In researching the language that is used within Freemasonry and the concept of universality, the concept of the mystic tie and the role of language in strengthening it are of interest. This may be particularly true for those in what some call mainstream Freemasonry as well as those in certain North America groupings such as Prince Hall or expatriate Obediences and what is called liberal or adogmatic Freemasonry as inclusionary language may not be used. The mystic tie is a term that connects Masons, binding them to one another and exemplifying the universality of Freemasonry. The role of language in describing the fraternal experience and the institution of Freemasonry includes the usage and meaning of words such as regular or clandestine within the rules and regulations of Grand Lodge, Obedience, or other bodies and informally as these vary significantly in North America and across the world. These words can tie Masons together into a metaphysical chain of union through inclusion or untie some through exclusion. There is opportunity for progress towards more universal freemasonry by thoughtful usage of inclusionary and respectful language through accepting the difference between recognition, which involves treaties between jurisdictions, and general Masonic terminology.

This research began several years ago as a result of observation on social media and the way those on Facebook, LinkedIn, and other groups related to Freemasonry referred to each other. Words like brethren were used for some and clandestine and bogus for others. There seemed to be a wide range of opinions and it appeared challenging for those who administered the groups to retain the fraternal warmth and harmony of the groups. As a result, the use of language was explored, as well as the terms, their origins, and how North American Grand Lodge, Obedience, or other body rules and regulations treated these terms. It quickly became apparent that common usage differed. The initial results were presented in March, 2014 at a small academic conference in Los Angeles, with additional research refined into an article in the Spring 2014 Journal of the Masonic Society (Grieg 22) and then presented at the December meeting of the Maryland Masonic Research Society. Work continues by studying additional United States and Canadian rules and regulations with the planned future addition of Mexican and Caribbean ones as well as continuing to monitor social media, publications and Masonic events to extend the understanding of the use of language and potentially the evolution of it.

This paper is organized into three sections. In the first section, it the origin of the term mystic tie, connectedness, and on the concepts of the language of inclusion and exclusion. The second section explores the use of words and phrases within Freemasonry with a focus on the United States and Canada. It includes sub-sections on inclusionary and exclusionary language. The final section is the conclusion showing how this has impacted some groups within Freemasonry and providing some recommendations.
Background Information

The term, the mystic tie, was popularized in 1786 by the Scottish poet and Freemason Robert Burns in his poem, “The Farewell to the Brethren of Saint James Lodge in Scotland”:

Adieu! a heart-warm fond adieu;
Dear brothers of the mystic tie!
Ye favored, ye enlighten’d few,
Companions of my social joy! (Burns 228)

Albert Mackey, known for his many Masonic books, published a book with this title in 1867 that stated, “That sacred and inviolable bond which unites men of the most discordant opinions into one band of brothers, which gives but one language to men of all nations and one altar to men of all religions, is properly, from the mysterious influence it exerts, denominated the mystic tie;…” (Mackey 588). Chris Hodapp, the author of Freemasons for Dummies, stated that this mystic tie, “mythically and symbolically binds its members to millions of brethren around the globe, spanning the centuries. This bond is what allows two strangers to meet on a street in a foreign land and greet each other as though they’ve known each other all their lives…” (Hodapp 62).

In researching connectedness, there was a good body of literature and knowledge about how ‘I’ becomes ‘we’, on social inclusion and exclusion, and how language contributes to or interferes with this bonding. The philosophy of Georg Hagel (1770-1831), a German associated with idealism and often considered the precursor to existentialism had some interesting concepts on how “I” becomes a “we” within a, “complex, collective awareness - the attitudes, behavior, vision, practices, consciousness, and aspiration of a culture” (Kain 2). Part of this deals with how the individual identifies with and distances from what they perceive as ‘the other’.

David Cannadine, an historian, in his book, The Undivided Past: Humanity Beyond Our Differences, looks at human solidarity by looking at the impact of religion, nation, class, gender, race, and civilization in bringing humanity together or separating them, particularly in what he calls, “the great game of “us versus them” (Cannadine 4). An interesting illustration about coexistence was about two approaches to accommodation between Catholics and Protestants in the 1578-1620 time period: one was “clandestine churches” (“schuilerk”) where Catholics and Protestants worshiped together and the other, “simultan Kirche” which were buildings that Catholics and Protestants could share yet separately practice (46). The first approach violated authority rule yet seemed to work as an open secret at the local level and the other, a method that allowed coexistence in a way that didn’t violate authority rule. Within Freemasonry, there are potentially similar options.

There is a good body of scholarly work in philosophy, sociology or linguistics on social inclusion and exclusion and how language contributes to or interferes with this bonding.

Crossing linguistics and sociology, there is an area of study called the language of inclusion and exclusion that looks at the categorizations, words, and phrases that highlight distinctions between in-groups and out-groups (Schrover and Schinkel). Often, the work is specific to a topical area like
nationality or gender. Within the scholarly work, there appears a pattern for the in-group to continuously update the terminology with the intention to mostly exclude or, more rarely, include by using language highlighting distinctions between the groups again with a binary logic of us versus them. Applying these concepts to words and phrases within Freemasonry will be explored further in this paper.

**Language Examples within Freemasonry**

As stated by an author and Executive Secretary of the Masonic Service Association, 3 “A universal Masonry? It is still a “dream” of dedicated Masons…” (Hahn, 10). In the contemporary world of social media, there is a wide range of opinions on the language used. A recent comment by a group member in a Facebook group shared the following:

> The problem seems to be with some Masons in the USA who have far more restrictive Obligations than in the UK and Europe and who call any Brethren not Recognised by their Grand Lodge "Bogus" "Clandestine" "Irregular" etc, Something Masons on this side of The Pond do not tend to do and indeed here in France there are friendly relations between the several Masonic GLs and Grand Orients who often share premises although some do not permit Intervisitation to Tyled meetings by some of the others. This tolerant attitude contrasts favourably to the antics of some posters here who just can’t wait to point their finger and yell “Clandy” at posters from Groups they do not accept [sic]. (Foley)

As there are rules and regulations related to the meaning of specific words, the sub-sections below will discuss some of these.

**Exclusionary Language.** The term clandestine as it applies to Freemasonry dates back to 1784 and has a specific Masonic definition. According to Mackey, it is “One made in or affiliated with a clandestine Lodge.” which is, “[a] body of Freemasons or of those improperly claiming to be Freemasons, uniting in a Lodge without the consent of a Grand Lodge....” (Mackey “Clandestine”). Usage of the term may be defined in a jurisdiction’s constitution, code, or other rules. As an example, the Masonic Code of Hawaii states that, “It adheres to the "American Doctrine of exclusive territorial jurisdiction" and holds as clandestine all so-called Masonic Lodges found within the boundaries of this state which did not receive their charters or dispensations from this Grand Lodge, with the exception of lodges in Hawaii under the jurisdiction of the Most Worshipful Prince Hall Grand Lodge of Free and Accepted Masons, States of California and Hawaii, Inc.” (Masonic Code of Hawaii 20) where as the Code of the Grand Lodge of Iowa gives the following definition, “A clandestine lodge is one without a Dispensation, Charter, or Warrant from a recognized Grand Lodge” (Constitution of the Grand Lodge 35). At least five U.S. states don’t even mention the word clandestine in their Constitution and at least two Canadian provinces mention clandestine but don’t define it. The United Grand Lodge of England’s Book of Constitutions doesn’t like clandestine. In The Plumbline, an article titled, “African-American Clandestine and Irregular Freemasonry”, and likely yesterday at this conference, Oscar Alleyne is discussing usage of these terms as well. So, for some Masons, usage of this term may be mandated by their jurisdiction; however, it would appear that not all use it.
The word bogus isn’t used extensively and most Masonic dictionaries do not include an entry for the term. The Phylaxis Society has a Commission on Bogus Practices. This has a very specific focus related to Prince Hall; however, the terms bogus and clandestine are used interchangeable by some Freemasons. There is a Mastermason.com forum on bogus masonry that has a comment, “Hopefully, some of those members who have been "conned" into joining these bogus Masonic Lodges will read threads like this and then realise/investigate the intentions of those bogus lodges that they have joined. I know these bogus Lodges charge huge fees as this has been testified by those who have joined this forum after being "Healed". This concept of healing surfaces in a number of the rules and regulations reviewed in relation to having insufficient numbers at a ceremony or being in a Lodge that wasn’t recognized by the jurisdiction. The word bogus itself is generally attributed to the late eighteenth century to a machine to make counterfeit money. Some Masons refer to organizations that offer degrees or other Masonic materials that bear little or no resemblance to materials legitimately transmitted as bogus and there may be broad agreement that this is an appropriate derisive term.

Let's move to three additional terms: cowan, intruder, and eavesdropper. Cowan is defined as one with unlawful Masonic knowledge; an intruder is one with neither knowledge nor secrets, and an eavesdropper as one who intentionally or unintentionally becomes aware of Masonic knowledge (4). Or, put another way, these terms refer to unintended transmission or intentional deception about one’s status in Freemasonry. It may include those who unknowingly followed what they thought was a Masonic process that none or nearly none recognize. Two mentions have been noted in the research to-date: Connecticut’s Policies and Procedures mentions that, “Visitors - ...to prevent the admission of Cowans” (Lodge Visitors 1) and there is an Indiana jurisprudence decision in 1921 decision related to study groups - "safe from cowans and eavesdroppers" (Indiana Blue Book 75). Like the term bogus, many within Masonry many agree the terms cowan, intruder and eavesdropper are appropriate terms that exclude.

The terms irregular, unaffiliated and nonaffiliated have been discussed in previous work. There is a range of meaning for each of these and like the terms above, can be resolved through healing or other approaches. Likewise, the term profane has been described prior and it was noted that a number of Masonic jurisdictions have moved to the use of words uninitiated or non-Mason to avoid the feelings of stigmatization or rejection that may be felt.

**Inclusionary Language.** When words like recognized, full, or regular are used, many feel included and part of the in-group. These words convey claiming and legitimacy as do terms like brethren. Within North America, the well-regarded publication, *The Journal of the Masonic Society*, was able to use some of these to specify the conditions for full membership while retaining specific standards and not using exclusionary terms:

1. You must be a Master Mason, and currently in good standing of a Lodge
2. Your Lodge must be chartered by a recognized Grand Lodge
3. Your Grand Lodge must be either:
a. A member of the Conference of Grand Masters of Masons in North American (CGMMNA)
b. Recognized by at least three CGMMNA member grand lodges (Membership Information and Requirements)

In studying the adopted U.S. State and Canadian Province rules and regulations, the majority of them treat words like regular as those that conform to their specific requirements. Many use the term grammatically rather than specifically meaning a Mason that they are in amity with and can have Masonic communication with. A good number relate regular to the Landmarks, a set of principles that many Freemasons claim to be "both ancient and unchangeable precepts of Masonry". Some, like Idaho, are more specific and state the standards for recognition include, “…initiation on VSL, no relationship with mixed or feminine bodies, Ancient Landmarks (United GL of England, 1723), belief in Supreme Being, et al.” (Idaho Masonic Code and Digest 19). A number of states and provinces have discussions about which the range and quantity of them (up to 25 are cited), with some, like Maine, stating that they do not accept nor deny these ancient Landmarks. A fair number, like Arkansas, Connecticut, and Hawaii don’t mention the Landmarks at all.

The California Masonic Code refers to those belonging to lodges not recognized as unrecognized Masons and states that, “California Masons may engage in any activity with an unrecognized Mason so long as they do not share specific information…” (California Masonic Code 222). The term unrecognized is generally seen as neutral and inclusive.

Prince Hall Masonry is making progress towards being included as regular with forty-one states and the District of Columbia recognizing them and some recognized by ten Canadian Provinces, the UK and other countries (Prince Hall Recognition 1). Their experience is described by Tony Pope in an article by an international Prince Hall research society as, “For over two centuries, Prince Hall Masons have been labeled clandestine, insulted, ignored, denied entry to other lodges, and virtually confined to a Masonic ghetto” (Pope 1) and Indiana’s oldest Prince Hall Lodge, Central Lodge No. 1, commented that there may be some limits, “…some have granted recognition to the extent of permitting intervisitation but not dual memberships…” (List of US States & Countries 1).

Likewise, another presenter at this conference, Karen Kidd, received the 2007 World in the Short Papers Competition Award for her essay:

I am Regular.
I know this to be true, though I’ve heard otherwise. That because various Masonic jurisdictions (such as the United Grand Lodge of England, the US Malecraft Grand Lodges and etc.) are not in amity with my jurisdiction, and because I’m a woman, I can’t possibly be Regular. I’ve also been counseled that, slander though this be, I should take it in good part and be grateful my Malecraft brethren speak to me at all.
And yet I know myself to be Regular because the Ritual and Masonic jurisprudence say that I am. So I am. (Kidd 1)
As noted prior, what is regular for one may not be for another so this word, while inclusive, may warrant some caution.

**Conclusions**

Within Masonry, some of the terms that tie Masons together and others that separate them have been discussed. Use of some of the exclusionary terms may be accurate and represent appropriately the definition used in the rules and regulations of the jurisdictions one is a part of or the historical definitions. Other usage, like the discussion on social media shared, may be more slang and not appropriately reflect the definitions used within and across jurisdictions.

As words seem to have a clear impact on the broadness of the mystic tie and the universality that many seek, there is opportunity to better understand terms that tie Masons together and include them, updating as appropriate, within the rules and regulations of the relevant jurisdictions. There are choices that have been made such as California’s use of *unrecognized* or the Journal of the Masonic Society’s membership criteria which are more inclusive. Several jurisdictions do have specific rules requiring the use of clandestine to those Masons that are not in jurisdictions theirs recognize. There is also the opportunity to use inclusive terms within civil society such as Masonic websites and social media while retaining ritual use of terms like profane, cowan, eavesdropper and others within tyled meetings. From the research done on social media sites, it appears Europeans are more inclusive that a number within North America and, even within North America, Canada appears more inclusive than the United States. The research continues so questions and feedback, as well as any Constitutions or other Rulebooks that can be shared, are welcomed. It is planned to provide charts comparing jurisdiction use of the terms discussed here as well as additional ones will be developed.

Each, within their obligations, the rules they abide with, and/or the values one has, also has the choice to use inclusive language that ties Masons to each other and all of humanity and, for those who are Masons, to the Mystic Tie. This potential for a difference between recognition, which involves treaties between jurisdictions, and general Masonic terminology, which can possibly be inclusive and respectful regardless of the current recognition or Masonic status, offers opportunity for progress towards more universality.
Notes

1. The conference was “At a Perpetual Distance: Universal Freemasonry and Its Historical Divisions” held by the Roosevelt Center for the Study of Civil Society and Freemasonry held March 23, 2014 at the Liberal Arts Lodge Building in Los Angeles, California, USA, with a website of the papers presented there at http://therooseveltcenter.org/events-the-roosevelt-center/.

2. The presentation was titled, “The Mystic Tie – Tying and Untying with Words,” held December 13, 2014 by the Maryland Masonic Research Society at the Grand Lodge of Maryland in Cockeysville, Maryland, USA.

3. Conrad Hahn was an author for the Masonic Service Association from 1958-1977 and Executive Secretary from 1963-1977 and was cited as the Deputy Executive Secretary of the Masonic Service Association. A Short Talk by the same title was published in November, 1963 making this likely the origin of this material.

4. These definitions were derived by the author from multiple sources listed in the Works Cited.

Works Cited


