

HISTORICAL SOCIOLINGUISTIC APPROACHES TO IDENTITY CONTEXTUALIZATION IN THE CORINTHIAN EPISTLES

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Abstract This study reexamines the relationship between language (text) and society (context) in biblical studies through historical sociolinguistics. While biblical interpretation has long acknowledged the importance of sociohistorical context, it has often relied on hypothetical reconstructions that treat language as a passive reflection of predetermined social structures. In contrast, sociolinguistics—especially in its third-wave developments—demonstrates that language actively constructs, negotiates, and transforms social identities and linguistic ideologies in dynamic and dialectical processes. Drawing on Nikolas Coupland’s identity contextualization model, this study proposes a text-centered analytical framework for examining biblical discourse as performative social action. As a case study, First and Second Corinthians are analyzed as unfolding through five indexical cycles in which linguistic ideologies are formed, contested, and reconfigured within changing communal dynamics. This analysis argues that Paul’s stylistic shifts reflect strategic performances of authority and identity negotiation rather than textual fragmentation. By integrating contemporary sociolinguistics into biblical interpretation, this study offers a methodologically robust approach to understanding the dynamic interplay between language and social reality in early Christianity. (Article)

Keywords: historical sociolinguistics, third-wave sociolinguistics, historical criticism, social-scientific criticism, Corinthian letters, style, linguistic ideology, social identity

1. *Introduction*

Sociolinguistics is the study of the relationship between language and society.¹ It is an interdisciplinary field shaped by linguistics, sociology, ethnography, critical constructivism, variationist sociolinguistics, and other related disciplines. In the field of sociolinguistics, a wide range of research topics has been explored, including language policy, language contact, dialectology, pragmatics, discourse analysis, conversation analysis, linguistic anthropology, and social psychology of language.² Over the past seventy years, sociolinguistics has accumulated a vast body of empirical case studies, thereby developing into a discipline that provides robust methodological tools for analyzing the complex patterns linking language and society.

Biblical scholarship is also concerned with the relationship between language (text) and society (context). Scripture was written in particular historical languages, and those languages are inseparably tied to the social worlds in which they were used. Biblical scholars have long employed historical criticism and social-scientific criticism in order to interpret the sociohistorical contexts behind biblical texts. With this in mind, they have investigated inscriptions, papyri, coins, and other written artifacts, but archaeological evidence simply does not provide enough data to support the use of contemporary sociolinguistic approaches to ancient languages. This lack of data has posed a significant challenge for those who attempt to investigate sociolinguistic topics. As a result, historical criticism and social-scientific criticism have inevitably constructed hypothetical social backgrounds, communities, or scenarios—frequently based on theological presuppositions—before analyzing biblical texts.

Meanwhile, the explicit use of sociolinguistics within biblical studies has remained highly limited. A few scholars have attempted to employ sociolinguistic concepts, but such attempts are rare and in most cases still rely on outdated theoretical frameworks.³

1. Regarding the definition of sociolinguistics, see Holmes, *Introduction*, 1–11; Bell, *Guidebook*, 1–2.

2. See Bell, *Guidebook*, 6–14.

3. Bell, “Early Greek-Language Tradition,” 232–33; Park, *Prestige Language*, 19–28.

Sociolinguistics itself has undergone three major methodological shifts and is now often described in terms of “third-wave” sociolinguistics.⁴ Since the emergence of third-wave sociolinguistics, sociolinguists have emphasized that language does not merely reflect social categories but actively performs and negotiates social identities and linguistic ideologies.⁵ However, biblical studies largely remain at the level of concepts associated with the “first wave” from the 1960s to the 1980s. For this reason, adopting the insights and methods of contemporary sociolinguistics is an important and necessary step if biblical studies are to account more fully for the intricate relationship between biblical texts and their social contexts.

In light of this background, this study suggests applying a historical sociolinguistic approach to the study of the relationship between biblical texts and their social contexts. In the first section, I will outline historical developments within sociolinguistics, with particular attention to the emergence of third-wave sociolinguistics and argue that contemporary biblical studies based on historical criticism and social-scientific criticism largely remain at the level of early sociolinguistic thought prior to the 1990s. On this basis, I contend that biblical studies should move beyond these earlier stages and incorporate more advanced sociolinguistic frameworks. In the second section, I will demonstrate how sociolinguistic theories and models can contribute specifically to the study of the Corinthian epistles, illuminating the ways in which Paul’s language style shaped, reflected, and negotiated linguistic ideology regarding the social identities of the Corinthian church.

2. Historical Developments in Sociolinguistics

In recent decades, biblical studies have increasingly shifted their focus from purely grammatical analysis to a more comprehensive examination of the dynamic interplay between text and its socio-historical context. Scholars have sought to identify the cultural, religious, and political significance that biblical texts carried for

4. Eckert, *Linguistic Variation*; Hernández-Campoy, *Sociolinguistic Styles*, 186–88; Schilling, “Investigating Stylistic Variation,” 328.

5. See Park, *Prestige Language*, 64–78.

their original audiences, and to explore how such texts functioned to shape and reinforce particular social identities within their historical settings. In this process, the roles of language in constructing and contesting communal boundaries have also come to the fore. As a result, contemporary biblical scholars have developed a strong interest in the communal language that undergirds and negotiates questions of social identity.

Biblical scholars have approached this issue by conducting studies grounded in literary and historical theories that presuppose the functions of communal language; however, such approaches are necessarily limited in that they rely on hypothetical reconstructions. In this respect, sociolinguistics can provide valuable insight, as it has developed the study of language, community, and social identity through sustained and rigorous case studies of language use among real social actors.

The mechanisms between language and community are often explained in sociolinguistics through the concept of linguistic ideology. The concept of ideology employed in this study differs from the Marxist tradition, which typically posits a dualistic ideology based on hegemony. Technically, the term *idéologie* originated not from the Marxists but in late eighteenth-century France, when Antoine Destutt de Tracy introduced it as *science of ideas*, an enlightenment project aimed at analyzing human sensations and thought processes in a systematic manner.⁶ Originally, the concept was used in a neutral sense, but after the Napoleonic era, it came to be employed in a dualistic way focused solely on social structures as in the Marxist tradition.⁷ Although some sociolinguists continue to adopt the Marxist notion of ideology, many mainstream sociolinguists have valued Destutt de Tracy's original proposal more highly and refined the concept into what is now called linguistic ideology. According to this latter group, linguistic ideology refers to the shared belief, idea, and thought by a specific community in terms of language, whereby particular linguistic forms, registers, or lexical choices are perceived in terms of ethical values, such as "proper/improper," "authoritative/non-authoritative," "standard/non-standard," "good/bad," and "sacred/secular."

6. Destutt de Tracy, *Éléments d'idéologie*.

7. See Silverstein, "Use and Utility of Ideology," 123–27.

Particularly, Teun A. van Dijk and Michael Silverstein have been instrumental in developing this concept, demonstrating how linguistic ideologies operate within discourse to reproduce or challenge relations of power and identity.⁸

The concept of linguistic ideology has become central to the development of third-wave sociolinguistics. This paradigm emphasizes that linguistic variation does not merely reflect preexisting social categories but actively performs and negotiates ideologies regarding communal identities through interaction. While some sociolinguists continue to operate with Marxist-influenced notions of ideology, others have contributed significantly to the development of empirically grounded and analytically precise frameworks of linguistic ideology, which provide more effective tools for examining the dynamic relationship between language and social identity. For this reason, the insights of third-wave sociolinguistics are of particular relevance to biblical studies, as they offer a means of analyzing how biblical texts use language to construct communal identity and to reconfigure authority within their social contexts.

2.1 *The First Wave of Sociolinguistics*

In the early formation of traditional sociolinguistics, three major schools developed independently with different emphasis: (1) sociology of language; (2) variationist sociolinguistics; and (3) ethnographic-interactional sociolinguistics.⁹ All these schools agreed that language systematically varies according to social factors. In this phase, researchers employed the concept of the speech community in order to analyze linguistic variation at the group level.¹⁰ They considered a speech community to be a group that shares a particular social norm and rule of language use, a notion that closely corresponds to what contemporary sociolinguists refer to as linguistic ideology. The concept of a speech community became a crucial starting point for explaining the link between language and society, producing linguistic ideologies that connected

8. van Dijk, *Ideology*; Silverstein, "Language Structure."

9. Park, *Prestige Language*, 64–69.

10. Park, *Prestige Language*, 69–71.

linguistic variation to social categories such as class, ethnicity, educational level, and gender.

However, each school's analytical focuses and approaches differed significantly.¹¹ Sociology of language focused on the social functions of language in society and studied how changes of social structures and hegemony influenced people's language choices. Ethnographic-interactional sociolinguistics defined communicative competences as the ability to choose the most appropriate language in a particular context and aimed at determining individuals' linguistic patterns within a particular social context through long-term field studies with more than twenty participants over multiple years. Variationist sociolinguistics aimed at identifying correlations between linguistic variation and social categories, such as social status, gender, age, and ethnicity, employing large-scale surveys and statistical methods.

During this phase, variationist sociolinguistics, founded by William Labov, played a pioneering role in the study of the relationship between language and social identity. The Labovian school posited "structured heterogeneity," namely, that linguistic variation emerges systematically in relation to social structure.¹² Based on data collected via large-scale surveys, Labovian scholars determined that linguistic variation carries social meaning in relation to particular social identities.¹³ They presented two research conclusions. First, an individual's language style is highly likely to vary depending on their membership in a speech community.¹⁴ Therefore, a linguistic style is a phenomenon contingent upon social group; it also reflects an individual's social identity. Second, stylistic shifts—depending on the degree of "attention to

11. Bell, *Guidebook*, 6–14.

12. The foundation of Labovian school was Labov's studies in the 1960s and 1970s. See Labov, *Social Stratification of English; Language in the Inner City; Sociolinguistic Patterns*.

13. Regarding other early variationist sociolinguistic studies, see Shuy et al., *Study*; Wolfram, *Sociolinguistic Study*; Wolfram and Fasold, *Study of Social Dialects*; Trudgill, *Social Differentiation*; Feagin, *Variation and Change*; Rickford, *Dimensions*; Macaulay, *Language*. Regarding Labov's further studies, see Labov, *Principles of Linguistic Change, Volume 1; Principles of Linguistic Change, Volume 2*; and *Principles of Linguistic Change, Volume 3*.

14. Labov, *Sociolinguistic Patterns*, 120–21.

speech”—can be made by the speaker.¹⁵ The more careful and attentive the speech, the more likely it is to reflect standard variants; conversely, less attentive speech tends to feature nonstandard variants. In this way, the Labovian school conceptualized style as a central axis of intra-individual variation.

Labov and those influenced by him exhibited clear limitations in their treatment of social identity. Their research tended to focus on linking social identity directly to abstract categories such as class, gender, and ethnicity.¹⁶ While this is useful in capturing patterns observed across an unspecified number of people, it is insufficient for understanding social identity as something performed and negotiated in actual interactions. Even within the same social class, speakers may differ greatly in their actual language use. However, Labovian research emphasized average patterns across groups rather than capturing this diversity.¹⁷ Statistical research tends to highlight phenomena that occur with high frequency, while low-frequency data are often dismissed as statistical error margins. Nevertheless, when such low-frequency data recur in specific contexts, they may represent not random noise but crucial linguistic or social cues that run counter to broader patterns.

A more advanced perspective than the structurally deterministic conclusions of variationist sociolinguistics has been proposed within ethnographic-interactional sociolinguistics. With Jan-Petter Blom, John Gumperz, one of the founders of ethnographic-interactional sociolinguistics, drew upon data collected through long-term ethnographic fieldwork and identified two distinct code styles associated with group identity in Hemnesberget, a small fishing and administrative village located in northern Norway in 1972.¹⁸ Building upon Joshua Fishman's concept of "we-code" and "they-code," Gumperz recontextualized these notions within a more interactional and ethnographically grounded paradigm.

15. Labov, *Social Stratification of English*, 58–86.

16. Labov, *Social Stratification of English*, 129–70.

17. Coupland, *Style*, 32–53; Park, *Prestige Language*, 70–71.

18. Blom and Gumperz, "Social Meaning."

(1) “We-code” refers to the linguistic variety typically used within a speaker’s in-group. It functions as an in-group language, which fosters solidarity, emotional warmth, and personal engagement.

(2) “They-code” is associated with communication directed toward an out-group. This is usually the dominant, official, or socially prestigious language. It conveys formality, social distance, and institutional authority.¹⁹

Blom and Gumperz placed particular emphasis on the phenomenon of code-switching, which was observed directly in natural interaction. Gumperz showed that speakers strategically alternate between codes depending on the social and communicative function the situation calls for. His ethnographic data led him to distinguish between two functional types.

(1) Situational code-switching occurs when external factors in the speech context (such as setting, interlocutors, or topic) change. This kind of switching reflects the alignment of language choice with social context.

(2) Metaphorical code-switching, on the other hand, takes place within a stable situation, but speakers shift codes to add nuance or reframe meaning—for instance, to express emotion, irony, solidarity, or authority. In these cases, code choice becomes a stylistic and interpretive resource, shaping how meaning is constructed and received in interaction.²⁰

In the phase of the first wave, the theoretical framework of ethnographic-interactional sociolinguistics differed markedly from that of variationist sociolinguistics. The Labovian school can be characterized as adopting a relatively deterministic approach, in that they tended to explain linguistic variation primarily through stable social categories such as class, gender, and age. In fact, they assumed specific social categories as speech communities and attempted to identify shared linguistic patterns within those communities. However, Blom and Gumperz’s ethnographic studies did not adopt a deterministic view in which individuals simply choose their language based solely on the speech community. Rather, they

19. Gumperz, *Discourse Strategies*, 92.

20. Blom and Gumperz, “Social Meaning.”

identified the crucial insight that individuals' code choices are shaped by discourse context and communicative intent, allowing them to switch codes dynamically depending on their interactional goals. This understanding of code-switching as a context-sensitive and purpose-driven stylistic practice remains a central concept even within third-wave sociolinguistics.²¹

2.2 *The Second Wave of Sociolinguistics*

First-wave sociolinguistics sought to explain linguistic variation through statistically measurable correlations with predetermined social categories such as class, gender, age, and ethnicity. Although this approach produced foundational insights into the systematic nature of language variation, it did so by relying on predefined social structures—analytical frameworks that were often treated as stable, abstract constructs rather than empirically grounded social realities. Specifically, in practice, the speech community was often presupposed rather than empirically identified—taken for granted as a unit of analysis whose internal coherence was assumed rather than demonstrated. This conceptual limitation gave rise to a major problem: linguistic variation that did not conform to the expectations of these categories was treated as anomalous, a statistical nuisance variable to be excluded, simplified, or explained away.

Second-wave sociolinguistics emerged as a critical response to this methodological limitation. It was driven by a recognition that language use cannot be fully explained through static correlations with social categories, but must instead be understood as a situated, socially embedded practice through which speakers actively construct identity, perform social alignment, and negotiate meaning. This shift in perspective necessitated a corresponding shift in method, and with it came the adoption of linguistic ethnography as a core methodological and epistemological orientation. Unlike the randomized and large-scale data collection and analysis of the first wave, linguistic ethnography is centered on prolonged engagement with individuals, close observation of interactional contexts, and the contextual interpretation of language practices. Its

21. Bell, *Guidebook*, 303–4.

defining strength lies in its ability to account for precisely those linguistic forms that the first wave dismissed as error or exception. What had previously been marginalized as nuisance variables—inexplicable deviations from statistical trends—comes to be considered important data that demonstrate the contextually situated factors involved in social meaning-making. In order to investigate these factors, linguistic ethnographic approaches conducted long-term fieldwork lasting at least two to three years with more than twenty participants. For these fieldwork settings, researchers should integrate themselves into the participant group under study, minimizing the “observer effect” and maintaining the cultural integrity of the data collected.

Lesley Milroy’s research exemplifies this methodological shift. In her ethnographic studies of working-class neighborhoods in Belfast, she rejected the idealized assumptions embedded in the speech community model and introduced the *Social Network* model as a more empirically grounded alternative.²² Milroy’s framework did not begin with abstract categories, but instead examined the actual interpersonal connections among individuals—connections she quantified through the concepts of density and plexity.²³ Density refers to the degree of interconnectedness among members of a network, while plexity captures the multiplicity of social roles and relationships that bind individuals together. The social network model allows researchers to identify how frequently individuals interact in the real world and the primary purposes or contexts of those interactions, thereby enabling a more realistic and objective method for data collection and analysis.

Building on this foundation, Penelope Eckert extended the network-based approach by introducing the concept of the “community of practice,” reconceptualizing community not as an abstract category but as an emergent social formation constituted through joint activity and interaction.²⁴ Her ethnographic study *Jocks and Burnouts* remains a defining example of second-wave sociolin-

22. Milroy and Milroy, “Belfast”; Milroy, *Language*.

23. Milroy, *Language*, 49–52.

24. Eckert, “Communities of Practice”; “Whole Woman”; “Variation and a Sense of Place.”

guistics.²⁵ Conducted over two years in a suburban Detroit high school, the study explored how two youth peer groups used language to enact distinct social identities, align themselves with or against institutional authority, and create localized linguistic ideologies.

What made Eckert's contribution especially significant was her treatment of linguistic forms not as reflections of social categories, but as empirical resources mobilized through everyday practices to index identity, allegiance, and stance. For example, the nonstandard linguistic forms used by the Burnouts were not indicators of social class in a deterministic sense; rather, they were strategic practices through which youth resisted institutional norms and performed a counter-hegemonic identity. Nonetheless, not all members of the Burnouts group engaged in the same linguistic practices. Eckert demonstrated that within this community, the frequency and consistency of Burnout-style language use varied according to the strength of individuals' participation in the group's core social practices.²⁶ Members with strong, high-density ties to the group—those deeply embedded in the shared social network—consistently exhibited linguistic features that strongly indexed Burnout identity and ideology. In contrast, those with weaker, low-density ties often displayed linguistic patterns influenced by multiple groups, blending Burnout-associated forms with features characteristic of other social alignments. From a first-wave perspective, such internal variation might have been dismissed as peripheral or anomalous. However, by employing an ethnographic, practice-based methodology, Eckert effectively demonstrated that these differences were socially meaningful and systematically patterned, thereby overcoming the explanatory limitations of the first-wave approach.

This approach was closely tied to the theoretical framework of indexicality, particularly as developed by Silverstein and later developed by Eckert, Scott Kiesling, and Allan Bell.²⁷ Especially,

25. See Eckert, *Jocks and Burnouts*.

26. Eckert, *Linguistic Variation*, 173–93; *Meaning*, 55–56.

27. Silverstein, "Indexical Order"; Johnstone and Kiesling, "Indexicality"; Kiesling, *Linguistic Variation*; Eckert, "Variation and the Indexical Field"; Bell, *Guidebook*, 268–72. Park (*Prestige Language*, 73–78, 96–99; "Sacred Language

Bell's Indexical Cycle model formalized the recursive process by which linguistic forms acquire social value and become ideologically significant. In this model, linguistic forms are first evaluated within social contexts (Cycle-0), then used to differentiate among speakers (Cycle-1), adopted as stylistic resources (Cycle-2), and finally enregistered as symbolic markers of identity (Cycle-3). Bell's model is especially useful in explaining how individual linguistic choices, when repeated and socially recognized, can shape broader linguistic ideologies within a community of practice—again emphasizing that so-called “exceptions” to dominant norms are often the seeds of linguistic innovation and ideological transformation.

Consequently, these theoretical developments within the second wave illustrate a profound shift in sociolinguistic inquiry, from correlation to interpretation, from structure to practice, from abstraction to interaction. The second wave represents a decisive turn toward a more contextually grounded, practice-based, and ethnographically informed understanding of language. By rejecting the idealization of the speech community and instead focusing on how communities are constituted through social interaction, it provides a more robust account of how language operates as a tool for social differentiation, identity construction, and ideological formation. This methodological transformation not only deepens our understanding of sociolinguistic processes but also restores analytical value to the very data the first wave had previously excluded.

2.3 *The Third Wave of Sociolinguistics*

Like second-wave sociolinguistics, third-wave approaches arose as a critical response to the limitations of the first wave, yet with a distinct approach and emphasis. Whereas the second wave challenged structural determinism by focusing on social networks and interactional practices among individual language users, the third wave seeks to understand the complex relationship between language and society through the lens of linguistic ideology. Crucial-

Ideology,” 139–41) integrates these scholars' studies and proposes a methodological framework applicable to any forms of communities of practice.

ly, this approach emphasizes the detailed analysis of individual discourse, aiming to uncover how ideological orientations are enacted in language use and how they intersect with broader social contexts.

Third-wave sociolinguistics constitutes a major theoretical and methodological advancement, most notably in its shift toward examining the distinctive linguistic style of individual speakers as performances for acts of identity. Rather than seeking to explain linguistic variation solely through correlations with abstract categories or the shared practices of groups, the third wave approaches an individual's language usage as an act of identity that intersects with power, ideology, and hierarchy. This reorientation has foregrounded intra-speaker variation, showing how the same individual mobilizes different linguistic resources in different contexts to negotiate meaning and perform identity.

The origins of style research in sociolinguistics can be traced to Labov, whose early variationist sociolinguistics operationalized style as a continuum of attention paid to speech.²⁸ Labov's approach treated style largely as a one-dimensional scale of formality or monitoring, without accounting for the fuller range of speakers' agency in designing identity, stance, and interactional goals.

Style models subsequently developed through audience-centered approaches. Bell's Audience Design model explained stylistic shifts as a function of audience type—addressees, overhearers, and eavesdroppers—arguing that speakers adjust their speech to suit the audience present.²⁹ This model effectively accounted for why the same speaker uses different styles across contexts and contributed to refining variationist methodology. Parallel developments such as Communication Accommodation Theory (CAT) similarly emphasized speakers' tendency to converge toward or diverge from the linguistic norms of their interlocutors.³⁰ However, these audience-centered approaches conceptualized the speaker largely as a reactive figure, whose stylistic choices were determined by external social factors. Over time, scholars came to

28. Labov, *Social Stratification of English*, 58–86.

29. Bell, "Language Style"; "Styling the Other"; "Back in Style."

30. Giles, "Accommodation Theory"; Giles et al., "Accommodation Theory."

recognize the limitations of this view and began to stress the need to analyze style as an active, agentive practice.

This recognition led to a decisive turn toward speaker-centered approaches, most notably articulated by Coupland. Drawing upon Dell Hymes's concepts of communicative competence and the SPEAKING model, Coupland reconceptualized style not as a reactive adjustment but as a performative act through which speakers construct social identities and produce social meaning.³¹ Coupland illustrates this process through a closet metaphor.³² According to Coupland, Hymes's SPEAKING model views language as a socially meaningful choice, where speakers select ways of speaking—like choosing clothes—based on context. However, his model assumes a level of speaker agency that may overlook the structural constraints and power dynamics shaping language use. By emphasizing individual choice, it risks underestimating how styles are socially regulated, stratified, and ideologically loaded.

Continuing Coupland's metaphor of the stylistic repertoire as a closet, I will explain how subsequent sociolinguists have contributed to the development of the Style model. Eckert laid the theoretical groundwork for the model, arguing that speakers choose their linguistic styles not only by focusing on what is in their personal closets but also by responding to fashion trends circulating in the broader social marketplace—that is, the linguistic ideologies that shape what is considered stylish, appropriate, or valuable to wear. Bell's audience-centered model further emphasizes that style is selected in relation to particular audiences. Just as one might choose an outfit not only based on the occasion or current fashion trends but also with specific people in mind, speakers adjust their linguistic style in relation to their audience. Coupland, moreover, argued that stylistic choice is not a singular or mechanical response to audiences but a strategic performance in which speakers simultaneously consider audience expectations, broader stylistic norms, and situational demands in order to fashion a socially meaningful identity. Bell's model treats the speaker primari-

31. Regarding Hymes's SPEAKING model, see Hymes, *Foundations in Sociolinguistics*, 53–62. As Park ("Inquiry") points out, Coupland's Style model is based on Hymes's model.

32. Coupland, *Style*, 82–84, 90.

ly as responding to different audience configurations, whereas Coupland reconceptualizes the speaker as an active agent who strategically performs style by deciding whom to address, how to frame the interaction, which voice or persona to adopt, what tone to set, and how much social meaning to attach to particular linguistic choices. It is worth noting that Coupland's model underscores that speakers do not choose styles freely from an open repertoire but rather negotiate their choices within socially structured limits—much like selecting an outfit that must align with an implicit dress code while still allowing room for personal expression. Even when speakers deviate from conventional stylistic norms, such choices are rarely accidental; rather, they often reflect a strategic intent to produce specific social meanings.

Central to Coupland's theoretical shift is his expansion of communicative competence. Hymes defined communicative competence as the ability not only to possess a linguistic repertoire but also to use it appropriately in context.³³ Coupland extends this idea, arguing that speakers select from their repertoire with consideration of macro-level sociocultural ideologies, meso-level genres and institutional structures, and micro-level interactional dynamics.³⁴

Therefore, third-wave sociolinguistics directs attention to the stylistic performances of individuals. No longer is the analytic focus confined to identifying shared patterns at the level of groups or social networks. Instead, it emphasizes how individual speakers mobilize linguistic resources in specific contexts, with particular interlocutors, and for defined purposes. This shift is crucial for explaining why linguistic variation occurs even within the same interactional context among members of a single social group. In practice, the language we encounter is always instantiated in indi-

33. Hymes coined the term “communicative competence,” arguing against Chomsky's “linguistic competence.” Although Chomsky asserts universal grammar in a homogeneous speech community, Hymes points out that the social norms and rules for language usages are different in the various speech communities. He defines communicative competence as the human ability to use language in consideration of the social norms and rules in the society. See Chomsky, *Knowledge of Language*, 1–50; Hymes, *Foundations in Sociolinguistics*, 45, 55, 75.

34. Coupland, *Style*, 103–4.

vidual stylistic performances, which cannot be reduced to group-level patterns. This perspective also underscores the rising importance of discourse analysis and pragmatics, which provide the methodological tools for analyzing how language use constructs meaning in context.

Coupland's model systematizes this speaker-centered perspective.³⁵ He identifies five key processes—targeting, framing, voicing, keying, and loading—through which speakers perform identity. Targeting refers to the orientation of identity work toward specific interlocutors or imagined audiences. Framing encompasses the macro context (sociopolitical elements), the meso context (sociocultural elements), and the micro context (interpersonal elements) that shape which identity meanings become salient. Voicing captures how speakers borrow or align with one or multiple social voices which index particular social identities. Keying refers to the tone or manner that inflects identity meanings, especially in cases of irony or stylization. Loading denotes the weight or investment speakers attach to an act of identity, signaling its seriousness or strategic importance.

Coupland's model operationalizes the third wave's central claim that style is not a byproduct of linguistic variation or a mechanical response to audiences, but a strategic performance and a central mechanism of identity construction.³⁶ Coupland advanced his model by situating linguistic style at the intersection of language, identity, and ideology. This reorientation shifts sociolinguistics from describing correlations between linguistic and social variables to analyzing the interactional performances through which identities and meanings are constituted. In this sense, third-wave sociolinguistics marks a decisive turn in sociolinguistics toward a more contextually grounded, interactionally sensitive, and identity-centered understanding of language use.

2.4 *Biblical Studies and Sociolinguistics*

Contemporary biblical studies remain deeply indebted to the methodological foundations of historical criticism and social-scientific criticism. These approaches are predicated on the assump-

35. Coupland, *Style*, 112–14.

36. Park, "Inquiry."

tion that biblical texts are intelligible primarily through reference to the social contexts from which they emerged. Both historical and social-scientific methodologies remain beholden to conceptual frameworks that bear significant resemblance to the limitations identified within first-wave sociolinguistics. Specifically, such approaches tend to conceptualize language as a passive index of predetermined social structures, such as class, ethnicity, religion, and politics.

Historical criticism epitomizes the following assumption: textual meaning is construed as a reflection of a presumed sociohistorical situation or community in which writers wrote, edited, and redacted, biblical texts.³⁷ This approach is grounded in the assumption that texts, to some degree, mirror or reflect the sociohistorical realities of their time. The processes of writing, editing, or redaction are interpreted as derivative of external social realities, thereby reifying the very structures the methodology claims to reconstruct. In this regard, historical criticism privileges hypothetical macrostructures over the observable dynamics of language use, marginalizing the discursive agency of the author and the stylistic complexity of the text.

This methodological limitation entails a hermeneutical circularity: the text is used to infer the contours of a historical community, and this inferred community is subsequently deployed as the framework for interpreting the text itself.³⁸ This circular logic presupposes a fixed correlation between textual form and social function. Such reconstructions rest on speculative correlations and impose coherence onto ancient communities that is rarely supported by empirical data.

Social-scientific criticism has sought to mitigate the limitations of historical criticism by introducing formal sociological models

37. Bultmann, *Primitive Christianity*; Käsemann, *New Testament Questions*; Conzelmann, *Theology of St. Luke*.

38. Regarding the community hypothesis, see Brown, *Community*; Meeks, *Prophet-King*. For criticisms of the community hypothesis, see Lamb, *Text*, 209–10; Bauckham, “For Whom Were Gospels Written?”; Klink, “Gospel Community Debate.”

into the interpretation of biblical texts.³⁹ The limitation of social-scientific criticism is that it relies on the uncritical application of contemporary theories—such as class conflict, structural functionalism, symbolic interactionism, social identity, and social memory—to ancient societies whose socio-cultural dynamics are only partially recoverable. This methodological move reflects an implicit endorsement of the uniformitarian principle whereby present social structures are assumed to be analogically applicable to past contexts. The use of the uniformitarian principle based on social structures is particularly problematic in the study of antiquity, where fine-grained sociolinguistic data are lacking. In the absence of such data, modern constructs are projected onto the past in ways that obscure rather than illuminate textual meaning. The consequence is a flattening of historical specificity and a displacement of individual agency in favor of generalized models of community. Social-scientific criticism thus tends to replicate the same conceptual biases found in historical criticism.

These critical approaches to biblical studies and first-wave sociolinguistics share fundamentally similar methodological limitations. First-wave sociolinguistics, particularly as articulated in the Labovian tradition, was founded on the premise that language correlates with social variables such as class, age, gender, and ethnicity. This correlational model treated social categories as fixed and objectively measurable, and language as their transparent reflection. While this model yielded important insights into patterns of language variation, it failed to account for the performative, strategic, and ideologically situated dimensions of linguistic practice. Speakers were conceptualized as representatives of social categories rather than as agents capable of discursively constructing identity, contesting authority, or negotiating social position.

In an analogous manner, historical and social-scientific criticism treat biblical texts as reflections of communal identities, failing to interrogate the mechanisms through which those identities are constructed within the discourse of the text itself. The most significant limitation is the absence of a rigorous and systematic

39. Meeks, *First Urban Christians*; Theissen, *Social Reality*; Elliott, *What Is Social-Scientific Criticism?*; Esler, *First Christians*; Malina, *Social Gospel of Jesus*; deSilva, *Letter to the Hebrews*.

methodology for textual analysis in the reconstruction of communities, for such approaches fail to account for the complex, dialectical relationship between language and society articulated in second- and third-wave sociolinguistics.

Some biblical scholars employ the sociolinguistic concept of the speech community.⁴⁰ However, this concept fails to overcome the limitations inherent in audience design. Community-based analysis grounded in audience design models suggest that language or text occurs as a function of audience composition. Applied to biblical studies, this has encouraged a mode of interpretation in which stylistic shifts or rhetorical strategies are read as adaptations to an imagined audience.⁴¹ While this may offer plausible insights in certain cases, it ultimately reinforces the assumption that texts are passive products of external social determinants, rather than active participants in the formation of social meaning. Such models tend to obscure the rhetorical agency of the author, neglect the ideologically charged nature of language use, and reduce the hermeneutical task to the reconstruction of a presumed socio-communicative context. The resulting interpretive paradigm prioritizes sociological inference over discursive analysis and fails to recognize the dynamic interplay between author, audience, and text as constitutive of meaning.

Third-wave sociolinguistics offers a profound theoretical and methodological alternative. This approach foregrounds social, communicative, and ideological nature of language, emphasizing how speakers employ stylistic resources to construct social meaning, negotiate identity, and assert ideological positions. It reframes the analysis of linguistic variation as an ethnographic-interactional

40. Snyder, *Language and Identity*; Ong, "Language of the New Testament."

41. For example, the "community hypothesis," including the Johannine, Petrine, and Pauline communities, and linguistic ideologies, such as the Honor-Shame, Patron-Client, Limited-Good, and Fictive Kinship models, are all based on speculative social-structural assumptions rather than on empirical linguistic or interactional evidence. To date, there is no concrete data demonstrating how these hypothesized social structures actually influenced the life, communication, or language of early Christian communities. The linguistic styles of the New Testament writers and the linguistic ideologies of these communities are not simple to identify using social-structuralism-centered theories.

enterprise grounded in observable discourse, rather than as a statistical mapping of social categories. In the context of biblical interpretation, third-wave sociolinguistics treat the text not as a passive imprint of community, but as a discursive site of identity construction and ideological contestation.

Particularly, a focus on linguistic ideologies, understood as belief systems regarding language that circulate within social networks, enables a more nuanced analysis of how texts articulate, reinforce, or subvert prevailing norms. Importantly, these ideologies are not assumed to be monolithic or community-wide; they emerge through interaction, are unevenly distributed, and are subject to negotiation and contestation. In this framework, the author is no longer a passive transmitter of communal values, but a strategic actor engaged in linguistic practice—crafting meaning, shaping audience, and constructing authority. This reconfiguration allows for a symmetrical model of interaction, in which both speaker and audience participate in the co-construction of meaning.

Meanwhile, an emphasis on discourse, performance, and ideology offers a methodological reorientation capable of capturing the complexity of biblical texts as social acts. Rather than reducing texts to artifacts of community, it understands them as sites where language constitutes social reality. This reconceptualization does not reject the insights of historical and social-scientific criticism but situates them within a more dynamic and reflexive interpretive framework. The merit of third-wave sociolinguistics is to determine the rhetorical agency of the author, the situatedness of the audience, and the ideological stakes of interpretation. It opens the possibility for a discursive hermeneutic, wherein meaning is seen as emerging through the interaction of language, identity, and ideology in historically situated acts of communication.

3. Linguistic Style and Ideology in the Corinthian Epistles

For Coupland, communicative competence extends beyond grammatical proficiency to include the speaker's awareness of social norms, expectations, and ideologies governing appropriate speech in specific contexts. Likewise, sociolinguistic resources are not merely linguistic forms, but semiotic materials imbued with social meaning—resources that speakers can manipulate reflexively and

performatively to construct identity, express stance, and recontextualize inherited meanings. This reflexive and performative capacity allows speakers to reshape linguistic ideologies across changing historical and social conditions.

Therefore, speakers will style their linguistic practices as acts of identity.⁴² In accordance with particular sociocultural conditions, situational contexts, and levels of education, their use of language as acts of identity may differ. Linguistic performances that prominently foreground and index social identity can be theoretically framed as instances of high performance. Conversely, when social identity is only weakly indexed or minimally foregrounded, the practice may be described as low performance. Performance is identified by intensified communicative focus across seven dimensions—form focusing, meaning focusing, situation focusing, performer focusing, relational focusing, achievement focusing, and repertoire focusing.⁴³ Within this framework, the Corinthian epistles should be understood as a product of high performance, in which Paul strongly stylizes his apostolic identity through strategic linguistic design.

Paul's aptitude for such stylization is intimately connected to his high educational background. Born in Tarsus—a prominent Hellenistic city renowned for its rhetorical and philosophical traditions—Paul likely received Hellenistic elementary education, including exposure to rhetorical techniques and identity presentation.⁴⁴ His subsequent training in Jerusalem under Gamaliel, a leading Pharisaic scholar who may have incorporated Hellenistic education into Jewish pedagogy, further suggests a dual intellectual heritage that enabled Paul to operate fluently within diverse cultural-linguistic registers (Acts 22:3; cf. Phil 3:5–6; Gal 1:14). This composite educational background granted him access to a rich linguistic repertoire, suggesting that he was able to equip himself to engage in complex acts of discourse design.

42. Coupland, *Style*, 108–11.

43. Coupland, *Style*, 147–48.

44. Porter, *Paul in Acts*, 104–5; “Paul of Tarsus”; “Complex Multilingualism,” 121–31; “Languages That Paul Did Not Speak”; Park, *Prestige Language*, 283–85.

Paul demonstrates that the Corinthian epistles display a high performance, particularly in his deliberate subversion of prevailing Greco-Roman and Jewish conventions. For instance, in 1 Cor 1:21–25, Paul writes,

For since, in the wisdom of God, the world did not know God through wisdom, God decided, through the foolishness of our proclamation, to save those who believe. For Jews demand signs and Greeks desire wisdom, but we proclaim Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, but to those who are the called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. For God's foolishness is wiser than human wisdom, and God's weakness is stronger than human strength.

This statement articulates Paul's intention to engage in stylization through high-performance discourse, grounded in a new tradition centered on the wisdom of God. Rather than conforming to Jewish and Greek traditions, Paul performs a stylistic persona that embodies paradox, humility, and divine inversion through a Christ-centered transformation.

Moreover, Paul articulates this stylistic strategy explicitly in 1 Cor 9:19–23, where he states,

For though I am free with respect to all, I have made myself a slave to all, so that I might win more of them. To the Jews I became as a Jew, in order to win Jews . . . To the weak I became weak, so that I might win the weak. I have become all things to all people, that I might by all means save some. I do it all for the sake of the gospel, so that I may share in its blessings.

This passage provides a paradigmatic example of agentive stylization, wherein Paul recalibrates his discursive identity in response to the cultural expectations and interpretive frameworks of his audiences. His stylistic persona is not fixed but dynamically constituted through strategic acts of identity performance.

In addition, the epistles' compositional circumstances—possibly involving scribal assistance, dictation, and iterative redaction—likely afforded Paul the opportunity for stylistic refinement and deliberate structuring. These conditions further support their classification as high-performance texts.

Paul was a high-performance writer who skillfully employed style-shifting for his discourse purposes. Some scholars have interpreted his stylistic variations through historical-critical methods, and, on that basis, assumed the redaction of the Corinthian Epistles involving multiple sources.⁴⁵ These proposals have generated a wide range of partition hypotheses concerning the composition of First and Second Corinthians. Nevertheless, no scholarly consensus has emerged regarding the number of constituent letters, the precise boundaries of the proposed fragments, or their original chronological sequence. To be sure, partition hypotheses have played a particularly prominent role in scholarship on Second Corinthians. Although various partition theories have also been proposed for First Corinthians, they have neither gained support comparable to that accorded to partition theories of Second Corinthians nor become an equally prominent premise of interpretation.⁴⁶ In this scholarly context, Christopher D. Land's study of Second Corinthians is particularly significant. Employing register theory, Land argues that the letter is not a compilation of disparate documents but a single text exhibiting substantial textual cohesion.⁴⁷ By demonstrating that the epistle can be understood to realize a single structured situation in which Paul and Timothy enact apostolic leadership in relation to the Corinthian church, Land establishes the integrity of Second Corinthians as a unified discourse.

45. For partition hypotheses concerning First Corinthians, see Hagge, "Die beiden Überlieferten Sendschreiben"; Pesch, *Paulus*, 29–97, 247–53; Couchoud, "Reconstitution," 17–31. For partition hypotheses concerning Second Corinthians, see Semler, *Paraphrasis II*; Betz, *2 Corinthians 8 and 9*, 37–42; Bornkamm, "History," 260–62. More recently, Hughes and Jewett (*Corinthian Correspondence*, 11–20, 43–66) have argued that the canonical Corinthian epistles are redacted composites of multiple Pauline letters or letter fragments, appealing to abrupt literary transitions, historical and logical discrepancies, and shifts in tone, rhetorical situation, and rhetorical genre.

46. Mitchell (*Paul and the Rhetoric of Reconciliation*, 1–3, 15–19, 184–99) defends the compositional integrity of First Corinthians, whereas she ("Paul's Letters to Corinth," 317–38) supports a five-letter partition hypothesis for Second Corinthians. For studies defending the literary unity of First Corinthians, see Hurd, *Origin*, 43–47, 61–92; Merklein, "Die Einheitlichkeit," 176–79; Kümmel, *Introduction*, 275–78.

47. Land, *Integrity of 2 Corinthians*, 280–81.

Given the demonstrated capacity of Paul as a high-performance communicator, tonal variation cannot be straightforwardly interpreted as evidence of multiple authorship. Instead, such variation is more coherently understood as the outcome of intentional style shifting employed to meet distinct discourse goals across changing interactional contexts. On this basis, Paul's style shifting should be interpreted not as a sign of textual fragmentation but as an index of rhetorical competence. That competence consists in the ability to recalibrate discourse through systematic adjustments in targeting, framing, voicing, keying, and loading, in line with Coupland's sociolinguistic model.⁴⁸

Accordingly, what has often been treated as a problem of compositional unity is more accurately framed as a question of discourse strategy. In actual communicative practice, high-performance authors characteristically deploy multiple voices and stylistic configurations within a single text, rather than maintaining a uniform tonal profile throughout.⁴⁹ Such stylistic plurality is a normal and expected feature of advanced written performance, particularly in contexts of conflict, persuasion, and communal regulation—precisely the communicative conditions reflected in Paul's correspondence with the Corinthian church.

In analyzing Paul's high-performance writing, it is important to address the limitation of reconstructing the linguistic ideologies of sociopolitical, socioeconomic, and sociocultural contexts in the city of Corinth shared within the Corinthian church. Although the secular influences Paul refers to in the Corinthian epistles are clear, it is impossible to investigate potential linguistic ideologies that are not explicitly stated in the text, and any attempt to do so would be little more than conjecture due to the lack of sufficient data. Given the scarcity of available data, in addition, reconstructing its sociohistorical context of Paul's opponents remains difficult.⁵⁰

The focus here is not on delineating those ideologies per se, but on assessing whether—and to what extent—Paul was able to draw

48. Coupland, *Style*, 111–14.

49. Coupland, *Style*, 137–45, 149–54.

50. Regarding previous discussions regarding the issue of Paul's opponents, see Porter, *Linguistic Analysis*, 309–16.

effectively upon such linguistic beliefs and sociocultural expectations. This is because the only source available to us—the Corinthian epistles—does not reveal the actual linguistic ideologies of the Corinthian church but rather reflects Paul’s understanding of those linguistic ideologies.⁵¹ In this regard, the starting point is to explore how Paul might have been positioned to strategically select and deploy particular sociolinguistic resources within that discursive environment. This perspective allows Paul’s linguistic practice to be understood not merely as an expressive choice, but as a potential manifestation of communicative competence, revealing both his sensitivity to audience expectations and his stylistic adaptability.

In light of this, Paul’s Corinthian epistles may be understood as a series of indexical cycles, namely phases in which Paul attempted to form, contest, and reconfigure linguistic ideologies.⁵² Each cycle represents a distinct moment in the evolving relationship between Paul’s apostolic discourse and the Corinthian community’s sociolinguistic realities. The New Testament books present five indexical cycles involving the Corinthian church.⁵³

3.1 *The First Indexical Cycle*

The first indexical cycle regards the formation of a linguistic ideology shaped by Paul missionary journey. Acts 18–19 records Paul’s initial ministry in Corinth, during which he spent approximately eighteen months establishing the foundational linguistic and theological framework of the Christian community. This stage may be identified as the formative period in which Paul constructed an apostolic linguistic ideology—a system of discourse linking his theological conviction with communicative practice.

51. According to Porter (*Apostle Paul*, 142–45), the linguistic ideology in the Pauline epistles is not a reflection of Paul’s personal convictions, but rather the enactment of a shared ideology of the group to which Paul belongs. Accordingly, Paul’s linguistic choices should not be understood as a form of public linguistic practice through which Paul’s group articulates Christian identity and engages in communication with other communities.

52. Park, *Prestige Language*, 314–17.

53. For a chronological reconstruction of the historical Paul’s relationship with the Corinthian church, see Porter, *Apostle Paul*, 55–58, 244–87.

During this period, Latin likely played an important role as the political language of Corinth, particularly as a symbol of the city's reconstruction as a Roman colony; nevertheless, the language more widely understood among the population was Greek rather than Latin.⁵⁴ Moreover, Paul's proficiency in Latin is not clearly attested, and given that all of the Corinthian epistles were written in Greek, it is evident that the indexical cycles were shaped primarily within a Greek linguistic framework.⁵⁵ Moreover, considering Paul's education in Tarsus and under Gamaliel, it is likely that he took into account the discursive practices of Hellenistic Judaism.

However, Paul did not merely imitate the linguistic ideologies of the Greco-Roman and Jewish traditions; rather, he appears to have initiated a new linguistic repertoire centered on the gospel.⁵⁶ While it is true that he took into account both Hellenistic and Jewish traditions, the core of the gospel message he proclaimed was fundamentally distinct from those earlier traditions. The distinctiveness of Paul's linguistic ideology from prevailing traditions is clearly demonstrated in Acts 18:12–17, particularly in his confrontation with his fellow Jews and the legal dispute before Gallio's tribunal. Given this, Paul established a language ideology that inverted conventional hierarchies of eloquence and authority.

3.2 *The Second Indexical Cycle*

The second indexical cycle concerns the emergence of plural linguistic ideologies following Paul's departure from Corinth. First Corinthians reveals several factions who followed Paul, Apollos, and Peter alike, as evidenced in the confessional slogans: "I belong to Paul"; "I belong to Apollos"; "I belong to Cephas"; and "I belong to Christ" (1 Cor 1:12). It remains uncertain whether Peter personally visited Corinth or whether the influence was mediated through his followers. However, the book of Acts indicates that

54. Park, *Prestige Language*, 257–62; "Rethinking Language Policy," 122–32.

55. On Latin, see Porter, "Did Paul Speak Latin?" For the overall argument, see Park, *Prestige Language*, 258–62.

56. Regarding the historical context of the city of Corinth, see Porter, *Apostle Paul*, 245–48.

Apollos was indeed in Corinth (Acts 19:1). Paul himself acknowledges Apollos's subsequent ministry there: "I planted, Apollos watered" (1 Cor 3:6). While it is clear that Apollos ministered in Corinth, the exact length and circumstances of his residence cannot be determined with certainty. Moreover, it is nearly impossible to reconstruct with certainty how many factions actually existed in the Corinthian church based solely on a few verses in First Corinthians. What we do know is limited to Paul's references to the situation, which were based on reports he received from certain sources within the church.

However, it is evident that Paul's absence created a vacuum of strong leadership and systematic language policy, fostering a linguistic ecology with diverse linguistic ideologies. When no leader with strong authority is present to implement a systematic language policy, the maintenance of a unified ideology becomes exceedingly difficult. It is a natural development that new linguistic ideologies spread, grounded in the social networks that intensify around alternative leaders. This demonstrates that, unless language is controlled by the authority with a systematic language policy, its continual diversification is an inevitable phenomenon. Paul departed after only initiating the founding stage of the Corinthian church, leaving the community without a fully developed hierarchical structure to support Paul's theology. In light of this context, the ideological fragmentation observable within the church should not be regarded as accidental. Rather, it must be understood as a sociolinguistically predictable situation.

Given this, the linguistic repertoire that Paul had initially established must inevitably be reallocated and reinterpreted within these factions. The result was a community marked by discursive fragmentation, where speech itself became an index of factional alignment and ideological orientation.

3.3 The Third Indexical Cycle

The third indexical cycle involves Paul's influence on the Corinthian church through First Corinthians. Paul wrote this letter in response to plural linguistic ideologies within the community. Having received reports from Chloe's household (1 Cor 1:11) as well as from Stephanas, Fortunatus, and Achaicus (1 Cor 16:17),

Paul recognized that these linguistic ideologies had become implicated in divisions and various other issues within the Corinthian church. Paul's purpose in writing First Corinthians can thus be understood as an attempt to address and regulate the linguistic ideologies that had contributed to such problems.

In the opening of First Corinthians, the macro framing and the meso framing are set and remain fixed throughout the letter: the former oriented toward the sociopolitical context of the city of Corinth within the Roman Empire, and the latter toward the socio-cultural context of the Christ-believing community in Corinth. At the very outset of the letter (1 Cor 1:1), Paul emphasizes his social identity as an apostle "called by the will of God," thereby asserting his authority as the foundation for reshaping and unifying the Corinthian church's linguistic ideologies.⁵⁷ Paul begins the first part of the letter by subordinating his own authority under that of God and by emphasizing his social identity as a co-worker alongside Apollos and Peter. In doing so, he underscores a God-centered structure of authority in which all leaders stand in a relationship of cooperation rather than rivalry. This stylistic strategy serves to weaken the linguistic ideologies of factional leaders who, by exalting the teachings of particular co-workers, were fostering division within the community.

Paul stylizes the language of First Corinthians and strategically employs frequent style shifts. These shifts are evident in the dimensions of targeting and micro framing.⁵⁸ The micro framing concerns the specific topics addressed in Paul's writing to his audience. Following the introductory section (1:1–1:9), the micro framing of First Corinthians is divided into two major parts: unity (1:10–4:21) and paraenesis (5:1–16:12), with a final section (16:13–24) functioning as the conclusion. In contrast to the relatively stable framing of the introduction and conclusion, it is

57. Although Best ("Paul's Apostolic Authority," 16–34) does not employ the terminology of indexicality, his examination of Paul's varied uses of "apostle" indicates that the designation may evoke different social meanings in different contexts rather than functioning as a fixed and direct assertion of authority.

58. Porter (*Apostle Paul*, 259) points out that Paul's style shift in targeting—marked by the use of the second person in three crucial passages (1:10–12; 3:4–5; 11:18–19)—functions as a deliberate discursive strategy to address the Corinthian community collectively.

within the unity and paraenesis sections that Paul develops a wide range of concrete issues facing the Corinthian church.

A. Unity (1:10–4:21)

1. Problem of disunity (1:10–17)
2. The gospel contradicts human wisdom (1:18–2:5)
3. God’s wisdom comes by the Spirit (2:6–16)
4. Divisiveness (3:1–23)
5. Paul as Christ’s servant (4:1–21)

B. Paraenesis (5:1–16:12)

1. Questions of morality (5:1–6:20)
2. Questions of marriage (7:1–40)
3. Questions of food sacrificed to idols (8:1–11:1)
4. Questions of worship (11:2–34)
5. Questions of spiritual gifts (12:1–14:40)
6. Questions of the resurrection (15:1–58)
7. The collection (16:1–12)⁵⁹

Targeting shifts occur multiple times within these micro-framing shifts. For instance, Paul explicitly designates his audience as “the church of God that is in Corinth, to those sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints together with all those who in every place call upon the name of our Lord Jesus Christ” (1 Cor 1:2), thereby situating the epistle as addressed to the entire Corinthian community. When addressing specific issues, such as the problem of divisions (1:11–12), however, Paul shifts his targeting by positioning those directly involved as the central addressees, while placing others in the roles of overhearers or eavesdroppers. By subsequently reversing this configuration and treating the problematic groups themselves as overhearers in other moments of the discourse, Paul positions the wider community as the primary audience, enabling them to view these negative cases as exempla—that is, as instructive warnings for their own practice. In this way, Paul uses strategic reorientation of audience roles to cultivate communal reflection, correction, and solidarity.

A similar pattern appears in 1 Cor 5, Paul directs his admonition toward the individual offender and those who tolerated the

59. For a detailed study of the topics in First Corinthians, see Porter, *Apostle Paul*, 259–68.

situation, constructing them as the central addressees when addressing the case of sexual immorality “of a kind not even found among the pagans” (5:1).⁶⁰ At the same time, the wider community is positioned to overhear the rebuke, learning indirectly that communal identity is compromised when sin is left unchallenged within the body of Christ. Paul subsequently re-expands the address to the entire congregation by exhorting them to “clean out the old leaven” (5:7), thereby transforming the incident into a collective call to communal holiness and boundary maintenance.

This pattern of targeting specific groups and subsequently re-expanding the address to the entire congregation continues throughout the letter. In each case, Paul begins with a concrete issue involving identifiable participants, but the discourse consistently widens to encompass the whole assembly and its shared identity and responsibilities. Thus, Paul initially engages in targeting those actors whose conduct deviates from his normative value system, rendering normative transgression visible, and then shifts the targeting to encompass the entire congregation. This discursive performance of targeting shifts functions as an act of boundary construction that differentiates the normative order of the Corinthian church from the dominant ideology of the Corinthian city. Through the repeated reconfiguration of this boundary, the social identity of the church is constituted.

Paul outwardly maintains a pastoral voice, but in certain situations he shifts to a polemical voice. As First Corinthians moves from ch. 4 to ch. 5, for instance, Paul’s discourse undergoes simultaneous shifts in framing, voicing, and keying. In ch. 4, Paul presents himself as “a servant of Christ” (4:1) and addresses his audience as “my beloved children” (4:14), speaking in a pastoral voice marked by warmth and relational concern. The framing centers on exhortation and spiritual kinship, portraying the church as a single family under God’s guidance. However, in ch. 5, as Paul confronts the issue of sexual immorality, the framing shifts from exhortation to discipline. His voice moves from that of a fatherly mentor to that of an apostolic judge, and his tone changes from gentle persuasion to stern command. For instance, the statement “to de-

60. Porter (*Apostle Paul*, 253–54) also argues that many of the major issues within the Corinthian church are best understood as beginning in 1 Cor 5:1.

liver such a one to Satan” (5:5) marks the climax of this keying shift, reinforcing both emotional distance and authoritative stance. Through this transition, Paul reconfigures the balance between love and discipline, intimacy and authority, thereby reshaping the moral and linguistic order of the community.

The characteristics of these shifts tend to follow targeting rather than the timing of framing changes. When Paul addresses the Corinthian congregation as a whole, he generally adopts fraternal voicing and warm keying, speaking as a brother within the community. By contrast, when he confronts those responsible for particular problems, he consistently adopts apostolic voicing and critical keying, thereby asserting his authority and articulating explicit judgment.

In First Corinthians, Paul employs repetition and recontextualization to produce loading in key theological terms. “Wisdom” (σοφία) and “foolishness” (μωρία) invert the rhetoric of Greco-Roman discourse, revealing the cross as the true locus of divine wisdom. “Body” (σῶμα) evolves from the notion of the individual body to that of the communal and Christological body, expressing the unity of the church. “Knowledge” (γνῶσις), initially a mark of self-assurance, is redefined as empty without love, urging ethical reflection, while “authority” (ἐξουσία) shifts from the claim of apostolic rights to the language of voluntary renunciation and servanthood. Through such processes, Paul infuses ordinary terms with theological weight, reconstructing the church’s linguistic value system within a new theological framework.

3.4 *The Fourth Indexical Cycle*

The fourth indexical cycle involves Paul’s revisit of the Corinthian church and the discursive conflict. After writing First Corinthians, Paul’s visit to the Corinth church—referenced in 2 Cor 2:1; 12:14; and 13:1—marks a pivotal moment in reshaping its linguistic ideologies. Referred to as “the painful visit,” this episode constitutes a face-to-face confrontation between Paul and Corinthian church leaders whose linguistic ideology had already diverged from his own.⁶¹

61. Porter, *Apostle Paul*, 56–57, 249–50, 280.

Due to the limited data, it is difficult to reconstruct the exact exchanges that took place. In light of the records in Second Corinthians, however, it is highly likely that divergent discourses emerged within the church at this time. On the one hand, the positive interpretation of Paul's humble language is reflected in Second Corinthians as an expression of "repentance" (cf. 2 Cor 7:8–11). Some members of the church took Paul's admonition to heart, turned back, and restored their relationship with him, thereby embracing the linguistic ideologies formed by Paul in the first indexical cycle and the third indexical cycle. On the other hand, others continued to regard his humility as a sign of weakness or inadequacy (cf. 2 Cor 10:10), reinforcing the linguistic ideologies that opposed those shaped by Paul.

This represents a moment of reallocation of linguistic resources: the same linguistic resource that once indexed apostolic authority were being re-accented to index both approval and disapproval, support as well as dissent. Paul's visit exposed the extent to which his own communicative repertoire had been reinterpreted and appropriated by competing social agents. This period, the fourth indexical cycle, therefore, embodies the tension between authorial intention and communal reinterpretation—a struggle over the control of linguistic meaning.

3.5 *The Fifth Indexical Cycle*

The fifth indexical cycle shows how Paul's linguistic style operates as a complex form of discursive performance. Compared to First Corinthians, Second Corinthians manifests markedly stronger polemical styles toward those who oppose Paul, such as emotional irony, defensive boasting, and direct accusations. It is worth noting that First Corinthians was composed by Paul not on the basis of direct experience, but rather through information he received indirectly via his co-worker network—specifically through Stephanas, Fortunatus, and Achaicus. Therefore, the linguistic style of this letter was constructed upon indirect sociolinguistic resources. The fact that Paul did not carry out sub-targeting of specific groups with detailed information reveals his limited grasp of the community's internal sociolinguistic resources. After revisiting the Corinthian church in person (2 Cor 2:1; 12:14; 13:1), how-

ever, Paul composed Second Corinthians on the basis of firsthand observation of the community's internal dynamics. This context profoundly affected Paul's language style shifts of framing, targeting, and keying across the entire discourse.

In the opening address (2 Cor 1:1), Paul identifies his audience as "the church of God that is in Corinth, together with all the saints throughout Achaia," thereby signaling that the letter is not a private correspondence to a single congregation but a public discourse encompassing the wider network of Achaian churches. This introductory formula establishes the targeting structure of the letter: Paul's speech simultaneously engages a central target—the Corinthian church—and a set of peripheral targets—the broader communities of believers in Achaia.

Paul's declaration of identity—"Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God" (1:1)—and his proclamation of "the God of all comfort" (1:3) establish this epistle's initial micro framing. Through this framing, Paul positions his discourse as a performative act under divine sovereignty. The micro framing of Second Corinthians develops through five major sections: the opening (1:1–2); thanksgiving (1:3–7); the body concerning Paul's ministry to the Corinthians (1:8–9:15); paraenesis centered on his apostolic authority and exhortation (10:1–13:10); and the closing (13:11–14). Within this structure, framing shifts occur continuously as Paul moves from apostolic identity and divine comfort to ministry, authority, exhortation, and communal unity:

A. Opening (1:1–2)

1. Sender (1:1a)
2. Addressee (1:1b)
3. Greeting (1:2)

B. Thanksgiving (1:3–7)

C. Body: Paul's ministry to the Corinthians (1:8–9:15)

1. Formal opening (1:8–11)
2. Paul's expectation of his recent conduct (1:12–2:13)
3. Paul's apostolic ministry (2:14–7:16).
4. Collection for Jerusalem (8:1–9:15)

D. Paraenesis (10:1–13:10)

1. Paul's personal appeal regarding his apostolic authority (10:1–12:10)

- 2. Pauline travelogue (12:11–13:4)
- 3. Final exhortation (13:5–10)
- E. Closing (13:11–14)
 - 1. Call to unity (13:11)
 - 2. Greetings (13:12–13)
 - 3. Benediction (13:14)⁶²

Paul's discourse within these framings reveals a complex stylistic shifting in which targeting, voicing, and keying shifting operate in close interaction. He not only shifts his addressee but also adjusts his emotional tone according to the social position and relational identity of those being addressed. When examining the dynamics of voicing and keying in Second Corinthians, it becomes clear that Paul's discourse presupposes a bifurcated audience structure—divided between those who align themselves with him and those who oppose him. Throughout the letter, Paul's shifts in tone and relational stance index this division, creating two distinct social and linguistic identities within the Corinthian community.

Those who support Paul are addressed through the language of affection, inclusion, and shared identity. For instance, expressions such as “our heart is open to you” (6:11), “brothers and sisters” (8:1; 13:11), and “beloved” (7:1) reflect a voicing of solidarity and reconciliation, framed in an intimate and empathetic keying. In contrast, Paul frequently singles out those who oppose him and employs a negative keying toward them (e.g., 2:6, 17; 4:2–5; 5:11–13).⁶³ These expressions reveal a more critical keying in comparison with First Corinthians.

Especially, Paul's voicing toward his opponents—those who challenge his authority or question his apostolic legitimacy—is marked by a sharper stylistic tone and heightened emotional intensity in chs. 10–13.⁶⁴ In ch. 11, for instance, Paul adopts the voice of irony and rebuke, describing his rivals as “false apostles” (οἱ τοιοῦτοι ψευδαπόστολοι), “deceitful workers” (ἐργάται δόλιοι), and as “disguising themselves as apostles of Christ” (μετασχηματιζόμενοι εἰς ἀποστόλους Χριστοῦ) (11:13–14). These

62. For a detailed study of these framings, see Porter, *Apostle Paul*, 282.

63. Porter, *Apostle Paul*, 276.

64. Porter, *Apostle Paul*, 272.

expressions reveal a more critical keying when compared with First Corinthians. In 1 Cor 5:3–5, Paul issues one of his strongest disciplinary pronouncements by ordering that the man involved in incest be “handed over to Satan.” This expression signifies expulsion from the community and constitutes the severest form of ecclesial discipline. However, in 2 Cor 11:15, Paul employs even sharper language, describing his opponents as “agents of Satan” (οἱ διάκονοι αὐτοῦ) and noting that Satan disguises himself as an angel of light. Here, the rhetoric moves beyond disciplinary action toward direct theological condemnation. While the identity of Paul’s opponents in First Corinthians remains somewhat indistinct, in Second Corinthians, it emerges with far greater clarity, accompanied by a more explicit and openly confrontational keying.

Moreover, Second Corinthians is marked by loading, in which key terms accumulate layered theological and social significance. Words such as “weakness” (ἀσθένεια) and “authority” (ἐξουσία) function as semantic nuclei, repeatedly recontextualized to express the paradoxical logic of Paul’s theology: weakness becomes the very locus of divine power (12:9–10). Through this process, Paul redefines conventional linguistic values and inscribes theological meaning into ordinary terms. With loading, the mixed uses of polemical voicing and enduring self-voicing of humility reflect both the escalation of the conflict and Paul’s strategic attempt to reassert linguistic and theological authority within a divided community.

In conclusion, Paul employs style shifting with notable frequency throughout First and Second Corinthians. In these epistles, shifts in voicing and keying demonstrate a meaningful correlation with framing, in that framing in the paraenesis section tends to exhibit more authoritative voicing and more critical keying than in the unity section. Nevertheless, this relationship is neither mechanically consistent nor perfectly symmetrical. Since authoritative and critical shifts also appear within the framing of the unity section, albeit less prominently than in that of the paraenesis section, the distinction between the two framings does not yield a rigid or absolute pattern of stylistic differentiation. More decisively, the intensity of voicing and keying aligns more closely with targeting shifts than with framing alone. When Paul directly tar-

gets his opponents, he adopts his most severe and polemical keying—most conspicuously in Second Corinthians. This heightened intensity likely reflects Paul's expanded knowledge of his opponents and the likelihood of more direct and overt confrontations with them. When addressing individuals responsible for specific transgressions, however, his keying, though disciplinary, remains comparatively restrained and oriented toward correction rather than outright condemnation. In addressing the wider congregation, Paul modulates between praise and warning, adjusting his voicing and keying in accordance with the community's social and theological needs. Thus, it is targeting, more than framing, that most clearly determines the intensity and direction of Paul's style shifting in the Corinthian epistles. Through this dynamic interplay of framing, targeting, voicing, and keying, Paul negotiates authority, constructs communal boundaries, and reshapes the linguistic and theological order of the Corinthian church.

4. *Conclusion*

Paul was a strategic architect of linguistic ideology across the early Christian international social network. Even in his physical absence from the churches he had established, Paul continued to exert discursive control through his co-worker networks and epistolary interventions. In the case of the Corinthian church, he had initially laid the foundation for its linguistic ideology regarding the gospel, but upon hearing of emergent conflicts and theological distortions resulting from alternative ideological formations, he sought to reassert a Christ-centered linguistic ideology. To this end, Paul employed a sophisticated array of stylistic strategies—targeting, framing, voicing, keying, and loading—flexibly and intentionally, in order to reinforce a united social identity within the Corinthian church. While First Corinthians reflects a more generalized and corrective style, Second Corinthians reveals Paul's expanded knowledge of specific opponents and his more assertive engagement in defending his apostolic authority and theology.

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