

# **Bible translation – A target of linguistic ideologies**

*Tibor M. Pintér*

## *Abstract*

*The study introduces some basic linguistic ideologies having affect on translation of sacred text, especially on the Bible translation. While presenting the most important notions of Bible translation, the study enumerates several ideologies of the translator and the reader presenting the complexity of the translation process. The translation of the culturally bound texts is not a straightforward activity – the creation of equivalents (to be found on several layers of the text) requires effort not only from the translator but from the reader too.*

**Keywords:** *Bible translation, linguistic ideologies, readers' preconceptions, translators' preconceptions, equivalence*

## **Introduction**

It is unquestionable that translation studies is a hard-core science having a broad background with respective methods, wide bibliography and perhaps: still having many scientific questions to solve. As an autonomous science, it operates with numerous theories and methods letting academics to raise questions and give possible answers to them. However, at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century there were still discussions whether translation science could be taken as an independent science or it was still part of literary sciences, or in case of literature, it had something to deal with aesthetics or literature theory – these questions were solved and in 1972, when James S. Holmes published his famous paper '*The Name and Nature of Translation Studies*', where he set the main tasks of this scientific movement and named it as *translation studies* (see Holmes 1972).

Gutenberg galaxy producing printed books and Neumann galaxy producing electronic books in new quantitative and textual dimensions (e.g. bringing new textual types) set translation studies to new tasks – both from theoretical aspects (e.g. equivalencies in translation) and both from practical aspects (computer-driven translation or translation of legal documents). Thus, scientific conception of translation process is typically an attainment of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, but translation as a scientific approach to text intermediation operating with theoretical questions and solving practical problems lives through millennia.

The first well-known debates on theoretical aspects in questions of translation came from Marcus Tullius Cicero in the 1<sup>st</sup> century BC, who faced problems of interpreting the ancient Greek texts for his students. In his famous book '*De optimo genere oratorum*' (On the Best Kind of Orators) he argued against word-for-word translation and emphasised the original meaning of the source texts<sup>1</sup> involving the audience, the target society to the translation process – for example their knowledge. Similar – but having other motivation – thoughts were articulated by Saint Jerome, who in his Bible translation to Latin emphasised translation of the meaning and not translations of words and grammatical formulations. Later, the Bible translation from the father of the protestant reformation, Martin Luther, was also a product of rationale strategies: his translation was driven not by the aesthetics, rather by practical reasons. His purpose was to enable all the people to read the Bible. His concept of

translation can be considered as preferring vernacular language variety to lingua franca of his era. His motivations of translation were aimed at conveying meaning of the Bible and not at conveying the structures of a language carrying literary or top-level culture.

### **Roads of Bible translation**

In the development of translation studies sacred texts always had a basic role: there were times when they were the materials and aims of the translation process at the same time. For example, spreading the teachings and thoughts of the Bible had influence not only on the first grammars of European languages (e.g. the first Hungarian grammar<sup>2</sup> was written to explain Latin language to learners in order to get closer to the Latin version of the Bible), but also on the translation process. Translation of sacred texts (in the European Christian culture it is mainly the Bible – the Old and New Testament) is done for passing on the knowledge, meaning of the source texts and for spreading the Word of God. The idea of spreading the meaning written in the source text has several bottlenecks: in this regard, one of the main ‘problems’ is that translation is not only about finding the perfect equivalent, but it also means interpretation of the source text. Interpretation, interpretative translation or adaption can be accepted as an offence towards churches, interfering with their interests (for example the translators of the oldest Hungarian Bible, the Hussite Bible – in Hungarian: *Huszita Biblia* – used several neologisms, within them the translation of the Latin words ‘spiritus sancti’ as *szent szellet* also meaning ‘holy breath’ and could mean ‘holy wind’ at that time – this translation was considered as heresy, something that is strongly at variance with accepted beliefs of the catholic church).

In the Reformation all translations of the Bible could be considered as spreading political or religious (against the old rules) thoughts amongst people. Spreading the theses of the Bible was one of the several methods against the Roman Catholic Church used in the Reformation – and one of its methods was Bible translation to national languages. That was the era when Bible or some of its parts were translated into several vernacular languages being spoken in Europe<sup>3</sup>. The version translated by Luther unlike other German Bibles was based on ancient Greek and Hebrew – and not on the Vulgate translated by St. Jerome and officially used by the Roman Catholic Church – and its source language was the so called Early New High German dialect, which was used as a lingua franca for its intelligibility between High and Low German dialects. The language used in this translation helped this version to become famous and widespread and could get closer to the majority of German speaking people. In the translation Luther preferred a language variety being spoken by the inhabitants of German towns and villages and not by the language of the high society of his era. His aim was to spread the Word of God to every German speaking people. Although the Reformation brought the Bible closer to people, the pragmatic functions of this sacred text (or texts, hence the Bible contains a wide range of texts) could not be kept on the surface as the substantive and formal elements of the source text were privileged.

In that era questions of translation process were mainly focused on the Bible and were linked to aesthetics and the church (although several translations of the Quran and the English translation of the Talmud were produced at that time).

However, translation of the Bible and other sacred texts raise similar questions and have similar problems, translation of sacred texts can have special, not Bible-specific issues (to list some of them: the degree of sacredness, the aim of the text or the target society of the texts)<sup>4</sup>. As it can be clear, linguistic questions regarding the translation are not products of the

modern era, but the product of the scientific recognition of translation. Its forming to a complex linguistic, scientific discipline could happen only in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. In that process of shaping to a modern academic field, other linguistic fields (as sociolinguistics, contact linguistics, text linguistics or pragmatics) had tremendous impact. The rising of new types of texts was also fruitful – it helped translation studies to discover all features of the texts and to provide new methods in research.

Bible translation is a complex process, having in focus several aspects of the text and readers too. According to the source languages, target languages and translation strategies we can form four main eras: the *First Great Age* lasted from about 200 BC to the fourth century AC was characterised by the translations based on the old Hebrew texts. From those the most important are the Targums (they can be accepted as paraphrased translations), Peshitta (translations to the Aramic language) and from the European perspective the most known Septuaginta (the most widespread and used Greek translation). Beside the dominant languages of this era (as Aramic and Greek) we know about Arabic translations from the Arabian Peninsula using a language variety of Arabic language used before Islam (perhaps not all parts of the Bible are translated). The *Second Great Age* started around the 4<sup>th</sup> century AD and lasted until the 16<sup>th</sup> century. The main characteristics of that era are the Latin versions of the Bible made mainly for early Christians. Translators worked in Palestine and in the communities of the Roman Empire. The most prominent translation was made by St. Jerome working in Palestine examining the original Aramic and Hebrew manuscripts. His version is called the Vulgate that later became the Catholic Church's officially promulgated Latin version of the Bible during the 16th century. It has been used by the Latin Church up to the present day – the later Latin versions in Western-Europe were mostly translated based on that version. The most important feature of the Vulgate is that St. Jerome did not translate the Septuaginta, but he used the original Aramic and Hebrew texts (that was the reason of moving to Palestine). The *Third Great Age* was brought to light in the early 1500's by the notions of the Reformation and therefore was basically driven by Protestants and lasted until the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. That era brought revolutionary attitude to Bible translation – and what is more important, it could be done on new, vernacular languages. In that period more Indo-European languages produced their versions of the Bible (e.g. English, German, French but also Slovak and – but not as Indo-European – Hungarian). The most powerful translations were Luther's German version (*Biblia, das ist, die gantze Heilige Schrifft Deudsch*) and King James's version (*King James Version / King James Bible* or the so called *Authorised Version*) or the *American Standard Version*. From my perspective it is worth mentioning that the first Hungarian translation of the whole Bible was published in 1590 and translated by a Protestant pastor Gáspár Károlyi (Carolus Gasparus), and the first Catholic Bible is also a product of those years. It was translated by a Jesuit monk György Káldi and published in 1626. Bible translations of vernacular languages in Europe had impact on the development of modern languages. For example, the modern Slovak was also constructed by Ľudovít Štúr, a Slovak priest – however, the first attempts to Slovak translations of the complete Bible (the so called *Camaldolese Bible*) were made between 1756–1759. That version was the very first written attempt to form an autonomous Slovak language, an ausbau language from the Czech. The *Fourth Great Age* has started in the 1950s characterised by the autonomisation of translation studies. That era is followed by a dominant change in the philosophy and notions of Bible translation. The focus of the translation process was being placed into the meaning in the source text and not the poetry and formation on the target

language (the work of Eugene A. Nida had a huge impact on the development of Bible translation).

### **Notions of Bible translation**

There are numerous definitions of translation: hence content of the Bible is closely linked to a certain place and time. Bible translation has roots in cultural dimensions (e.g. Lanstyák 2013, Naudé 2010, van der Watt – Kruger 2002). In this regard translation is a kind of mediation across cultures, which means it is a tool for conveying knowledge from one language to the other or from one language variety to another variety (in case of interlingual translation).

This cultural linkage can cause several problems in the translation process. From those, one basic problem or notion is to decide who should be the target group, who will be the reader and what knowledge have they already got. Translators have to take into consideration who will read their product – because translations should provide modified versions according to the perceived target: for example, women, children or speakers of special varieties of a language. There are several kinds of translations having in focus a simplified grammar and lexicon (*Holy Bible English Version for the Deaf*) or the modern young generation of the translator (*The New Testament in Modern English* by J.B. Philips), but there are also translations on fictional languages (just the most famous: Klingon Bible and Na'vi Bible).

Translations can be done according to several criteria, however, one can assume that in Bible translation there are several factors translators have to bear in mind. A central role of translation is to convey the meaning of the source text. It can be done by focusing on the *formal aspects* or on the *meaning of the source texts*. These notions are in line with the two main aspects of the translation theory: the formal and functional equivalence. If the formal equivalence is used, the translation prefers the lexical and grammatical layers of the source text (it is also called as *word-for-word translation*). There are several perceptions of the formal equivalence or the word-for-word translation, but one of the most interesting is the so called *concordant translation* (which is close to direct translation, cf. Smith 2000: 18), which theoretically enables the precise rendering of meanings into target language. However, because of the differences between languages, this is more than problematic (and in case concordance translation is carried out, the target text is not always enjoyable or readable). In case of concordant translation, a word in the source text must have the same equivalent in the target text, and on the contrary a word in target language stands for the same word in the source text. Despite the above mentioned concordant translation, it is useful from several points of view. There are several Bibles using this method of translation and could be also useful for researches (for concordant translation, see: <http://www.konkordans.net>, <https://www.concordant.org>, <https://www.konkordanterverlag.de>).

The other basic feature of the translated text is the *intelligibility* – the precise conversion of the meaning coded in the source text (this notion is called the *dynamic equivalence*). This concept is used in the above mentioned special Bibles where the translator is driven by the intelligibility and usefulness of the text for the readers of the target group. Emphasising the needs of the target group can cause loss of several layers of the source text, e.g. loss of styles or stylistic features or meanings, shades of meanings. Notions emphasising the aspects of the source text will produce a text which is closer to the source, however, in the target text there are usually more footnotes clarifying the connections or historical facts or issues related to a specific language. It is worth mentioning that interpretation of translations

having such ‘footnote-apparat’ is the task of spiritual leaders and teachers – the deeper interpretations of the Bible usually come by a certain help. Footnotes are good for interpretation. Nevertheless, these Bibles are not made for reading at home, they are used to study the words or read them in communities (see *New Revised Standard Version*, *New American Standard Bible*, *English Standard Version*). For this reason, translations having the intelligibility in focus are easier to read, they contain more paraphrases and less footnotes (or they have none of them); the interpretation of the text was done by the translator in this regard, the reader is not inconvenienced. These kinds of Bibles are made for everyday reading or considered to be used by special groups (e.g. by children or made for missionary purposes). Further possibilities can be the extended translations or paraphrases where translator (in brackets or marginal glossaries) can give more varieties or give explanations (for example the *Amplified Bible* or the *Expanded Bible*). These translations are likely to be read by researchers or those who want to examine the gist of the Word.

If one compares the translation process of a documentary film and the translation of a sacred text, one can assume that the latter will be more difficult (although I do not claim that film translation is a straightforward task). The text, the target audience, the inspiration of the text are key factors that make translation of sacred text difficult. Translation of the Bible as one of the sacred texts is also not without problems (see Robinson 2000). Jacobus Naudé in his study about translation of religious texts raises the question whether is it possible or may we translate the religious texts (cf. Naudé 2010: 285). Religious text can be regarded as texts of LSP (*Language for special purpose*) having in mind that they use certain terminology, vocabulary or textual features as style or register which are specific in the use of language. As special texts, their translation requires special strategies from the translators. The ‘speciality’ of religious or sacred texts lays (in contrast to other texts) in the fact that conveying meaning in the process of translation raises the question of exotextual cultural and content-related character (as intercultural bounding, knowledge – or its lacking – of the translator and of the readers). There are conceptual, cultural and religious aspects which come from the sacredness of the texts and can have an effect on the quality or on the perception of the of the target text. Because of the contextual or inspirational features of the Bible several theoretical questions arise (some of the are listed below) from which there are ones we cannot give a straightforward answer:

- how can religious texts be translated?
- when does the right time for a new translation of the same text come?
- for what target group is it worth making a special translation (bearing in mind that retranslation consciously or even unconsciously is a new interpretation of the text when ideological contents not being encoded into the source text can come to light)
- who is authorised to review the translation (e.g. from contextual, stylistic, pragmatic aspects) – in Hungary there are three main institutions which are authorised to revise translation, the Hungarian Bible Society (Magyar Bibliatársulat) as part of the United Bible Societies, the Saint Jerome Catholic Bible Society (Szent Jeromos Katolikus Bibliatársulat) and the Unified Hungarian Jewish Congregation (Egységes Magyarországi Izraelita Hitközség), but they usually take steps within their own translations (they are not authorised to revise texts translated by other religions); however unified qualitative measures can be used when translating or choosing a Bible, not only by the translators, but also by the readers (see <https://www.biblesociety.org.uk/explore-the-bible/which-is-the-best-bible-translation/>)

- can the translated text remain sacred after the translation? (there are thoughts that for example the translated versions – also Arabic translations – of the Quran cannot express all the shades of meanings, because of the cultural and linguistic differences, therefore in the context of Quran only interpretations can be meaningfully translated (cf. Aldahesh 2014); or there are thoughts that several Hindi texts written in Sanskrit lose their spiritual effect when they are translated into other languages)?
- can there be differences between the oral and written cultures in terms of sacredness, translation methods etc., and do the oral texts need other translation strategies used in case of written texts?
- can there be, are there any differences (and if, of what nature) between the translation strategies, methods between sacred texts (Bible, Talmud, Quran) of the three main monotheistic religions (Christian, Jewish, Islamic), and what kind of differences are in terms of accepting and authorising methods between those three religions?

### **Ideologies of the translator and the reader**

Translation is a complex process where meaning is generated through the (semantic, grammatical or sociocultural) decoding steps of the source text with the ‘joint work’ of the translator and the reader (see van der Watt – Kruger 2002). Although everything can be translated (bearing in mind that we know about the non-equivalent lexicon, but in case of a good translation readers should not recognise it), connections between two languages are followed by grammatical or semantic overlaps. The meaning which is built up by a joint process of the translator and the reader consists of several layers: for example the *denotative* or *situative meaning* or the *sociocultural meaning* formed in a community.

The complex procedure of translation relies on the precise conversion of basic structural units found in the source language. The translation process described above as conversion is not else than analysis and synthesis of meanings being created by lexical units (words, compound words, lexical units and idiomatic structures). Reproducing meaning and style structure of the source text is carried out through the language-specific syntactic constructs and the translator’s strategies. The complexity of the Bible is strengthened by contextual and stylistic diversity: the translation must pay attention to genre-specific, stylistic features at the micro- and macro level (while knowing that the very first source texts did not contain unambiguous inner structures – e.g. paragraphs or clear-cut sentence boundaries). The translator must cope with the implicit, socio-cultural meanings of the source texts to give answers to the questions of the reader, he has to mediate straightforward content to all recipients – in any language.

As it was pointed out, the translation of sacred texts requires from the translator special grounding or preparation, but main difficulties of the translation arise from the sacredness and the socio-cultural differences, in this regard linguistic problems of the translator or problems arising from the text itself are only secondary. This however does not mean that because of the cultural and religious bounding special knowledge and skills wouldn’t be required by the translator. Mediation of culture rewords the knowledge linked to a special society or group to another language, whilst the aim should be a customisation of it to the needs or knowledge of the target group (this can be called as the *problems of the receptors*).

In the process of contextual mediation, there is a key aspect the translator has to take into consideration – the cultural background of the target group. In this regard the product made by the translator always differs from the original, but only this can bring the text closer to the new audience (the modifications should ease the interpretation of the target group). The cultural constraints can also cause differences in the level of sacredness (as it is proved in case of the numerous translation of Quran), or – on the contrary – because of the linguistic determinism it can bring the text closer to the target audience (see translation of the Latin *Agnus dei* ‘Lamb of God’ into Inuit as ‘Seal of God’ Punč 2007: 38). The linguistic determination and perception of cultural constraint will raise a question: What can a translator do with the texts, contents written by societies which are not alive? Furthermore, it is questionable whether texts written to not existing communities and cultures can be in modern societies and communities really ‘sacred’.

That dilemma can also be seen in the dichotomy of *formal* and *dynamic* equivalence. The main difference between two notions is in the rendering of elements to be found in the source text (e.g. grammatical structures) or the meaning (e.g. pragmatic or cultural) that brings a text closer to the new readers. The equivalence between the source and target text is done from other perspectives. Formal equivalence means putting the linguistic signs (and not preferably the meaning) of two language into equal position: it can be done by translating nouns with nouns, reflecting the punctuation of source text in the target one or just bringing back compound words or idiomatic expressions in the same way as it is in the source text (in some cases formal equivalence can be treated as word-for-word translation). *Dynamic* (or *functional*) *equivalence* brings back the contextual or pragmatic parts of the source text in the target text neglecting the grammatical or lexical elements of the source text. If one concentrates on the knowledge of the target audience, we can agree that preferring formal equivalence is not the adequate choice (as it can be in translation of juridical texts). Varying techniques of formal and dynamic equivalence produce a more readable text for readers – it is worth mentioning that Hungarian Bible translations tend towards that.

Managing equivalencies and translation strategies in case of the Bible translation is not straightforward, mainly, because the Bible itself contains texts of several styles, forms and registers forcing translators not to stick to only one strategy. Normativity of sacred texts also plays an important role in this process (it has a special effect mostly in case of dynamic equivalence – in formal equivalence normativity of the source text is unambiguous). It is a fact that normative or descriptive translation produces different texts not only in grammar but also in meaning. Hence the Bible is a text which is not easily accessible to all readers, its acceptable or good translation tends towards descriptive and explanatory texting, while preserving certain aspects of normativity (see for example the edition printed in 2014 of the Bible of the Reformed Church in Hungary, the so called Károli Bible or Vizsoly Bible, where translators used notes to make meaning clear for the readers). Translation of sacred or religious texts can be regarded as transmission of culturally bound contexts revealed through certain hermeneutical interpretation written in a language that can be easily accepted by the readers. The aim of the translator should be to meet the requirements of several target groups (who usually have other needs, as for example in case of children, women, youth or analphabets) either by paraphrasing or word-for-word translation – however it is essential to keep the stylistic characters of the source text: it contains several types and genres of texts, but the inspiration and sublimity of the source should remain.

If one claims translation is an intercultural knowledge-transfer, problems during the translation process seem to be linked to the content, to its interpretation, transformation and

to its presentation. Deriving from the theories of bible translation published by István Lanstyák it is noteworthy that translation of sacred texts is in the macrostructure “a tool for preventing or solving communicational problems having roots in lack of common language between the two partners” (Lanstyák 2013: 309) and therefore can be divided into problems or *characteristics of the translator and the reader*<sup>5</sup>. The gist of the problem lays in the lack of common cultural knowledge (or background) and language (e.g. influence of the linguistic ideologies like following the linguistic norms of the source texts or expectations towards the language and the style).

During the translation process translators work at least with two texts (source text and target text), resulting an influence of linguistic ideologies from at least two languages (linguistic ideologies do have an effect not only on occasional translators but also on more confident, professional translators too, see Lanstyák – Heltai 2012). However, translation means interpretation: accepting the needs of the readers, composing structures of meaning or choosing the equivalents are factors that show the personal features of the translator. The recipients, the readers are influenced mostly by ideologies of the target language, but readers knowing both languages can also be influenced by ideologies of both languages (the reader of the target language who is also a speaker or reader of the source language – or is familiar with the source text – can for example search the textual elements of the source language in the target text). It is true that the translator and the reader can see the text from different perspectives, which can result in different interpretations of the same text.

One of the typical *linguistic ideologies of the translator* is the *linguistic formalism*. This ideology builds theoretically on the perfectionism of the source text resulting in assumptions that original meaning of the source text can be mediated only by keeping most of the contextual, stylistic or other textual features of the source text. According to this ideology, the accuracy of the translation is driven by the level of precision in mirroring the grammatical structures of the source text, which is in accordance with the notions of formal equivalence. As language is a set of continuously changing elements (forms and meanings), and the morphological and syntactic structures in one language differ from the one in another language, the presence of linguistic structures of the source language in target text does not always generate texts that can be easy to read or understand. It is still not easy to decide on the usefulness of this ideology, because certain level of archaisms to be found and kept in sacred texts can be regarded as a stylistically relevant part of the sacred text creating exotextual characteristics of it. Although sticking to linguistic formalism can provide strange translations, using translation strategies of dynamic equivalence can also harm the accurate interpretation: if dynamic equivalence is built on the interpretation of the translator, its usage presumes inaccurate wording of the meaning to be found in the source text (see Ryken 2000: 6; Dazdarevic – Milovanovic – Fijuljanin 2013: 6).

The translation of sacred texts must be precise in terms of mediation: a good target text should contain those meanings which are encoded in the source text. While translating, the translator must interpret the sources and with the possibilities of the target language should bring back the pillars found in the source, even though contents are linked to the specific culture with numerous points. The translator himself is also a reader, which means that he is influenced by the problems of interpretation and text creation at the same time. Those problems may come from the linguistic and cultural diversity<sup>6</sup>.

Translation is also text creation: translation must serve the readers in linguistic and contextual part. To do so, the translator must be aware of requirements and the language use of the target society (which is not the same when for example children or scholars are the



target groups). The language use of the target text means for the translator an accurate usage of linguistic norms or norms used by the audience. In case of bible translation, the translator must be aware of several norms to be found in the source material. That produces a situation where the translator must follow the norms of the readers and all norms used in all genres of the source text. For example, the forms of verses and strophes of hymns and psalms can determine a specific language use.

Not only the form, but also the genre, style and register of a sacred text can determine the strategies of the translator. Therefore, for the translator it is important to recognize that the Bible itself has several textual types and genres, of which he features a good translation which cannot hide (there are texts having informal-common style and there are also texts built up by eloquent stylistic elements). The meaning of words and phrases are not merely denotative, it is also connotative, so translation meanings and interpretation can depend on the type and style of the source text. As van der Watt and Kruger point out, layers of the accurate meaning of the biblical texts can be deepened by the interaction of the translator and the reader, but meanings of mere words are always determined by the sophisticated interaction of the reader and the macro-structure of the text (van der Watt – Kruger 2002: 122).

The accurate and precise rendering of meanings encoded in the Bible is difficult. The actual meaning can be driven by the style or contextual elements, but the time gap between the age of composing the original and reading the translations makes the whole process of comprehension more difficult. This work can be helped by the knowledge of the *explicit* and *implicit references* (the Bible Commentaries are useful in this clarifying process of the Bible). As it was mentioned before, the role of the translator is to mediate a text written two thousand years ago in a different socio-cultural surrounding with presenting the contextual and formal features of the source text – in a way that reader should easily reveal all connections and meanings from the text. Words like *bread*, *vine* and *rock* in the texts “I am the bread of life” (John 6,35), “I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinedresser.” (John 15,1) or “For you are my rock and my fortress” (Psalms 31,3) surely had other meaning for the people living in the Palestinian desert than for somebody in the modern era. It is indisputable that communication between text and reader can be fluent only by certain socio-cultural, social and geographical knowledge. To help this communication, translators have to clarify not only the implicit information structure, but also the more visible references and allusions: at this point we can agree that for example, the allegory of *vine* and *shepherd* in the New Testament cannot be revealed without the complex interpretation (or at least, they knowledge) of meanings to be found in the Old Testament. By the implicit cultural context, the translator must pay attention also to the explicit references: when referring to archaisms (geographical names, currencies, units of measurement, names of social positions etc.) the target text will not be the same during the use of formal equivalence (for example by using footnotes) and dynamic equivalence (for example by using content usually known by modern readers).

The formal structure of Biblical texts can also have an effect on meaning. The translator can form the meaning of the written text through the letters, characters or punctuation, because characters (or their lack) can form the meaning. This problem of recognition is not the problem of the new era – the original Hebrew and Aramic texts were written without capitalisation and punctuation (translators started to use punctuation and capitalisation in the Greek translations dated to the 7<sup>th</sup> century, see Metzger 1993: 278). Although the first translators of the original text had to tackle with it, we can assume that this is not more than *adding to the Word*. Just like punctuation, formation of biblical texts into

elements like sentence and paragraph is also an interpretation. Original texts could not give clear references to such division, only the interpretative work of translators formed the meaning finalised in particular languages (just like in case of creation of the *pragmatic coherence*, relying on the formal and semantic connection of texts).

It is obvious that the Bible as a cultural and sacred text is a kind of challenge for the translator. That ‘challenge’ can also be found on the other side: for the recipient, for the reader the Bible is not just a mere text. The Bible is a lifelong teaching, a guidance on life. It is a text which differs from other texts – both in content and style.

The meaning in the Bible is often created and actualized by the style used in the text. Although the Bible contains several styles and stylistic tools, we can assume that the language (or wording) has generally accepted features. As Szalai points out, the archaic language has certain meanings to the reader or is created because of several reasons:

- custom/routine: readers like the texts they read and know from their early age; it provides a kind of safety and security
- positive feelings coming from the text
- the identity of a social community (who likes the text is a part of us)
- it is hard to change in the liturgical texts: the more people read it, the harder it is to change it
- this language gives an aesthetic, sublime tone
- a sublime tone that helps us to get inspired.

From the point of view of the reader, the basic problem is that he reads a text interpreted and reconstructed by the translator, so the text read by the reader could not be *fully equivalent* with the original (that problem can be found also in case of the Quran, but in its case it is obvious to the readers that they read an interpretation of the original words of Muhammed). Certainly, these problems of the text can have several levels depending on the reader – depending on his viewpoint and his expectations from the text (finding deeper connections and searching for deeper content requires other type of reading than in case of “shallow reading” with the aim of getting the minimum information from the text).

Interpretation can also be influenced by the language itself. Readers of other languages can have other interpretations of phraseological units, idiomatic expressions, but – as languages are usually linked to cultures – cultural distances can also deepen the diversity of interpretation. One can assume, that translated text cannot return the meaning or interpretation encoded in the original text (it can be regarded as *translation loss*).

The meanings of smaller textual units (smaller texts, paragraphs) get their final meaning in macro level, so the actual meaning of a bigger textual unit can be revealed only after the interpretation of the smaller unit. Translation, however, is done on the micro level, so the meaning on macro level can easily change (*inaccuracy of translation*). Because of the differences between languages, the equivalence of a certain meaning can differ, resulting in the fact that accurate rendering of a meaning found in the source text is difficult or impossible in the target language. That happens when the target text can have several interpretations (while the source is because of the context or grammatical form unambiguous). Consequently, during the translation process meanings can be lost or new meanings can be added to the untouchable original text, meaning.

Besides the equivalence in the content and form in case of the Bible, we must take care of the aesthetical equivalence<sup>7</sup>. By rendering the aesthetic level of the text, the translated text can preserve its three dimensions: the aesthetic, formal and contextual dimensions. Rendering the equivalence in the aesthetic dimension is a complex process, since it is usually

present in the source text like a smooth connection of formal and contextual elements, mostly linked to certain languages. Formal elements are linked to grammatical constructions resulting in differences in languages. For that reason, the rendering of the aesthetic equivalence is awkward: its absence in the source text results in two-dimensional, *flat* text.

The Bible is for the believers more than simple collection of texts. It provides guidance on life communicating complex messages. Translations must be aware of that message. Translators must handle the problems and ideologies resulting in incorrect content and must strive for forming the precise equivalence.

## Conclusion

Translators of sacred texts, especially of the Bible have a hard and laborious task. In the process of translation, they must mind rendering the equivalents in their precise correlation and must endeavour to fulfil the needs of the reader helping him to reconstruct the text according to his (knowledge of history, culture or context). In the shade of relevance theory, the translator must give a guidance for the readers to create their own interpretation while preserving the faithfulness of the original text (cf. Smith 2000: 71–72). A good translator creates a text, which makes every effort to construct the basic equivalents relying on the knowledge of the reader. There is a wide range of equivalences the translator must bear in mind. They can be varied since the Bible itself contains several types of texts and genres. The most relevant equivalences which can be followed are the *motivational*, *denotative*, *connotative*, *stylistic*, *pragmatic* and *textual equivalence*.

While reading the Bible, readers (and the translator staying behind) must build their own interpretations by the presence of several linguistic ideologies. Those hidden barriers can help in creation of the proper meaning or can mislead both representatives in the process. If we take into consideration that translation is based on a common or personal interpretation, readers get a text which is never more fully equivalent with the original. However, after being interpreted, stirred with ideologies – can it still have the same inspiration for readers of all era?

## Notes:

1 „[...] nec converti ut interpres, sed ut orator”, meaning in English I did not translate as an interpreter or translator, but as an orator.

2 Grammatica Hungarolatina (can be found at <https://mek.oszk.hu/03400/03466/03466.pdf>) was written and published by Ioannes Sylvester in 1539 – the author’s main activity was Bible translation and ‘linguistics’ of his era. This book was the first Hungarian grammar having novelties in several fields and was the first in the history of Hungarian language setting rules in the field of orthography.

3 It is translated to more than 7000 languages or language varieties (see Szalai 2016: 1)

4 It is worth mentioning that the term sacredness cannot be used to every text of the Bible.

5 In this regard the communication is common to the one described by Roman Jakobson, which is based on the speaker, recipient, common code and common knowledge.

6 Concerning the linguistic diversity, the differences can be found in the source itself: the Old Testament was written in Old Hebrew, Aramic, while the New Testament was written in Koine Greek; concerning the cultural bounding or diversity it is not easy to compare the cultural or social habits of the ancient and modern society, not to mention the differences between Aramic, Hebrew, Greek and a modern language, for example, the Hungarian.

7 For more about the aesthetic equivalence, see Newmark 1988: 42.

## References:

ALDAHESH, Ali Yunis 2014. (Un)Translatability of the Qur'ān: A Theoretical Perspective. In *International Journal of Linguistics*, 2014, vol. 6, no. 6, pp. 23–45.

*Concordant Bible translations* [online] [cit. 2019-11-04] Available at: <<http://www.konkordans.net>>, <<https://www.concordant.org>>, <<https://www.konkordanterverlag.de>>

DAZDAREVIC, Samina, MILOVANOVIC, Ana Stisovic, FIJULJANIN, Fahreta 2013. [online] *Translating sacred words. 5th International Social Sciences Conference in Balkans Organizatori: Sakarya University, Turkey, International University of Novi Pazar*, [online] [cit. 2019-11-04] Available at: <[https://www.researchgate.net/publication/282186914\\_Translating\\_Sacred\\_Words](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/282186914_Translating_Sacred_Words)>

DE WAARD, Jan, NIDA, Eugene A. 1986. *From one language to another: functional equivalence in Bible translating*. Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Inc., 1986.

HOLMES, James S. 1972. The Name and Nature of Translation Studies. In HOLMES, James S. *Translated! Papers on Literary Translation and Translation Studies*. Amsterdam : Rodopi, 1972, pp. 67–80. [online] [cit. 2019-11-04] Available at: <<https://archive.org/details/Holmes1972TheNameAndNatureOfTranslationStudies>>

LANSTYÁK, István, HELTAI, Pál 2012. Universals in Language Contact and Translation. In *Across Languages and Cultures*, 2012, vol. 13, no. 1, pp. 99–121.

LANSTYÁK, István 2013. Nyelvi problémák a bibliafordításban [Linguistic problems in Bible translation]. In BENŐ, Attila, FAZEKAS, Emese, KÁDÁR, Edit (eds.) „...*hogy legyen a víznek lefolyása...*” *Köszöntő kötet Szilágyi N. Sándor tiszteletére*. Kolozsvár : Erdélyi Múzeum-Egyesület, 2013, pp. 309–318.

METZGER, Bruce 1993. Persistent Problems Confronting Bible Translators. In *Bibliotheca Sacra*, 1993, vol. 150, no. 3, pp. 273–284.

NAUDÉ, Jacobus 2010. Religious translation. In GAMBIER, Yves, VAN DOORSLAER, Luc (eds.) *Handbook of translation studies 1*. Amsterdam : John Benjamins, 2010, pp. 285–293.

NEWMARK, Peter 1988. *A Textbook of Translation*. New York : Prentice Hall, 1988.

PUNČ, Erich 2007. *Entwicklungslinien der Translationswissenschaft: von den Asymmetrien der Sprachen zu den Asymmetrien der Macht*. Berlin : Frank & Timme GmbH, 2007.

ROBINSON, Douglas 2000. “Sacred Texts”. In FRANCE, Peter (ed.) *The Oxford Guide to Literature in English Translation*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000, pp. 103–107.

RYKEN, Leland 2000. *Bible Translation Differences*. Wheaton, Illinois: Crossway Books, 2000.

SMITH, Kevin G. 2000. *Bible Translation and Relevance Theory. The Translation of Titus*, (Unpublished PhD-thesis) Stellenbosch, South Africa : University of Stellenbosch, 2000, [online] [cit. 2019-11-04] Available at: <<https://www.sats.edu.za/userfiles/BibleTranslationandRelevanceTheory.pdf>>

SZALAI, András 2016. *Bibliafordítás és a bibliafordítások [The Bible translation and Bible translations]*, 2016, [online] [cit. 2019-11-04] Available at: <<http://www.apologia.hu/keresztenyseg/biblia-1/bibliaforditas-es-a-bibliaforditasok>>

VAN DER WATT, Jan G., KRUGER, Yolande 2002. Some considerations on Bible translation as complex process. In *Acta Theologica, Supplementum 2*, vol. 22, no. 1, pp. 118–139.

*Which is the best Bible translation?* [online] [cit. 2019-11-04] Available at: <<https://www.biblesociety.org.uk/explore-the-bible/which-is-the-best-bible-translation>>

***Tibor M. Pintér***

*Senior Lecturer*

*Department of Hungarian Linguistics, Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, Károli Gáspár University of the Reformed Church in Hungary*

*Hungary, 1146 Budapest, Dózsa György str. 25-27*

*E-mail: m.pinter.tibor@kre.hu*

In SKASE Journal of Translation and Interpretation [online]. 2020, vol. 13, no. 1 [cit. 2020- 06-05]. Available online at [http://www.skase.sk/Volumes/JTI18/pdf\\_doc/02.pdf](http://www.skase.sk/Volumes/JTI18/pdf_doc/02.pdf). ISSN 1336- 7811.