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Библейская фразеология английского языка в диахронии

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Аннотация. Исследуются структурно-семантические аспекты развития библейской фразеологии в древне-, средне- и новоанглийский периоды. Рассматриваются устойчивые словосочетания в текстах псалтирей IX–XVII веков, переведенных с латинского языка. С помощью методов лингвокультурологического, компонентного и контекстуального анализа, фразеологической идентификации и корпусного метода изучаются вопросы этимологии, а также семантики и структуры библейской идиоматики в диахронии. Установлены признаки фразеологического калькирования, отмечен постепенный отход от принципа буквальности при переводе исходных латинских словосочетаний, анализируются примеры семантической и формальной эволюции библейских идиом.

Ключевые слова: Псалтирь, фразеология, диахрония, древнеанглийский язык, среднеанглийский язык, новоанглийский язык

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Original article

English Idioms of the Bible in Diachrony

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Abstract. The article aims at diachronic analysis of the structural and semantic aspects of idiomatic word-combinations in the Old, Middle, and New English psalters (9th–17th centuries) translated from the Latin Vulgate version. With resort to the methods of linguocultural, componental and contextual analysis, phraseological identification and corpus method, the article addresses the problems of etymology, semantics and structure of biblical idioms in diachrony. The research focuses on the attributes of phraseological loan-translation and stresses a gradual digression from the principle of literality in translating the original Latin word-combinations. The semantic and formal evolution of biblical idioms is analyzed on the example of specific contexts.

Keywords: Psalter, phraseology, diachrony, Old English, Middle English, New English

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INTRODUCTION

The abundance of idiomaticity in the biblical text has long been a source of attraction for scholars of phraseology. Ample contribution to the research on the subject was provided by such scholars of renown as: J. G. Frazer, Earl R. Mac Cormac, V. G. Gak and many more [Frazer, 1918; Mac Cormac, 1976; Gak, 1993]. Still in demand in various types of discourse, idioms of biblical origin have by no means been exhaustively scrutinized because the bulk of research is built around the present-day structure, meaning and use of bibleisms.

Significant effort in studying historical and functional aspect of modern English idioms was made by A. M. Kaplunenko [Каплуненко, 1992]. But what makes the entirety of available study look largely lacunar is almost complete absence of interest in the diachronic aspect. This is characteristic of phraseology in general for two reasons: first, the linguistic evidence is growing increasingly scarce as the researchers apply themselves to trace the history of expressions down to their origins, and second, it is a very challenging task to ascertain that in the past the word-combinations in question enjoyed a phraseological status. The only type of linguistic evidence to make use of is the text of manuscripts.

Such are the circumstances that determine the sources and procedure of the present research. The main tasks to address are these:

1) establishing the etymological nature of biblical idioms by means of etymological analysis;
2) defining the phraseological markers to verify the phraseological status of idiomatic word-combinations by means of phraseological identification;
3) describing the main evolutionary changes affecting biblical idioms by means of componental and contextual analysis.

LINGUISTIC EVIDENCE

The linguistic evidence is taken from the English text of psalters belonging to three historical periods according to the traditional periodization of the history of English. King David's psalms are full of imagery and highly metaphorical, which provides breeding ground for phraseologization. Another reason is that psalms enjoyed immense popularity in the Middle Ages. About four dozen of Old English Psalter versions have survived to this day [Old English ... 2001], with 16 of them glossed[1], which constitutes the largest topical group of Old English manuscripts. The Psalter is known for having been commonly used as a textbook to learn Latin; it was extensively subject to quotation and reference, which is also an important factor of phraseologization.

Since the English text of the psalms is secondary, i.e. translated, it matters a lot what original text was used as the basis for the translation. To ensure the correctness of the diachronic research, it necessitates that all the original texts should be made in the same language. There is little doubt as to what specific language that has to be: up to the Reformation, Latin as a source language fared uncontested. Therefore, all the Psalter versions submitted to analysis have to be Latin–English translations, with the Vulgate[2] being the source text. There are three Psalter versions whose record and nature make them special because they perform the role of landmarks in the course of linguistic and literary history:

1) **the Vespasian Psalter**[3] of the early 8th century, with the 9th century gloss (London, British Library, MS Cotton Vespasian A I). This version is considered to be the earliest collection of psalms ever submitted to translation into (Old) English and, what is more, the earliest attested attempt to render a biblical text into the vernacular language on the British soil [Ball, 1970];
2) **Wycliffe's Bible**[4] of the late 14th century is a Middle English version, which reflected John Wycliffe's growing religious dissent and marked the transition from the word-for-word to sense-by-sense principle of translation. Accordingly, the text is presented in two varieties: the 1382 more literal translation and more liberal, released posthumously in 1394 [Hague, 19--]. The latter is of more interest for the purposes of the present research;
3) **the Douay-Rheims Bible**[5] was published in 1582–1610 in France and is known for being, again, a translation from Latin in the aftermath of Reformation, when such occasions grew rare enough, and most contemporarily produced English versions of the Bible were translated from Greek and Hebrew [Pope, 1910].

[1]Porck Th. 'You are truly the same': The Varied Nature of Old English Glossed Psalters. 2022. URL: https://thijsporck.com/2022/10/01/you-are-truly-the-same-the-varied-nature-of-old-english-glossed-psalters/

[2]Vulgate. The Holy Bible In Latin Language With Douay-Rheims English Translation. URL: https://vulgate.org/

[3]The Oldest English Texts. Sweet H. (ed). London, 1885.

[4]The Holy Bible containing the Old and New Testaments, with the Apocryphal Books in the Earliest English Versions Made from the Latin Vulgate by John Wycliffe and his Followers. J. Forshall, F. Madden (ed.). Vol. 1. Oxford: University Press, 1850.

[5]The Holy Bible. Douay Rheims Version with Deuterocanon. The Lord Henfield Edition, 2024.

All the three versions listed above have the Vulgate as the translation source. The Latin original texts feature some marginal lexical variations, with infrequent alternation of synonyms, but in essence those are one and the same text. English translations demonstrate chronologically stepping down degrees of literality ranging from the highest in the Vespasian Psalter gloss to the lowest in the New English Douay-Rheims Bible.

ETYMOLOGICAL ASPECT

The text of the 150 psalms is traditionally ascribed to King David and in this interpretation has to be placed around the 10th–11th centuries BC. Being an integral part of the Old Testament, the psalms played an important role in providing the continuality of the biblical written tradition in various linguocultures. In case of the Anglo-Saxon culture, Latin is the immediate source that relayed the text of psalms with all its poetic, metaphorical, and hence phraseological patrimony.

The first available translation found in the Vespasian Psalter appeared soon after Christianity took root in England. The gloss shows the translators' consistent tendency to follow the principle of literality. In order to fully keep the original form and sense of the sacred text the original Latin syntax, including idiomatic word-combinations, was reproduced with utmost precision. In terms of phraseology, it means loan-translation, or calque. Phraseological calques became the earliest outer means of replenishing the (Old) English phrase-stock. This fact itself is important in proving the phraseological status of the expressions in question, as phraseological loan-translation can result in nothing less than emergence of a new phraseologism in the recipient language.

A phraseological calque has several distinct characteristics, which can be best displayed by a specific example:

Vulgate: ***Reges*** eos ***in virga ferrea*** *et* ***tamquam vas figuli confringes*** eos (*Psalter 2:9*)

Vespasian: ðu ***reces*** hie ***in ȝerde iserre*** & ***swe swe fet lames*** ðu ***ȝebrices*** hie

The verse above offers two word-combinations which may and should be interpreted as idiomatic. In modern variant these are *to shepherd with an iron wand* and *to break like a potter's jug*. The Vespasian version is absolutely literal; it is a typical calque, which can be proven by the following:

1) the number of the word-combination components in the Latin original and in the gloss is almost identical: 4:4 for the first idiom and 4:5 for the second one (the latter difference, incidentally, is of no great importance as it may be merely a matter of spelling: the Old English *swe swe* for the Latin *tamquam* or *tam quam*);
2) the word order in both cases demonstrates absolute word-for-word coincidence;
3) there is the highest affordable likeness of grammar categories and forms both in the original and gloss (e. g. the verbs *regere* and *recan* in the form of *præsens indicativi activi*, 2nd person singular, or the nouns *figulus* and *lam* in the form of *genitivus singularis* and suchlike);
4) the structural model of the idiom appearing in Old English as a result of translation, patterns itself on that of the Latin original;
5) the key components of the expressions both in the original and translation are related to the same codes of culture: agentive and material. The interaction of these codes is inherent in creating a certain phraseological image;
6) both in the original and gloss the idiomatic transference of meaning is achieved by means of metaphorization. In the first case the symbolic function of a shepherd and his iron wand is resorted to in order to express the idea of a strict ruler empowered to exercise authority over his people. In the second case a broken to fragments clay pot symbolizes complete ruin and defeat.

Literal translation, tantamount to phraseological calque, in the theory and practices of interpretation is usually conceded to be a failure, but in this situation, it appears to be essential means of constructing the phraseological system of a language at the dawn of its written history.

PHRASEOLOGICAL MARKERS

Phraseological meaning is formed under the influence of culture as a result of intersemiotic transposition [Зыкова, 2015]. Specific semiotic fields are the source of transferring the conceptual content into the symbols of another semiotic system – the language. Such process gives rise to new idioms.

An idiom is understood to be a fixed combination of lexical components. It is reproduced in speech and is based on the stable correlation between certain lexico-grammatical structure and meaning[1]. The task of verifying the phraseological status of biblical idioms in their historical form is addressed proceeding

[1]Телия В. Н. Фразеологизм // Русский язык: Энциклопедия / гл. ред. Ю. Н. Караулов. 2-е изд., перераб. и доп. М., 1997.

from the assumption that phraseological status can be verified convincingly enough on the basis of two main markers of phraseologization: 1) recurrence of a word-combination in the text of a given manuscript and other textual sources; 2) stability of the phraseological image in diachrony.

The best way of showing how these rather abstract markers are realised in practice, is by virtue of specific examples. There is a comparatively infrequent somatism *flesh*, which occurs to be in a number of Psalter verses, which in the Douay-Rheims version read as follows:

> moreover my ***flesh*** also shall rest in hope (*Psalter 15:9*)
> And my ***flesh*** hath flourished again (*Psalter 27:7*)
> For thee my soul hath thirsted; for thee my ***flesh*** (*Psalter 62:2*)
> all **flesh** shall come to thee (*Psalter 64:3*)
> my bone hath cleaved to my ***flesh*** (*Psalter 101:6*)
> Pierce thou my ***flesh*** with thy fear (*Psalter 118:120*)
> Who giveth food to all ***flesh*** (*Psalter 135:25*)
> let all ***flesh*** bless thy holy name for ever (*Psalter 144:21*)

It can be noticed that in three of the contexts above the word *flesh* goes together with *all*, which marks the recurrence of this word-combination in the Psalter. But not in the Psalter alone because in other books of the Bible it also is recurrent. Below are a few more contexts from the Douay-Rheims version:

> ***All flesh*** is grass (*Isaiah 40:6*)
> ***all flesh*** shall be no more destroyed with the waters of a flood (*Genesis 9:11*)
> I am going the way of ***all flesh*** (*1Kings 2:2*)

In New English the word-combination *all flesh* with the meaning "the mankind" or "all the living creatures" does have a phraseological status because it is recurrently used in different textual sources by different authors and is listed in dictionaries of idioms. The lexicographic criterion is of minor importance, as it is absolutely invalid for Old and Middle English. However, the criterion of recurrence both in one text and in various texts is always secure enough. For instance, recurrence of the idiom is also to be noted in the same and more contexts of Wycliffe's Bible, and has to be interpreted as a proof of its phraseological status in Middle English:

> ***Ech fleisch*** is hei (*Isaiah 40:6*)
> ***ech fleisch*** schal no more be slayn of the watris of the ȝreet flood (*Genesis 9:11*)
> Y am the Lord ȝod of ***al fleisch*** (*Jeremiah 32:27*)
> Y schal helde out my spirit on ***ech fleisch*** (*Acts 2:16*)
> for the lijf of ***ech fleisch*** is in blood (*Leviticus 17:14*)
> ***Ech fleisch*** schal faile toȝidere (*Job 34:15*)

The number of contexts with the word-combination *ech fleisch* is more than sufficient to make sure that in Wycliffe's time the expression was very recurrent.

Phraseological status has to be proven not only by recurrence of a word-combination in various contemporary texts, but also by diachronic recurrence. It means that the idiom has to be found in chronologically diverse texts in order to earn the title of an idiom. In this respect the most problematic forms are the earliest ones, as the quantity of linguistic evidence is in inverse proportion to its age. Nevertheless, even within the confines of the Old English period it is possible to definitely detect recurrence:

Vulgate:	sicut fluit cera a facie ignis (*Psalter 67:3*)
Vespasian:	swe floweð wex from onsiene fyres
Eadwine's[1]:	swæ swa floweð weæx from ænsine fyres
Arundel[2]:	swaswa milteþ & flewþ weax fram ansyne fyres
Cambridge[3]:	swa swa flowyð wiex fram ansyne fyrys
Junius[4]:	swa floweð wex from onsiene fyres
Lambeth[5]:	swaswa flywð weax fram ansene fyres
Paris[6]:	swa fram fyre weax floweð and mylteð
Vitellius[7]:	swaswa flewð weax of ansyne fyres

The adverbial expression in the eight Old English Psalter versions above metaphorically represents the idea of complete disappearance, as is clear from the overall context of the verse:

> As smoke vanisheth, so let them vanish away: ***as wax melteth before the fire***, so let the wicked perish at the presence of God (*Douay-Rheims 67:3*).

The image of melting wax exposed to fire shows remarkable persistence from one version to another all through more than four centuries which comprise the versions above. Despite some variability of the lexis and syntax (*e.g.* lexical alternations *flowan* / *miltan* or the alternation of the prepositions *fram* / *of* alongside with the differences in the word order that make the Paris version special), the repeated set of key components (i.e.

[1]Eadwine's Canterbury Psalter. Harsley F. (ed.). London, 1889.
[2]Der Altenglische Arundel-Psalter. Heidelberg, 1910.
[3]Der Cambridger Psalter. Darmstadt, 1964.
[4]Der Altenglische Junius-Psalter. Heidelberg, 1908.
5 Der Lambeth-Psalter. Helsingfors, 1909.
[6]The Old English Version of the Heptateuch, Ælfric's Treatise on the Old and New Testament and his Preface to Genesis. Crawford S. J., Blitt B. (ed.). London, 1922.
[7]The Vitellius Psalter. Rosier J. L. (ed.). Ithaca, N.Y., 1962.

flowan, weax, ansyn, fyr) is ever stable. Not only is the image entirely preserved in Old English but also the later historical periods testify to its stability. In the Wycliffe version it is worded as follows: *as wax fletith fro the face of fier.* The Germanic *ansyn* gives way to the Romanic *face*, but it does not affect the image and meaning, which remain intact. The New English context referred to earlier also has the identical image.

EVOLUTION OF IDIOMS: MEANING AND STRUCTURE

In terms of evolution, leaving aside the aspects of phonetics and style as little relevant, let us focus on semantics and grammar. The lexical composition of idiomatic expressions, as of the late 14th century, shows one obvious tendency for romanization, fully in accordance with the general development of the Middle English word-stock. Germanic components get commonly replaced with Old French equivalents:

Vulgate: Lingua mea ***calamus scribæ*** velociter scribentis (*Psalter 44:2*)
Vespasian: tunʒe min ***hreod writ*** hreðlice writendes
Wycliffe: Mi tunʒe is ***a penne of a writere***; writynʒe swiftli
Douay-Rheims: My tongue is ***the pen of a scrivener*** that writeth swiftly

In the set of contexts above the substantive phrase *a pen of a scribe* stands for TONGUE. In the entirely Germanic Vespasian version the first component is the noun *hreod (reed),* which literally reproduces the Latin *calamus (cane)*. The plant is known to have been used to make writing tools in antiquity. The Middle Ages saw a change of the technics, with feathers becoming the main instrument for writing. This innovation made the meaning of the noun *rede* obscure in this context. Hence the replacement of it with the Romanic *penne* (*feather*). The Renaissance brought in more romanization; in this particular case the Douay-Rheims version offers the Romanic component *scrivener* instead of the Germanic *writer*, which is used in the earlier versions.

The changes of the lexical composition went hand in hand with the changes of realia. New concepts and objects came in abundance from the continent with their original names. The proof is provided by the Psalter as well as by other biblical books, e. g.:

A-S Gospel[1]: wundon ***þyrnenne cyne-helm*** and asetton hyne on his heafod (*Mt. 19:2*)
Wycliffe: writhen ***a coroun of thornes***, and setten on his heed
Douay-Rheims: platting ***a crown of thorns***, put it upon his head

In the Old English variant of the expression *crown of thorns*, which is a symbol of suffering, the concept CROWN is conveyed by the Germanic composite *cyne-helm* reflecting the realia of pre-Norman England, with reference to tribal kinship and helmets worn by Anglo-Saxon chiefs. In the High Middle Ages and henceforth, the Romanic word *coroun* marks the transition from tribalism to nationhood, of which a crown is a token. Jesus Christ is thus understood to be a king of a much greater regal status than it can be associated with a tribal chief's headgear.

When the general meaning of an idiom is diachronically unchanged, there can be noticed some modifications of the image effected by lexical means:

Vulgate: ero similis ***discendentibus in lacum*** (*Psalter 27:1*)
Vespasian: ic biom ʒelic ***astiʒendum in seað***
Wycliffe: Y schal be maad lijk to hem, that ***ʒoen doun in to the lake***
Douay-Rheims: I become like them that ***go down into the pit***

In the contexts above the verbal idiom *to go down into the pit* metaphorically and euphemistically spells out "to die". Diachronically the translators choose different words to express the concept GRAVE. Whereas initially in the Vulgate there is *lacus*, which, besides its commonly known aquatic meaning, in Latin could also denote any cavity in the ground, the Vespasian version prefers the best suitable Old English equivalent *seað (pit, hole, well, reservoir, lake)* to the possible *lacu*. The Wycliffe translator opts for literality by using *lake*. To the Douay-Rheims version readers *lake* would not sound explicit enough, since its New English meaning is too specific: one can hardly imagine a lake burial in the Christian culture. Hence, the *pit*.

In spite of quite a few, albeit minor, lexical and semantic variations, in each particular case all diachronic (and dialectal) variants retain the main distinctive characteristics: one and the same phraseological meaning and symbolic function. All the variants of the expressions *crown of thorns* and *to go down into the pit* both mentioned and bypassed in the present article constitute phraseological invariants of the idioms existing and evolving in English ever since the first written use in the 9th century Vespasian Psalter gloss up to day.

The dynamics and degree of structural development of biblical idioms depends on the two principal

[1]The Gospel according to Saint John in Anglo-Saxon and Northumbrian Versions. W. W. Skeat (ed). Cambridge: University Press, 1878–1887.

factors: general evolution of the English grammar system and the structural complexity of idioms themselves. The least prone to formal evolution are the structurally simpler two-component idioms. The most common types of such are the verbal model V+N and the nominal model Adj+N. The following set of contexts proves the stability of the verbal idiom *to set the covenant*, which means "to make a solemn agreement":

Vulgate: Congregate illic sanctos ejus qui ***ordinaverunt testamentum*** ejus (*Psalter 49:5*)
Vespasian: ȝesomniað ðider halȝe his ða ***ȝeendebyrnun cyðnisse*** *his*
Wycliffe: Ȝadere ȝe to hym hise seyntis; that ***ordeynen*** his ***testament***
Douay-Rheims: Gather ye together his saints to him: who ***set*** his ***covenant***

The comparison shows that in this case the ever-going lexical changes of the idiomatic word-combination in bold have no structural match, leaving the V+N model in English intact for at least eight centuries. The same is usually true about attributive phrases with adjectives or participles. The change of the nominal models is often reduced to their mutual substitution. As a rule, original adjectives and participles tend to get succeeded by of-phrases in later versions:

Vulgate: esto mihi in Deum protectorem et in ***locum munitum*** (*Psalter 79:3*)
Vespasian: bio ðu me in ȝod ȝescildend & in ***stowe ȝetrymede***
Wycliffe: Be thou to me in to Ȝod a defendere; and in to a ***strenȝthid place***
Douay-Reims: Be thou unto me a God, a protector, and a ***place of strength***

The expression *place of strength* built on a locative metaphor evinces the meaning of "support, resource". The Old and Middle English participial forms give way to the New English prepositional phrase of + N, thus swapping the original adjectival model for the N+of+N type. The same type is best effectively used to convey the meaning of original genitive phrases of the N^{gen}+N type:

Vulgate: generatio rectorum (Psalter 111:2)
Vespasian: cneorisse ðæra rehtra
Wycliffe: the ȝeneracioun of riȝtful men
Douay-Rheims: the generation of the righteous

The meaning of the word-combination above is "the descendants of God's followers and true believers". The original Latin and Old English genitive gets substituted by an of-phrase already in the Wycliffe version.

The more structurally complex an expression is, the more room does it have for diachronic change of whatever kind. This observation is particularly relative to all sorts of paroemiac contexts that the Bible is so full of. It takes the level of a complete sentence for a phraseologically bound word-combination to fully activate evolution, as is below:

Vulgate: ad vesper demorabitur fletus et ad matutinum lætitia (*Psalter 29:6*)
Vespasian: æt efenne wunað wop & to marȝentide blis
Wycliffe: Wepynȝ schal dwelle at euentid; and ȝladnesse at the morewtid
Douay-Rheims: In the evening weeping shall have place, and in the morning gladness

The entire context is too complex to be just an idiom. It is an aphoristic sentence of proverbial nature. Its didactic meaning amounts to the advice for a man to never yield to despair. Grammatically the three English versions above are rather different, due to the two previously mentioned factors: 1) the structural complexity allowing for variability; 2) the mainstream analytical tendency of linguistic development typical of English.

The Vespasian version above repeats the word-order and grammar forms of the Vulgate word for word. The only exception here is the Present tense of *wunian (to reside, to inhabit)* instead of the Latin *Futurum Primum*, for lack of a Future tense in Old English. The Wycliffe version is dramatically different in terms of grammar. Rendering the Latin future form is done by means of an analytical complex with a desemantized verb: *schal dwelle* succeeds to *wunað*. Themes and rhemes trade places in both parts of the verse, the word-order becomes direct. A definite article appears to qualify the noun *morewtid (morning)* (yet never is it there before *euentid (evening)*). The Douay-Rheims version finalizes the analytical transformation. Now the article appears twice, to follow not only the use, but the rule. The future form gains in analytism by further desemantization and structural discreteness: *shall have place*. As a result, the New English version of the sentence is structurally almost antithetical to the Old English one, but the original meaning is kept to the fullest.

CONCLUSION

A diachronic study of English biblical phraseology is a task of such scale that it can never claim to be exhaustive. However, it appears affordable to strike

upon a few directions of research that look the most relevant and promising.

First, diachrony is never imaginable without etymology. In this aspect it is important that all the biblical idioms in English are phraseological calques translated in the earlier time from Latin and later from Greek and Hebrew. The influence of the original texts should necessarily be paid heed to.

Second, the key problem of identifying the phraseological status of biblical word-combinations can be efficiently addressed by linguocultural methods and textual analysis. The former are instrumental in analyzing the phraseological images, which are in fact valid identities of idioms through centuries, while the latter is in demand to study the functional aspect of idiomatics in diachrony.

Third, diachrony inevitably suggests change. Research of this nature has to primarily focus on the development of biblical idioms in two dimensions: semantics and structure, which implies analyzing the lexical and syntactical properties of components used to build idiomatic word-combinations.

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