Are We "Misreading" Paul?: Oral Phenomena and Their Implication for the Exegesis of Paul's Letters

Sam Tsang

Introduction

A critical approach toward oral rhetorical qualities and styles can be traced as far back as Quintilian,[1] if not before. Inquiry into the orality of Homer dates as far back as Josephus, but the work of Milman Parry and Albert B. Lord stands out in particular. Parry and Lord studied South Slavic poetry in an attempt to answer the Homeric question that addresses the authorship of the major Greek epics.[2] Their research has alerted modern readers that the ancients did not receive a written message in the same way the modern readers do.[3] These theories are absolutely essential foundations for any Pauline letter.[4] Like the Greek epics, letters were verbally mediated, as the discussion below will indicate. A brief survey of both non-biblical and biblical scholarship on this matter will reveal varying insights, as well as implications for an improvement of rhetorical studies and general exegesis of Pauline letters. At the very least, the exegetical assumption of the interpreter must accommodate orality in Paul's society.

Theories

As early as 1930, Martin Buber, along with his colleague Franz Rosenzweig, began to think about the "spoken" instead of the "written" Bible in their biblical translation.[5] In a desire to

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[1] See, for example, *Inst.* 2.1-17.

[2] Diachronically, Parry and Lord took a poetic phenomenon they observed in a certain part of the world
[2] Diachronically, Parry and Lord took a poetic phenomenon they observed in a certain part of the world from this century and applied this model to Homeric studies.

[3] There are obviously differences between the Homeric texts and Paul. The context of Homeric reception was closer to the modern theater setting than Paul's liturgical setting. Nevertheless, both works were delivered orally and received aurally. The two were also different in compositional process and rhetorical purposes.

[4] Paul's letters to the churches take up roughly one-quarter of the New Testament. Due to their dominance in the corpus of the New Testament, many important doctrines and ethics have been formed by reading these letters, and their influence has extended well beyond the first-century world.

[5] I do not mention the mountain of scholarship on oral sources in biblical scholarship because of the lack of

improve Luther's translation, they argued that neither theology nor politics should be the guiding principle in biblical translation. Rather, the aesthetic sense, or the "rhyme" and "rhythm" of the words themselves, should inform the final translation. Such a proper aural sense in translation should "speak" to the human heart, as it did thousands of years ago in the biblical world (Buber and Rosenzweig 1994:215-18, 76). As part of their translation strategy, they sought to excavate the "sensory and concrete" rather than the lexical meaning in the Hebrew Bible (179-81). Buber recorded Rosenzweig's stark (perhaps too stark for some) comment before their joint translation effort: "Only when it is translated back into orality does it suit my stomach" (211). In spite of Buber and Rosenzweig's strong declaration, biblical scholars paid little attention to orality theories in their interpretive process until the latter part of the twentieth century.

Among non-biblical scholars, Walter J. Ong's observation on the psychodynamics of orality has continued to shape the older model. Regarding the importance of sound and silence, he gives a helpful description of the audible nature of speech. As Ong puts it, "in a primary oral culture, to solve effectively the problem of retaining and retrieving carefully articulated thought, you have to do your thinking in mnemonic patterns, shaped for oral recurrence. Your thought must come into being in heavily rhythmic, balanced patterns in repetitions or antitheses, in assonance and alliterations" (1982:34).[6] Ong makes a final observation that oral cultures are "practical" rather than "theoretical" (*idem*).[7]

Among biblical scholars, those of the Uppsala School were pioneers in this field by noting the diachronic development of culture through folklore studies and by maintaining that diachronic gap between ancient and modern cultures.[8] This school of thought formulated a different set of queries within the biblical text. One particularly useful and interesting work on the Hebrew Bible is Susan Niditch's *Oral World and Written Word*, in which she combines the aforementioned theories from scholars studying folklore and literacy in order to interpret the Bible (1996:117-30). She has special interest in how folklore is compared with the Bible, not in terms of religious or moral authority but in terms of the characteristics of orality. Although her work does not equate the Bible with folklore, she focuses first on the various oral patterns in the Hebrew Bible, which in turn reveals different types of compositional styles. From different texts, she finds different models of composition.[9] Niditch's work is beneficial primarily because she

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space here. Source criticism of the Synoptic Gospels deals not so much with message reception as with the source, while the present study deals with message reception. For an example of orality useful for source study, see Henderson 1992:283-306.

[6] Rosenberg finds similar assonance and alliterations in modern African- American sermons. He also notes the same research results in Lord's work on the South Slavic meter (1990:145).

[7] Scribner and Cole find this formulation of the concrete and the abstract problematic in their application of these ideas to the Librarian educational system (1981:14). The problem with Ong's observations is that they simply cannot be directly transferred to the application of Scribner and Cole.

[8] See Engnell 1969; Nielsen 1954; Nyberg 1935.

[9] First, there is the Parry-Lord model of recorded performance. Second, there is the model of dictated work intended for reading aloud, which also fits perfectly for the letters in the New Testament as well. Third, there is the

takes orality scholar Ruth Finnegan's (1988) pluralistic model seriously and formulates her own work accordingly.

One significant contribution to the recent scholarship on the letters of Paul is C. W. Davis' *Oral Biblical Criticism* (1999), which applies a long-overdue oral theoretical application to Pauline literature. By making use of research on orality in non-biblical literature, Davis applies his theory to Paul's letter to the Philippians. In his methodology, Davis combines orality, modern linguistics, and classical rhetorical studies to create what he calls "oral biblical criticism" (21). There are three steps in his discourse analysis: classical criticism, biblical rhetorical criticism, and linguistic studies.[10] First, he analyzes the author's rhetorical style. Second, he identifies and analyzes the rhetorical units using oral characteristics. Third and finally, he evaluates the method of progression from unit to unit. Davis uses the data gathered in the first step on oral characteristics to illuminate both the second and third steps. Even though he calls his method oral biblical criticism, orality is not the overarching framework but is instead only a part of his rhetorical analysis. Nevertheless, his work is the first to fully apply a methodology based on orality to a Pauline text.

Another serious study on orality in Paul is J. Harvey's *Listening to the Text* (1998). Harvey's work is different in nature from Davis', though both promote further discussions of Paul's orality in terms of parallelism, chiasmus, and *inclusio*. In other words, traditional structural exegesis takes on the "new clothing" of studies in orality. While Davis deals in great depth with Paul's understanding of Philippian culture, Harvey broadly covers the whole of Pauline corpus. In so doing, Harvey performs a great service for all studies of orality in Paul and ultimately provides a primer for all Pauline scholars. Akio Ito, in an important article on Roman culture, distinguishes between Paul's deeper theological thoughts as a whole versus his rhetorical flow (2003:240).[11] Orality should be the methodological umbrella over rhetorical analysis where the audience's first hearing dictates the meaning and interpretation instead of a holistic study of a Pauline theology.

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model of writing that imitated speech. The third model basically resembles the first except for the fact that the written process comes first, before the performance. Fourth, there is the literary model of writing meant for the literate. Such a study definitively denies any unified theory of textual transmission in an oral world. This sophisticated and diversified approach yields four models of textual transmission with both orality and literacy in mind. Silent reading was not evident until the writing of Cyril of Jerusalem's *Procatechesis* 14 and Augustine's *Confession* 6.3; 8.12. There is little evidence of such a practice exist until 350 AD (Slusser 1992:499). Surely it is not hard to argue that all those who were literate had the ability to read silently as early as the fifth and fourth century BCE (for example, Euripides' *Hippolytus,* 116-27; Plutarch's *On the Fortune of Alexander,* 340A; Pseudo-Aristotle's *Problems,* 18. 1, 7). Still how many can read in the first place? See also Gilliard 1993:689-94.

[10] Davis (1999:55, 63) provides a synopsis of his methodology. His linguistic theory is based on A. Radford's model of phonology (the sound), morphology ("the smallest possible language unit with semantic content"), syntactics (sentence constructions), and semantics (meaning of words, phrases, and sentences).

[11] I am not sure Ito's distinction can be realistically discerned. Paul wrote all his letters to address specific situations and problems within the church, compounded with the added complexity of the audience's backgrounds. In a sense, these letters are all "rhetorical." How the interpreter should tease out the deeper theology and what criteria should be used remains an open to question.

Oral Phenomenon

Following this brief survey of studies of oral tradition in Pauline scholarship, I must provide a theoretical discussion to summarize this study's theoretical base. In discussing ancient writings, it is very important to establish some differences between audience reception then and today. Thus the following discussion focuses on the socio-cultural context of Pauline society before the literary context, especially in regard to letter writing. This sort of discussion is important both in terms of Paul's rhetorical strategy and of literary communication in general. There are five social and literary factors that demand attention in this kind of oral communication: the role of rhetoric, the role of memory, the relationship between letter writing and speech, the practice of reading letters publicly, and euphonics.

In some ancient civilizations, literacy was not generally considered necessary for one to be a functional member of society as it often is today. Some societies granted little or no elevated status to the literate.[12] Letter writing thus became a profession, and even slaves were sometimes taught to read and write in order to perform certain duties.[13] Any discussion must allow literacy to be acknowledged as a certain reality that often superseded the class structure of Greco-Roman society (Bowman 1991:123).

Besides indicating certain realities of literacy in Paul's society, the educational system of classical society points to other developments related to orality. One is its rhetoric. With many obstacles to literacy, the functional medium of oral communication took center stage in Greco-Roman society. At this point, it is important to see the development of oral communication as it is connected to the Sophists. Due to the fact that society was generally oral, for example, the Sophists took this phenomenon very seriously in their pedagogy. Since Paul's audience, indirectly or directly, inherited the sophistic tradition, it is equally important to see how the Sophists used oral communication to their advantage.[14] As education developed, so did competition.[15] Even with the availability of writing, oral communication remained central.[16] One

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[12] I thank my colleague Margaret E. Lee for her contributions in many informal communications during the years 2005 and 2006 towards this important point.

[13] Literacy did not necessarily empower ancient readers in the way of their modern counterparts. This is in contradiction to scholars such as W. V. Harris (1989:334), who sees literacy as part of the empowerment of the upper class—even his own data does not necessarily lead to that conclusion. Horsfall (1991:60) builds from this point, takes Harris to task, and proposes literacy at all levels, however sparse. The real issue, however, is whether literacy was necessary for Paul's audience, especially among the emerging middle-class. For Horsfall, literacy was nearly a necessity for advancement. However, his confidence seems to be founded on partial evidence because his definition of "literacy" seems quite different from that of Harris. If his definition does not differ from Harris' as much as it appears to, however, then the general assumption of widespread literacy is both unfounded and unreasonable. Even Horsfall, who is the sharpest of Harris' critics, agrees with this general assumption. Literacy, of course, should not be the sole indication of class. See Robbins 1994:80 and Harris 1989:197.

[14] This prompts scholars such as Johan S. Vos (2007:29-52) to read Paul from a Sophist's point of view.

[15] Structured education, which allowed one to earn a living, likely began with the Sophists. For more information, see McDougall 2006.

purely logistical issue is pointed out by Small, who observes that, "keeping track of where multiple references are within blocks of text written in continuous script would be no easy matter" (1997:167). The sound, not the concordance survey (as in a modern exegetical process), of words dominated such a society. Even though knowledge was recorded in writing, the transmission and composition of works were still mediated through the spoken word. Knowledge was useless without verbal eloquence because people respected and trusted spoken words (Isocrates' *Ep*. 1.2-3). As is the case in many cultures, spoken words were a means to empowerment in ways that written words were not (Harris 1989:208).[17] While Greek education evolved into a more Isocratic or practical model, the pragmatic Romans took practicality to a higher level.[18] Everything ranging from the speed, passion, and diction to the volume of speech can be found in rhetorical handbooks of the era (Bonner 1977:73).[19] The practical concerns of the day forced many of the educated to pursue rhetoric instead of philosophy (Ward 1994:97).[20] For instance, the legal profession, which was politically and financially profitable, was essentially a private enterprise (Bonner 1977:66).[21] Consequently, the tendency to favor the study of rhetoric over history and even philosophy became the norm (*Inst*. 10. 31).

Although strong memory certainly does not belong exclusively to oral society, and the modern brain likely has the same physiological makeup as its ancient counterpart, memory in Greco-Roman society, for example, was trained far more vigorously than today. In fact, the

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[16] See Plato's *Prot*. 313d-315a and *Grg*. 447c-448a. It is Plato's tendency to despise and caricature the Sophists, but it is logical to see the need to "sell" one's oratorical competence. The same Corinthian mentality plagued Paul in 1 Corinthians. In fact, even though Quintilian observed that written and spoken words were so closely related as to be practically inseparable, he still concluded that writing was the tool to better oral delivery (*Inst*. 10.1. 2-3; 10.3.1). See also Bonner 1977:32.

[17] Harris uses the example of the "herald" (a common office under consuls and praetors) to prove his point. Though ancient Rome was known for generating written works, the herald's role is a significant indicator of a society in which political administration was carried out by oral means.

[18] Rhetorical training probably did not become established until as late as 169 BC, but it gained popularity very quickly (Stanley F. Bonner [1977:65] quotes the Ennius fragment for this date). In the process of conquest, the Romans were able to enslave and make use of many educated Greeks, especially after the third Macedonian War (23).

[19] In the classroom, the practice of declamation became commonplace. Such practices were to prepare the student to encounter real-life situations (*Inst*. 2. 1-4). The emphasis on poetics and reading aloud continued (*Inst*. 1.8.1-2).

[20] Ward (1994) points out the fact that the "performance" of Paul's opponents was so impressive that they swayed some of the Corinthians to their side. The rhetorical competition was fierce indeed. Though the comparison of a synagogue to a spiritual theater by Ward is a bit farfetched, the oral circumstances of the service does allow for some parallels. However, his further description of the Christian more resembles a mixture between the charismatic denomination and the Parry-Lord performance than the first century synagogue.

[21] Though the *Lex Cincia* of 204 BC legislated the ban of legal fees, the popularity of the legal profession trespassed the prohibition.

ability to memorize words was an essential trait in such a society.[22] But, lest we view ancient societies as drastically different from today, we must remind ourselves that memory is the first-line storage of information even in modern society.

The dynamics of memory affect how an audience receives any piece of performed work in two ways: via literary composition or reception, and via educational process. First, the compositional style or performance of any literature must complement the memory of the audience. The Greeks, followed by the Romans, had a certain method of memorization. Rhetoricians probably used the same pattern to help the audience understand speeches. Scholars often argue that literacy automatically diminishes memory. Such is not the case. As early as the Greeks, literary works became more complex, wording and phraseology became increasingly varied. This shift caused the need for memory to increase rather than decrease (Small 1997:22-23). People trained their memory more for oral performance of written works. For example, the meter, or more basically, the sound of the composition, could easily help a piece be more memorable (*Rh* 3. 1409b; Small 1997:75).[23] In ancient letter writing, attention span was surely related to the short-term memory of the audience, which brought up the issue of letter length. According to Demetrius (or the tradition attributed to him), the letter writer had to keep the length of the letter within control and not turn it into a treatise (*Dem*. 228).[24] Since Demetrius' dictum also addresses audience, one can assume that he was referring not only to papyri length but also attention span. Sophisticated argument and elaborate ornamentation in the style of Plato and Thucydides hinder rather than help (*Dem*. 228, 232-33). Most audiences, perhaps with the exception of the fully educated aristocrats and their slaves, could not appreciate this type of writing (*Dem*. 234). Demetrius, sensitive to the audience, summarizes good letter writing as simple eloquence (*Dem*. 235). Furthermore, it seems that children learned as far back as Aristotle to take dictation before learning to read; this directly affected how the sounds of words were received (Dean 1996:54; Small 1997:84-98).[25] Writing at this time, then, primarily served to record sounds rather than meaning.

Examination of the Hebrew culture in which Paul lived further highlights the importance of memory. Liturgical literature such as Psalms 119 exploited acrostic form. The alphabetical pattern helped the faithful memorize a large amount of material for public worship. Certain

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[22] In their study of Vai culture, Scribner and Cole (1981:233) show that literacy does not thwart memory. Rather, the essential obstacle of literacy to memory is the changed learning habit. If people continue to learn by sound with the help of sight (reading), their memory may improve in some cases. However, if they only rely on their new literacy and use the written word as the basis for learning, their memory likely suffers somewhat. The authors thus conclude that "literacy makes some difference to some skills in some context" (1981:234).

[23] Quintilian also talked about the importance of words sounding pleasing to the ear (*Inst*. 1.5.4).

[24] This study is not the place to debate the important issue of how the final form of *On Style* came together. Let it suffice to say that the possibility of multiple authors is very real. Thus, this study uses the name "Demetrius" to denote the final form or the final name under which the text was published.

[25] The memory training invented by Simonides in accordance with Quintilian's writing was developed in order to memorize in terms of "scenes" or imagery (*Inst*. 11. 2. 17). Such imagery was often tied to a location. In Greek, the geographical association was called "topoi," while in Latin it was termed "loci." Words therefore became metaphors. Aristotle explored numerical and other patterns that had beginnings and endings in combination with image association of the earlier invention (*Mem*. 452a12-25; *Top*. 163b17-33).

regular combinations created by wordplay could stimulate the audience's memory. Orality and memory, along with aural reception, were built into a written text. From the vantage point of aural reception, neither orality nor memory diminished or enhanced the written work's literary quality. Another ancient example is the Roman requirement of memorization of the legal Twelve Tables by heart. Some scholars may regard such a practice as an indication of literacy (*de Leg.* 2.59). Nevertheless, the conclusion that memorization of certain social codes is equivalent to literacy is far from certain. What this regulation does show is that memorization was valued by this society for its practical usefulness. Without neglecting the scientific and literary scholarship, the Greek emphasis on memory training and eloquence continued into the Roman era, thus demonstrating the strong Greek rhetorical influence within Roman society.[26] In education, the emphasis on memory in Greco-Roman culture was similar to that of the Hebrew culture in which Paul lived (c.f. Josh. 1:8; Prov. 1:1-7; 3:1; 7:1ff; 31:1-9; Eccl. 1:1ff; Josephus' *Vit.* 8ff, etc.).[27] Such a parallel in memory training further reinforces the connection between orality and memory.

Since this study focuses only on the aural reception and oral performance of Paul's letters, it is important to see how letter writing was closely related to everyday conversation.[28] If letter writing were in some way a representation of a living voice, then the audience would have received the words differently than a modern day reader does. The first people to note the relationship between oral communication and letter writing were the ancient rhetorical scholars.[29] For Cicero, emotional expression, which communicates true feeling, must have had an effect on the reception of the letter (*Fam.* 2.4.1). Hence, there is no reason to assert with F. G. Kenyon that Cicero was necessarily more of a man of the letter than an orator (Gamble 1997:79). Cicero was well versed in both because there was little distinction between the two. In his letter to Atticus, Cicero described letter writing as *quasi loquerer*, a kind of conversation (*Att.* 9.10.1).

Demetrius made the relationship between conversation and letter writing even more clear by recording a particular teaching by Artemon, the editor of Aristotle's *Letters*. He recorded that letter-writing should be "in the same way as a dialogue" (*Dem.* 223). However, Demetrius himself went against conflating letters with speech by advocating a more careful construction of letters (*Dem.* 224, 226). Speech, in the conversational sense, was to Demetrius more suited for the theater than letter writing (*Dem.* 226). He made the distinction between oration and conversation elsewhere, showing that the two were related in their oral nature but different in their deliveries (*Dem.* 225). To put the issue another way, to what degree can writing mimic

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[26] See Quintillian, 1.1.36; 2.5.3.

[27] Rajak (1983:32) gives an example of a possible memorization feat by Josephus. If her contention is true, Josephus had incredible memory of Old Testament scriptures, without much access to manuscripts. This might also explain why Paul's Old Testament quotes were sometimes less than exact.

[28] Schubert (1939), O'Brien (1977), and White (1978) also contribute to understanding the parts and the whole of Paul's letter. White's study, from a sample of 660 papyri, proposes to examine the functions of the opening, closing, and the body of a letter (1978:283-319).

[29] Malherbe's *Ancient Epistolary Theorists* (1988) provides an excellent collection of sources for ancient epistolary theories in their original language as well as in translation. Much of my discussion on epistolary theories will draw its sources from this notable book.

speech but still remain intelligible? While letter writing handbooks probably had no more influence on letter writing than they do today, it is important to note that Demetrius and others like him probably made some observations on written letters before formulating their rules.

Compared with Cicero and Artemon, Demetrius' conception of letter writing and speech had some differences as well as similarities. Demetrius seems to be much more interested in theories rather than the practice of letter writing. Apparently, for people like Demetrius, who were completely conscious of a long tradition of letter writing, the theories were as important as the practice. Demetrius' commentator and translator, W. Rhys Roberts (*Dem*. 222-235), considered Demetrius' verses on letter writing among the best of his overall work on style (1996:276). Like Cicero, Demetrius regarded writing as half a conversation (*Dem*. 223). Thus writing was not an end in itself but served other social functions.[30] Unlike Artemon, Demetrius took more care with style than merely imitating a conversation (*Dem*. 224, 226).

The issue at hand is two-fold. First, how oral was ancient letter writing? Was it purely or partially conversational? Second, how did the presentation impact the audience? Did it represent the real author or merely the ideas the author wished to communicate? In reviewing many of the theorists in the Greco-Roman world, the perspectives on letter writing were far from uniform. For example, Seneca favored a conversational or plain-speaking style of writing (*Ep*. 75.1) and appreciated others for doing so (*Ep*. 40.1). For him, honesty without exaggeration was the best policy.

In Paul's time, to read a letter aloud in public likely required a much higher degree of comprehension by the reader than today. The Christian scribes wrote fewer lines to a page with fewer letters to a line and paid stronger attention to breathing marks than in contemporary literature. This attention to oral detail highlights the difficulty of public reading itself.[31] The fact that people then learned words in almost exactly the same way as people do today hindered rather than helped comprehension in the reading process (Dionysius of Halicarnassus, *Comp*, 25; Small 1997:23-4). The breathing marks and the lack of sentence breaks further stress the importance of pronunciation. Psychologists have made similar studies by re-creating the format of ancient writings in English. They have found that the effect of continuous capital letters without break causes the reader to read more slowly and carefully (Small 1997:19; Crowder and Wagner 1992:13-14). Apparently, reading as a skill is somewhat different from speech making, according to the personal example of Pliny the Younger, who alleged that he was a better extempore speaker than a book reader (*Ep*. 9.34.1-2). Either, the public readers were able to read at a good pace by their mastery of the language, or they had to look over the Pauline texts several times before public performances. Both required an advanced degree of literacy. Otherwise, public reading could be a real struggle for the readers and the audience.

In order to speak of the aural reception of an oral message, one has to take seriously the listeners' point of view. This is where the study of euphonics comes in. Whether or not the

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[30] Harris (1989:26-27) presents a well-structured list of the functions of writing.

[31] H. Gamble (1997:74) notes that E. G. Turner was the first one to discern this phenomenon. See also Turner (1977:84-87) who commented on the Chester Beatty Papyri. See also Gamble (1997:229-30) and Small (1997:13).

audience was consciously judgmental, Paul's letters would affect the listeners differently depending on the sound of the written words. Both the Greeks and the Romans were aware of the sound of words; indeed, they wrote treatises on the topic. Since this study considers the audience's perspective, it is important to see how insights from euphonics influenced the original audience. Not every theory of euphonics formulated by ancient intellectuals considers the audience in the same way.[32] To be sure, euphony was an important value in rhetorical formulation. The disagreement might have instead surrounded what was considered euphonic. Therefore, only a general discussion of overarching principles formed by ancient Greco-Roman scholars best serves the purpose of this study.

Among Greek writers, Dionysius of Halicarnassus had much to say about euphonics in poetry and prose (*Comp.* 10, 20).[33] Looking at a combination of alphabetical sounds, he proposed certain criteria for what combinations worked better aurally than others.[34] Curiously, the same sort of idea existed among Latin writers.[35] As a multilingual society, the Romans needed to take euphonics seriously. As one understands the various realities of ancient writing, the better question to ask may have to do with whether Paul's letters were truly oral and public.

In addressing the public reading of Paul's letters, confronting the problem of the Greco-Roman multilingual reality is unavoidable. Despite their conquest, the Romans did not discourage the diversity of languages in the Empire. The vastness of their Empire could not have unified language without the aid of modern media. Based on inscriptions in different dialects, Harris (1989:176-77, 193) accurately assumes a multilingual, multicultural, Roman society. Epigraphic languages outside of Italy included Greek, Latin, Getic, Lycaonian, Punic, Libyan, Gaelic, and countless others which were lost due to the natural erosion of papyri and other writing materials. Some local dialects were transliterated into Greek and Latin alphabets, thereby stressing the sounds rather than the forms of the words (Malakoff 1992:519-26).[36] This great

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[32] This is not to stress the great gulf between "intellectuals" and "commoners." After all, much of what the modern era considers classical literature was performed in public where many in the ancient lower class had equal access to these works. See Downing (2000) for an informed discussion of the alleged class differences in literature artificially and mistakenly created by modern interpreters.

[33] Though he noted the ears needing a sense of beauty as much as the eye, Dionysius distinguished between the two senses (*Comp.* 10). This highlighted the aural aspect of writing, as writing was for the ear in his society, and his work was intended for both poets and orators (*Comp.* 20). Later writers such as Quintilian considered his analyses within the tradition of good rhetoric (*Inst.* 3.1.16; 9.3.89; 9.4.88).

[34] Dionysius based his observations and qualifications on Homer, Herodotus, and Demosthenes (*Comp.* 12). Paul's audience was probably at least familiar with the Homeric epics, as these stories were a regular theatrical mainstay.

[35] Among Latin writers, Aulus Gellius wrote about the teaching of Valerius Probus, a prominent Roman grammarian in the second half of the first century CE (*NA* 13.21).

[36] A similar study on the African language Twi and English was done in the same collection of essays (Opoku 1992:175-89). In modern studies of children raised in bilingual families, the translation process is part of the child's developed ability. The common pitfall of syntactical and grammatical confusion found in some adults who acquire a second language does not happen in children. Having seen the great mixture of ethnic groups in Asia, for example, it is reasonable to assume that there were people raised as fluent bilinguals who could conduct perfect

diversity suggests that not everyone could read Greek but might have understood only the spoken forms (Gamble 1997:230).[37] Even if someone did not understand Greek, which was an unlikely scenario, church members could have practiced the logical steps of simultaneous translation long before this late evidence.[38] Having briefly touched on how a multilingual congregation could have understood a Greek letter, it is now beneficial to examine the evidence of orality in Paul's letters.

Orality in Paul's Letters

When reading Paul's letters, one may notice hints of oral composition that suggest he composed his letters by a combination of oral and written processes. Certainly, Paul himself saw his written words as having an oral representation by saying in Galatians 4:20, "How I wish I could be with you and change my tone." Many of his letters suggest the context of public reading. Compared with the papyri, Paul's letters are relatively long.[39] Some of Cicero's longer

translation without misrepresenting the meaning of Paul's words. Altarriba (1992:157-174) proves from multiple language research of bilinguals—ranging from speakers of Spanish, English, Dutch, and French to non-European language speakers like Korean—that fluent bilinguals translate by common concepts between two languages. In other words, the bilingual speaker finds the semantic concept from the one language and replaces it with a word that shares the same semantic range from another language. Although many still vigorously debate this point by taking the bilingual phenomenon as the sum of two distinctly separate languages, evidence seems to favor the singular semantic universe which is greater than the sum of the two distinct languages. Most of the studies done on this work have been based on post-colonial societies. Paul's audience was such a society, with various ethnic groups under a centralized Roman colonial rule.

[37] The officially known evidence for bilingual translation from Greek to Syriac comes from late fourth-century Jerusalem. In churches where bilingualism is both a linguistic and cultural issue today, simultaneous translation is a natural step. No written procedure is necessary to deal with this problem. Therefore, no "evidence" will have been found of translation having taken place for future researchers.

[38] With the discussion of sounds, there is still the problem of someone not understanding either Aramaic or Greek. In the case of Paul's multi-lingual audience, how could a person who understood no Greek derive any meaning from hearing Greek sounds? The problem was not as great as it first appears. From what his letters indicated about his mission, Paul tended to stay on the major Roman trade routes. Churches founded along these routes would naturally have been familiar with Greek. As for the circulatory letters, they could have easily been translated and copied into other dialects before their distribution to the more rural areas. If the sound gave any sense or meaning to written words, anyone familiar with the sense can easily explain the idea in his or her own dialect with little difficulty. An excellent example of sound being exactly the sense and meaning of the word is "onomatopeia" or "mimesis" (see Stanford 1967:99-121 for a useful discussion of this topic). For example, the word "murmur" literally sounds like someone making annoying complaints. For the translator, s/he could explain the *sense* rather than the *sound* of the assonance. Quintilian noted that with people who became literate through thorough rhetorical training, the practice of translation from Greek to Latin was not uncommon (*Inst*. 10.5.2-3). There is even a discussion on "dynamic equivalence" in translation considered (*Inst*. 10.5.3), and translations ranged from the more literate sort to that of paraphrase (*Inst*. 10.5.4-10). As long as people in the congregation had literary training, they were qualified to transmit and read Paul's relatively simple letters.

[39] In fact, they resemble the treatise form that Demetrius found so unhelpful (*Dem*. 228). For example, if one can make comparisons between Paul, Cicero, and other writers like Pliny the Younger, all of whom were prolific letter writers, there is a marked difference in average letter length between them. Most of the letters by

letters are not too terribly lengthy compared to an average Pauline letter.[40] The same is true of the works by Pliny the Younger.

Indications of Orality

Two lines of evidence clearly indicate spoken words in the delivery of Paul's letters: the first point at which the social convention of public reading is illustrated within Pauline letters is in 1 Thessalonians 5:27. Paul's saying in 1 Thessalonians 5:27 seems to indicate that he intended his letter to be read aloud to the church (Dewey 1995:40-49).[41] The ecclesiastical function of these letters directly points to public reading. Since the second century, the synagogue, for example, evidently practiced regulated public reading in liturgy (Gamble 1997:209-11). Since people wrote in continuous scripts (alphabets and words with no breaks in between), public reading became an interpretive exercise in itself. The manner of reading would create meaning and emphasis for the audience. That is perhaps why Latin was sometimes written in separate wordings (Small 1997:20-12).[42] In fact, word layout strongly affects the reading process. Experiments with bilingual speakers of English and Hebrew who were originally Hebrew speakers illuminate the issue (Small 1997:19-20). Participants in this exercise read aloud an English text and an unpointed Hebrew text. The result was that the readers were able to read the English text in a much faster manner. Written presentation certainly affects the reader.

Second, Paul's way of dealing with problems and conflicts within the church was to let his letter speak for him through his emissaries, if he could not resolve the situation in person (1 Cor. 16:10-11). In Greco-Roman times, emissaries were often members of the letter writer's household who were bound for the destination of the letter (*Att*. 8.14; *PCol*. 3.6.15).[43] Since the content of the letter could be contaminated, trust was an important factor (*QFr*. 3.8.2; 3.9.6). Even though a trusted friend could also distort meanings (*Inst*. 11.1.37), it was still better for people who knew Paul to read for him. Since trust was often the problem when it came to delivery and representing a letter (*Att*. 4.15.4), emissaries made up of those recognized by Paul

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Cicero and Pliny the Younger approach the length of Paul's shortest letter (his letter to Philemon), though Pliny wrote some relatively long letters as well. However long Pliny's letters may have been, they are nowhere the length of Paul's letter to the Romans.

[40] Two longer examples from Cicero are his letters to his brother Quintus *QFr*. 1.1 and 3.1. In his longer letters, Cicero discussed his concerns in brief as opposed to Paul's drawn-out discussions, explanations, and careful nuances.

[41] Gamble (1997:208-31) gives a thorough history of early public reading mostly from the second century. *Anagnôsis* and its cognate was traced back prior to the LXX to Pauline era as a technical word for reading in public, especially in an ecclesiastical context (Arndt and Gingrich 1979:52).

[42] Concerning this circumstance, Seneca the Younger remarked that the pace and style of reading between Greek and Latin might have been due to Latin word separation in written words (*Ep*. 40. 11-12).

[43] *PCol*. is taken from the papyri samples from White (1986:43).

and the Christian community came to be qualified Pauline representatives (2 Cor. 8:16; Ward 1994:102-4; Ziesler 1991:3).[44]

Based on the comparison of Pauline data and social convention of secretarial help, the communication process from writing to delivery probably included the following seven steps: First, Paul dictated to the secretary after having worked out the scheme of the letter either in his head or on wax tablets (*Inst*. 10.3.31-33).[45] Second, after the completion of the dictation, Paul would in turn check on the work of his secretary to correct any kind of error.[46] At this stage, the secretary possibly helped with grammatical nuances. Then, Paul would sign his own letter with a few summary remarks. Third, a close Pauline associate would deliver the letter as an emissary. Fourth, a church official would receive the letter and would arrange to have either himself or someone in the church read the letter aloud publicly. Such a duty depended on the skill of the public reader. Fifth, the big day came when the letter was read in public. Sixth, after this process, the letter would either be analyzed by the literate official or be copied into another roll for other churches (in the case of the circular letter). The copies could be either in Greek or interlinear with other local dialects, including Latin. And finally, the letter was sent to another church for reference, if it was indeed a circular letter (Col. 4:16).[47]

After exploring the social convention evident in Paul's letters, it is important to focus on the orality of Paul's literary work. In so doing, it is important to explore some of the parallel techniques recorded in many oral cultures, which are also found in Paul's writings. Some techniques Paul used were alliterations, repetitions (Gal. 1:5-7, 11, 13; 2:16-21, etc.), and paranomasia, or word play (i.e. putting words of the same sound or the same words in close proximity to each other). Margaret E. Lee (formerly Margaret E. Dean [1996:55]) quite correctly notes that Paul had introduced many of his arguments by deliberate repetition of important words and concepts. Tolmie's (2005:251) recent work shows a substantial amount of word play in Galatians alone. Paranomasia was extremely important for emphasizing certain concepts and for

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[44] Also see passages like Galatians 6:11, 17; 2 Corinthians 10:10; and 11:6.

[45] The degree of involvement by the secretary would probably depend on Paul's familiarity with Greek grammar and his view of the subject matter. Just as it does not take someone with a higher education to know how to write "Dear Sir/Madame" in modern times, Paul must have had the most basic exposure to knowledge of Greco-Roman letters. This does not suggest that Paul was familiar with or made use of all the epistolary techniques accumulated in his cultural surroundings, but he did not need such knowledge to write a coherent letter to his audience who stood within the Greco-Roman tradition. Josephus, on the other hand, stayed in Jerusalem's and Galilee's Jewish circle, so he was slightly restricted as to what he could say at the beginning of his writing (*AJ*. 1. 7; 20. 263). However, the final version seems to be in good enough Greek to be considered a sound literary work. The multilingual culture of Palestine and its surrounding area would typify many different areas of the Roman Empire. On this subject, see especially Rajak (1983:230-32), specifically on the possibility of Josephus being competent in Hebrew and Aramaic (*AJ* 1. 34; 3. 151-178).

[46] Richards (1988:45, 55) gives examples of why proofreading for grammar (*Fam*. 16.17.1) and content (*QFr*. 3.9.8; *POxy*. 1487) is important.

[47] This is not the place to debate whether or not Paul wrote Colossians. At the very least, the letter shows a prominent tradition of circular letters in the early church.

queuing the audience to focus on certain concepts in Paul's letters. In fact, interpretation of repeated patterns does not undermine but enhances philological research. Sounds add a new dimension to philology. In Paul's other letters, one can find the practice of paronomasia, or word play. In 1 Corinthians 16:22a, the love of the Lord is mentioned along with a curse (1 Cor. 16: 22a). The same Greek curse word *anathema* was used in 1 Corinthians 12:3. The love of the Corinthians seemed to be focused on either human beings (1 Cor. 1:12), their personal preferences (1 Cor:5-11), or on their own gifts (1 Cor:12-14), thus bringing upon themselves the danger of a curse. The mention of the transliterated Aramaic formula *maranatha* seems to be a Eucharistic formula echoing the chaos of 1 Corinthians 11:17-22 and the hope of 1 Corinthians 11:26.[48] If the modern interpreter considers the oral characteristic of this particular formula and refers back to the Greek word *anathema* almost all the same letters except for one were used to spell out both words.[49] Furthermore, Paul's usage of the LXX spelling *anathema* instead of the usual non-biblical Greek *anathêma* possibly hinted at the covenantal context of the Old Testament holy war (Kern 1998:224).[50] This further matches the new covenant contained within Paul's eucharistic ideal. This kind of link is provided by the context of sound patterns, thereby linking the blessing of the second Aramaic word to the curse of the first which in turn changes the nature of the second Aramaic word.[51] This second Aramaic formula echoes the oral practice of the early church liturgy. Therefore, the second Aramaic word functions as both a blessing and a curse—a blessing for the obedient and a curse for the rebellious. In this case, the sound gives the sense of the meaning.[52] The last verse 1 Corinthians 16:24 turns from a stern tone to a merciful one that transitions well to the final chapter of 1 Corinthians. One may again suspect that Paul finished this greeting with his own hand in the length of four sentences. 1 Corinthians 16:21, which seems to function as a part of a greater motif of blessing and cursing in the Corinthian situation, clearly indicates another trait similar to Galatians 6:11: Paul's own signature.

Finally, based on the above assessment of Paul's letters, one may find Ruth Finnegan's categories of audience helpful (1980:217-33, 416). First, the audience could have been part of the performance itself, which could be further subdivided into degrees of involvement. Second, the audience was functionally demarcated from the author (Paul's audience resembled this second kind). While scholars often attempt to arrive at a monolithic theory on orality, humanity

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[48] How else would a group of Greek-speaking gentiles know the Aramaic transliteration, unless it was a Eucharistic formula?

[49] Gluck 1970:72-75 calls this an associative pun, though his examples are from the Hebrew Bible (for example Lev. 26:41; Deut. 10:16; Jer. 4:4; 9:25; Ezek. 44:7, 9, etc.).

[50] The two spellings had overlapping and similar semantic range. Was the choice for the LXX spelling deliberate? Did Paul write this in relation to the oral delivery with a view of further visual examination of the meaning?

[51] For the common Hebrew examples of linking sound patterns, see McCreesh (1991:51-63).

[52] Dean (1998:88) concludes that the ancients may have used auditory rather than purely logical connections. Her own exegetical examples of Paul's repetitions sufficiently prove her point.

is simply too complex for any single "correct" theory or model. Thus, it is unhelpful for any case study to be forced into a model. For the most part, the models are usually correct in the specific situation, which they attempt to describe. For interpreters of Paul, Finnegan's presupposition of the coexistence of literate and illiterate fits Paul's society perfectly (Foley 1986:18). As with any case of literary analysis, context is the key. In conclusion, it is far more fitting to classify Paul's letters as written letters meant for public delivery or discourses rather than as purely literary letters.

Implications

The above discussion supports several implications. First, while writing can have a more lasting value, speech can only have power when the speaker makes sounds. This raises a separate but not an entirely different issue. Even if it is fine to talk about orality, the idea of aurality also must be considered. Furthermore, the speaker not only pronounces sounds but the hearer also hears them (Ong 1982:39-40). Any interpreter must examine the whole informational transaction.

Second, social context should include literacy in relation to orality, education, and social structure. When scholars discuss Greco-Roman literacy, their presuppositions often come into play.[53] Observations made on ancient data range from those who assert high to very low degrees of literacy in Paul's society.[54] Paul's society of course had a low literacy rate compared to modern "first world" countries.[55] Unlike today, one did not need to read to function in society. Rather, the different social functions of literacy and orality should be the central issue of any hermeneutical endeavor for specific literature.

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[53] See for example, the discussion on the impossibility of formulating Pompeii's literacy rate in Franklin, Jr. (1991:80-81). Hopkins (1991:135) uses simple statistics in material evidence from archeological finds only in comparing Greek and Egyptian demotics. The approach of transferring linguistic phenomena in a specific region to many other geographical and social situations is too reductive.

[54] Carol M. Cipolla (1969:38-39), for example, theorizes that literacy was a contribution from Hellenism. In fact, literacy existed in varying degrees from much older eras. It likely existed since the days of Cadmus around 1300 BC, if the Roman legend has any accuracy. Many such views are personal opinions, without the precision and nuance necessary to understand the complex social dynamics of Greco-Roman literacy. Though there is really no demonstrable data of the low estimate on Greco-Roman literacy, there exist parallels in similar conditions in some communities today.

[55] Harris (1989:22-26) presents data from 1871 Italy to 1960 Morocco to preface his study of the Greco-Roman world. Some of the known parallels with today's tribal situations are as follows: the availability of printing technology, the availability of public education, the economic demands on the family, economic record keeping, and the evidence of professional scribes (see Aristotle's *Pol.* 8.3.1338a15-17; Diodorus 7.13). Harris concludes that the literacy rate in the Roman Empire was less than ten percent. Even if Herodotus' (8.22) record has frequently been used as the proof of ancient literacy, the famous historian himself wrote about characters that dictated for something to be copied and then in turn read out loud to the audience. Such a strange irony should alert anyone with too quick a claim of ancient literacy. Kenyon (1932:35-37) assumes simplistically that Roman occupation was the main cause of Egyptian literacy. He further applied this notion to all of the Empire. The assumption is that the amount of written material discovered in a certain period is a direct indication of mass literacy in that period.

Third, Paul's society was thoroughly rhetorical, with great emphasis on the "spoken" word. Memory and spoken words were intertwined, which demands the modern interpreter gain a true understanding of the symbolic universe of memory along with written and/or spoken words. As in ancient Hebrew culture, Roman society relied on memory much more thoroughly than many modern societies. For instance, repeated sounds, as well as culturally repeated patterns, can conjure ideas. Using a modern example of speech can make this point even more clearly. If one were to make a speech and memorize the pattern based on numerical points, the audience should recognize that after point number two comes point number three. Upon hearing "one, two," the listener does not think about "nine" but expects a "three."

Fourth, the length of Paul's sentences matters in terms of how effectively he communicated in an oral environment. Where, then, does this leave the listeners of Paul's letters in relation to sentence length and oral characteristics? The reader cannot determine oral characteristics on sentence length alone because Paul could have taken a pause before he finished a formal grammatical sentence unit. There were places where Paul used long formulae in addition to his main sentences. The sentence length, then, can be balanced by breaking up phrases in Paul's sentences in the exegetical process in order to better appreciate the spoken delivery of the letters.

Fifth, orality and rhetoric were closely linked. Naturally, the social function of orality in the ancient society contributed to linking the oral and rhetorical in some sort of relationship. In his letters, Cicero noted that writing in his society was meant primarily for the ear and not the eye (*Fam*. 2.4.1). Rhetorical strategy must have taken oral delivery into consideration. Therefore, long and complicated studies of discourse analysis with many ring patterns and elaborate chiasmus would have to adjust to the idea of original aural reception. Such elaborate efforts in rhetorical studies are largely the product of modern printed texts for a literate reader. Any effective claim of chiasm had to be within a few verses, in order for the text to be effective in communication.

So, in conclusion, are we "misreading" Paul? The answer, of course, depends on what we mean by "reading."[56]

Overseas Theological Seminary, USA

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[56] This article is a revised version of an earlier publication, "Are We 'Misreading' Paul?" in *Jien Dao,* 26 (2006):25-54.

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Dem.   Demetrius' *de Elocutione*

Ep.   *Epistulae* by Pliny the Younger, Seneca or Isocrates

Fam.   Cicero's *Epistulae ad Familiares*

Inst.   Quintilian's *Institutio oratoria*

NovT   *Novum Testamentum*

PCol.   *Columbia Papyri*

POxy   *Oxyrhynchus Papyri*

Pol.   Aristotle's *Politica*

QFr   Cicero's *Epistulae ad Quintum Fratrem*

Rh.   Aristotle's *Rhetorica*

Vit.   Josephus' *Vita*

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