

similarities and differences, group status within a region, group population size, ethnic pride or demoralisation, the degree of bilingualism, the linguistic distance between minority and dominant language, and the form of the script. If more research were undertaken, it might be possible to develop a hierarchy of these and maybe other factors (such as whether the channel is oral or written) that would allow some predictive power about the likely reaction of any group to translated material, and the economic feasibility of providing such material.

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1 CORINTHIANS 11.10 REVISITED

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In his article "Authority, Women and Angels"¹ W. Gerald Kendrick presented a survey of how various commentators have struggled to understand 1 Cor 11.10 and how a number of translations have attempted to make sense out of it. A literal translation of the verse says, "Because of this the woman/wife ought to have authority on her head because of the angels." There is wide agreement among commentators that the context makes the reader expect Paul to have said, "A woman/wife ought to have a veil on her head." So, the main question is: Why does he say "authority" rather than "veil"? The next question is: Since he does use the word authority, who has authority over whom or over what? One possibility is that "authority" is used as a metonym for veil. This suggestion is rejected by Kendrick (336), possibly based on the argument by Gordon Fee² that "authority" is in other places always used in an active sense of having authority over someone, not in a passive sense of being under authority. Kendrick continues his survey by saying that, "Probably the most widely held view understands *exousia* as a sign or symbol of authority to which the woman is subject." However, he follows Morna Hooker³

1 *The Bible Translator*, 46:3 (1995).

2 Gordon D. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, NIC, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans 1987, 519.

3 Morna Hooker, "Authority on Her Head: An Examination of 1 Cor. xi.10," *NTS*, 10 (1963/64), 413.

and C.K. Barrett¹ in rejecting the traditional, majority view and accepting a modern view that the authority being talked about is a new authority to pray and prophesy which the New Testament gives to the woman/wife. The purpose of this rejoinder is to support the majority view by pointing out that the rejection of the metonym possibility as well as the passive sense of authority seems to be caused by a lack of understanding of how metonyms function. Before discussing the semantics of metonyms, I shall briefly look at the meaning of *exousia* and the strength of contextual pressure in favour of the traditional interpretation.

Understanding and translating *exousia*

There is no single word in English which adequately covers the meaning of *exousia*. Kendrick cites two Greek dictionaries, but does not refer to the Greek-English Lexicon by Louw and Nida.² This dictionary lists the following senses for *exousia*: “authority to rule” (37.35), “jurisdiction” (37.36), “symbol of authority” (37.37), “ruler” (37.38), “control” (37.13), “power” (76.12), “supernatural power” (12.44) and “right to judge” (30.122). All of these definitions in English are related to the basic meaning of “authority”. Although the Bauer-Arndt-Gingrich-Danker Greek dictionary lists “freedom of choice” as one possible sense of *exousia*, this is not the basic meaning of the word. There are contexts in English where the word may be translated “freedom,” but in these contexts, the word might as well be translated by “authority” or “right” without any real change of meaning. If the context does not allow such a substitution, then “freedom” would be a wrong translation.

Gordon Fee says in his commentary that “The word [*exousia*] ordinarily means ‘authority’ ” (384, n 46). It is therefore rather surprising that he later supports “those who understand ‘to have authority’ in its *ordinary* sense of ‘freedom or right to choose’ ” (520, italics mine). The first statement that *exousia* ordinarily means authority is correct. The second statement can therefore logically not be correct, unless Fee wants to claim that “authority” is the same as “freedom or right to choose.”

Since the area of meaning of a word is best determined by its usage in context, it is very helpful to look at the 103 occurrences in the New Testament and see how the word has been translated into English by various versions. As I looked at RSV, NIV, GNB and NEB it became clear that the most common translation is “authority”, used more than half the times in all the translations considered. The next most common translation was “right” (20 times in GNB, 10 in NIV and 16 in NEB). The third most common translation was “power” (10 times in GNB, 8 in NIV and 11 in NEB). RSV used the word “power” more often than “right”, but this I interpret as a carry over from the King James Version where the most common translation was “power”. There are other translations used such as “dominion”, “rulers”, “control”, “be in charge”, but they are all closely related to the basic meaning of having authority to exercise some kind of rulership and decision-making.

The use of *exousia* in the New Testament implies that someone is given authority to do certain tasks by someone else who is in a higher position of authority. Very often the word “give” is found in the context, so that someone is

1 C.K. Barrett, *A Commentary on the First Epistle to the Corinthians*, HNTC, New York 1968.

2 *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament based on Semantic Domains*, New York: United Bible Societies 1987.

“given authority” to do something or to have jurisdiction over a certain region. When someone has been given authority then he is also given the “power” to enforce his authority and has the “right” to do so. This is why words like “power” and “right” can appropriately be used in English in certain contexts, and it is in accordance with the definition of the basic sense of “authority” in a dictionary such as *Collins English Dictionary*: “The power or right to control, judge or prohibit the actions of others.”

However, it is wrong to assume that *exousia* then also means “power” and “right” in English. There are areas of meaning of these English words which are clearly outside the range of meaning of *exousia*. For instance, the “right” we talk about is a legal right to exercise certain powers given to someone, but it is not a right or freedom to do whatever one chooses. It is a very limited freedom in the sense that one is free to do what one has been authorized or permitted to do. It is interesting to note that the noun *exousia* is related to the verb *exesti*, meaning “it is permissible.”

There are a few special cases which need a brief comment. One such case is Acts 1.7 where the word “authority” refers to God’s power and authority. This is the only place where *exousia* is used in reference to God. However, the context talks about something which is outside the authority or right of the disciples to know. It is even outside the authority of Jesus, since it is God alone who has authority to set the date for the establishment of the Kingdom. That is why the word “own” is emphasized in “his *own* authority” (the emphasis is shown by the fronting of the word in the Greek text). The word “own” also indicates that God has his own authority and power without being submitted to any higher authority.

Another special case is 1 Cor 8.9: “But watch out that this right of yours does not somehow become a stumbling block to the weak.” This is the *only* place where the four translations mentioned above use the English word “freedom”, and the context will allow for both the words “freedom” and “right” to be used, since it concerns the Christian’s freedom or right to eat food that is considered by the “weaker” Christians to be unclean. The CEV (Contemporary English Version) maintains the word “right” also in this place, and it seems to be the better choice, because it is a major theme in 1 Corinthians that the Christians have certain rights which they should voluntarily refrain from using out of concern for those with a weaker conscience.

In conclusion, then, my point is that it is incorrect to state as both Kendrick and Fee do that *exousia* *ordinarily* means “freedom or right to choose.” It may be acceptable in special cases to translate *exousia* with “freedom” or “right” if the context allows it, but I do not see the context of 1 Cor 11.10 allowing it.

Contextual pressure

No one will deny that 1 Cor 11.10 is a difficult verse to interpret. Whenever a verse is difficult to understand in itself, it is the more important to let the context help in deciding what was probably the intended meaning. Kendrick says (340) that “We expect Paul to say in v 10: For this reason she ought to have her head covered.” Fee has a similar comment (519) and he includes in footnote 22 a citation from Robertson and Plummer, 232, to the effect that “There is no real doubt to the meaning, which is *clear from the context*.” If we ignore the word *exousia* for a moment, the relevant part of the statement says: “For this reason, a woman ought

to have...on her head.” RSV inserts the word “veil” and this certainly fits the context well, although an expression like “scarf” or “head” covering might be better, since the item Paul had in mind would probably not cover the face.

Since it is impossible to put an abstract idea like “authority” on one’s head, and since the context clearly talks about putting a head covering on one’s head, the most reasonable solution is that the head covering in some sense is connected with or a symbol of authority. There is strong evidence from both Jewish and Roman culture that a head covering was a symbol of submission, or putting oneself under someone else’s authority. A married Jewish woman was expected to wear a head covering to show that she was already bound to a husband. It was a Roman custom for *both men and women* to wear a head covering when they brought a sacrifice to the gods.¹ Figures of speech like the one Paul is using here is “compressed communication.” It seems fairly clear that Paul is focusing on the *function* of the head covering, and he would lose that detail, if he only used a direct word for head covering. Of course, he could have said the woman should wear a covering on her head as a symbol of being under authority or a symbol of having authority, if that was what he meant. He must have assumed that his readers were able to deduce the correct meaning from the abbreviated figure of speech he was using and from the context in which it is used. This leaves many of us puzzled, because head covering has no symbolic meaning in modern, Western culture.

It is an interesting fact about biblical authority that no one (except God, of course) has true authority over others unless he or she is willing to submit to a higher authority. In a sense, then, when the woman is willing to submit to the authority of the man whom Paul has mentioned in v 3, then she also has the authority or right or even freedom to pray and prophesy in the congregation. Although I do not intend to discuss in any detail the phrase “because of the angels” it is possible that the angels who would be invisibly present at the worship service would be tempted to rebellion if they saw the women being in rebellion against the authority they have been put under. The sin of rebellion, based on pride, was the sin of Satan and of one third of the angels who were cast out from heaven.

The semantics of metonyms

The interpretation favoured by the great majority of commentators takes *exousia* as a metonym. Both Fee and Kendrick reject the option of a metonym, but in my opinion, they do it with inadequate or mistaken reasoning. Fee talks about an “active” use of “having authority” which implies that the subject of the sentence is the one who exercises authority over someone else. A passive sense would be that the subject of the sentence is the one who is under someone else’s authority. He then proceeds to say that “there is no known evidence that *exousia* is ever taken in this passive sense”.² Because of the nature of the concept of authority, it is natural that the word should normally occur in what Fee calls an “active sense”. However, there are examples where the construction could be termed “passive”. In Lk 23.7 we hear about Jesus that “he was of the authority of Herod” which means that he was under the authoritative rule (jurisdiction) of Herod. What is important is the construction used and the prepositions employed. Another example is Lk 7.8: “For

1 Ben Witherington III, *Conflict & Community in Corinth. A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary on 1 and 2 Corinthians*, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans 1995, 231ff.

2 Fee, 519.

I am a man placed *under* authority, having soldiers under me.” This officer was *under* the authority of a higher placed officer and he had authority *over* his soldiers. It is correct that a construction like “having authority *over*” would have to be in the so-called active sense.

However, if we accept that a metonymy is used, the preposition *epi* (on/over) is not at all related to the word *exousia*, but to the implied object used as a head covering. It is the head covering which is physically *epi* (on/over) the head, it is not “authority” which is exercised *epi* (over) the head. To see this, we need to study the semantics of metonyms.

A metonymy is a word used to stand in place of another, closely related idea.¹ If I say “the kettle is boiling”, the word “kettle” is used as a metonymy for the contents of the kettle. Although the surface subject of this sentence is “kettle” the underlying subject is “water.” It is the underlying subject which conceptually and semantically is related to the rest of the sentence. The meaning is that the *water* in the kettle *is boiling*, and it would be irrelevant to argue whether a *kettle* can actually boil or not.

Similarly, if I say “put water on (the stove) for tea”, I have implied that it is the kettle which contains the water which is to be put *on* the stove. Assuming we are using a gas stove, people who are not familiar with this figure of speech would argue that the water would put out the fire if I put the water on the stove, so it doesn’t make sense. They would attempt to get some other meaning out of it, if they don’t understand the semantics of metonyms, or they wonder why I said “put water on the stove” when I should or could have said “put the kettle on the stove.”

Mt 3.5 reads: “Then Jerusalem went out to him.” Here the word Jerusalem is used as a metonymy, signifying the people of Jerusalem. Again, it is irrelevant to argue that a city has no legs to walk with. If a particular metonymy is used in the source language, but not understood in the receptor language, then a meaning-based translation has to supply the underlying subject. NIV and GNB (and many other translations) supply “people” in Mt 3.5.

How does the semantics of metonyms influence our understanding of the verse under study? If we accept that “having authority on the head” is using a metonymy where the surface subject is authority and the underlying subject is head covering, then it is the underlying subject which conceptually relates to the rest of the sentence. The way metonyms are used requires us to take the preposition *epi* with the head covering and not with the surface word “authority”. It is therefore irrelevant to talk about what “authority on/over the head” might mean, just as it is irrelevant to argue about whether a kettle can boil or not. It is also irrelevant to claim that “having authority over” is always used in an active sense, because the construction does not combine “authority” with “have” and “over”. Since the English language does not allow cities to walk or people to carry authority on their heads, a good translation will need to clarify the unfamiliar metonymy by saying: “a woman ought to have a covering of authority on her head.” This is exactly the way that most translations handle the metonymy in Mt 3.5 by saying “people of Jerusalem” rather than just “Jerusalem.” It is up to the *context* to show whether it is a case of being *under* authority or having authority *over* someone. I believe there is overwhelming agreement among commentators that the *context* forces us to take

1 Katharine G.L. Barnwell, *Introduction to Semantics and Translation*, SIL 1974, 118.

the meaning of being under authority, although it may not be clear whether it is the more specific sense of a wife being under her husband's authority or the general sense of a woman being under man's authority. Depending on which of these two options is preferred, a fuller translation, if needed, could be made either along the lines of Good News Bible: "A woman should have a covering over her head to show that she is under her husband's authority" or Phillips: "A woman ought to bear on her head an outward sign of man's authority."

Some have said that if the meaning in this context is the same as being submitted, why didn't Paul simply say that? Now it is always difficult to argue with an author and say that he should have said something different. It is very likely that this was a readily understandable metonym in the times of Paul, and we are disadvantaged by having a very limited understanding of the figures of speech and cultural assumptions which were well known to Paul's contemporary readers.

The main point for Paul is not really whether men or women wear head coverings, but whether both men and women are willing to accept the place and function that God has ordained for each of them. It is not a matter of one being more important than the other as Paul clarifies in the following verse, but a matter of functioning together in harmony. The Corinthian church was under the influence of strong pagan traditions, resulting in divisions, arguments, and immoral practices. Some Corinthian women seemed to have put themselves in a position of authority over men which they showed by refusing to cover their heads, and some men seemed to have refused to take their rightful position of authority, which they showed by covering their heads like some of the women apparently did. The symbolic meaning of and therefore use or non-use of head coverings is a culturally specific matter, but an attitude of humility and willingness to be subordinate is a universal Christian value.

REVIEWS

Aland, Barbara, and Joël Delobel, eds: **New Testament Textual Criticism, Exegesis, and Early Church History: A Discussion of Methods.** "Contributions to Biblical Exegesis and Theology, vol 7." Kampen: Kok Pharos Publishing House 1994. 152 pp, \$31.75. ISBN 0926-6097.

Ehrman, Bart D. and Michael W. Holmes, eds: **The Text of the New Testament in Contemporary Research.** "Text and Studies, vol. 46." Grand Rapids: Eerdmans 1995. 401 pp, \$39.99. ISBN 08028-2440-4.

These two volumes honor giants in the field of NT textual criticism in the 20th century. Four of the five papers in the first volume, published in honor of Professor Kurt Aland, were presented at the text-critical seminar at the International Society of Biblical Literature meeting in Münster, July 1993.

The articles in the first volume provide an excellent overview of where text-critical studies are heading and what some of the major methodological issues are. There are no indexes or bibliography. However, the footnotes have extensive references to secondary literature. Jacobus H. Petzer's "The History of the New Testament—Its Reconstruction, Significance and Use in New Testament Textual Criticism" (11-36) contains excellent discussions of current perspectives on the Alexandrian, Western, and Byzantine text types and the various ways in which they are employed to reconstruct the "original" text. Other articles include: Tjitze