TRANSLATION OF ‘GRACE’ IN JULIA
OF CÔTE D’IVOIRE


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In present-day semantics there are three approaches to the definition of word meaning which I have found especially helpful for the Bible translator who wants to translate biblical key terms in an appropriate manner: the referential (analytical or denotative) approach, which seeks to determine the essence of meaning by analyzing it into its main components; the communicational/contextual approach, which attempts to determine the meanings of words from their usage; and the prototype approach derived from cognitive theory. Semantic analyses not only need to be undertaken by the first two traditional approaches, but also enriched by the third one, because of the problem cause by ‘fuzziness’ of meaning.
1. Definitions of meaning

1.1 Referential theory of meaning

The referential theory of meaning is at the basis of diachronic word studies in philology and theology. In this view, it is assumed that words are carriers of meaning or that they have a hard core of meaning. The step from this assumption to etymologizing is not far. The hard core of meaning is often equated with the root meaning of a word. Etymology is a legitimate field of study in its own right. But great care and precision are needed when speaking about the etymology of a word, in order to determine its meaning. The search for hidden meanings bound up with etymology becomes dangerous when it leads to what James Barr (1961:100–6) called the ‘root fallacy.’ By way of example, the English word *nice* may be mentioned. It comes from the Latin *nescius*, meaning ‘ignorant.’ While it might be possible to prove historically how *nescius* generated *nice*, it would be absurd to say that *nice* means ‘ignorant’ in present-day English just because *nice* comes from a root that meant ‘ignorant.’ However, many philological and theological word studies are based on this faulty notion of meaning. They operate on the assumption that the meaning of a word can be found by tracing its history. In some cases it is true that all words derived from a root do share a common meaning, but it is erroneous to assume that they *must* do so.

Diachronic and synchronic studies have their place. They need to be combined, taking advantage of the strengths of both. However, the ultimate importance of the context needs to be asserted. While we cannot afford to neglect insights about a word’s past history that sheds light on its present-day use, the priority of synchrony must be maintained. That is, synchronic
(contextual) evidence always has priority over diachronic (historical) evidence for determining word meaning.

1.2 Communication theory of meaning

In recent years the communication conception of meaning has begun to take shape inside and outside of semantics. This view received its greatest impetus from the insights into perception and language developed by philosophers like Ludwig Wittgenstein (1953) and by the linguist Ferdinand de Saussure (1966). They emphasized the importance of context for determining meaning. Wittgenstein pointed out that words and sentences do not carry meaning so much as they stimulate the hearer’s thoughts into the right channels. His later doctrine is the bold assertion that “the meaning of a word is its use in the language” (1953:20). This is very pertinent to translation, which, in the final analysis, is concerned with contextual use. Wittgenstein’s rudimentary observations (words as stimulators of meaning and receptor-oriented meaning), now developed, have become important parts of the source-message-receptor model of communication (SMR).

According to the SMR code model of communication theory “meanings are in people, not in words” (Berlo 1960:175). Kraft, who tries to refute the theory that words contain their meanings, says that “meanings are attached to words (and other symbols used in communication) by people rather than being an inherent part of the words themselves” (Kraft 1991:34). It seems to me that Berlo and Kraft overstate their case for communication theory’s sake. Their view is to be contrasted with the position of those who adhere to the referential theory of meaning. Referential theoreticians generally see in each word a hard core of meaning
that is relatively stable and modifiable by the context only within certain limits.

Arguments and examples can be adduced to prove either position. I think it can hardly be doubted that most vocabulary items are linked to a more or less stable semantic core (especially in the triconsonantal Hebrew or Arabic roots): indeed, without it, communication would be impossible. The difficulty enters in when this simple fact is used to support erroneous ideas about the supposedly inherent meaning of a word. And here I subscribe wholeheartedly to the communicologists’ definition of meaning. The present semantic core of a word can be significantly different from its etymological one (as in the example of nice, derived from Latin nescius, ‘ignorant’). Likewise, what one person means by a word may not be quite the same as what another person means by it. However, semantic ranges of words cannot be expanded infinitely or too subjectively—there needs to be agreement between communicators and receptors about basic semantic ranges of words in order to make communication possible.

Modern communication theory is right in its emphasis on people and context for the determination of meaning. All kinds of contexts can influence the meaning of words: the immediate context in the phrase or sentence as well as wider contexts ranging from the paragraph to whole discourses, entire books, and extratextual contexts. The contextual theory of semantics uses the overall context and the collocations of words (i.e., co-occurrences of individual lexical items) to determine word meaning. For example, synonyms and antonyms that occur in the context of a word in question provide conclusive evidence of meaning, along with other words in the context. Another important function of the context is that it clarifies the meaning of polysemous words.
However, two notes of warning need to be sounded concerning the weak side of the argument from context. First, it is admitted that an acceptable interpretation must fit the context. However, it does not follow that any meaning that fits the context is acceptable. Second, the determinative function of the context does not justify the practice of reading the meaning of what a term is supposed to have in a context into the basic meaning of the word. In other words, one can fall prey to the fallacy of not recognizing real verbal concordance in the source text and, as a result, dissipating what is arguably technical terminology according to the nuance deemed to be uppermost in a given context.

In summary, there is no need to set the referential theory and the communication/contextual theory of meaning, and their respective approaches, against each other. They approach meaning from different points of view. Wisdom lies in maximizing the potential of both approaches. As a balanced combination of both approaches to biblical semantics the recent works by Louw and Nida (1988) and Nida and Louw (1992), and for Qur’anic semantics the works by Izutsu (1966, 1987), may be mentioned.

1.3 Prototype theory of meaning

Contemporary prototype theory of meaning has made a significantly new contribution to our ideas of meaning and categorization. From the time of Aristotle to the later work of Wittgenstein people used monothetic categorization; that is, a class or category was defined in terms of a set of properties. Categories were thought to be abstract containers and items were assumed to be included in the same category if and only if they had certain criterial properties (that is, ‘necessary and sufficient features’) in common. Adherents of this view of category
formation assume that categories are logical, bounded entities in which category membership is treated as a digital, all-or-nothing phenomenon. In semantics, this view of meaning still underlies the methodology proposed in Nida’s seminal *Componential Analysis of Meaning* (1975). It has its validity, but it is significant that Nida has moved in theory and practice to a prototype view of meaning (which can very readily incorporate componential analysis) (see Louw and Nida 1988; Nida and Louw 1992).

Prototype theory has received prominent support from a wide range of disciplines (anthropology, linguistics, philosophy, psychology) in the last three decades. It radically departs from the assumption of classical theory that categories have clear boundaries, which are defined by common properties. It uses polythetic categorization in which classifications are based, not on rigid, all-or-nothing distinctions and unique defining features, but rather on family resemblances, bundles, clusters, continuums, and multidimensional relations. It does, however, retain the notion of necessary criteria; that is, in order to belong to a category defined by a set of properties, an object must possess a large number of (though not all) the necessary properties. Prototype theory assumes meaning to be ‘fuzzy.’ This is a direct challenge to classical Aristotelian logic, where categories are organized in terms of simple taxonomic hierarchies and concepts have sharp boundaries (cf. Lakoff 1987:12, 56).

As cognitive psychology has demonstrated, categories, in general, have best examples or most representative members (‘prototypes’). This is corroborated by common sense since persons do not necessarily think in either/or or true/false terms; they also think in terms of likelihood. As an alternative to classical category formation according to criterial attributes, prototype
theory operates on themes that can be understood in terms of the principle of family resemblances. The idea is that members of a category may be related to one another without all members sharing all category-defining properties. In a family resemblance relationship each item in a category has at least one element, and probably several elements, in common with one or more other items, but no, or few, elements in common with all items. This can be demonstrated by the similarities and relationships existing between the facial features of members of the same family. There is no one trait that is shared by all the family members, yet one can still identify them as members of the same family. This principle of family resemblance (or membership gradience) will be applied in the setting up of a prototype for the fuzzy concept of grace to be discussed in this study.

In a fuzzy set, items have vague boundaries and fuzzy edges and belong to the set to different degrees; whereas in a bounded set, which assumes discrete boundaries, an item is either in or out of the set. Fuzzy sets, by definition, involve partial (variable) set membership, gradations of membership and blurred boundaries instead of yes/no (attribute) membership in a set. Membership in a fuzzy set can be considered as sharing a discriminative characteristic. Just as a discriminative characteristic can be a qualitative dimension with an either/or or true/false criterion of membership, so it can be a quantitative variable consisting of degrees of membership (e.g. slightly true, fairly true, mostly true; or reddish, sort of red, tinge of red).

Fuzziness models reality in terms of continuums (see Appendix 1). This is more in agreement with what is termed common sense and the kinds of categories ordinary people use in natural thought and communication. Some examples of this fuzzy type of set
membership are age, intelligence, and race. Someone can be fairly young or slightly old, somewhat intelligent, or of mixed ethnicity.

I will try to integrate the two perspectives of bounded and fuzzy sets in this study, especially with application to the polysemous biblical term ‘grace,’ which is notoriously hard to define if strict bounded-set thinking and feature analysis are applied. On the one hand, de Saussurean structural semantics and componential analysis (based on shared and distinctive features) will provide the necessary rigor to the delineation of a semantic field; on the other hand, the assumption of a prototype in a semantic domain together with the assumption of the essential fuzziness of meaning of a concept or of the members of a semantic field will allow one to do justice to the open-ended expressive power of concepts and the open-endedness of semantic fields.

My goal is to develop a methodology in order to provide an appropriate bridge between the source message and a specific receptor audience. Translation of key terms demands accuracy and constant searching for the closest equivalent; however, absolute precision will never be attained since concepts and the semantic sets to which they belong are fuzzy. This assumption of fuzziness (and prototypes) has nothing to do with vagueness, unreliability, and unwarranted generality but is based on the essential indeterminacy of meaning. This then, helps translators to be realistic about the whole process of translation and transculturation.

2. Componential analysis revisited

Componential analysis (CA) is a brainchild of structuralism. It was first developed by linguists such as Nida (1975a). A useful
method to study the meaning of terms in the source and receptor language, CA is also a very helpful tool to come to appropriate decisions in translation. It is, however, controversial as a heuristic device. The problems associated with the methodology and how to address these problems are not mentioned in Bible translation handbooks. They simply assume its soundness and show how do it. Therefore some of the problems are discussed here (for a fuller treatment see Goerling 1995).

Semantic CA takes as its methodological model structuralist phonology, which describes every phoneme as a bundle of plus-minus features. In modern linguistics this analytical procedure is carried over to feature research on lexical items. The assumption is that people respond to words as if they were bundles of semantic features (Larson 1984:55–65): every concept—which is a bundle of semantic features—can be adequately described by analyzing complex meanings into atomic units of meaning (the components of meaning). In semantic field research, then, the basic assumption is that the terms to be analyzed in a semantic set form a legitimate semantic domain; CA allows one to delineate such semantic fields with a relatively high degree of objectivity.

2.1 Problems in using componential analysis

Originally, the componential model was successfully used in describing the interrelationships among limited homogeneous sets of terms, such as universal or cultural series (kinship or color terms, ranks, and hierarchies). These areas of language lend themselves better to CA than other areas because in these limited well-defined sets lexical items can be explained by contrasts that are minimally distinguishable (e.g., for kinship: sex, age, ascending and descending generations, consanguinity, affinity). However, the
assumption of a componential nature of meaning as such has been challenged in all branches of linguistics and related fields. Classical CA, based on Aristotelian bivalued logic, has been found less suitable to deal with ill-defined, complex domains, and ultimately with the fuzziness and imprecision of language phenomena.

Before I show what CA can actually do, I will address two problems connected with CA and try to propose solutions to them. The problems are the following:

(1) the problem of synonymy and polysemy
(2) the problem of denotation versus connotation

CA becomes complex when one is dealing with sets of terms that seem to have limitations which are not easily definable and in which there appears to be a considerable area of overlap. CA is complicated by synonymy (related meanings of different words) and polysemy (different meanings of the same word). Polysemy creates ambiguity and complicates (or invalidates) neatly constructed componential analyses. Conventional CA usually analyzes semantic components of words within a domain only up to the point at which all of them can be shown to be pair-wise distinct. This binaristic approach to the analysis of meaning is an inadequate method.

The incompleteness of the traditional componential model becomes evident in Bible translation. In the search for equivalences of key terms, we cannot base our analysis solely on diagnostic components that establish minimal sets of contrasts within domains in the source or receptor languages. Distinctions made on evident contrasts is a safe and decisive technique but only covers those components of meaning that can be set up as
pairs. In addition, because of the semantic mismatch between languages a CA done for a source language term will very likely not be an adequate gauge for separating equivalent lexical items in a receptor language. This can be demonstrated by the semantic fact that one form can have different meanings (as charis in Greek does) and one meaning can be expressed by different forms (e.g., *jump*, *skip*, *hop* in English). Moreover, there is hardly ever equivalence of the cases of polysemy or synonymy between languages.

However, we do not have to restrict ourselves to too simple a concept of CA. An enriched CA may include figurative extensions, derived meanings and emotive meanings, and ranges of application in the source language and the receptor language. Thus enriched, CA would deal with the open-ended expressive power of language rather than dealing only with those parts that are neatly organized according to atomic contrastive elements. Such CA is more consonant with reality: Words do usually function in semantic fields that are not rigidly structured but are a loose conglomeration of words grouped around a topic or prototype.

In all fairness to a strict componential approach it needs to be said that it cannot be judged by what it does not aim to achieve. Traditional CA is not the whole story, but it is a significant part of it; that is, it is a useful tool (among others) to get at the meaning of words. CA needs to be an integral part of semantic field analysis based on a prototypical view of meaning. Here lexical decomposition is possible at the first analytical stage, that is, when the graded differences between the prototype and the other members of the category are determined.
To summarize, CA is problematic, which can, however, be offset if it is fitted into a more realistic theory of meaning. It needs to be embedded in prototype theory with its view of fuzzy sets and concepts.

2.2 Using componential analysis to solve translation problems

Now that the potential problems of CA and their solution have been pointed out, the almost universal usefulness of CA as a procedure for discovering meaning needs to be emphasized. Newmark (1988:115) defined translation as “an ordered rearrangements of sense components.” Such a definition, which can hardly be challenged, supports the value of CA in identifying these components for cross-language translation.

CA, which was developed by structural semantics as a meaning discovery procedure, has great potential for the practical needs of cross-language transfer of meaning in view of the fact that there is no exact equivalent between the words of one language and the words of another. In translation the method serves a practical purpose: comparing and contrasting the sense components of a source-language word with those of a receptor-language word with a similar but never equivalent meaning, in order to arrive at the closest possible approximation of meaning.

A source-language term and a corresponding receptor-language term may share most or some components of meaning, they may differ with regard to more or less components, components may overlap, but there is hardly ever exact equivalence. In order to translate important sense components that are in focus in a particular context, a source-language key term may have to be
translated by several different words or by a combination of words or a paraphrase in the receptor language. CA helps to come to informed decisions in these areas of semantic match and mismatch between languages—it enables translators to make intelligent transfers not of senses but of sense-components.

CA embedded in a semantic field approach (based on a prototype view of meaning) can handle synonymy and polysemy equally well: semantic domains are based on componential feature analysis (shared, distinctive, and connotative meanings) of different related words (so-called synonyms), while the same word (i.e., a polysemous word) can be assigned to different semantic domains according to its different meanings or components.

3. Translation of the biblical ‘grace’

The biblical ‘grace’ is notoriously hard to translate because of its polysemy. I hope this analysis, which integrates structural semantics and prototype semantics, will help other translators confronted with the same problem, which is difficult to solve by the classical bivalued logic of feature analysis.

Grace is a thoroughly Christian concept; yet it is hardly understood in modern-day post-Christian society. In the English language secular people might be familiar with at least one of its religious semantic components, ‘to say grace’; but for the most part, grace is used only in the sense of social graces, graceful movement, showing grace under pressure, or a grace period in paying bills. In other Indo-European languages the same secularization of the term for grace has taken place, for example in French (grâce) and German (Gnade). If the term cannot be reclaimed and rechristianized, it would be advisable to use other
terms or paraphrases, depending on the particular context, to convey to modern-day people the biblical concept in all its richness.

Cross-cultural communicators of the biblical message must first do careful research into the biblical meanings of this concept. They must be aware of reinterpretations in their own language so as to avoid interferences in the cross-cultural transfer. They must also do a careful study of terms available in the receptor language capable of conveying correct biblical meanings while avoiding wrong implications. The methodology that follows—in the analysis, comparison, and contrast of biblical, Qur’anic, and Jula terms—is one that can accomplish these goals.

3.1 ‘Grace’ in the Old Testament

‘Grace’ seems to be less common in the Hebrew Scriptures than in the New Testament. People with a superficial knowledge of the Bible have wrongly inferred that the God of the Jewish Bible is typically a God of wrath, while the God of the New Testament—almost a different God—is a God of love. This impression is strengthened by such New Testament statements as “The law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ” (John 1:17) and “sin will have no dominion over you, since you are not under law but under grace” (Rom. 6:14). (Scripture quotations in English are taken from the RSV, second edition, except where otherwise indicated.)

There is no one word for grace in the Old Testament, and it does seem to be mentioned less frequently than in the New Testament. This has to do with what happened in the translating of the Hebrew Scriptures via the Septuagint (LXX) into other
languages. Polysemous \( \xi\varepsilon\sigma \) (which can also mean ‘grace’) appears frequently (245 times) in the Old Testament but was concordantly translated as \( \text{eleos} \) in the LXX. Many formal correspondence translations in English followed this lead and translated \( \text{eleos} \) systematically by ‘mercy.’ On the other hand, \( \xi\varepsilon\nu \), which appears far less often (sixty-nine times), was translated in the LXX by \( \text{charis} \), which English versions systematically translated by ‘grace.’ So the impression is gained that there is little said about ‘grace’ in the Hebrew Scriptures, and that judgment and justice are what characterize the God of Israel. This is not only semantically untrue but is also theologically unfounded. It would be more correct to say that while both the Old and New Testaments proclaim the mercy and grace of God, the Old has, in fact, more than four times as much to say about it as the New.

The substance of the doctrine of grace can be found everywhere in the Old Testament. God is a God of grace throughout the Bible, starting with Genesis. We find the duality or polarity of wrath and grace in the Old Testament also, “for my wrath I smote you, but in my favor I have had mercy on you” (Isa. 60:10); “For his anger is but for a moment, and his favor is for a lifetime” (Ps. 30:6). God’s mercy often gains the upper hand over his wrath (Isa. 54: 7–8; the whole of Hosea). The apparent opposite poles of mercy and justice, wrath and grace are not irreconcilable but two sides of the same holy and loving God. Throughout the Old Testament, grace is God’s essential attribute. Israel relied on the saving grace of their God throughout their history: from slavery in Egypt to the culmination of their history in the coming of the Savior.

That grace is an essential attribute of God in the Old Testament is demonstrated, for example, in the pair of synonyms “merciful
and gracious”—they occur in prominent summaries of what Israel’s God is like in the Old Testament. Grace is manifested in the great event of the Exodus and throughout salvation history, from the gracious covenants with Noah and Abraham to the new covenant to be sealed by the blood of Christ. So law and grace in the Old Testament are not antithetical, they are consistently set in the context of covenant.

As noted, there is no one word for grace in the Old Testament as there is in the New. In fact, the Greek charis translates three Old Testament terms that express the idea of grace in the sense of free bestowal of kindness on one who has neither claim on it nor adequate compensation to make for it. These three terms are ξεν, ξεσε, and ραχν. (ραχν only occurs three times and is therefore not included in the discussion here.)

3.1.1 ξεσε

God’s ξεσε is a fundamental experience of the people of Israel (Ps. 25:6) who saw themselves as chosen, protected, guided, and redeemed by God. The word ξεσε is the key word of the Old Testament. It is the most prominent of the concepts that express God’s mercy, grace, and compassion. It is the great covenant word of the Old Testament (see p. 102 of Glueck’s important 1967 monograph; also Sakenfeld 1978 and 1985). The lasting contribution of Glueck’s classic study is his emphasis on the centrality of a covenantal relationship between two parties within which ξεσε is offered. It is often connected with בְּרִית (covenant), as in Deut. 7:9, 12; 1 Kings 8:23; 2 Chron. 6:14; Neh. 1:5; 9:32; and Dan. 9:4). It spells out God’s commitment to be merciful to his people, especially in the famous statements that say that God is “abundant in ξεσε” and that he “maintains ξεσε.” These statements
appear in four key passages in the Pentateuch (Exod. 20:5–6; 34:6–7; Num. 14:18–19; Deut. 7:9–10), and they are echoed at several places in the rest of the Old Testament. A passage like Isa. 54:10 conveys these two aspects of \( \xi\varepsilon\sigma\varepsilon\Delta \) well: “Though the mountains be shaken and the hills be removed, yet my unfailing \( \xi\varepsilon\sigma\varepsilon\Delta \) for you will not be shaken nor my covenant of peace be removed. . . .”

We know that the LXX largely used translation Greek and that we need to be cautious about the way these translators rendered Hebrew words. The word \( \xi\varepsilon\sigma\varepsilon\Delta \) is a case in point. The LXX nearly always rendered polysemous \( \xi\varepsilon\sigma\varepsilon\Delta \) as \( \text{eleos} \). This is not very helpful in arriving at the basic meaning(s) of the term, let alone the contextual meanings. The Latin Vulgate followed with \( \text{misericordia} \). Until Jerome’s translation the words in the LXX were read as Greek words, just as if Greek had been the original language. Earlier formal-correspondence translations into English followed this model although in English the meanings of the Hebrew term are not easily rendered by one word; in other words, some English versions of the Bible, following the LXX’s lead, rendered \( \xi\varepsilon\sigma\varepsilon\Delta \) as ‘mercy.’ For instance, in the KJV it is most often translated by ‘mercy’ (sometimes by ‘kindness’ or ‘loving-kindness’). In the RSV it is rendered as ‘steadfast love’ or ‘love’ in reference to God, and in the NIV mostly as ‘unfailing love’ and sometimes simply as ‘love’ thus: “your love is better than life” (Ps. 63:3) instead of the well-known “your loving kindness is better than life.” ‘Steadfast love’ is probably a good translation in many contexts where God’s fidelity to the covenant, his unfailing love, is in focus (Ps. 6:4; 13:5; 21:7; 31:16; 32:10). This is certainly the case in passages where the stereotypical formula “keeping covenant and showing kindness to” is found (1 Kings 8:23; 2 Chron. 6:14). Even ‘faithfulness’ (German \( \text{Bundestreue} \)) would be an appropriate translation in these contexts. Sakenfeld (1985) summarized the various meanings of
ξενε under the noun ‘loyalty,’ although in her dissertation (1978) she had convincingly pointed out how difficult it is to grasp the polysemy of the Hebrew term by one single English word.

The older ‘loving kindness,’ if a concordant or semiconcordant term needs to be chosen at all, does not have to be rejected either. It focuses on another component (‘loving’) but would have the advantage of signaling continuity with the New Testament, which emphatically affirms that “God is Love” (1 John 4:16).

One would be very lucky to find one single word in any receptor language to convey the same richness of meaning. (English translations render it according to context by ‘steadfast love,’ ‘unfailing love,’ ‘faithfulness,’ ‘loving kindness,’ ‘charity,’ ‘benevolence,’ or ‘mercy.’). But maybe a similar polysemous word can be found and then reinterpreted (narrowed or expanded) in translation. This happened when ξενε and ξΕν were translated by Greek charis, which makes charis a broader term than its Hebrew equivalents; at the same time charis is a narrower term because of its transformation in the Christian sense. There is certainly hope for something similar happening in a language like Jula that has borrowed its religious vocabulary from Arabic, a Semitic language close to Hebrew. It does not have to be a concordant translation with a single word covering all the senses of ξενε (or ξΕν, which was borrowed into Jula) or their main Greek equivalents, eleos and charis, in all their contexts. It would be utopian to expect that, but a more concordant translation can be strived at, namely one that translates the same sense components concordantly. This would signal continuity of the receptor-language term with the Old Testament and the Qur’an (where this is justified) and meet the requirements of good communication. I say this with the proviso that the terms are basically equivalent referentially.
I now turn to عبر, the second of the Hebrew terms that can convey the idea of grace.

3.1.2 عبر

While عبر emphasizes God’s covenant mercy or grace, the word عبر conveys the sovereign nature of God’s mercy or descending favor. A significant verse that demonstrates the use of عبر in this sense is Exod. 33:19. As this verse shows, it is pure sovereign mercy that alone determines the exercise of divine mercy: “I will have mercy ( عبر) on whom I will have mercy ( عبر).” The focus of عبر is on the fact that God’s mercy is not evoked by any merit on our part; rather it is the undeserved favor of a superior to an inferior. God’s sovereign favor comes out of God’s covenantal mercy and steadfast love, as in Ps. 51:1: “Have عبر on me, O God, according to thy عبر.” But apart from the preceding context, the two terms rarely occur together; in fact, they are found in quite different environments. This shows that, in spite of their superficial semantic similarity (both can be translated by ‘mercy’ or ‘grace’), there is a fundamental difference between the two. عبر is not mutually practiced and it does not have to be sustained. The term is used not only with reference to the relation between God and human beings but also between human beings, where it often has the sense of favor, benevolence, or condescension. A great number of uses of عبر can be found in the formula ‘to find favor in someone’s eyes.’

The word عبر, derived from the verb عبر means ‘to be merciful, loving, generous, favorably disposed.’ It is an active principle expressed in dealings with those by whom one is surrounded. One essential aspect of this Old Testament concept is that it is a gift. عبر can mean ‘grace’ in the sense of a benefit
granted (Gen. 6:8). It is often coupled with \( \rho \alpha \xi \mu \), a word that signifies a tender feeling of pity (Exod. 34:6).

The Hebrew equivalent for charis, \( \xi \nu \) (‘sovereign grace/favor’), occurs much more frequently in the Old Testament than \( \xi \epsilon \sigma \Delta \) and \( \rho \alpha \xi \nu \) (while \( \xi \epsilon \sigma \Delta \) in the sense of ‘covenant mercy’ or ‘steadfast love’ is more frequent than \( \xi \nu \)). This frequency and usage of \( \xi \nu \) shows what grace is historically. In Semitic religions it applies naturally to God who is perceived and invoked as a powerful sovereign to whom one is bound by covenant. The power distance between the superior and the inferior is overcome by the initiative and inclination of the stronger one. The latter is moved by the need of the weaker one. So \( \xi \nu \) has the meaning of being favorable, with the idea of condescension attached to it.

The usage of the terms \( \xi \epsilon \sigma \Delta \) and \( \xi \nu \) in the Old Testament, as shown in the preceding sections, helps us understand the theological meaning of grace in the New Testament, to which I will turn now.

### 3.2 ‘Grace’ in the New Testament

The writers of the New Testament inherited from the Old Testament a number of key terms (‘grace’ being a very crucial one). The use of these terms firmly anchors the New Testament message in the mainstream of Israel’s historic faith and salvation history. In order to be sensitive to the whole biblical corpus and signal the continuity that exists, it might sometimes be advisable to translate them more concordantly.

The immediate objection against a concordant translation will be the difficulty of maintaining consistency. It is very unlikely that
an equivalent word can be found for a polysemous word like charis, that is, one with similar polysemy. Would it not be more realistic (and, in any case, more meaningful) to opt for contextual consistency? I would have strongly tended to answer yes until I had seen the Jula evidence (see sec. 3.4).

The area of meaning of “charis ‘grace’ is exceptionally extensive in the New Testament. The theological definition ‘unmerited favor’ is applicable to a great many of the passages. Often charis is used to signify the sovereign and saving favor of God exercised in the bestowal of blessings upon those who do not merit them. However, a number of other meanings need to be differentiated. These include: ‘favor,’ ‘good will,’ ‘loving kindness,’ ‘merciful kindness,’ ‘generous service,’ ‘generosity,’ ‘gift,’ ‘benefit,’ ‘privilege,’ ‘special task,’ ‘pleasing manner,’ and ‘loveliness.’ All but the last two of these meanings (including ‘unmerited favor’) show that charis is an active principle (or the result of it), manifesting itself in both God’s relation to human beings and also in human dealings with other human beings. It is far from being a mere passive quality; its results are tangible: benefit, favor, gift, and privilege.

Nida and Louw (1992:68) summarized all these meanings of charis well as three closely linked stages in a single complex process:

That is to say, a benevolent attitude normally produces an act of kindness, which in turn may result in a particular gift. Meaning A provides the motivational basis or presupposition, Meaning B focuses on the activity, and Meaning C points to the result. For any of these three meanings, the others become “implicatures.” For Meaning B, namely, the act of kindness, Meaning A is presuppositional and Meaning C inferential, since an act of kindness presupposes a favorable attitude and implies a valued result.
The translation of the fuzzy concept *charis*, then, presents a particular challenge for the Bible translator. The difficulty lies in the variety of meanings and in determining which meaning fits which context and the chain-like linkage between the different meanings. I think this can be handled by a prototype approach incorporating componential analysis. An additional challenge in the Jula context is that the richness of the biblical term grace and its specific Christian character needs to be communicated to Muslims.

The term *charis* is used in the New Testament one hundred and fifty-five times. The majority of its occurrences are found in Paul’s letters (one hundred times), in which *charis* plays a central role. It is Paul who gives grace its place in the Christian dogma. Grace in the Pauline sense symbolizes the free gift of salvation. It is grace that destroys all human pretensions to being justified by good works, a notion previously quite unknown to Jewish and Graeco-Roman ethics and theology. Grace is for Paul the quintessence of God’s redeeming action in Jesus Christ. Luther grasped this superbly and intuitively in his translation ‘by grace alone,’ which makes explicit what is implicit throughout the Good News as set forth in Paul’s writings.

In the New Testament, the new Christian experience of having received grace in Christ is often talked about in relation to law. Paul, especially, opposes and relates grace and law (Rom. 5:20–21). The two are inseparable for Paul and indeed in Christian doctrine; grace supplements law as the expression of the whole nature of the law-giver. Grace is to be regarded not as abrogating law but upholding it (Rom. 3:31). Without grace, law has only a demanding aspect; only when supplemented by grace does it become “the perfect law, the law of liberty” (James 1:25).
The New Testament content of ‘grace’ can be summarized as follows:

(1) God is the inexhaustible source of grace, that is, the favor (the same meaning as Hebrew ξΕν) he shows towards humankind (Eph 2:7; Col. 1:6). He purposed in himself the everlasting covenant of redemption. The manifestation of this saving grace culminates in Jesus Christ (John 1:14–16; Eph. 1:6). In Christ, the giver becomes the gift (God the Father being the giver, the fountain of all grace). Grace as gift and grace in its forensic sense become one in Christ. Christ is the cause of salvation and the gift of salvation. This gift is received freely (Rom. 3:24; 11:5; Gal. 1:15) and that is Good News (Acts 14:3; 1 Pet. 5:12).

(2) The richness of God’s grace manifests itself in his loving kindness shown to people (Luke 2:40; Acts 14:26), in the forgiveness of sins (Rom. 5:15, 20; Eph. 1:7), in the gift of eternal life (Rom. 6:23), and in spiritual gifts (Rom. 1:11; 11:29; 1 Cor. 1:7).

Semantically, these features of charis could be summarized under the crucial feature God’s ‘loving kindness’ rather than ‘unmerited favor.’ It is ‘God’s loving kindness’ that should be regarded as a prototype (including all the other features mentioned) of the polysemous word charis. Nida and Louw’s analysis is worth quoting in support of this position:

The phrase unmerited favor is basically inadequate for most people, since a favor is often something rather insignificant and almost always suggests a quid-pro-quo addition, the term unmerited focuses the attention on the receiver rather than the giver. Accordingly, for most people the Scriptures would make much more sense if the grace of God were spoken of as ‘God’s loving kindness’ or ‘God’s loving goodness.’ The crucial feature of charis is the complete absence of any feature of compensation (1992:66).
Concerning ‘loving kindness’ I fully agree with Nida and Louw’s conclusion. However, I think the semantic component unmerited is an important diagnostic one because it is a contradiction in terms to speak of ‘meriting’ grace. If grace could be earned, gained, or claimed, it would cease to be grace. It is this aspect that distinguishes, strictly speaking, grace from mercy. Whereas grace presupposes unworthiness in its object, mercy presupposes suffering and misery. And concerning ‘favor’ in the collocation ‘unmerited favor,’ one might argue that biblical grace is correctly conveyed by the translation ‘favor’ in its primary sense of a favorable attitude. As a rendering of God’s charis, then, ‘favor’ is closer in meaning to sovereign grace than to compassionate grace, without excluding the latter. In the final analysis, however, the prototype ‘God’s loving kindness’ probably comes closest to what the biblical word ‘grace’ means in all its richness.

There is a radical opposition in the Bible between the grace of God and the merit of human beings. It is important to keep this in mind in order to understand what grace means according to the New Testament, and how it differs from qur’anic notions in the same semantic domain. Grace in this sense is a distinctly Christian notion that distinguishes the Christian faith from qur’anic belief.

As we have seen, the New Testament meanings of charis can be subdivided under ‘loving kindness, favor,’ on the one hand, and ‘grace’ in the forensic/imputative (justifying) sense, on the other. The latter soteriological aspect is significantly missing in the qur’anic concept of grace.

3.3 ‘Grace’ in the Qur’an
There is plenty of common ground between Christianity and Islam in their concept of God and in their concepts of ‘mercy/grace.’ In both faiths God is good. In the Qur’an, divine satisfaction, approval, favor, and blessing are expressed by words derived from the roots RDW, FDL, LTF, and N’M. RDW is used mostly in an eschatological sense referring to the favors bestowed upon believers by Allah on the day of judgment or in paradise (3:13–14/15–16; 3:155–56/161–62; 9:21; 9:73/72; 9:101/100; 9:110/109; 47:30/28; 49:8. These citations from the Qur’an are from Arthur Arberry’s widely acknowledged and accurate translation. The first verse number indicates the Egyptian edition, the second the Flügel edition.) FDL is used in the general sense of ‘favor’ (3: 163–168/169/174; 57:27). The third root is LTF with the general meaning of ‘favor/grace.’ These three roots need not concern us here, as Jula has not borrowed any of them. It has only borrowed nèèma (derived from N’M).

N’M comes from a verb meaning to live in comfort and luxury. The noun ni’ma has the general meaning ‘favor.’ It occurs forty-seven times in the Qur’an and is frequently used of God’s favor (2:40/38; 2:47/44; 93:11; and elsewhere), especially in phrases like ‘the grace/favor of God rests upon someone’ (2:211/207; 2:231; 3:98/103; 3:164/171; 3:168/174; 5:7/10; 5:11/14; 5:20/23). When Allah bestows N’M it results in abundance of blessings, in this life and in the hereafter. In the Qur’an N’M is inevitably coupled with ‘gratitude’ (shukr), as in 2:147/152. In other words, the supreme moral rule is to respond to divine favor by gratitude. In modern Arabic N’M refers to blessing, favor, and grace.

Allah’s common grace, his benevolence and favors, can be characterized as follows: Allah holds the sum of all that is good (2:99/105; 3:67/74; 8:29). He holds all goodness and showers
spiritual and material gifts on humankind (2:244/243; 10:61/60). He gives free spiritual gifts such as faith, for example (3:158/164; 4:96/94; 6:53). He is the constant Giver (3:6/8; 38:8/9; 3:34/35) and the Benefactor (52:28 only).

Allah shows his general grace by creating human beings and placing them above all other creatures, including angels (15:29–35; 17:72/70; 38:71–85). It is Allah who guides toward truth (10:36/35). He has grouped humankind into peoples and tribes in order to enable them to live a social life (49:13). Allah is the Merciful One, the sum of all that is good.

There are, however, fundamental differences with regard to the biblical concept of grace in Christianity and Islam. In Christianity there is no doubt whatsoever that we are saved by grace through faith in Christ’s redemptive work, whereas the Muslim believer can only hope to be saved through an accumulation of merit or avoidance of demerits. There is no salvation history in the Qur’an. Islam denies that human beings need to be saved in the biblical sense of salvation from sin, since they are not sinners by nature. Their problem is ignorance and they need guidance. If there is deliverance from sin in the Qur’an at all, it is from its penalty, not from its bondage. There is no new heart nor spiritual transformation in the Qur’an either. This has to do with qur’anic anthropology and its doctrine of sin, which reduces God’s part in salvation to simply granting mercy to weak human beings and offering guidance. In Christianity God takes the initiative through his Son’s sacrificial death to save sinners, whereas Allah is not a Savior God showing such saving grace. In Islam God does not incarnate himself to save the lost; salvation is part of human beings’ responsibility. They stand, as Allah’s representatives on earth, directly before Allah and do not need a Savior.
Christianity has been called a religion of grace. This is the distinctive. It distinguishes the Christian faith from all other religions, especially Islam. In spite of this fundamental difference, however, Allah’s favor/kindness in the Qur’an has much in common with the biblical concept of grace (without denying the fact that the important diagnostic component of saving is missing); there are, in fact, several points of contact between New Testament charis and the qur’anic concept of ‘grace/favor.’ In order to see these, the different meanings of the Greek charis as given by Barnwell, Dancy, and Pope (1994) are helpful, as well as those by Nida and Louw (1992:68). These meanings are presented here in two sets: those with close similarities and those with minor differences.

**Close similarities**

1. undeserved favor
2. favorable attitude toward someone
3. free gift
4. kindness, goodness

**Minor differences**

5. privilege
6. thanks
7. function in a greetings formula

The four meanings in the first set all come under the prototype meaning of ‘loving kindness.’ This meaning is close enough to the
qur’anic concept ‘grace/favor/kindness’ that it forms a valid point of contact between the two faiths.

In the second set, neither ‘privilege’ nor ‘thanks’ is a meaning of ‘grace/favor’ in the Qur’an. Nor does ‘grace/favor’ function in a greetings formula in a qur’anic context; that is, there is no greeting in the Qur’an which includes the idea of favor or grace within it. These three usages are, however, sufficiently far away from the prototype meaning that they represent almost irrelevant differences.

The differences between the Christian and qur’anic usages of the four senses in set 1 include the following:

(1) The distinction of whether a favor is deserved or undeserved is irrelevant in the Qur’an because Allah does what he wills. As a rule Allah’s forensic favor is deserved (although unpredictable), but general favor is undeserved.

(2) In the Qur’an grace/favor refers to Allah’s attitude alone, whereas in Christianity humans can also display grace/favor.

(3) Allah’s general favor is a free gift just as in both the Old and New Testaments. Otherwise Allah’s favor is dependent on the good behavior of humans, and it is unpredictable. In opposition to this, the grace of the Father of Jesus Christ is unmerited, it is love freely given towards guilty sinners. In the New Testament grace and salvation belong together as cause and effect, and salvation is assured.
(4) The words ‘kindness’ and ‘goodness’ can translate qur’anic ‘favor/grace’ (ni’ma) in certain contexts (elaborated further in sec. 3.4).

This brief comparison of the qur’anic notion of Allah’s favor and the Christian concept of grace show much common ground. In the following section I will show how the different meanings of charis have been translated into Jula.

3.4 ‘Grace’ in the Jula Context

Barnwell, Dancy, and Pope (1994) organize the different senses of ‘grace’ in a way that I adopt here (by permission) to present my findings about the Jula translation in Côte d’Ivoire. The headings are as follows:

1. blessing
2. loving kindness
3. goodwill, favor
4. benefit
5. privilege

I will now elaborate on each of these in turn, citing examples taken from translation, enriched and confirmed by examples from Jula literature and others based on participant observation.

1. Blessing, wishing somebody well, especially as part of a greeting
‘Grace’ in these contexts is always translated by *nèëma* in Jula (e.g., 1 Cor. 1:3; 16:23; 2 Cor. 1:2). Jula blessings including *nèëma* are frequently spoken. One of the most common is the blessing conferred on Muhammad. This is heard in preaching or when his name is mentioned: *Nèëma ni kisi bè a ye*, ‘Grace and salvation be on him!’ Another blessing is *Ala ye an nèëma*, ‘May God give us grace.’ This is said after a meal. A condolence might be expressed as *Ala ye a nèëma*, ‘May God give him/her grace.’

2. Loving kindness, esp. God’s loving kindness to undeserving people

Sense 2a of *charis*, namely God’s loving kindness shown by his plan of salvation (i.e., by his accepting people through Jesus Christ and forgiving their sins), is translated by Jula *nèëma* in all of the following passages: Acts 14:3; 18:27; 20:24; Gal. 1:6, 15; 2:21; Eph. 1:6; 2:5, 7, 8; and 1 Pet. 1:10, 13.

Sense 2b of *charis* is God’s loving kindness as shown by his giving help and strength and guidance for daily Christian living, for special problems, for special service, or for protection from harm. This sense is also translated by Jula *nèëma*.

Both of these senses occur in 1 Cor. 15:10: “But by the grace (*nèëma*, sense 2b) of God I am what I am and his grace (*nèëma*, sense 2a and/or b) toward me was not in vain. On the contrary, I worked harder than any of them, though it was not I, but the grace (*nèëma*, sense 2b) of God which is with me.” Further examples for *charis*, rendered *nèëma*, in sense 2b are found in Acts 4:33; 6:8; 15:40; and 2 Cor. 9:14.
In Islamic contexts, too, the general benevolence of God expressed in blessings and favors of any kind is conveyed by nèèma in Jula:

The rain, the sun, the wind, they all are God’s neèma. God gave Isaac nèèma, he gave him riches. God gave Abraham nèèma, he gave him knowledge. God gave Moses nèèma, he gave him faith.

In such contexts nèèma comes very close to ‘blessing,’ which is one of its meanings in Arabic. The semantic components of indiscriminate and unmerited favor/blessing come to light in a statement made by a Muslim holy man: Ala tè wolomani kè; hali ni i tè Ala fè, a bè nèèma caman di i ma, i n’a fò kënèya ani si caman, ‘God makes no distinctions; even if you reject God, he gives you a lot of nèèma like health and long life.’

Likewise, in sermons of Muslim preachers one may hear sentiments like this: sanji min bè na, tere min bè bò, fònyò min bè firi, o bèè ye Ala ta nèèma dò ye, ‘The rain which falls, the sun which shines, the wind which blows, all are expressions of the grace of God.’

Everything in Jula culture that is sweet, pleasant, easy, cool or fresh is considered to be a nèèma from Allah. Coolness, freshness and rain are especially considered as nèèma in this part of the world. (Heat is not a nèèma.)

Nèèma seems to be appropriate in Côte d’lvoire Jula in all the above-mentioned contexts. Even the most prominent qur’anic key term, ‘mercy’ (as in the opening formula of the suras, “in the name of the Compassionate, the Merciful”), is translated by nèèma. Ar-Rahman is rendered nèèma lòkònì tigi. This means the ‘possessor of general grace,’ where general refers to unmerited favor to
everyone. (These favors include sun, rain, wind, water, trees.) Ar-rahim is rendered nèèma kërèkérènnin tigi. This means the ‘possessor of special grace,’ where special refers only to those who merit it in the hereafter, that is, the believers. A common Jula exclamation of surprise or despair is E, nèèma Masal, ‘O, gracious King!’

Sense 2c of charis is God’s loving kindness and unmerited favor towards each believer as shown in giving believers special abilities with which to serve each other. For example “By the grace (nèèma) God has given me, I laid a foundation” (1 Cor. 3:10); “But grace (nèèma) was given to each of us according to the measure of Christ’s gift” (Eph. 4:7). See also Rom. 1:5; Gal. 2:9.

Sense 2d of charis is God’s loving kindness to an individual in choosing him or her for a particular task. Examples include “And the angel said to her, ‘Do not be afraid, for you have found favor (nèèma) with God.” (Luke 1:30) and “And the favor (nèèma) of God was upon him.” (Luke 2:40.)

Sense 2 e of charis, the favorable attitude of one human being towards another, is never translated by nèèma but by paraphrases. For example: “and having favor (ka di x ye) with all the people” (Acts 2:47, lit., “everybody was pleased with them”). See also “favor (ko diya x ye) with Pharaoh” (Acts 7:10). This sense also occurs in the fixed expressions

“give grace (nèèma)” (James 4:6); “find grace (nèèma)” (Luke 1:30); “receive grace (nèèma)” (Rom. 1:5).

In contexts, the use of nèèma in the sense of favoring (either ‘to favor someone,’ ‘to give grace to,’ or ‘to find favor/grace with’)
is only used of God. One Muslim holy man stated this categorically: *Ala dòròn bè nèèma kè,* ‘only God dispenses grace.’ This general benevolence is expressed in a number of ways, not only benevolence to creatures but to all of creation: *Ala ka jamana sòn nèèma ra,* ‘God gave grace to the land’ (i.e., he blessed it providing a good harvest).

3. **An act of kindness, goodwill, favor**

   In this sense *charis* is never translated by *nèèma* because the favor granted is of a human kind. Acts 24:27 and 25:3 are examples of this sense.

4. **Something good and helpful, a benefit**

   In this sense *charis* is translated by *nèèma,* as in 2 Cor. 1:15: “I planned to visit you first so that you might benefit (*nèèma*) twice.”

5. **Privilege, privileged position given because of the goodwill of God**

   In this sense *charis* is translated by *nèèma.* Examples are in Rom. 1:5, “through whom we have received grace (*nèèma*) and apostleship”; Luke 1:28, “Hail, O favored one (*nèèma*), the Lord is with you”; and Eph. 3:7.8 (where *nèèma* is also the rendering).

6. **Miscellaneous other senses**

   Another sense of the Greek word *charis* is something that is pleasing or attractive or suitable; still another, thanks or gratitude. In these senses *charis* is not translated by ‘grace(favor)’ in English nor by *nèèma* in Jula.
It may be helpful here to summarize all these senses of grace and how they are rendered in Jula: The Jula word \textit{nèèma} (borrowed from Arabic and the Qur’an) is an all-purpose word just as \textit{charis} is. The main senses of \textit{charis} in the New Testament, (1) undeserved grace or favor, (2) favorable attitude toward someone, (3) free gift, (4) kindness or goodness, are all encompassed by Jula \textit{nèèma} (a borrowing from qur’anic N’M), as long as the agent is God.

Note that in the Arabic Bible ‘grace’ is mostly translated by \textit{ni’ma} (and not by other words from the same semantic domain). To me this is a confirmation that \textit{ni’ma} or \textit{nèèma} is a very likely equivalent for \textit{charis} in languages that have borrowed this term. It would confirm that a more concordant translation in these Muslim contexts is possible. How this \textit{nèèma} is filled or reinterpreted is another matter. It should, however, be easier to attach the Christian meaning of saving grace and unmerited favor to this form rather than to use something new (that would not carry all the right meaning components either or would be a cumbersome paraphrase). The use of \textit{nèèma} has the advantage, first, that it signals continuity with scriptural antecedents (both biblical and qur’anic) and, second, that it communicates with the Jula receptors.

However, I hasten to add that the close equivalence of \textit{nèèma} with \textit{charis} cannot be assumed for every receptor language that has borrowed this Islamic term. Careful comparisons and contrasts of the receptor-language terms always need to be made with the source-language terms (Hebrew, Greek, Arabic), as semantic shifts are likely to occur. Semantic fields differ between languages (in composition and overlap). This is exactly the case of \textit{nèèma} and
related terms: this comes to light when Hebrew, Greek, Arabic, and Jula (which borrowed from Arabic) are compared.

3.5 Summary of translation considerations

As the examples in this section have shown, nèèma in the Jula language of Côte d’Ivoire bears a similarity to charis in New Testament Greek in terms of polysemy. Out of all the senses of charis, nèèma shares these: (1) favor (deserved or undeserved); (2) favorable attitude toward someone; (3) privilege; (4) free gift; and (5) kindness, goodness. Hence nèèma is an excellent equivalent for charis. In addition, if sense 5, ‘God’s kindness,’ is taken as a semantic prototype of the biblical meanings, one can say that the qur’anic meanings and Jula meanings can likewise all be subsumed under or designated by this cover term. Taking ‘kindness’ as a semantic prototype is perfectly biblical and qur’anic, as God’s attitude of kindness is the basis of his acts of kindness, which in turn may result in a particular gift. How this kindness or grace is fulfilled is another matter. Allah’s kindness is a benevolent attitude, which is the prerogative of Allah’s power, while the kindness of the Father of Jesus Christ is a loving kindness flowing from his love. What is also missing in the Islamic understanding of the term is the idea that grace is obtained in Jesus Christ, hence the forensic-imputative (justifying) aspect of grace.

Islam’s ‘grace’ is the gift/favor aspect of grace; it is God’s ‘common grace’ shown to all humankind. It is not, however, ‘saving grace.’ It is not costly, as biblical ‘grace/mercy’ is (Rom. 12:1; 1 Cor. 6:20; 1 Pet. 1:19). In the Qur’an Allah is seen to be merciful to the meritorious (sura 64:9), but the Qur’an has no message for sinners, who have no merit to plead. Its symbol is the
scales, whereas the Cross speaks only of grace, of the Savior God’s unmerited favor to sinners (Rom. 5:8).

These specifically Christian semantic components of ‘grace’ can be added to the Muslim understanding, or the Muslim notion can be reinterpreted and expanded to include the full biblical meaning. In addition, the Muslim semantic component of merit that is attached to mercy and grace needs to be eliminated. Such reinterpretation seems to be easier than introducing some altogether different terms or paraphrases.

The deep-structure difference between Christianity and Islam concerning ‘grace’ can now be summarized as follows: In Islam the sovereign will and benevolence of Allah is emphasized, and it is from this that his grace (mercy) flows. In Christianity, on the other hand, God’s supreme love is the source of his sovereign grace (see Appendix 2). However, as we have seen, there is enough common ground in the Christian and Islamic concepts of God and Allah and his ‘grace’ that the word nèèma serves as a suitable bridge and translation of the Christian concept of ‘grace’ in Jula. The same may possibly prove true in other Arabicized languages.

4. Conclusion

I developed a methodology out of several approaches that are the outflow of a number of theoretical viewpoints and assumptions about meaning: (1) referential theory, (2) communicational/contextual theory, and (3) cognitive theory (prototype semantics). In this methodology the choice of key terms holds a prominent position in the translation process; indeed, this choice has far-reaching effects on people’s receptivity to the translation and also on its communicative effect. The best process
for coming up with appropriate key term choices in the receptor language is shown in Figure 1.
The biblical concept discussed in this study was chosen because of its importance for communicating the concept of biblical grace.
to the ethnic Jula and Jula-speaking people in West Africa. However, the methodology can be applied to any receptor language (not just Arabic or one influenced by Arabic). It is meant to be a guide to enable others to come to appropriate key term decisions. It should serve as a guide, and not more, because no definitive study of terms of Islamic origin or from another religious tradition can be made for all languages that have borrowed these terms. This is not even possible due to ongoing semantic shifts.

The cross-cultural (etic) generalities derived from particular (emic) contexts (Bible, Qur’an, Jula), which were analyzed in their own right, will hopefully result in a broader theory that can help in understanding other contexts. The procedure presented in figure 1 could be used in almost the same way for the religious terminology of other languages that have been influenced by a different religious tradition (e.g., Hinduism). The procedure could be simplified for any religious context where there is no influence through Scriptures of another tradition.

The simplified procedure can be a three-step approach as in figure 2, although it should be borne in mind that it has been notoriously difficult to show a semantic domain organized around a prototype pictorially (see Appendix 2). However, such a semantic domain can be shown as an open-ended continuum with fuzzy boundaries, with the prototype at its center. The prototype is arrived at analytically and through intuition. Terms in that domain
are related more or less closely to the prototype. Each term has its own range of meanings which overlap with the prototype:

The first step is to analyze and compare the prototype and terms in the semantic domain in the source language(s). In most languages of the world into which the Bible is translated, this will be Hebrew and/or Greek. In languages influenced by Islam, the influence of Arabic needs to be accounted for. The same applies to languages whose religious vocabulary are influenced by another religious tradition.

The second step is to analyze the corresponding (but never equivalent) prototype and semantic domain (and included terms) in the receptor language, and compare them with the source language(s).

The third step is to select the term or rendering in the receptor context which communicates relevant sense components in a given biblical context.

This procedure was applied to the concept of grace, for which the prototype ‘loving kindness’ was posited. The wider semantic domain, including ‘mercy,’ ‘blessing,’ and ‘grace’ is organized around the same prototype, ‘loving kindness,’ which is the dominant attribute of the biblical concept of God (“God is Love”). Biblically, ‘grace,’ ‘mercy,’ and ‘blessing’ can be seen as outworkings of divine love (αγάπη); this is not the case for the Qur’an or the Jula context (see Appendix 2).

My contribution in this study lies in (1) an emphasis on prototype theory and fuzzy set theory as being able to build
techniques that solve important problems in data analysis and (2) a recombinant of established approaches to the analysis of meaning with a view to arriving at appropriate key term decisions. While charis is a term notoriously difficult to translate, it could be handled by prototype theory in a more sensitive way than traditional componential analysis has been able to do (see Appendix 1). As I have demonstrated in the appendixes, prototype theory can integrate componential analysis very well. In fact, the semantic field and its constituent terms dealt with in this study are delineated and established on the basis of componential analyses. The essential fuzziness of meaning is given due consideration in that the overlap of fields and terms is assumed and stated. This basic assumption of fuzzy meaning is also conducive to building bridges not only to a Muslim target audience but to any receptor community. The prototype approach, focusing on shared features, helps in the appreciation of human commonality through synthesis, whereas componential analysis, focusing on dichotomies—if done exclusively—helps in understanding linguistic differentiation.

The most representative member in a semantic domain, that is, its prototype, drives all the terms included in that domain. This is shown graphically in Appendix 2: ‘grace,’ ‘mercy,’ and ‘blessing’ are the outflow of the biblical prototype ‘loving kindness,’ while the prototype in orthodox Islam and in Jula is ‘kindness’ (or ‘benevolence’). This is a significant difference; however, the equally significant overlap of a pan-human prototype ‘kindness’ and related terms in the source languages and the receptor language allows for a good amount of bridge-building by using the same terms (especially in the semantic domain of grace/mercy). In mystical Islam, with its focus on love (although not understood as self-giving αγάπη), there is even more common ground and opportunity
for bridge-building. The prototype ‘(loving) kindness’, then, emerges from the total analysis as a pan-human (or at least inter-cultural or interlingual) concept that allows for the discovery of the correct terms in the receptor language for a specific context in text.

Exact one-to-one correspondence between languages is an illusion in most cases, but meaningful relevant equivalents can be attained. In order to achieve this goal, we need to know how concepts and terms function in the context and semantic fields of another world-view, those of the source and receptor cultures, and the translator/communicator’s, if this is different). We need to know what the differences and similarities of the terms are, and the continuities and discontinuities that exist between the religious assumptions and corresponding cultural/linguistic manifestations. The knowledge of the source languages and cultures and the receptor language and culture and awareness of one’s own biases helps in the indispensable procedure of comparison and contrast of concepts between languages. It enables translators to avoid wrong implications and to translate appropriately.
APPENDIX 1: Prototype and Componential Analysis of "Grace"

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Full crosses indicate primary components. 
Crosses in parentheses indicate secondary components.

The prototype for the Qur’anic and Jula semantic field would be "kindness" or "benevolence," not "loving kindness."
APPENDIX 2: PICTORIAL PROTOTYPE VIEWS SHOWING THE DEEP-STRUCTURE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN THE BIBLE AND THE QUR’AN

Bible

Grace

Mercy

Grace

Blessing

LOVE IS GOD’S NATURE

Qur’an/Jula

Grace

Mercy

Grace

Blessing

BENEVOLENCE IS A PREROGATIVE OF ALLAH’S POWER
References


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