

LANGUAGES FOR SPECIAL PURPOSE

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<https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.7483423>

The article deals with the conspicuous properties of religious English as a most distinctive system of lingual expression described in terms of universals inherent in it. Subjected to analysis are grammatical, lexical, structural and discourse features of religious English found in formal articles of faith, Scriptural texts and diverse ritual forms both in ancient and modern religious contexts.

Key words: Languages for Specific Purposes, religious English; retrospective; prescriptive; imaginative; exploratory; the King James Bible; the Prayer Book; religious prayers and hymns of new times.

The human community conceived in terms of the communication of thought extends far as the bounds of such communication among men. It is not limited by political boundaries. It overcomes by translation the barriers set up by a diversity of tongues. It includes the living and the dead and extends to those as yet unborn. In this sense, human civilization can be described as the civilization of the dialogue, the great conversation in which all men can participate.

Language, being the most important means of communication, is regarded as an instrument by means of which the actual process of conveying ideas – information – from one person to another is carried out. Language for Specific Purposes (LSP) is a particular form of general language, adjusted in such a way as to describe a certain area of knowledge or of activity as precisely as possible. It can be identified as a conventionalized semiotic system based on a natural language and characterized by a cognitive function.

The most general properties of LSP are described, such as monosemy on a semantic level, hypotaxis on a syntactic level, emotional neutrality on a stylistic level and simplification on a morphological level. It is conspicuous by special lexis, syntax and a frequent usage of certain grammatical forms [5, p. 7].

All specific varieties of language can be described in terms of universals inherent in them. The language community recognizes each variety as an independent whole. It is a relatively stable system at the given stage in the development of the literary language, but it changes from one period to another, therefore language for specific purposes is a historical category.

There is a meaning of language, which includes more than the speech of man; it is conceived as the language of God. God, according to the English philosopher and philologist of the XVIIth century John Locke, ‘furnished man

with language, which was to be great instrument and common tie of society' [7, P. 229].

The language of God serves to express the unconscious thoughts and desires, which cannot be expressed in the ordinary language of social intercourse over which consciousness exercises some control. Religion to the man of faith means much more than the acceptance of a creed. It means acts of piety and worship, recourse to prayer, the partaking of sacraments, the observance of certain rituals, the performance of sacrifices and purification.

It means rendering to God what is His due, obeying His commandments, beseeching and gaining the help of His grace, whereby to lead a life, which shall seem worthy to Him. According to the present day English theologian Gerhard Ebeling, the language of faith provides 'a dialogue with the experience of the world' [4, p. 192].

Enormous influence on the development of religious as well as Standard English exercised a translation of the Bible – the King James Bible – published in the XVIIth century. Within the Judeo-Christian tradition at least God is believed to have revealed Himself to man through the vehicle of human language. Written by men under divine inspiration, Sacred Scripture is the word of God. God speaks to man in his unique way.

The King James Bible is also known as the Authorized Version of the Bible. Its style is very conservative. As the translators say in their Preface, their aim was not to make a new translation, 'but to make a good one better, or out of many good ones, one principle good one' [2, p. 65]. They aimed for a dignified, not a popular style, and often opted for older forms of the language, when modern alternatives were available. The style of the King James Bible greatly influenced both oral and written forms of language. Because it is at once human and divine, this language is the most difficult for man to interpret.

The analysis of the Bible throws special light on the peculiarities of orthography, grammar and vocabulary in religious English. The oral variant of religious English is a kind of the oratory style. The English philosopher of the XVIIth century Thomas Hobbes suggests 'that the first author of speech was God himself, who instructed Adam how to name such creatures as He presents to His sight' [6, p. 368].

The oral variant of religious English is especially close to spoken language in its emotional aspect. It is aimed at logical and emotional persuasion of the audience. As there is a direct contact with the audience, the priest can use direct address (the pronoun of the second person – you), and often begins his speech with special formulas of address to the audience, Brethren, for example. As the

priest attempts to establish closer contact with the audience, he may use such features of colloquial style as asking the audience questions, e.g.:

Consider the people of Israel; are not those who eat the sacrifices partners in the altar? What do I imply then? That food offered to idols is anything, or that an idol is anything? (St. Paul, 1 Corinthians 10)

Asking the audience questions is also usual with Baptist communities, but they are less eloquent, cf. Am I right about it?

On the other hand, unlike in colloquial style, the vocabulary of prayers, sermons, litanies and printed religious texts is usually elaborately chosen, though it may have emotional colouring and sound solemn or mourning, instructive or ironic, but it always remains mainly in the sphere of lofty style. Consider the following extract from The Lord's Prayer (Matthew 6:11):

Our Father which art in heaven, hallowed be Thy name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil: For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever, Amen.

Religious English, in short, is probably the most distinctive of all domain-restricted language varieties. There are three main reasons that provide for peculiar features of this functional style:

I. It is consciously retrospective, in the way it constantly harks back to its origins, and thus to earlier periods of the English language (or of other languages). People set great store by the accurate and acceptable transmission of their beliefs. That is why religious English abounds in archaic, obsolete forms and words: thy = your; thou = you; shalt = shall; brethren, kine, and twain.

II. It is consciously prescriptive, concerned with issues of orthodoxy and identity, both textual and ritual. This quality is deeply rooted in the very nature of the Bible. It is not the right human thoughts about God, which form the content of the Bible, but the right divine thoughts about man. The Bible tells us not how we should talk to God but what He says to us; not how we find the way to Him, but how He sought and found the way to us.

III. It is consciously imaginative and exploratory, as people make their personal response to the claims of religious belief. Some religious expressions – Bible words and phrases – may be based on metaphors and thus they are emotionally coloured – the fat years and the lean years; the land of milk and honey; voice crying in the wilderness; the golden calf; a fly in the ointment.

Words, which in other situations would seem meaningless, absurd, or self-contradictory, are accepted as potentially meaningful in a religious setting.

Expressions of this kind are especially frequent in Christianity, though they can be found in the thought of several religions. But figurative language does not stay fresh forever, and the metaphors of traditional religious expression need to be regularly refurbished, if its message is to stay relevant, meaningful and alive.

The devising of new ways of talking about God is always a controversial activity, but it is always there; and the process presents people with a steady flow of fresh language, whose aim is to make people think again about their response to the issues the language conveys.

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