Sons, Then Heirs: A Study of Kinship and Ethnicity in the Letters of Paul* (Oxford: Oxrod University Press, 2007) 47–56. D. C. Duling, 'Ethnicity, Ethnocentrism, and the Matthean *Ethnos*', *BTB* 35 (2005) 129 notes that *goyim* in the Hebrew Bible and ἔθνη in the Septuagint are 'oppositional terms for outsiders'. Of course ἔθνος can on occasions be used in the Septuagint of the people ('nation') of Israel; e.g. Gen 18.18; Exod 19.6; Ps 105.5; 1 Macc 8.23; 2 Macc 11.27. It need not be used in an oppositional way therefore. Note also that τὰ ἔθνη can be used for both 'nations' *and* 'foreign nationals', that is, a multiplicity of non-Jewish individuals; see Scott, *Paul and the Nations*, 60–120.

51 See also, for example, Lev 20.23–6; Deut 7.1, 6; 18.9; Wis 14.11; 15.15; 1 Macc 1.15; 2 Macc 10.4.

52 See, for example, Lev 18.20–7; Deut 12.1–4; 28.64; *Jub.* 1.8–9; 2.4–8; 22.10–24; see J. M. Lieu, *Christian Identity in the Jewish and Graeco-Roman World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004) 116–20.

We need to remind ourselves of a feature of groups in general: 'outsiders' to a group often do not know, and would not accept, the terms used for them by insiders. Just as the identity and salient features of a group are constructed by that group, so too is the identity of its outsiders. The *designations* used for outsiders are key features of the way the identity of a group's outsiders is constructed. 'Gentiles' is a classic case of this. When Paul writes of the Gospel being 'foolishness to Gentiles', the people he is referring to would, of course, not see themselves as 'Gentiles'. They would argue that they were Greeks or Corinthians and so on.[53]

Within the wider Greco-Roman world, ἔθνος has the basic meaning of a 'number of people living together, company, body' of people[54] and so can be used of a tribe, nation or people.[55] But τὰ ἔθνη also came to be used with the meaning of 'people groups foreign to a specific people group',[56] and so of foreigners or barbarous nations. Aristotle uses τὰ ἔθνη with the meaning of 'non-Hellenic nations',[57] and Appian of foreign people in contrast to Italians,[58] or of 'other peoples' in Asia.[59] Regularly, ἔθνος has a disparaging and negative valence in this literature.[60]

The key point here is that Christ-believers – or non-Christ-believers – in Corinth or Rome would not have *self-identified* as belonging to 'τὰ ἔθνη'. They might have called *other people* an ἔθνος, or τὰ ἔθνη. If they did use the term of themselves, as an entity with which someone personally identified, it would have been, explicitly or implicitly, as part of the ethnos *of something* – for example, you were part of τὸ Μηδικὸν ἔθνος ('the Median nation', Herodotus 1.101). Even if a group did use ἔθνος as a self-designation, it was never in the sense that Paul uses τὰ ἔθνη, of 'everyone else but Ἰουδαῖοι' (1 Cor 1.23), 'all non-Jews'.[61]

So when Paul calls 'non-Jewish outsiders' τὰ ἔθνη, he expects his Corinthian readers to have accepted and adopted a new and quite different way of

---

53 See, for example, Rom 1.14; 1 Cor 1.22, 24; 2 Cor 6.11; Acts 17.21–2; 18.8.

54 LSJ s.v. 1; see also R. Dabelstein, *Die Beurteilung der 'Heiden' bei Paulus* (BBET 14; Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 1981) 21–2; C P Jones, 'ἔθνος and γένος in Herodotus', *CQ* 46 (1996) 315–20; J. M. Hall, *Ethnic Identity in Greek Antiquity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997) 34–5.

55 In this sense it can be used of the Jewish ἔθνος; see, for example, Luke 7.5; 23.2; Acts 10.22; John 11.48.

56 BDAG 276, ἔθνος, 2; see also P. Arzt-Grabner, R. E. Kritzer, A. Papathomas, F. Winter, *1. Korinther* (Papyrologische Kommentare zum Neuen Testament 2; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2006) 99–101.

57 Aristotle, *Pol.* 1324b 10.

58 Appian, *Bell. civ.* 2.24.99; 2.28.107; 3.35.140; 4.57.246.

59 Appian, *Bell. civ.* 2.13.89.

60 See *TDNT* ii.371; *EDNT* i.382; Duling, 'Ethnicity', 129–130.

61 The only exception might be non-Jews who had been God-fearers, or who otherwise had spent a good deal of time with Jews, but even in their case it seems unlikely that they would have gone so far as to call themselves 'one of the Gentiles'.

viewing and labelling insiders and outsiders. The insiders were called brothers and sisters, saints, believers and so on;[62] one key group of outsiders could be called τὰ ἔθνη.

A non-Jewish Corinthian convert to a Pauline community would need to have grasped how those who were currently 'the outsiders' to this new community were constructed linguistically. This would be part of adopting the idiolect of the new community, which involved significant linguistic relearning on the part of the newcomer, including of changes in the meaning and referent of a term.

In this context we can understand Gal 2.15: 'We ourselves are Jews by birth and not Gentile sinners (ἐξ ἐθνῶν ἁμαρτωλοί)'. Here Paul is dividing the world according to his Jewish map – Jews, and all others – with the latter being called not only 'Gentiles' but also 'sinners'. In doing so, Paul is almost certainly echoing 'the distinction made by the men from James between Jews and Gentiles',[63] but he will immediately go on to undercut this distinction in Gal 2.16–17.[64] Yet he expects his Gentile Galatian readers to understand the 'map' he is using here.[65]

3.2 'No Longer τὰ ἔθνη'

The process involved here is particularly clear in passages in which NT authors speak of their non-Jewish Christ-believing readers as 'formerly τὰ ἔθνη' or 'no longer τὰ ἔθνη'. Note 1 Cor 12.2: 'You know that *when you were ἔθνη* (οἴδατε ὅτι ὅτε ἔθνη ἦτε), you were enticed and led astray to idols that could not speak.' 1 Cor 5.1 is similar: 'It is actually reported that there is sexual immorality among you, and of a kind that is *not found even ἐν τοῖς ἔθνεσιν* (καὶ τοιαύτη πορνεία ἥτις οὐδὲ ἐν τοῖς ἔθνεσιν); for a man is living with his father's wife.' And Eph 4.17: 'Now this I affirm and insist on in the Lord: you must no longer live as τὰ ἔθνη live, in the futility of their minds.'[66]

---

62 See Trebilco, *Self-Designations*, on these terms.

63 R. J. Bauckham, 'James, Peter, and the Gentiles', *The Missions of James, Peter, and Paul: Tensions in Early Christianity* (ed. B. Chilton and C. A. Evans; NovTSup 115; Leiden: Brill, 2005) 125; see also J. D. G. Dunn, *A Commentary on The Epistle to the Galatians* (BNTC; London: A&C Black, 1993) 133. In 2.17 Paul is also echoing the language of the men from James: Jews who associate with Gentile 'sinners' must themselves be seen as 'sinners'.

64 There Paul emphasises that if 'Jews by birth' themselves came to believe in Christ in order to be justified, thereby admitting that 'works of the law' were inadequate for justification, then surely 'Gentile sinners' too must be justified by faith in Christ and not by 'works of the law', the latter also being irrelevant for *their* justification; see M. C. de Boer, *Galatians: A Commentary* (NTL; Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2011) 142–3.

65 See Heckel, 'Das Bild der Heiden', 271.

66 Some texts include τὰ ἔθνη in 1 Cor 10.20, which would mean we could include it here. However, the reading is probably not original; see Thiselton, *First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 773.

In these passages it is presupposed that the addressees, who are predominantly non-Jewish,[67] *could once have been called* ἔθνη, but are *no longer* labelled simply as τὰ ἔθνη (1 Cor 12.2), or are no longer to be included ἐν τοῖς ἔθνεσιν (1 Cor 5.1). The shocking thing from Paul's perspective in 1 Cor 5.1 is that the Corinthians are *acting* in a way that is *not even found* ἐν τοῖς ἔθνεσιν, among *your outsiders*, those 'beyond the boundaries'[68] of your community, the group they once belonged to but of which they are no longer a part.[69] Paul's language in 1 Cor 5.1 shows that he no longer thinks of them as τὰ ἔθνη, no longer as 'outsiders to your group'. He explicitly says in 1 Cor 12.2 that they once were, but no longer are, τὰ ἔθνη; in these verses the designation applies *only* to present-day 'outsiders'. Eph 4.17 is similar.

This presupposes a two-step process of linguistic socialisation into the group. Firstly, the appropriation of the insider–outsider map of ᾿Ιουδαῖοι – τὰ ἔθνη'. A non-Jewish convert would need to have learnt, not only that the present-day outsiders of this new community could be called τὰ ἔθνη, but also that what *they* had really been personally in a past period was part of τὰ ἔθνη. They are being called to redefine a common word and to recognise their prior history in this label and so to revise, or reconstruct, their *past*.

But secondly, this usage presupposes a transference from outsider to insider, *such that while they had been τὰ ἔθνη, they are no longer.* They *were* members of τὰ ἔθνη – understood as outsiders to God's people – but are no longer. Hays comments on the highly significant *function* of this language:

> Paul's statement in [1 Corinthians] 12:2 implies that the Gentile Corinthian Christians have now been made part of Israel … When he indicates that the Corinthian believers are no longer Gentiles, Paul is unmistakeably suggesting that they have turned away from idols to serve the living God of Israel (cf. 1 Thess. 1:9) and thereby become grafted into Israel (cf. Rom. 11:17–24). That is why he can speak of Israel in the wilderness as 'our fathers' (1 Cor. 10:1): He includes the Corinthian Gentiles among those who can rightly claim ancestry from the Israel of the Old Testament stories. Paul does not develop the point here in 12:1–3, but his offhanded turn of phrase reveals much about his ecclesiology and his understanding of the place of his converts in relation to the people of Israel.[70]

---

67 This is clear from passages like 1 Cor 6.9–11; 7.18; 8.7; 12.1–3; see W. Schrage, *Der erste Brief an die Korinther: 1. Teilband. 1 Kor 1,1–6.11* (EKK VII/1; Zürich: Benziger, 1991) 31–2. For Ephesians, see Eph 2.11–12, 17; 3.1–6.

68 P. Hartog, '"Not Even among the Pagans" (1 Cor 5.1): Paul and Seneca on Incest,' *The New Testament and Early Christian Literature in Greco-Roman Context: Studies in Honor of David E. Aune* (ed. J. Fotopoulos; NovTSup 122; Leiden: Brill, 2006) 63, who translates ἔθνεσιν here as 'Gentile pagans'. See also Dabelstein, *Die Beurteilung der 'Heiden' bei Paulus*, 57–8.

69 This usage leads to the translation of 'pagans' in the NRSV in 1 Cor 5.1; 10.20; 12.2.

70 R. B. Hays, *First Corinthians* (Interpretation: Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 1997) 209; cf. J. A. Fitzmyer, *First Corinthians: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (AYB; New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008) 233.

Paul sees the 'former Gentiles' as inscribed into the story of Israel, as incorporated into Israel, and so could think of them as 'once but no longer Gentiles'. This usage of τὰ ἔθνη as 'what you once were' is not confined to Paul; it is also found in 1 Peter and Revelation, although these passages are beyond my discussion here.[71] So expecting 'Gentile Christ-followers' to come to see themselves as 'formerly Gentiles' but no longer part of these 'outsiders to God's people' is quite common, along with the linguistic relearning that it entails.

In these passages where readers are spoken of as 'former Gentiles', τὰ ἔθνη often retains the negative connotations and association with idolatry and sexual immorality that the term has in Jewish literature in general. For example, in 1 Cor 12.2 Paul writes: 'You know that *when you were ἔθνη*, you were enticed and led astray to idols that could not speak.' Or note 1 Pet 4.3: 'You have already spent enough time in doing what the Gentiles (τῶν ἐθνῶν) like to do, living in licentiousness, passions, drunkenness, revels, carousing, and lawless idolatry.'[72] But in these passages it is clear they are 'no longer Gentiles'.

3.3 *Paul's Other Uses of τὰ ἔθνη*

From this perspective we can understand Paul's other ways of using τὰ ἔθνη. We have already seen that, when writing to non-Jewish converts, Paul uses τὰ ἔθνη of contemporary 'non-Jewish outsiders'. This is his predominant use of the designation[73] and it seems straightforward, but *actually* presupposes the whole process that is behind calling 'non-Jewish Corinthian converts' 'no longer Gentiles'. For in writing to the Corinthians, or to all his other churches, Paul calls non-Jewish outsiders τὰ ἔθνη, *presupposing* that his (insider) readers have adopted the insider–outsider worldview that labels outsiders as τὰ ἔθνη.

But Paul can *also* call 'non-Jewish *converts*' simply 'Gentiles', and presupposes that they will identify with this label. Note Rom 16.3–4: 'Greet Prisca and Aquila … to whom not only I give thanks, but also *all the churches of the Gentiles* (πᾶσαι αἱ ἐκκλησίαι τῶν ἐθνῶν).' Or Rom 11.13: 'Now I am speaking *to you Gentiles* (ὑμῖν δὲ λέγω τοῖς ἔθνεσιν). Inasmuch then as I am an apostle *to the Gentiles* (ἐφ᾽ ὅσον μὲν οὖν εἰμι ἐγὼ ἐθνῶν ἀπόστολος), I glorify my ministry.'[74]

---

71 1 Pet 2.12; 4.3; Rev 11.2, 18; 15.3–4; 20.3, 8. Note also Matt 6.32; 24.9; 28.19, although the meaning of Matthew's usage is particularly debated. ἐθνικός is found in Matt 5.47; 6.7; 18.17; 3 John 7.

72 See also 1 Cor 5.1; Eph 4.17–19; 1 Pet 2.11–12.

73 See, for example, Rom 2.24; 11.11–12, 25; 15.9–12; 1 Cor 1.23; 2 Cor 11.26; Gal 1.16; 1 Thess 2.16.

74 See also Gal 2.12: 'he used to eat with the Gentiles' (μετὰ τῶν ἐθνῶν συνήσθιεν); Gal 2.14: 'how can you compel the Gentiles to live like Jews?' (πῶς τὰ ἔθνη ἀναγκάζεις ἰουδαΐζειν); Eph 3.1: 'for the sake of you Gentiles' (ὑπὲρ ὑμῶν τῶν ἐθνῶν) (cf. Eph 2.11). See Dabelstein, *Die Beurteilung der 'Heiden' bei Paulus*, 35, 37. In saying in Rom 1.5–6 that he seeks 'to bring about the obedience of faith among all Gentiles … including yourselves', Paul is demonstrating

In saying 'I am an apostle to the Gentiles', Paul of course means 'to outsiders who are not Jews', his standard usage. But 'I am speaking to you Gentiles' (Rom 11.13) presupposes some intellectual and linguistic steps, as does speaking of 'all the churches of the Gentiles' (Rom 16.4).[75] After conversion readers of Romans could now see themselves as 'once having been Gentiles'. In the conceptual worldview of 'Jew and Gentile', they were *once* the latter – non-Jewish outsiders. *Now* they were 'believers', 'saints', but Paul found that 'Gentiles' was *still* a helpful term for them. It was shorthand for those who were not originally part of Israel, and so were formerly part of τὰ ἔθνη, but who now were part of God's people, yet to whom Paul wanted to say some different things from what he would say to those we often call 'Jewish Christians' or 'Jewish Christ-followers'. And so he uses τὰ ἔθνη of *Christ-followers* in this different sense.[76] The vital point for Paul, of course, is that such a distinction between 'Jew' and 'Gentile' *no longer mattered* with regard to salvation. Paul has neutralised τὰ ἔθνη, so that it no longer carries negative or derogatory connotations,[77] as its use for insiders demonstrates. But its ethnic meaning is *not* obliterated, since it is very important to Paul that those he calls τὰ ἔθνη are *still* of non-Jewish ethnicity. The vital matter is that their ethnicity is no longer salient as far as ingroup relations are concerned. Ethnicity is not ignored, as it is with the language of οἱ πιστεύοντες and οἱ ἄπιστοι, but it is no longer a boundary issue.

I suggest that Paul *continued* to use τὰ ἔθνη of 'Gentile believers' when it was potentially confusing[78] because other terms were too long-winded! For the

---

this same usage of calling 'non-Jewish *converts*' simply 'Gentiles'; see Johnson Hodge, *If Sons, Then Heirs*, 55.

75 It might be thought that 'the churches of …' indicates that they are Christian 'Gentiles'. But my point is that 'Gentile' here changes its sense – from outsider to non-Jewish insider.

76 1 Thess 4.5 suggests Paul was aware that there could be some ambiguity: 'not with lustful passion, like the Gentiles who do not know God (τὰ ἔθνη τὰ μὴ εἰδότα τὸν θεόν)'. The addition of '*who do not know God*' (probably a direct allusion to Jer 10.25, but see also Ps 78.6 (LXX)) to 'the Gentiles' shows Paul presupposes that there are two types of Gentiles – those who do not know God (whom the Thessalonians should not imitate) and groups like the Thessalonian addressees – who by implication are 'Gentiles who do know God'. They have learned that in the LXX ideological map they were τὰ ἔθνη, and *they can still be called by this* – with the important addition that they do 'know God'. But Paul normally speaks simply of 'Gentiles' and leaves it to his readers to determine whether he is speaking of non-Christ-following or Christ-following Gentiles. 'Gentiles' will normally suffice then. Note also Eph 2.11: 'So then, remember that at one time you *Gentiles by birth* (τὰ ἔθνη ἐν σαρκί), called "the uncircumcision" by those who are called "the circumcision"'; Acts 15.19: 'those *Gentiles who are turning to God*' (τοῖς ἀπὸ τῶν ἐθνῶν ἐπιστρέφουσιν ἐπὶ τὸν θεόν) and 15.23: 'to *the brothers and sisters of Gentile origin*' (ἀδελφοῖς τοῖς ἐξ ἐθνῶν).

77 This is clearest in Rom 11.11–13; see also Heckel, 'Das Bild der Heiden', 272.

78 This is because in 1 Corinthians he could say that they were no longer Gentiles, and because he can *still* use τὰ ἔθνη of 'Gentile *outsiders*'.

alternatives – 'non-Jewish outsiders who have now become insiders' or 'who have now become part of God's people by adoption'[79] or something similar – hardly roll off the tongue! In addition, it is *vital* to Paul that they were saved precisely as τὰ ἔθνη – and not as Ἰουδαῖοι. But what is involved here is a creative and innovative redefinition of the term.

3.4 *Summary*

What linguistic ploys do we see here? Non-Jewish converts are expected to understand a change in referent for τὰ ἔθνη, so that the designation refers to 'all non-Jews'. They need to come to see that it functions as an outsider-designation in relation to the people of God, and that they *were* Gentiles. They should also come to see that, for example, non-believing family members are actually presently 'Gentiles' in the sense of outsiders. In this way their language becomes Judaised. But they themselves as converts are no longer τὰ ἔθνη, they are 'brothers and sisters', 'saints' and so on.

But Gentile converts also need to come to see that they can still be called 'Gentiles' – we would add 'Gentile Christians', 'Gentile believers', but Paul generally does not. 'Gentiles' is sufficient, for they understand Paul's in-house language. In this usage, insiders can be called 'Gentiles'; for Paul, its outsider-ness, from the LXX and the Jewish worldview, can be done away with. Prior 'ethnic otherness' – from the perspective of the Jewish worldview – is no longer salient, and 'Gentileness' becomes a reason for crossing rather than reinforcing a social boundary.

Accordingly, τὰ ἔθνη can be used as a simple term of address for insiders or as a way of referring to them and so it becomes a label for both outsiders *and* insiders. We would expect it to be used only of outsiders, but it becomes both an outsider and an insider term. This involves linguistic innovation. And of course this redefinition of language is something that *both* 'Gentile' and 'Jewish' Christ-followers would need to come to terms with, for Jewish Christ-followers would also need to learn the new and creative ways in which τὰ ἔθνη was being used by Paul – that those fellow believers they had regarded as members of τὰ ἔθνη were that no longer, but also that τὰ ἔθνη could continue to be used of 'Gentile Christ-followers' as a convenient shorthand.

We see a clear example here of the significant change of referent of an established term and hence of linguistic creativity.[80]

---

79 BDAG 277 illustrates the problem when it gives meaning (2b) for ἔθνος as '*non-Israelite Christians, gentiles* of Christian congregations composed of more than one nationality and not limited to people of Israel' (emphasis original), for passages like Rom 16.4; Gal 2.12 and Eph 3.1. Since 'non-Israelite *Christians*' was not available to Paul, BDAG demonstrates well the issue that led Paul to call them simply 'Gentiles'.

80 This could also be understood as an example of 'linguistic defamiliarization', as discussed by Adams, *Constructing the World*, 27–30, 113.

4. Overall Conclusions

One feature of a group's identity is how its members think of 'outsiders'. This involves language: the designations that are used for outsiders, and how this language functions.

Here I have argued that early Christ-followers were involved in a variety of linguistic ploys in their use of designations for 'the other'. We see a process of creatively negotiating identity in both speech and practice. We observe the creation of new language and linguistic innovation in the way a label is used, which includes the change in the referent of an established term. We see them 'othering the unothered' (when some family members came to be seen as ἄπιστοι), as well as 'unothering the other' or undermining outsider-terminology (in the case of 'Gentiles'). One dimension of what is involved in joining a group is induction into that group's language. This would certainly be the case for those joining the movement of Christ-followers.

That such linguistic creativity can be seen as going on 'at the boundary', to create and define the boundaries of the movement, shows how important such boundaries were. Otherness is not done away with altogether, but we do see a creative redrawing of maps and boundaries and a process of negotiating across established boundaries. Deciding who was, and who was not, an outsider, defining and understanding 'the outsider', and grappling with how to represent outsiders to 'ourselves', were key undertakings that led to linguistic creativity, change and transformation. This new movement was innovative in many ways, one of which was the process of identity formation involved in outsider-labelling.