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The Reciprocity of Paul's Identity Formation

An Analysis of Gal 3:28 through the Lens of Cultural Transfer

Abstract: In this chapter, I employ an approach from cultural transfer studies to understand and interpret Paul's interaction and encounter with his Galatian congregations, thus contributing to a newly developing perspective on the Pauline letters. I will argue that Paul, in the process of cultural transfer of the Gospel of the Jewish Messiah Jesus, not only construes a new identity for his addressees but is also affected in his self-understanding showing the reciprocity of cultural transfer. The main question is thus: how does Paul understand and interpret the encounter with the Galatian congregations and what strategies does he employ for this cultural transfer to work? I will firstly describe how the concept of cultural transfer and biculturality is applied in newer research on Paul. This then functions as a hermeneutical frame for the following case study of Gal 3:28 in the context of Paul's letter to the Galatians.

Keywords: cultural transfer (studies), letters of Paul, Epistle to the Galatians, New Testament studies, identity construction

1 Introduction

The apostle Paul is one of the most important figures in early Christianity, which developed in the first century CE. Seven of his authentic letters¹ have been transmitted in the corpus of the New Testament, and they provide an interesting textual example for tracing the transcultural encounters explored in this volume. In this chapter, I employ an approach from cultural transfer studies to understand and interpret Paul's interaction with his Galatian congregations, thereby contributing to a newly developing perspective on the Pauline letters. I view this historical encounter as a premodern example of Connected Philology, understanding it as a form of non-monodirectional cultural transfer. I will argue that in the process of cultural transfer of the Gospel of

¹ The letters to the Romans, 1&2 Corinthians, Galatians, Philippians, Thessalonians and to Philemon. For further information, see Horn (2013, 165–226). For a minority opinion which considers the case of

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the Jewish Messiah² Jesus,³ Paul not only shapes a new identity for his addressees but is also affected in his self-understanding, illustrating the reciprocity of cultural transfer. Here, Paul acts as a cultural mediator, whose reasoning is deeply embedded in an argument centring on Israel's forefather and figure of identification,⁴ Abraham. He draws upon the textual tradition of the Old Testament, and in his citations from Genesis, as well as his grammatical and allegorical approach to the figure of Abraham, he employs methods that can be called philological in a premodern sense.⁵ The main question, then, is: how does Paul understand and interpret the encounter with the Galatian congregations, and what strategies does he employ to ensure the success of this cultural transfer?⁶

First, I will describe how the concept of cultural transfer and biculturality has been applied in recent research on Paul. This functions as a hermeneutical frame for the then following case study of Gal 3:28 in the context of Paul's letter to the Galatians. The verse is especially promising as the theoretical paradigm has previously been applied mainly to Paul's first letter to the Corinthians (Ehrensperger 2013; Kobel 2019). Thus, this new case study expands the textual base for this approach in Pauline studies, thereby testing its broader applicability. In it, I will first introduce the historical and argumentative context of the letter. Then, I will explore Gal 3:28 and interpret corresponding self-depictions of the apostle.

2 Paul and cultural transfer studies

In recent research on the apostle, concepts from cultural studies have been applied to the Pauline corpus. For this chapter, the monographs by Kathy Ehrensperger and, more recently, Esther Kobel are particularly important (Ehrensperger 2013; Kobel 2019). Both establish a new perspective on Paul's identity and his role in the communication with his congregations. Ehrensperger and Kobel understand Paul as having had a bicultural identity (Ehrensperger 2013, 51–62, 214–216; Kobel 2019, 55–62, 153–214). This means that he participated in Jewish culture⁷ and drew upon its tradi-

a canonical redaction of Paul's letters in the second century CE, particularly concerning the role of Abraham in Galatians, see Klinghardt (2018).

² For the understanding of Χριστός not only as a title but as a concept, see Novenson (2016).

³ For the term Jewish Messiah Jesus, see Thiessen (2023, 71–81).

⁴ For Abraham as a figure of identification, see Mühling (2011, 343–370).

⁵ See 3.2.

⁶ The language of cultural transfer is, of course, etic language. But as such it may help in better understanding some aspects of Galatians. As will become clear in this chapter, the concept of cultural transfer is not just applied to Paul but is used to highlight Paul's specific strategies.

⁷ Of course, the concept of one uniform Jewish culture is illusory. What is of interest here is not that Paul is compatible with a scholarly construct of norm Judaism, but that he himself identifies as belonging to this culture. For an ethnological perspective on this question of belonging to Judaism or considering Paul within Judaism, see Van Maaren (2023).

tions, which can be seen, for example, in his frequent citations⁸ from the Old Testament (Kobel 2019, 2). His identification with Jewish culture is evident in his letters and clearly part of his self-understanding. Paul identifies as a correctly circumcised (Phil 3:5) Jew (Gal 2:15; Rom 9:3) and situates himself within the genealogical matrix of Judaism and its groups in the first century CE, describing himself as a part of the tribe of Benjamin and a Pharisee (Phil 3:5). But Paul is also part of the Greek-speaking Hellenised cultural sphere. This is most clearly reflected in the language he uses in his letters: Koine Greek. Describing Paul as bicultural, or bilingual with respect to the form of his letters, helps these scholars to better understand his mediating role for his congregations.

Ehrensperger and Kobel criticise paradigms that emphasise the cultural fusion and indistinguishability of different cultures under the influence of Hellenism. Challenging this concept of cultural amalgamation, they focus on the cultural differences between the apostle and his congregations (Ehrensperger 2013, 17–38; Kobel 2019, 39–55). Kobel, in particular, seeks to understand the communication process between Paul and his congregations from the perspective of cultural transfer studies.⁹ Cultural transfer takes place between the sender from a source culture and a receiver from a target culture, and has both a procedural and reciprocal character.¹⁰ “Betrachtet wird also bei der Kulturtransferforschung der Prozess, der zwischen Sendenden, Vermit-

⁸ Paul mainly seems to use the Greek translation, the Septuagint (LXX), though sometimes his citations are closer to the text of the Hebrew Bible. This may be explained through a use of a different *Vorlage* or Paul's knowledge of the Hebrew text. For a thorough analysis of Paul's use of scripture, see Koch (1986).

⁹ Kobel attributes the origin of this approach to Michel Espagne and Michael Werner, who established a research group at the Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique (Kobel 2019, 20). For Espagne and Werner's work, see also Espagne and Werner (1985; 1988). For the analytical model of cultural transfer, see Werner (1995); Kortländer (1995); Lüsebrink (2005; 2016, 143–188). Common critiques of this approach include the presupposition of a bilateral scheme of cultural transfer and its focus on print media. The second point, for obvious reasons, is not relevant to this chapter. The first critique is more pertinent, but as this chapter focuses specifically on reciprocity, the hierarchy often presupposed in a bilateral schema will be questioned.

The cultural transfer approach was further developed into *histoire croisée*. Kobel combines the two approaches with the goal of countering a common critique of the original theory: that it fails to fully account for the reciprocity of such processes (Kobel 2019, 25–28). Werner and Espagne serve as links between these two approaches, using the critique of the cultural transfer paradigm to refine the new approach of *histoire croisée*. For *histoire croisée*, see Werner and Zimmermann (2002; 2006). *Histoire croisée* is very closely related to other methods like the Connected History. For connected history, see Subrahmanyam (2022).

¹⁰ See Lüsebrink (2005, 27): “es beschreibt keine komplexen interkulturellen Räume oder Sphären, wie etwa die Konzepte des *transkulturellen Raums* und der *multikulturellen Gesellschaft*, sondern *prozessuale Verlaufsformen*, durch die kulturelle Artefakte verschiedenster Art zwischen Kulturräumen *zirkulieren*” (emphasis in the original) [it does not describe complex intercultural spaces or spheres, such as concepts of transcultural space and multicultural society, but rather processual forms through which cultural artifacts of various kinds circulate between cultural spaces.].

telnden, Empfangenden sowie vermitteltem Kulturgut abläuft” (Kobel 2019, 22) [In the research on cultural transfer, the process that occurs between senders, mediators, recipients, and the mediated cultural goods is considered].¹¹

When applying this approach from cultural transfer studies to Paul’s communication in his letters, we consider the apostle communicating the gospel of the Jewish Messiah Jesus – an immaterial cultural artefact from the Jewish source culture – to a largely gentile, that means non-Jewish, target culture in his congregations (Kobel 2019, 20–28).¹² His mediating role is not only an etic category but also reflected in the emic language of Paul’s letters, where he calls himself the apostle to the gentiles (Gal 2:8; Rom 11:13, 15:16).¹³ However, this process should not be imagined as one-sided. In the cultural transfer, a reciprocal effect on both sender and receiver can be observed. In the case of Paul, this is reflected in his bicultural identity which allows him to also participate in the target culture (Kobel 2019, 3). In this model, Paul assumes the role of a cultural mediator who, by participating in his target culture, facilitates the successful cultural transfer of the gospel of the Jewish Messiah, Jesus.

In the following, this model of cultural transfer will be applied to Paul’s letter to the Galatians.¹⁴ This analysis will consider the effects of the cultural transfer of the gospel of the Jewish Messiah, Jesus, on both the gentile congregations and Paul’s sense of identity. I will argue that in Gal 3:28, Paul reflects on the process of transfer itself. This can be observed in his flexible self-identification along the lines of already diminished ethnic, social, and gender differences in relation to Christ, as depicted in Gal 3:28. Thus, the reciprocal character of the cultural transfer Paul is striving to achieve is emphasised.

3 The case study: Galatians

In the following, a key verse from Paul’s letter to the Galatians will be analysed with regard to the process of cultural transfer in which it is embedded. First, I will describe

¹¹ Unless indicated otherwise, the translations are my own.

¹² For the gospel as the content of Paul’s communication, see Rom 1:1; 15:16.19.25; 1Cor 4:15; 9:14.18; 15:1; 2Cor 2:12; 10:14; 11:4.7; Gal 1:11; 2:2.7; Phil 4:15; 1Thess 1:5; 2:4.8.9.

¹³ These letters and the underlying personal contact between the congregations and Paul represent cultural encounters. Lüsebrink (2005, 29): “Kulturtransferprozesse im definierten Sinn sind genuine Bestandteile von Kulturkontakten, die von ganz unterschiedlichen politischen Kontexten und sehr verschiedenen sozio-kulturellen Konstellationen gekennzeichnet sein können” [Cultural transfer processes in the defined sense are genuine components of cultural contacts, which can be characterised by very different political contexts and very different socio-cultural constellations]. Concerning the significance of the letterform in these encounters, see Kobel (2019, 71–88).

¹⁴ Strecker’s suggestion to examine Gal 3:28 (Strecker 2020) is taken up here to provide a response to the criticism directed at Kobel’s specific focus on 1 Cor 9:19–27.

the Galatian addressees and the situation in their congregations. As a second step, I will consider the context of the main argument of Paul's letter in Gal 3–4. Paul appeals to the Old Testament and uses the Genesis story of Abraham to establish a connection between his gentile audience and the forefather of Israel through a Christological interpretation of this authoritative text. The primary focus of this chapter – Gal 3:28 – will then be translated and analysed. I will demonstrate how this verse not only leads to the construction of a new identity for the addressees but also shapes Paul's self-understanding. Gal 3:28 can be understood as Paul's reflective understanding of the process of cultural transfer, which he interprets through a Christological lens. In this way, the object of cultural transfer becomes the subject of a redefinition of both sender and receiver.

3.1 Paul's addressees and the historical situation

Paul's addressees are the congregations in Galatia,¹⁵ which he founded, resulting in a close relationship with him (Gal 4:12–13.19). The exact location of Galatia has long been an object of debate in New Testament studies. Two main hypotheses can be distinguished. On the one hand, the south Galatian hypothesis locates Galatia in the Roman province of the same name (Riesner 1994, 243.250–259; Breytenbach 1996, 99–173; Witulski 2000, 224; Schäfer 2004, 290–315; Sängner 2010 = 2016; John 2016, 133–159). This region is known for its Jewish influence and the presence of Jewish communal life (Acts 13:14; 14:1; 16:1–3). Regarding the profile of the congregations, a presence of both gentile and Jewish Christ believers is therefore possible. On the other hand, several scholars also support the north Galatian theory (Schnelle 2013, 121–122; Betz 1988, 34–40; Koch 2014, 296–300). Here, Galatia is identified to be part of the region Galatia, for which no evidence of a Jewish presence has been found (Riesner 1994, 252–253). Both hypotheses are to be considered with care and evaluated in light of the evidence within the letter itself.

Paul's primary purpose in sending the letter seems to involve be to address a problem that mainly concerns the gentiles of his congregations. Paul's argument is shaped by this problem. From the text of the letter, the following can be recon-

15 From an ethnohistorical perspective, the Galatians were Celts that migrated to Asia minor starting in 279 BCE and settled in the regions of Gordion and Ancyra, which were later named Galatia after them. Around 25 BCE, this region was incorporated into the Roman province of Galatia "die auch Teile südlich gelegener Landschaften wie Pisidien, Lykaonien, Isaurien, Paphlagonien, Pontus Galaticus und (zeitweise) Pamphylien [umfasste]" (Schnelle 2013, 119) [which also [included] parts of southern regions such as Pisidia, Lycaonia, Isauria, Paphlagonia, Pontus Galaticus and (temporarily) Pamphylia]. In the context of the chronology of Acts, the south Galatian hypothesis presupposes Paul's first mission trip (Acts 13:4–14:28) and the north Galatian hypothesis the second or third trip (Acts 16:6–8; 18:23).

structed: after Paul had left Galatia, his relationship with the Galatian congregations¹⁶ was tested when other preachers¹⁷ introduced a different teaching. This teaching required the gentiles to undergo circumcision and become a part of Israel (Gal 6:12–13). It is thus likely that the majority of the congregants had not previously considered themselves Jews and were not circumcised, but were instead non-Jewish gentiles.¹⁸ Even if some members of the congregation were Jews, Paul is mainly concerned not with their Jewish identity but with the attempt to alter their gentile identity. While the location of the Galatian congregations is of historical interest, it does not alter the fact that Paul mainly addresses Christ-believing gentiles.

For the preachers, the Galatian reception of the gospel of the Jewish Messiah posed a religious and ethnic dilemma, which they sought to clarify by advocating for circumcisions. They understood the gospel of the Messiah Jesus as being solely directed at Israel. Conversion to the gospel was therefore seen as requiring membership or at least bodily association with Israel through circumcision.¹⁹ With his letter to the Galatian congregations, Paul responded to this difficult situation. Paul identified these other preachers as his opponents and took a very polemical stance against them. He attempted to address the ethnic confusion by connecting the gentiles to Israel's forefather Abraham without directly incorporating them in Israel. Paul's letter concerns the very future of the Galatian congregations, a future he tries to shape by appealing to the sacred past.

¹⁶ I use the plural because, according to Gal 1:2, several congregations are the addressees of the letter (ταῖς ἐκκλησίαις τῆς Γαλατίας [to the congregations of Galatia]).

¹⁷ Different descriptions of this ominous group exist. Scholars have called them preachers, opponents, teachers, etc. All of these are etic descriptions. Paul himself does not identify the group, referring to them only as τινές [some] (Gal 1:7). This opposing group appears in only five passages (Gal 1:6–9; 3:1; 4:17; 5:7–12, and 6:12–13). The identity of these opponents is still up for debate. However, most scholars interpret them as Christ-believing Jews who had a judaising intention. See Eckert (1971, 236–238); Lüdemann (1983, 144–151); Betz (1988, 43); Mußner (1988, 25); Howard (1989, 19); Dunn (1993, 9–11); Lang (1996); Martyn (1997, 117–126); Becker (1998, 12–14); Sumney (1999, 134–159); Hurd (2005); de Boer (2008); de Boer (2011, 50–61); cautious: Lührmann (1988, 106); Vouga (1998, 159–162); recently: Sängner (2019); Bachmann (2021).

See also the introductions to the New Testament: Schnelle (2013, 125–128); Broer (2016, 428–432); Theobald (2020, 358–361).

¹⁸ This becomes evident in Gal 6:12, where circumcision emerges as the central issue of the letter. Concerning the circumcision in Galatia, see Gal 5:2–6.11–12. Paul also mentions that his companion Titus was not forced to undergo circumcision in Gal 2:3.

¹⁹ This differentiation is necessary because it is not entirely clear how exactly Paul's opponents understood circumcision, though it is most likely that they intended it as a means of incorporating gentiles into Israel. Paul hints at this when, at the end of his letter, he mentions Israel (Gal 6:16) only shortly after addressing his opponents (Gal 6:12–13).

3.2 Paul's argumentation in Gal 3–4

Paul reacts to the Galatian confrontation with a complex argument that he develops in Gal 3–4. In the structure of the letter, these chapters constitute the main part of his argument.²⁰ Especially in Gal 3:6–29 and 4:21–31, the apostle draws upon the Abraham narrative from Genesis (Gen 11:26–25:10), thereby demonstrating his familiarity with the Jewish traditions of the Old Testament. Paul invokes the figure of the patriarch to integrate the gentile Galatians into God's history with Abraham and in a broader sense his relationship with Israel. In an attempt to refute the necessity of circumcision, Paul argues that God's promise to Abraham already foreshadows the inclusion of the gentiles in His plan. He uses various strategies to connect his gentile audience with the patriarch. On the one hand, he describes the structural parallels in their relationship to God, which is constituted by their faith (Gal 3:6–9). On the other hand, Paul establishes a genealogical link between the gentiles and Abraham via Jesus Christ, who is understood to be Abraham's true heir (Gal 3:10–18, esp. 15–18). Paul, after addressing the role of the law (Gal 3:19–25), connects the gentile Galatians with Jesus Christ, portraying their relationship as a union in Christ (Gal 3:26–29). He reinterprets the story of Abraham's two wives, Sara and Hagar, as an allegory to underscore the Galatians' link to the patriarchal era (Gal 4:21–31).

Assuming a broad definition of philology,²¹ Paul's argumentation can be identified as philological in a premodern sense, as he draws on the written sacred tradition of the Jewish people. The specifically philological nature of his argument is reflected in three aspects of this passage: his use of citations, a grammatical argument, and an allegorical argument.

To begin with, Paul cites from different sections of the Genesis story to connect the gentiles to Abraham. While the citation in Gal 3:6 can be identified with Gen 15:6,²² Paul also employs composite citations that are more difficult to trace to a single section in Genesis. This is evident in Gal 3:8, where he quotes a verse with elements drawn from both Gen 12:3 and Gen 18:18.²³ Another example appears in Gal 3:16, where Paul uses the phrase τῷ σπέρματί σου [your seed], which could be drawn from

²⁰ Structure of the letter: (A) Beginning: Prescript: 1:1–5; Prooemium: 1:6–10; (B) Letter corpus: Autobiographical sequence: 1:11–2:21; Theological argument 3:1–5:12; Parenetical sequence: 5:13–6:10; (C) Closing: 6:11–18 (Frey 2021, 369–370).

²¹ I am following Sheldon Pollock's definition: "What I offer instead as a rough-and-ready working definition at the same time embodies a kind of program, even a challenge: philology is, or should be, the discipline of making sense of texts" (Pollock 2009, 934). This applies all the more to the interpretation of authoritative religious texts, as seen in Paul's argumentation connecting the gentiles to Abraham.

²² Although the text in Gal 3:6 is also very close to the Hebrew Bible, the similarity to the Septuagint is remarkable. Only the conjunction καί [and] and Abraham's name in the LXX, which are omitted in Galatians, can be identified as differences with Gal 3:6.

²³ Similar formulations can also be found in Gen 22:18 and 26:4.

Gen 17:7 but also appears in several other places in Genesis (Gen 12:7; 13:15; 15:18; 22:15; and 24:17). Lastly, a citation of Gen 21:10 is found in Gal 4:30. Although Paul's use of Genesis is selective, his argument is clearly rooted in the text.

A second philological aspect that Paul uses to identify the plural "seed of Abraham" with the singular person Jesus Christ is found in a grammatical argument in Gal 3:16.

τῷ δὲ Ἀβραάμ ἐρρέθησαν αἱ ἐπαγγελίαι καὶ τῷ σπέρματι αὐτοῦ. οὐ λέγει· καὶ τοῖς σπέρμασιν, ὡς ἐπὶ πολλῶν ἀλλ' ὡς ἐφ' ἑνός· καὶ τῷ σπέρματί σου, ὅς ἐστιν Χριστός.

[But the promises were told to Abraham and to his seed. It does not say: and to his seeds, as with many but as with one: and to his seed, which is Christ.]

Although Paul must be aware of the plural sense of the word "seed" (זרע in Hebrew and σπέρμα in Greek) when referring to offspring (Rom 1:3; 4:13.16; 9:7–8; 11:1; 2Cor 11:22), in this instance, he chooses to apply a grammatical argument that aligns the singular τῷ σπέρματί σου [your seed] with Jesus Christ. This allows Paul to construct a direct genealogical link from Abraham, through Christ, to the believers who are connected with him.

Paul calls the argument in Gal 4:21–31 allegorical, although even Gal 3:16 can be classified as such (Lanzinger 2016, 277–293):

4:24 ἅτινά ἐστιν ἀλληγορούμενα·

[These things are spoken allegorically]

Without delving deeply into the intricate argument in these verses, it is evident that the apostle himself understood his argument as using a widely practised method of textual interpretation (Lanzinger 2016, 200–236).²⁴ Having briefly established the context and philological nature of the verse, we can now explore the cultural transfer reflected in them.

3.3 A translation and analysis of Gal 3:28

After presenting a translation, I will analyse the structure and content of the verse.²⁵

28αα οὐκ ἐνὶ Ἰουδαίῳ οὐδὲ Ἑλλήνι,
28αβ οὐκ ἐνὶ δοῦλῳ οὐδὲ ἐλεύθερῳ,

²⁴ For an overview of different uses of the allegorical method in antiquity, see Lanzinger (2016, 52–186).

²⁵ A similar statement can be found in 1Cor 12:12–13: "Καθάπερ γὰρ τὸ σῶμα ἓν ἐστιν καὶ μέλη πολλὰ ἔχει, πάντα δὲ τὰ μέλη τοῦ σώματος πολλὰ ὄντα ἓν ἐστιν σῶμα, οὕτως καὶ ὁ Χριστός· 13 καὶ γὰρ ἓν ἐνὶ πνεύματι ἡμεῖς πάντες εἰς ἓν σῶμα ἐβαπτίσθημεν, εἴτε Ἰουδαῖοι εἴτε Ἕλληνες εἴτε δοῦλοι εἴτε ἐλεύθεροι, καὶ πάντες ἐν πνεύμα ἐποτίσθημεν" [12 For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. 13 For in the one Spirit

28aγ οὐκ ἐνὶ ἄρσεν καὶ θῆλυ·
 28b πάντες γὰρ ὑμεῖς εἷς ἐστε ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ.²⁶

[28aα There is neither Jew nor Greek
 28aβ There is neither slave nor free
 28aγ There is not male and female
 28b All of you are one in the Messiah Jesus.]

The verse consists of two distinguishable parts: first, a part in which Paul presents three parallel sentences, and second, a part that gives the reason behind these statements.²⁷ In v. 28a, the first two sentences follow the same structure, while the third diverges in its use of the copula καὶ [and] instead of οὐδέ [nor]. In each sentence, Paul juxtaposes a pair of terms and resolves their difference in a Christological perspective

we were all baptized into one body – Jews or Greeks, slaves or free – and we were all made to drink of one Spirit] (Tr.: *New Revised Standard Version*, Updated Edition).

Here Paul uses very similar word pairs. The first two pairs are practically identical, though he uses the plural in 1Cor 12:13 and connects the pairs with ἐτε [or]. What is missing is the third pair, which focuses on gender. 1Cor 12:12–13 is also more concerned with the corporal dimension, which is expressed in the frequent usage of the word σῶμα [body]. The context of baptism is more pronounced and connected with the giving of the spirit. The union with Christ is not described with the same emphasis as in Gal 3:28.

See also Col 3:11, which is connected to the Pauline school of thought: “ὅπου οὐκ ἐνὶ Ἑλλήν καὶ Ἰουδαίος, περιτομὴ καὶ ἀκροβυστία, βάρβαρος, Σκύθης, δοῦλος, ἐλεύθερος, ἀλλὰ τὰ πάντα καὶ ἐν πᾶσιν Χριστός” [There is not Greek and Jew, circumcision and uncircumcision, barbarian, Scythian, slave, free, but all and in all Christ]. Col 3:11 focuses primarily on ethnic differences, including references to barbarians and Scythians and, like Gal 3:28, it also references slaves and freemen.

What this comparison shows is that Paul does not simply reproduce a traditional formulation. In Gal 3:28, he notably adds the perspective of gender differences. Moreover, the first two word pairs seem to be highly adaptable to their context, an adaptability that will be examined in the case of Gal 3:28 (Keener 2019, 305–306).

For a sociological approach to the aforementioned topic of Greek and Jew, see Horrell (2000).

26 The interpretation of this verse is intensely debated in New Testament Studies. Stegemann, for example, differentiates four interpretations: (a) a radical egalitarianism; (b) the suspension of differences being only of interest for the relation to God; (c) in the context of a baptismal tradition (Gal 3:27); (d) not as a suspension of differences but as a subordination under the identity in Christ. This chapter follows most closely the last option (Stegemann 2014, 23). For the fourth interpretation, see also Hodge (2007, 117–136, esp. 129).

27 De Boer (2011, 244) understands the communicative value mainly in the first word pair, while the two following pairs are to be understood as complementary. Against this, Keener (2019, 305–306) stresses that via the topic of the circumcision, the last two word pairs can be explained since slaves and women are excluded from this practice.

of unity. The verb ἐνείμι [to be]²⁸ takes up the motif of the leading preposition ἐν [in] in Gal 3:26–29.²⁹

The first pair of terms refers to ethnic distinction between the Jews and the Greeks. Surprisingly, Paul utilises the term Ἕλλην [Greek] here, despite previously speaking of ἔθνη [gentiles] (Gal 1:16; 2:2.8.9.12.14.15; 3:8.14). In his use of ἔθνος [gentile] or the corresponding adjective (ἔθνικός), it is noticeable that the word never appears in the singular.³⁰ It is therefore likely that Paul employs the word Ἕλλην [Greek] primarily to preserve the formal structure of the sentence, rather than to signify a substantial deviation from his previous use of ἔθνος [gentile].³¹ The word οὐδέ [nor] reinforces the contradictory nature of each pair through its adversative connotation. The second pair of terms consists of δοῦλος [slave] and ἐλεύθερος [free], that is, a noun and a nominalised adjective. This is followed by the last pair of terms, which consists of two adjectives: ἄρσεν [male] and θῆλυ [female], introducing the dimension of gender. Paul may have deliberately avoided using the adversative οὐδέ [nor] in this last pair because it does not form a contradiction in the same way as the previous pairs. It is possible that the change to καί [and] is a reference to Gen 1:27 (Martyn 1997, 376; Keener 2019, 308; Meiser 2022, 181), where the Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible (the Septuagint) here uses the same expressions.³² Paul may be referencing the natural division of humanity into male and female as it is depicted in Gen 1:27.³³

In summary, Paul uses these pairs of terms to traverse ethnic, social, and gender differences, seeking to resolve the corresponding tensions in Christ. It is not Paul's aim to eliminate all differences, nor is he advocating for revolutionary transformation. Instead, Paul's main interest lies in establishing a perspective of unity (Keener 2019, 308). After the succession of pairs, Paul provides a reason for this unity in v. 28b. He uses the universal term πάντες [all] and ascribes a unified identity to the Galatians: πάντες γὰρ ὑμεῖς εἷς ἐστέ [All of you are one].³⁴ This, however, is not the end of the verse, as Paul adds the prepositional phrase: ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ [in the Messiah

28 Concerning the form ἐνί, see Blass et al. (2001, §98 n. 4).

29 The preposition is frequently used in Gal 3:26–29. In verse 26, the status as sons of God is connected with the prepositional phrase ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ [in Christ Jesus]; in the next verse the preposition is part of a verb which explains the relationship to Christ as that of putting on clothes: Χριστὸν ἐνεδύσασθε [you put on Christ]. Finally, in Gal 3:28 again the prepositional phrase ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ [in Christ Jesus] is used.

30 The singular is only used in a direct citation from Dtn 32:21 (LXX) in Rom 10:19.

31 It was suggested that here Paul cites an early Christian baptismal tradition (de Boer 2011, 245–247). Against this hypothesis, see Lategan (2012).

32 Gen 1:27 (LXX): “καὶ ἐποίησεν ὁ θεὸς τὸν ἄνθρωπον, κατ’ εἰκόνα θεοῦ ἐποίησεν αὐτόν, ἄρσεν καὶ θῆλυ ἐποίησεν αὐτούς” [And God created the human, corresponding to the image of God he created him, male and female he created them].

33 See also Gen 5:2 and, concerning the animals entering the ark, Gen 6:19–20; 7:2–3.9.16.

34 This union already leads up to Christ as the masculine form of the number word is used (Martyn 1997, 377; de Boer 2011, 244).

Jesus].³⁵ He thereby emphasises that the union in Christ appears to be the main expression of the Galatians' relationship with Christ.³⁶ What is important for this study is that the dissolution of the distinctions is not to be understood as a call for transforming the social structures of the congregation but rather as an expression of the relationship with Christ.

This verse is not separated from Paul's argument with Abraham. On the contrary, it prepares one of Paul's argumentative climaxes in Gal 3:29:

εἰ δὲ ὑμεῖς Χριστοῦ, ἄρα τοῦ Ἀβραάμ σπέρμα ἐστέ, κατ' ἐπαγγελίαν κληρονόμοι.

[If you belong to Christ, you are Abraham's seed, heirs according to the promise.]

The connection of Christ and the Galatians is one argumentative step for Paul to re-imagine their genealogy and to connect them with Israel's patriarch Abraham (Hodge 2007, 131).

3.4 Gal 3:28 and cultural transfer

Gal 3:28 can be understood in light of the cultural transfer which takes place between Paul and his Galatian audience. More than just facilitating the transfer, it seems that Paul is reflecting upon the process of transfer itself in this verse. While the formal model addressed before posits a clear separation between the source culture and the target culture, Pauls seeks to bridge this gap. He does this by drawing upon the object of transfer, the gospel of Jesus, an immaterial cultural artefact. The differences between sender and receiver are reinterpreted through the perspective of their mutual relationship to this object of transfer. The addressees are unified across ethnic distinctions, as well as differences in social status and gender identity.

The relationship between sender and receiver is not hierarchical or characterised by juxtaposition. Instead, sender and receiver are unified through the process of transfer itself. For Paul, this approach is only logical as the relationship to the object of transfer is not purely intellectual nor is it just an act of speech or writing, but it is a relationship to an actual person. This leads me to the conclusion that in Gal 3:28, the object of transfer is dealt with not purely as an object but is understood by Paul as a subject: Jesus Christ himself. Thus, the unified identity Paul envisions is not actively constructed or grounded in human communication but passively received. This seems

³⁵ See the variant in P⁴⁶, κ*, and A. Those witnesses read “ἐστε Χριστοῦ” [you are of Christ] instead of “εἷς ἐστε ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ” [you are one in Christ Jesus]. The reference to the unity and preposition is omitted, resulting in a formulation more closely aligned with Gal 3:29 “εἰ δὲ ὑμεῖς Χριστοῦ” [but when you [are] of Christ], which also uses the genitive.

For a thesis that argues for this variant as a better reading, see Herzer (2017, 134–142).

³⁶ The category of relationship was also understood in the terms of liminality, see Russel (2014).

to reflect a distinctly premodern perspective on the communication of the gospel, which considers not only the subjects of sender and receiver but the presence of another supreme subject behind the verbal and written communication of the gospel of Jesus.

3.5 The Addressees' Identity Construction

In their pursuit of ethnic uniformity, Paul's opponents proposed circumcision as a means to unify the Galatian congregations. Paul rejects this solution and chooses a different path. He approaches the issue of ethnic diversity not by suggesting a change in the addressees' identity but by offering a completely new interpretation of the model of sender and receiver. It is not only the gentile Galatians' identity which is transformed in the relationship to the Jewish Messiah Jesus; the Jewish identity is also affected. Paul's approach is undergirded by a Christological reasoning, which focuses on the relationship to the object of transfer instead of the ethnic dimension of the issue. Paul begins this argument by making a point about ethnicity and then goes on to expand it to include the social status and the gender identity of the Galatians. In relation to Paul's message of Christ, differences lose their divisive power. Paul argues that the transformation which the Galatians sought to achieve through circumcision had already taken place through their acceptance and belief in the Messiah. No other marker of identity is required beyond their relationship with Christ.

3.6 Paul's identity construction

The reciprocity of the relationship to Christ affects not only the Galatian addressees but also Paul himself. This is evident across all three juxtapositions in Gal 3:28. In the following section, Paul's argumentative strategy will be described and interpreted through the lens of cultural transfer occurring in Gal 3:28.

Beginning with the first juxtaposed pair of terms, "neither Jew nor Greek," it is important to note that, in recent decades, Paul's Jewish identity has been a closely examined topic within Pauline studies.³⁷ This ongoing effort has led to a rediscovery of the importance of Jewish thought in Paul's letters, helping to place his writings in the broader context of Second Temple Judaism. Paul's self-identification as Jewish, however, is undisputed. In Galatians, Paul makes a clear statement of his identity during his retelling of the Antiochene incident (Gal 2:11–14), where he criticises Peter for dis-

³⁷ In research of recent years, this especially applies to scholars trying to situate Paul within Judaism. For an overview over this scholarly approach, see Nanos and Zetterholm (2015); Thiessen (2016; 2023); Runesson (2022); Bühner (2023).

tancing himself from gentile Christians.³⁸ Recalling his speech to Peter, he states in Gal 2:15:

Ἡμεῖς φύσει Ἰουδαῖοι καὶ οὐκ ἐξ ἐθνῶν ἁμαρτωλοί

[We are Jews by nature and not gentile sinners.]

Paul's self-identification as Jewish is reenforced by the dative φύσει (by nature).³⁹ This signals that Paul's belonging to the Jewish nation is not a matter of choice but an intrinsic quality. Interestingly, Paul addresses his Jewish identity in order to juxtapose it with a gentile identity. Gentiles are disqualified in this verse by being depicted as sinners (ἁμαρτωλοί). This harsh distinction between Jews and gentiles is common in Second Temple Judaism.⁴⁰ What is remarkable, however, is that Paul seems to mention a further ethnic identification for himself in the letter.

A verse in Gal 4:12 focuses on Paul transcending the ethnic boundaries between Jew and gentile:

Γίνεσθε ὡς ἐγώ, ὅτι καὶ ἐγὼ ὡς ὑμεῖς, ἀδελφοί, δέομαι ὑμῶν.

[Become like me, as also I became like you, brothers, I beseech you.]

Paul directly addresses the Galatians with an imperative,⁴¹ urging them to become more like himself. He justifies this appeal by referencing his own transformation that made him more like the Galatians.⁴² This rhetorical strategy is not unique to his letter to the Galatians; a similar passage can be found in 1Cor 9:19–22.

19 Ἐλεύθερος γὰρ ὢν ἐκ πάντων πᾶσιν ἑμαυτὸν ἐδούλωσα, ἵνα τοὺς πλείονας κερδήσω· 20 καὶ ἐγενόμην τοῖς Ἰουδαίοις ὡς Ἰουδαῖος, ἵνα Ἰουδαίους κερδήσω· τοῖς ὑπὸ νόμον ὡς ὑπὸ νόμον, μὴ ὢν αὐτὸς ὑπὸ νόμον, ἵνα τοὺς ὑπὸ νόμον κερδήσω· 21 τοῖς ἀνόμοις ὡς ἄνομος, μὴ ὢν ἄνομος θεοῦ ἀλλ' ἐννομος Χριστοῦ, ἵνα κερδάνω τοὺς ἀνόμους· 22 ἐγενόμην τοῖς ἀσθενέσιν ἀσθενής, ἵνα τοὺς ἀσθενεῖς κερδήσω· τοῖς πᾶσιν γέγονα πάντα, ἵνα πάντως τινὰς σώσω.

[19 For though I am free with respect to all, I have made myself a slave to all, so that I might gain all the more. 20 To the Jews I became as a Jew, so that I gain Jews. To those under the law I

³⁸ The Antiochene incident is the story of a direct confrontation between Peter and Paul. It was caused by Peter's behaviour when those from James (τινας ἀπὸ Ἰακώβου) were visiting Antiochia. Before, he had eaten with gentiles but after their arrival, he separated himself from them. Paul criticises Peter's hypocritical behaviour.

The connection of Gal 2:11–14 and Gal 2:15–21 has been thoroughly discussed. Based on Keener (2019, 167), I take Gal 2:15 to be a short summary of Paul's speech to Peter. For a different approach, see Meiser (2022, 117).

³⁹ The differentiation of Jew and gentile by nature is also found in Rom 2:27; 11:21.24.

⁴⁰ A possible parallel is found in Jub 23:23: "sinners from the gentiles." See Keener (2019, 170 n. 766).

⁴¹ See also 1Cor 4:16; 11:1; Phil 3:17; 1Thess 1:6; 2:14.

⁴² This verse can also be understood against the background of the ancient rhetoric of friendship. For this interpretation, see Keener (2019, 369).

became as one under the law, though I myself am not under the law, so that I might gain those under the law. 21 To those outside the law I became as one outside the law, though I am not outside God's law but am within Christ's law, so that I might gain those outside the law. 22 To the weak I became weak, so that I might gain the weak. I have become all things to all people, that I might by all means save some.] (Tr. NRSVUE = New Revised Standard Version Updated Edition)

As in 1Cor 9:19–22, Paul reflects on becoming like one of the gentile Galatians in Gal 4:12. This corresponds to what he describes in 1Cor 9:21 (Mußner 1988, 305–306; by contrast, see Meiser 2022, 203), where he recalls becoming like those outside the law. This makes sense in the context of the Galatian crisis, as Paul is fighting against his opponents who attempt to convince the Galatians that they need to live under the law. The apostle urges the Galatians to become like him, recalling how⁴³ he acted when he was among them, living as one not under the law to convince them of the gospel. This argument reveals a certain flexibility in Paul's self-identification. While he clearly asserts his Jewish identity in Gal 2:15, in Gal 4:12, he highlights his transformation into someone not bound by the law, aligning himself more closely with his gentile addressees. These identifications do not seem to be mutually exclusive; rather, Paul emphasises different identifications based on the argumentative context.

This flexibility is not only apparent in the first word pair in Gal 3:28 but also in the second. Here, Paul shifts his focus from the ethnic to a social perspective, describing both the social status of the slave and the free man. Both social categories are also related to Paul's identity construction in Galatians. First, I will analyse Gal 1:10:⁴⁴

Ἄρτι γὰρ ἀνθρώπους πείθω ἢ τὸν θεόν; ἢ ζητῶ ἀνθρώποις ἀρέσκειν; εἰ ἔτι ἀνθρώποις ἡρεσκον, Χριστοῦ δοῦλος οὐκ ἂν ἤμην.

[Do I persuade people or God? Or do I seek to please people; if I still were to please people, I wouldn't be Christ's slave.]

At the beginning of the letter, Paul identifies himself as Christ's slave, an expression he frequently uses in his writings (Rom 1:1; 2Cor 4:5; Gal 1:10; Phil 1:1). In Galatians, however, this term serves a specific purpose, as it connects to the theme of Gal 3:28.⁴⁵ Paul is not only diminishing the differences between a slave and free man but also using the unity in Christ to identify himself with the social status of the slave. The social status is not primarily envisioned in its horizontal dimension, as part of the so-

⁴³ Of course, ὅτι καὶ ὡς ὑμεῖς [for also I like you] is a highly elliptical expression that provides no clear indication of the exact time. However, given the context of Gal 4:13–20, the past is the most probable reference point. For more speculative reconstructions of the meaning of the verse, see Mußner (1988, 305) and Meiser (2022, 203–204).

⁴⁴ For the exegetical difficulties of this verse, see Keener (2019, 67–70).

⁴⁵ Meiser (2022, 61) concludes: "Der Appell Gal 1,10 ist somit ein indirekter Aufruf an die Galater, diesses ἑθνος sich zu eigen zu machen" [The appeal in Gal 1:10 is therefore an indirect call to the Galatians to make this ἑθνος their own]. He rightly stresses the relational aspect of the verse. In light of Gal 3:28, as this chapter argues, Meiser's idea of a call to identification with Paul becomes clear.

cietal structure of men, but in a vertical dimension, as a special form of relationship to Christ himself. This fits well within the literary context, as in Gal 1:6–9 and Gal 1:11–2:10, Paul is defending the gospel he preached in Galatia against the differing interpretations of his opponents, pointing to his biography and the apocalyptic revelation of the gospel. The expression “Christ’s slave” thus emphasises Paul’s special connection to Christ, reflected in both his preaching and life.

The identification contradicts Paul’s actual social status as a free man, who may have even possessed the Roman citizenship (Acts 22:28). This is not dealt with directly in Galatians. Instead, Paul picks up the topic of freedom later in the letter, formulating the following verse in Gal 5:1:

Τῇ ἐλευθερίᾳ ἡμᾶς Χριστὸς ἡλευθέρωσεν·

[Christ set us free for freedom.]

It is significant that Paul includes himself in the process with the use of the first-person plural (ἡμᾶς). Once again, in relation to Christ, Paul identifies not only as a slave but also as its exact opposite: a free man. This corresponds to Gal 3:28 (Keener 2019, 438). In his identifications as both a slave and freeman, Paul mirrors the word pair in Gal 3:28, demonstrating that in the relation to Christ, not only are the social differences diminished, but there is also a flexibility in how he navigates these identities. This becomes part of Paul’s broader argumentative strategy.

Similar observations can be made concerning the last word pair, “male and female.” While Paul obviously depicts himself as a male,⁴⁶ this does not seem to be exclusive either. In Gal 4:19 he explores a different identification:

τέκνα⁴⁷ μου, οὓς πάλιν ὠδίνω μέχρις οὗ μορφωθῇ Χριστὸς ἐν ὑμῖν·

[My children, whom I again give birth to in travail until Christ is formed in you.]

In a complex metaphor, Paul identifies himself as the mother of the Galatians. The verse is difficult to understand, as it shifts between the image of Paul as a mother to the Galatians and the idea of a birth leading to Christ being formed in them.⁴⁸ What is of interest here is Paul’s ability to transcend boundaries – even those between gen-

⁴⁶ This can be seen in the grammatical use of masculine forms. See for example Gal 1:1: Παῦλος ἀπόστολος οὐκ ἀπ’ ἀνθρώπων οὐδὲ δι’ ἀνθρώπου ἀλλὰ διὰ Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ. [Paul apostle not from humans and not through humans but through Jesus Christ].

⁴⁷ Several accounts (see Nestle Aaland apparatus) include the reading τέκνῃα [small child], which emphasises the congruence with the Verb ὠδίνω [to suffer from birth-pains].

⁴⁸ It is somewhat unexpected that Paul alters his language of being in Christ to Christ being in you. Meiser (2022, 211) correctly points to Gal 3:26–29. It could also be translated as ‘with you’. Mußner (1988, 313) comments on an ambiguity of the preposition ἐν [in].

ders – identifying with the female role of the birth-giver and mother.⁴⁹ This verse can be understood in the light of Gal 3:28. As with the second word pair, a direct connection is drawn to the figure of Christ. In an argumentative context where Paul aims to express his special relationship to the Galatians as the founder of their congregations (Gal 4:12–20), he draws upon maternal imagery to demonstrate that, in Christ, identity is understood to be flexible and not exclusive.⁵⁰

The importance of the word pairs is not limited to Gal 3:28 alone but also seems to be integral to Paul's self-depiction in his letter to the Galatians. He not only transforms their identity in light of their relationship to Christ but uses this redefinition for his argumentative self-depiction. Throughout the letter, Paul presents himself as Jewish and gentile, slave and freeman, and male and female. The relationship to Christ functions reciprocally, affecting not only the Galatians but also Paul himself. The cultural transfer is thus formative for sender and receiver. While its importance for the receiver is more clearly evident, this chapter explored the formative impact of the transfer on the sender, contributing another dimension to this debate. This sheds new light onto the interpretation of Gal 3:28. The analysed argumentative strategy clarifies that Paul did not set out to erase the different categories of identity described in Gal 3:28. Rather, he subordinates them to the relationship with Christ, allowing him to freely associate with these contrasting identities. By shaping his self-depiction according to the word pairs found in Gal 3:28, Paul acts as an example for the Galatians, demonstrating that it is only through their relationship with Christ that they can eliminate the ethnic tension among them.

4 Conclusion

This chapter explored the application of cultural transfer studies on Gal 3:28 and the corresponding self-depiction of the apostle in his letter to the Galatian congregations. A helpful hermeneutical framework for understanding Paul's reasoning was identified. A closer look at Gal 3:28 revealed insights into the process of cultural transfer from Paul's perspective. It was argued that this verse presents a theological reflection

⁴⁹ This is not the only verse in which Paul envisions himself in a parental role towards his congregations. See 1Cor 4:14–17; 2Cor 12:14; Philm 10; Paul as father: Phil 2:22; 1Thess 2:11; Paul as mother/wet nurse: 1Cor 3:1–3; 1Thess 2:7.

⁵⁰ Some scholars suggest that an eschatological scene is implied in this verse, as can be seen in Rom 8:22 (Keener 2019, 392–393; Gaventa 2007, 31). However, I do not understand Paul's struggle to be connected with his health, which may have suffered under persecution (Eastman 2007, 110), or to an eschatological scenario. Rather, Paul's struggle arises directly from the Galatian situation. While eschatological connotations may be intended, the relational aspect of the verse is more pronounced. In the context of Gal 4:21–31, it appears that Paul conceives the topic of kinship as being the most important. This topic already shaped his argument in Gal 3:6–4:7.

on the transfer of the gospel of the Jewish Messiah Jesus, which is deeply embedded in Paul's philological argumentation concerning Israel's forefather Abraham. Paul conceives of what, in the formal model of cultural transfer, would be the object of communication not as an object but a subject: Jesus Christ. This enables him to understand the relationship between sender and receiver not as hierarchical but as constituted by the message itself. The relationship with Jesus alters the identities of both sender and receiver, exemplifying the reciprocity inherent in cultural transfer. While Gal 3:28 focuses on the receiver, an analysis of Paul's self-depiction in Galatians revealed the impact on the apostle himself. Paul uses the three sets of paired words from Gal 3:28 to transform his own self-identification in line with his argumentative goals. Thus, identity differences are left behind in the relationship with the Messiah, enabling the apostle to shift between different ethnic, social, and gender descriptions. What is termed a bicultural identity is, from Paul's perspective, not only a prerequisite for the communication with his congregations; rather, the communication, understood as a relationship with Christ, first allows Paul to fully utilise his bicultural identity – not only in an ethnic context but also in a broader sense. The results of the case study presented above thus contribute significantly to the understanding of Paul within the frame of cultural transfer studies, revealing a unique premodern reflection on this transfer and its reciprocity.

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