

# On Approaches to Translating the Bible into English

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*The present paper analyzes the various approaches to translating the Bible into English. The differences concern denominational traditions, linguistic strategies, or the level of political correctness of the target language. The denominational traditions differ in the accepted canon of biblical books and in the preferred linguistic strategies. The linguistic approaches oscillate between formal equivalence, emphasizing the role of the source language structures, and dynamic equivalence, focusing on rendering the meaning in preference to form. A number of contemporary English versions of the Bible employ inclusive language, omitting or changing the traditional masculine language forms of the biblical language.*

*Key words: Bible translation, denominational traditions, formal equivalence, dynamic equivalence, inclusive language*

## Introduction

Over centuries, the Bible has become one of the most widespread books in the world. The Holy Scriptures constitute the basics of faith for millions of Christians of different denominations: Catholic, Protestant, Orthodox, and others, as well as for the Jews who were the first authors and readers of the Bible. Scripture is also respected by numerous Muslims, and by believers of other religions. Also, those who do not believe in the God of the Bible read it and describe its various literal, linguistic, or philosophical merits. Scholars representing different disciplines have always placed the Bible among their areas of interest. The research conducted by them includes a vast range of issues concerning the Bible: its history, cultural background, languages, interpretations, as well as translations into various languages.

This article attempts at analyzing the main approaches to translating the Bible into English. The first part presents the problem of the original languages of the Bible; as various texts have been considered the original Holy Scriptures by different people throughout history, this issue seems to be of high significance to the topic of our discussion. The second part analyses denominational and theological differences in translating the Bible into English. The third part concentrates on the problem of fidelity to the original text, and the last part focuses on the issue of gender-inclusive language in the English versions of the Bible.

## The original languages of the Bible

The origins of the Bible date back to the beginnings of the ancient Hebrew culture, hundreds of years BC. Some of the oldest fragments may have been written even about the tenth century BC. It is unknown when exactly the Hebrew started to write their Holy Scriptures, but without any doubt the oldest of the biblical stories were passed down orally before the written versions were produced.

The word *Bible* means 'little books'. The term is ultimately derived from the Greek word *biblos* which means 'book'. The diminutive of *biblos* was *biblion*, which means 'little book' or 'booklet'. The plural of *biblion* was *biblia*, and the word passed through Medieval Latin into the Old French as *bible* and Middle English as *bibul* (Trawick 1970: 18).

The original texts of the Bible were written in two Afro-Asiatic languages from the Semitic branch, Hebrew and Aramaic, and in one Indo-European language from the Hellenic branch, Greek. The Old Testament was written in Hebrew and Aramaic. There is also a Greek version, which contains some books that are absent from the Hebrew-Aramaic text. Greek is also the language of The New Testament.

The archaic Hebrew language from the Semitic family was similar to and derived from other ancient Afro-Asiatic and Semitic languages: Chaldean, also called Babylonian, and Phoenician. Aramaic resulted from the mingling of many foreign elements with Hebrew throughout the numerous invasions, defeats and periods of captivity suffered by the Hebrew people (Trawick 1970: 22; Tronina: 1986: 151).

When analysing the biblical texts, it is important to notice that different books of The Old Testament represent different stages of the language development of Hebrew. Therefore, the same words might mean something different in different texts, depending on their date of origin (Szlaga 1986: 196-198). Although the vowel sounds were spoken in Hebrew, for hundreds of years the Hebrew alphabet consisted only of consonants. Moreover, the letters were written one next to another, without any space between words and even between prose sentences or lines of poetry. The absence of vowels in the written language allowed different interpretations of the same clusters of consonants, and left many passages in obscurity. It was only thanks to the Masoretes, who were given responsibility of preserving and transmitting the traditional Hebrew text of the Bible, and from AD 600 to 925 applied notes to the biblical texts, that these days it is known how to interpret the texts according to the Jewish tradition. They invented a special system of vowel sounds and accentual marks, which they inserted into the traditional Hebrew text made only of consonants. It is on their texts that the Hebrew Bibles have been based up till today (Trawick 1970: 21-24).

From the sixth century BC, when in the year 538 BC the people of Israel returned to Palestine after the Babylonian captivity, Hebrew was used mainly in liturgy, while the official language as well as the everyday language was Aramaic. There are only few fragments in Aramaic included in The Old Testament, and scarce traces of it in The New Testament. From the linguistic point of view, however, Aramaic is very similar to Hebrew (Szlaga 1986: 198).

Greek used in the Bible was the lingua franca, a common language of the peoples living in the area of the Mediterranean Sea. It appeared during the times of Alexander the Great, about the fourth century BC. In the Hellenist era the Greek language connected the nations of the East together, and it even spread to the West. The biblical Greek, however, was not an everyday language, but the language of Hellenist literature. Two books of The Old Testament: *II Maccabees* and *The Wisdom of Solomon*, some parts of *Baruch*, and the whole of The New Testament were written originally in Greek. As an Indo-European language Greek was much different from the Semitic Hebrew or Aramaic. Nevertheless, it is worth mentioning that though on the one hand the biblical Greek tends to have many neologisms, on the other hand it also has numerous Semitisms in both vocabulary and grammar (Szlaga 1986: 198-199).

The attempts to translate the Bible into the languages of new believers started very early. In the ancient times there were Syriac and Aramaic translations, as well as Greek and Latin. Especially the two latter translations played an important role in the development of Christianity (Trawick 1970: 24-26; Tronina 1986: 164-169).

The Old Testament was translated into Greek around the third century BC, so that the Jewish people living in Greek-speaking Alexandria could read the Holy Scriptures. The famous translation is called *Septuagint* and has a special abbreviation, *LXX*. The name, according to legend, comes from the seventy translators of the Bible. This translation is very important for the study of the Bible because it was based on the pre-Masoretic version of the Hebrew Bible, and it contains the so-called deuterocanonical books, presented in the following part of our article. Moreover, it is this very edition of the Bible which was adopted by the early Christians.

The Latin text of both The Old and The New Testaments was prepared by St. Jerome in the fourth century AD, and it has been known to the world as *The Vulgate*, which means 'people's version'. The translator based his work on both the Hebrew texts and the Septuagint. It became a widespread version of the Bible in the contemporary Latin-speaking world. During the remainder of the Middle Ages The Vulgate was the version used by the Western Christian nations, and it still remains the authoritative standard text for the Roman Catholic Church.

In the late Middle Ages and in the Renaissance there were some attempts to translate the Bible into the national languages of the European nations. Among them were some Old English and Middle English paraphrases and translations of some books of the Bible, produced from Latin between AD 670 and 1380. They were intended for the use of the clergy, and the most popular were the Psalms and the Gospels. The first translation of the whole Bible was The Wycliffite Bible produced in 1380-1390 from the Latin Vulgate. In the next centuries, following the development of printing and the religious diversification in the world, numerous English versions of the Bible appeared. The English editions of Scripture represent different approaches to translating the sacred texts. These discrepancies concern both theological and linguistic issues, which usually intertwine with one another. An important role has been played by the versions considered to be the original source texts, especially when theological traditions are concerned. The next part of this article analyses the differences in translating the Bible into English among various religious denominations.

### **Denominational and theological approaches to translating the Bible**

The theological differences between denominational approaches to translating the Scriptures into English revolve around such issues as the canon of the biblical books, the dilemma between translating the form or the meaning of the original text, and the question of gender-inclusive language. Table 1 presents a selection the most popular and most important English versions of the Bible, which are either used by different religious denominations or discussed by various scholars. The Bibles are classified according to the theological tradition which stands behind their origins, and listed in chronological order of publication.

Protestant	Catholic	Other
<p>WB – Wycliffite Bibles (1382-1395)  TB – Tyndale Bible (1534)  COB – Coverdale Bible (1535)  GRB – Great Bible (1539)  GEB – Geneva Bible (1560)  BB – Bishops' Bible (1568)  KJB – King James Bible (1611)  WB – Webster Bible (1833)  YLT – Young's Literal Translation (1862)  ERV – English Revised Version (1885)  DB – Darby Bible (1890)  ASV – American Standard Version (1901)  REB – Rotherham Emphasized Bible (1902)  WNT – Weymouth New Testament (1903)  MT – Moffatt's Translation (1926)  GSB – Goodspeed Bible (1931)  BE – Bible in Basic English (1949)  RSV – Revised Standard Version (1952)  NTME – New Testament in Modern English (1958)  AMB – Amplified Bible (1965)  CPG – Cotton Patch Gospel (1968)  NEB – New English Bible (1970)  NASB – New American Standard Bible (1971)  LB – Living Bible (1971)  GNB – Good News Bible (1976)</p>	<p>RDB – Rheims-Douay Bible (1609)  CHB – Challoner Bible (1752)  CONB – Confraternity Bible (1941)  KB – Knox Bible (1955)  JB – Jerusalem Bible (1966)  RSVC – Revised Standard Version (Catholic Edition) (1966)  NAB – New American Bible (1970)  NJB – New Jerusalem Bible (1985)  NRSVC – New Revised Standard Version (Catholic Edition) (1990)</p>	<p><b>Orthodox:</b>  LB – Lamsa Bible (1933)  OSB – Orthodox Study Bible (2008)</p> <p><b>Jewish:</b>  HS – Hebrew Scriptures (1917)  LTO – Living Torah (1981)  LNA – Living Nach (1996)  TAN – Tanakh (1985)</p> <p><b>Messianic Judaism:</b>  CJB – Complete Jewish Bible (1998)</p> <p><b>Jehovah's Witnesses:</b>  NWT – New World Translation (1961)  BLE – Bible in Living English (1972)</p> <p><b>Ecumenical (critical):</b>  AB – Anchor Bible (1964-2008)</p>

<p>NIV – New International Version (1978)</p> <p>NKJB – New King James Version (1982)</p> <p>LT – Literal Translation of the Holy Bible (1985)</p> <p>NCV – New Century Version (1987)</p> <p>REB – Revised English Bible (1989)</p> <p>NRSV – New Revised Standard Version (1990)</p> <p>UNT – Unvarnished New Testament (1991)</p> <p>21KJB – Holy Bible: 21<sup>st</sup> Century King James Version (1994)</p> <p>CV – Clear Word (1994)</p> <p>CEV – Contemporary English Version (1995)</p> <p>GW – God's Word (1995)</p> <p>NLT – New Living Translation (1996)</p> <p>ESV – English Standard Version (2001)</p> <p>MES – Message: The Bible in Contemporary Language (2002)</p> <p>HCSB – Holman Christian Standard Bible (2004)</p> <p>GN – Good as New: A Radical Retelling of the Scriptures (2004)</p> <p>TNIV – Today's New International Version (2005)</p> <p>NET – New English Translation (2005)</p> <p>NAV – New Authorized Version in Present-Day English (2006)</p>		
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**Table 1. Denominational classification of selected English versions of the Bible**

Most of the English translations are Protestant. This reflects the denominational structure of the English-speaking countries, in which Protestants prevail. Then, there are nine

popular Roman Catholic editions of the Bible, two Orthodox translations, three Jewish versions, one translation prepared by Messianic Jews, two translations published by Jehovah's Witnesses and one ecumenical-critical version. It is worth noticing that our list does not include all the English translations of the Scriptures as many more of them have been published throughout history, and some are being prepared currently.

The problem of the biblical canon seems to dominate when the denominational differences between the English Bible versions are concerned. The Protestant biblical scholars have always felt free to translate from Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek. Freedom in interpreting the Bible constitutes one of the fundamental rules of the Protestant movement. The Catholic translators, on the other hand, believed they had to obey the instructions from their church leaders. The Vatican ordered them to follow the Latin version of the Bible, The Vulgate, and the Roman Catholic Church during the Council of Trent (1545-1563) decided that this was the only divinely inspired version of Scripture. The decision was highly motivated by the struggle against the Protestants who became very influential in Europe and attempted not only to translate the Bible from the original languages, but also to decide which books should be included into the canon and which should be omitted. This approach to the Bible in the Catholic Church lasted until Pope Leon XIII in 1893 recommended reading the Bible more frequently, and Pope Pius XII in 1943 suggested that the Catholic biblical scholars should pay more attention to the original languages of the Bible (Tronina 1986: 178-179).

The Bible contains from twenty-two to eighty-one books, depending on the accepted version. The Hebrew Scriptures only consist of what Christians call The Old Testament: twenty-two or twenty-four books arranged in three parts: *The Law* or *Torah* in Hebrew, *The Prophets* or *Nevi'im*, and *The Writings* or *Ketuvim*. The Catholic Bible is arranged into two parts: The Old Testament and The New Testament. The Old Testament consists of forty-six books: twenty-one *historical*, seven *doctrinal*, and eighteen *prophetic*. The New Testament consists of twenty-seven books: five *historical*, twenty-one *doctrinal*, and one *prophetic*. The Catholic Old Testament contains a number of books which are omitted in most of the Protestant Bibles. These are called *deuterocanonical books* or *apocrypha*, because they are absent from the Hebrew canon of the Bible. However, they were included into the Jewish translation of the Bible into Greek, the Septuagint, and adopted by the early Christians. Also, the Roman Catholic names of the books and spellings of their names differ in some cases from the Protestant ones. The Protestant versions of the Bible are arranged into The Old Testament (thirty-nine books), The Apocrypha (fifteen books), and The New Testament (twenty-seven books). The Old Testament consists of *Law*, *History*, *Poetry*, *Major Prophets*, and *Minor Prophets*. However, in many Protestant editions of the Bible, The Apocrypha are very often omitted. The New Testament includes the four *Gospels*, *Acts*, twenty-one *Epistles*, and the book of *Revelation* (Trawick 1970: 18-20). The Messianic Jews and Jehovah's Witnesses follow the same canon of biblical books as the Protestant denominations. The Orthodox churches vary remarkably when it comes to the contents of the Bible: some of them reject the deuterocanonical books, for instance the Greek Orthodox Church and the Russian Orthodox Church, whereas other churches accept them or even include additional books, considered to be apocryphical by Catholics and other Christian denominations (Homerski 1986: 94-97).

Table 2 compares the contents of the Bible used by the Hebrews, the Roman Catholic Church, most Orthodox churches, and the Protestant churches.

<b>The Hebrew Bible</b>	<b>The Roman Catholic Bible</b>	<b>The Protestant Bible</b>
	<b>I. The Old Testament</b>	
<b>1. The Law</b>	<b>1. Historical books</b>	<b>1. Law</b>
Genesis	Genesis	Genesis
Exodus	Exodus	Exodus
Leviticus	Leviticus	Leviticus
Numbers	Numbers	Numbers
Deuteronomy	Deuteronomy	Deuteronomy
<b>2. The Prophets</b>		
<b>a. The Earlier Prophets</b>		<b>2. History</b>
Joshua	Joshua	Joshua
Judges	Judges	Judges
Samuel (I-II)	I Samuel	I Samuel
	II Samuel	II Samuel
Kings (I-II)	I Kings	I Kings
	II Kings	II Kings
	I Chronicles	I Chronicles
	II Chronicles	II Chronicles
	Ezra	Ezra
	Nehemiah	Nehemiah
	Tobit	
	Judith	
	Esther	Esther
	I Maccabees	
	II Maccabees	
	<b>2. Doctrinal books</b>	<b>3. Poetry</b>
	Job	Job
	Psalms	Psalms
	Proverbs	Proverbs
	Ecclesiastes	Ecclesiastes
	The Song of Songs	The Song of Songs
	The Wisdom of Solomon	
	Ecclesiasticus (Sirach)	
<b>b. The Latter Prophets</b>	<b>3. Prophetic books</b>	<b>4. Major Prophets</b>
Isaiah	Isaiah	Isaiah
Jeremiah	Jeremiah	Jeremiah
	Lamentations	Lamentations
	Baruch	
Ezekiel	Ezekiel	Ezekiel
	Daniel	Daniel

		<b>5. Minor Prophets</b>
The (Twelve) Minor Prophets	Hosea	Hosea
	Joel	Joel
	Amos	Amos
	Obadiah	Obadiah
	Jonah	Jonah
	Micah	Micah
	Nahum	Nahum
	Habakkuk	Habakkuk
	Zephaniah	Zephaniah
	Haggai	Haggai
	Zechariah	Zechariah
	Malachi	Malachi
<b>3. The Writings</b>		
Psalms		
Proverbs		
Job		
The Song of Songs		
Ruth		
Lamentations		
Ecclesiastes		
Esther		
Daniel		
Ezra (+ Nehemiah)		
I-II Chronicles		
		<b>The Apocrypha</b>
		Tobit
		Judith
		The Rest of Esther
		The Wisdom of Solomon
		Ecclesiasticus (Sirach)
		Baruch
		The Epistle of Jeremiah
		The Song of the Three Holy Children
		Susanna and the Elders
		Bel and the Dragon
		I Maccabees
		II Maccabees
		I Esdras
		II Esdras
		The Prayer of Manasses



<b>II. The New Testament</b>		
	<b>1. Historical books</b>	<b>1. Gospels</b>
	Matthew	Matthew
	Mark	Mark
	Luke	Luke
	John	John
	Acts	<b>2. Acts</b>
	<b>2. Doctrinal books</b>	<b>3. Epistles</b>
	Romans	Romans
	I Corinthians	I Corinthians
	II Corinthians	II Corinthians
	Galatians	Galatians
	Ephesians	Ephesians
	Philippians	Philippians
	Colossians	Colossians
	I Thessalonians	I Thessalonians
	II Thessalonians	II Thessalonians
	I Timothy	I Timothy
	II Timothy	II Timothy
	Titus	Titus
	Philemon	Philemon
	Hebrews	Hebrews
	James	James
	I Peter	I Peter
	II Peter	II Peter
	I John	I John
	II John	II John
	III John	III John
	Jude	Jude
	<b>3. Prophetic book</b>	
	Apocalypse	<b>4. Revelation</b>

**Table 2. Contents of the Bible in different denominational traditions**

As far as linguistic traditions of translating the Bible are concerned, Protestant translators assumed two approaches to the process of translation: sometimes they were very literal in their work, but at other times their versions were very free in style and interpretation. Many churches decided to co-operate in producing good English texts of the Bible, and there are English Bible editions prepared by special committees of biblical scholars representing different denominations. Moreover, especially since the times of the second Vatican Council (1962-1965) the Roman Catholic Church has been participating in producing so-called *ecumenical*, that is cross-denominational, versions of the Bible. Nevertheless, the Catholic Church in a special instruction *Liturgiam Authenticam* (2001, point 30) objects to paraphrastic translations of Scripture, as well as to following the

principles of gender-inclusive language. The issues of literal versus free interpretation and of gender-neutral language will be discussed in the next sections of our article.

### **Formal and dynamic equivalence**

Besides the issue of denominational traditions, modern or contemporary versions of the Bible can be divided into two groups: those that want to remain literal in translating from Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek into modern languages, and those that prefer more idiomatic, paraphrastic, and free translation (Hammond 1997: 655-661). Although the translators agree that the translation should remain faithful to the original meaning, the problem is that a clear definition of faithfulness in translation does not exist (Matuszczyk 1995: 52); therefore, not all of the Bible translators agree that the translation should adhere closely to the grammatical forms of the original language. Both points of view have supporters and strong arguments, and the versions prepared by both schools are widely accepted and used among Christians.

The literal translation of the original biblical texts is often called *formal equivalence*. This approach means choosing an expression that has one-to-one matching forms in the target language, regardless of whether the meaning is the same. The formal and traditional translations tend to be rather difficult for reading, and demand a certain degree of professional knowledge from the reader. In fact, applying the formal equivalence to translating the Bible results in a foreign-sounding text, alienated from the reader's culture (Ellingworth 2007: 310). On the other hand, however, formal-equivalence Bible translations prove useful in understanding how meaning was expressed in the source text by means of original idioms or rhetorical patterns, and how individual authors used certain vocabulary terms uniquely. Moreover, many people prefer formal-language Bibles because when the text sounds old-fashioned or even ancient, it seems to be closer in meaning to the original. Additionally, it can be claimed that strange language suggests the supernatural character of the text (Nida 1997: 193-194).

The other approach to translating is the theory of *dynamic equivalence*. The term itself was coined by a linguist and translator, Eugene A. Nida (1964), who later developed his theory and renamed it as *functional equivalence* (Nida and de Waard 1986). Central to the approach is the principle of translating meaning in preference to form, as Nida (1964: 159) states, "a translation of dynamic equivalence aims at complete naturalness of expression". Thus, dynamic equivalence means choosing an expression that yields equivalent meaning in the target language, ascribing little significance to the forms, or even ignoring them.

The supporters of this translation school argue that sentence structures vary remarkably between languages, especially between such distant languages as Hebrew or Greek and English. Furthermore, words take different meanings, and it is often difficult to find English equivalents for many Hebrew or Greek words, which mean different things in various contexts. Then, the cultural background of the Bible and its influence on the biblical language differ from today's English-speaking world in many aspects. Therefore, the original idioms or cultural references seem to be incomprehensible for today's readers and require certain changes or adjustments. The more dynamic or even paraphrastic the translation is, the more readable and better understood it becomes. However, the problem is that introducing

too many changes may result in losing or distorting the original meaning (Poythress and Grudem 2000; Matuszczyk 2001: 59-60).

Table 3 presents a biblical verse from The New Testament (Ephesians 1:3) in selected English translations of the Bible, considered to be the most literal.

<b>Bible</b>	<b>Ephesians 1:3</b>
TB (Protestant)	<i>Blessed be God the father of oure lorde Iesus Christ which hath blessed vs with all maner of spirituall blessinges in hevelly thynges by Chryst</i>
GEB (Protestant)	<i>Blessed be God, and the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which hath blessed us with all spiritual blessing in heavenly things in Christ,</i>
KJB (Protestant)	<i>Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ:</i>
YLT (Protestant)	<i>Blessed 'is' the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who did bless us in every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ,</i>
ERV (Protestant)	<i>Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ:</i>
ASV (Protestant)	<i>Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ:</i>
LB (Orthodox)	<i>Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heaven through Christ;</i>
RSV(C) (Protestant and Catholic)	<i>Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places,</i>
NASB (Protestant)	<i>Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ,</i>
NKJB (Protestant)	<i>Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ,</i>
LT (Protestant)	<i>Blessed is the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenlies with Christ,</i>
NRSV(C) (Protestant and Catholic)	<i>Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places,</i>

ESV (Protestant)	<i>Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places,</i>
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**Table 3. Ephesians 1:3 in selected English versions of the Bible employing formal equivalence**

All the examples in Table 3 have identical sentence structure: a complex sentence with a non-defining relative clause, starting with the relative pronoun 'who', or 'which' in the 16<sup>th</sup> century texts (TB, GEB). The fact of employing the same grammatical structures can be explained by the translators' intention to reflect the structures of the original text. The main clause contains the formulaic subjunctive form 'blessed be (the) God', except for LT and YLT, which have the personal form 'is' instead, written in inverted commas, marking an additional word, absent from the original text. In the subordinate clause, most of the translations use the Present Perfect verb form, 'has/hath blessed', whereas two versions have the Past Simple form: 'blessed' in LT and the emphatic structure 'did bless' in YLT. The differences concern also the order of the object ('with' or 'in every spiritual blessing') and complements ('in/by/with/through Christ' and 'in (the) heavenly places or things'). In addition to the expression 'in (the) heavenly places' in most cases we have individual differences, which rather refer to the form of the lexemes, not their meaning: 'in heavenly things' in TB and GEB, 'in heaven' in LB, or 'in the heavenlies' in LT.

The next table shows how some English translations of the Bible employ dynamic equivalence in rendering the quotation from Ephesians 1:3.

<b>Bible</b>	<b>Ephesians 1:3</b>
BE (Protestant)	<i>Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has given us every blessing of the Spirit in the heavens in Christ:</i>
NTME (Protestant)	<i>Praise be to God for giving us through Christ every possible spiritual benefit as citizens of Heaven!</i>
CPG (Protestant)	<i>Three cheers for our Lord Jesus Christ's Father-God, who through Christ has cheered us along the heavenly way with every possible spiritual encouragement!</i>
NEB (Protestant)	<i>Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has bestowed on us in Christ every spiritual blessing in the heavenly realms.</i>
GNB (Protestant)	<i>Let us give thanks to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! For in our union with Christ he has blessed us by giving us every spiritual blessing in the heavenly world.</i>
NCV (Protestant)	<i>Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. In Christ, God has given us every spiritual blessing in the heavenly world.</i>
GW (Protestant)	<i>Praise the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! Through Christ, God has blessed us with every spiritual blessing that heaven has to</i>

	<i>offer.</i>
CEV (Protestant)	<i>Praise the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ for the spiritual blessings that Christ has brought us from heaven!</i>
NLT (Protestant)	<i>How we praise God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly realms because we belong to Christ.</i>
MES (Protestant)	<i>How blessed is God! And what a blessing he is! He's the Father of our Master, Jesus Christ, and takes us to the high places of blessing in him.</i>

**Table 4. Ephesians 1:3 in selected English versions of the Bible employing dynamic equivalence**

The versions quoted in Table 4 do not follow the same sentence structure as they do not attempt at reflecting the original text grammar. The priority is conveying the meaning, not the form. Instead of the traditional 'blessed be (the) God' these versions have other expressions, such as 'praise be to (the) God', 'how blessed is God', 'how we praise God', 'let us give thanks to the God' or 'three cheers for our Lord'. The last rendering comes from CPG, which is claimed to be one of the most paraphrastic English versions of the Bible, one that is not only highly interpretative in its translation, but also changes remarkably the cultural background of the Scriptures, placing the biblical events in the reality of the contemporary United States of America. Similarly, instead of 'has blessed us' in formal translations, the dynamic translations have more interpretative expressions, for instance: 'has cheered us along the heavenly way with every possible spiritual encouragement' (CPG), 'takes us to the high places of blessing' (MES), or 'has bestowed on us in Christ every spiritual blessing' (NEB). In place of the most common expression 'in the heavenly places' in formal translations, here we have other phrases: 'in the heavens' (BE), 'in the heavenly world' (NCV, GNT), 'along the heavenly way' (CPG), 'in the heavenly realms' (NEB, NLT), 'the high places of blessing' (MES), 'blessings that Christ has brought us from heaven' (CEV), 'blessing that heaven has to offer' (GW), or even 'citizens of Heaven' (NTME).

The last group of English Bible translations includes some of the versions that are optimal when it comes to using dynamic equivalence.

<b>Bible</b>	<b>Ephesians 1:3</b>
DB (Protestant)	<i>Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenlies in Christ;</i>
WNT (Protestant)	<i>Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has crowned us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly realms in Christ;</i>
MT (Protestant)	<i>Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ who in Christ has blessed us with every spiritual blessing within the heavenly sphere!</i>

NWT (Jehova's Witnesses)	<i>Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, for he has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in union with Christ,</i>
NIV (Protestant)	<i>Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ.</i>
NJB (Catholic)	<i>Blessed be God the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with all the spiritual blessings of heaven in Christ.</i>
CJB (Messianic Judaism)	<i>Praised be ADONAI, Father of our Lord Yeshua the Messiah, who in the Messiah has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in heaven.</i>
HCSB (Protestant)	<i>Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavens, in Christ;</i>
NET (Protestant)	<i>Blessed is the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly realms in Christ.</i>
TNIV (Protestant)	<i>Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ.</i>

**Table 5. Ephesians 1:3 in selected optimal English versions of the Bible**

The translations presented in Table 5 follow the same sentence structure as the formal versions. The differences concern mainly the choice of vocabulary, but the suggested equivalents are not very interpretative or paraphrastic. Some of these translations start the main clause with 'blessed be', others with 'praised be' or 'praise be to'. In place of 'has blessed us' WNT uses 'has crowned us'. The expression 'in (the) heavenly places' is additionally rendered as 'in (the) heaven(s)' (CJB, HCSB), 'in the heavenly realms' (WNT, NET, NIV, and TNIV), 'within the heavenly sphere' (MT), 'in the heavenlies' (DB), or 'the spiritual blessings of heaven' (NJB). CJB also utilises 'Adonai' instead of 'God', and 'Yeshua the Messiah' instead of 'Jesus Christ' since such is the Jewish tradition. These choices confirm the tendency to find a compromise between faithfulness to the original language forms and the contemporary English lexis.

Although we can find a great number of the versions of Scripture representing both translation schools, it can be observed that the degree of formal or dynamic equivalence in each version is individual and varies from one Bible edition to another. This fact has been observed by biblical scholars, and thus, Vern S. Poythress and Wayne Grudem (2000) suggest classifying all the English Bibles on a linear spectrum, on which one end will be literal, and the other paraphrastic. Between these extremes we can place all the English Bible versions, according to the degree of literariness or idiomaticity they present. As shown in this article, there are very literal English translations, such as LT, YLT, NASB, KJB, some 'middle'-equivalence Bibles, for instance NJB, CJB, NWT, or NIV, and some dynamic translations,

featuring different degrees of their paraphrastic character, for instance BE, NLT, GNB, NEB, or CPG.

Formal equivalence		Dynamic equivalence	
NASB	NWT	BE	CPG
NKJV	NIV	NEB	GNB
LT	TNIV	NCV	
RSV	NJB	NLT	
YLT	CJB	GW	
NRSV	HCSB	MES	
	NET		

**Figure 1. The degree of equivalence in contemporary translations of the Bible into English (based on Poythress, Grudem 2000)**

### Gender-inclusive language

The latest translations take into account also the problem of political correctness: they try to sound gender-neutral and use the so-called *inclusive language*. Gender-neutral translation is a complicated issue but generally comes from a perceived change in language usage, driven by feminist tendencies in society. Because of the male-female differences in the various areas of the language, such as phonology, morphology and vocabulary, English is sometimes accused of being sexist. Political correctness demands choosing neutral language forms in order to avoid any form of discrimination (Wardhaugh 1992: 312-317). Language awareness concerning the gender issues is also present in theology and biblical studies. However, the practice of changing long-established linguistic forms in the religious discourse is perceived as very controversial, as in views of some scholars this tendency seems to neglect the tradition originating in the cultural backgrounds of the ancient world of the Bible (Marlowe 2001).

In the original biblical languages, it is common to use the masculine gender in the generic sense, that is to represent both masculine and feminine referents, and meaning 'people in general'. This usage developed because of the lack of a singular personal pronoun unspecified for gender. Advocates of gender-neutral translation contend that today's English speakers prefer more inclusive language, and think that women are excluded from the generic masculine forms. According to this approach, the inclusive language in translation helps to de-patriarchalize the Bible as well the whole Judeo-Christian world, which is perceived by feminists as masculinist biased (Simon 1996: 121).

In English the use of generic masculine forms was common until recent times, when under the influence of political correctness, people started to deliberately change the masculine language forms into the neutral ones, whenever the generic meaning was intended.

Among other issues, the problem concerns the pronouns 'he/him/his/himself' which sometimes mean both men and women. In gender-neutral texts they are replaced with 'you', 'one', 'they', or a longer expression 'he or she'. The results of Poythress's research into the use of masculine pronouns in contemporary English show that in some cases the generic use of masculine forms is still used regularly, whereas in others it definitely only refers to male subjects (2003: 371-380).

Apart from the use of neutral pronouns, the most important issues of the inclusive-language English Bibles concern the problem of the word 'man' meaning 'human' or 'people', and addressing the communities of believers by means of masculine expressions, such as 'brethren'. Introducing the changes into the biblical language seems to be a very hard task as the culture presented in the Bible was male-oriented. Therefore, the biblical writers usually presupposed the absence of women from their audience, even though the listeners and readers of the Scriptures were always both men and women, with no difference in this matter between the times of The Old Testament and of The New Testament. Also, the scale of inclusive changes varies in different Bible translations: some of them are very radical, for instance NRSV(C) or TNIV, while others introduce only mild changes, for example GNB or NJB, which can be assessed as traditional when compared to the most extreme inclusive English translations. The most gender-neutral versions usually also apply a high degree of dynamic equivalence in their language (Marlowe 2001).

Table 6 presents a verse from The New Testament (Hebrews 12:7) in some English Bibles that feature inclusive language.

<b>Bible</b>	<b>Hebrews 12:7</b>
GNB (Protestant)	<i>Endure what you suffer as being a father's punishment; your suffering shows that God is treating you as his children. Was there ever a child who was not punished by his father?</i>
NRSV(C) (Protestant and Catholic)	<i>Endure trials for the sake of discipline. God is treating you as children; for what child is there whom a parent does not discipline?</i>
CEV (Protestant)	<i>Be patient when you are being corrected! This is how God treats his children. Don't all parents correct their children?</i>
NLT (Protestant)	<i>As you endure this divine discipline, remember that God is treating you as his own children. Whoever heard of a child who was never disciplined?</i>
MES (Protestant)	<i>God is educating you; that's why you must never drop out. He's treating you as dear children. This trouble you're in isn't punishment; it's training,</i>
TNIV (Protestant)	<i>Endure hardship as discipline; God is treating you as his children. For what children are not disciplined by their father?</i>

**Table 6. Hebrews 12:7 in selected English Bibles featuring inclusive language**



Compare them with a few examples of traditional translations without gender-neutral language:

Bible	Hebrews 12:7
KJB (Protestant)	<i>If ye endure chastening, God dealeth with you as with sons; for what son is he whom the father chasteneth not?</i>
YLT (Protestant)	<i>if chastening ye endure, as to sons God beareth Himself to you, for who is a son whom a father doth not chasten?</i>
NASB (Protestant)	<i>It is for discipline that you endure; God deals with you as with sons; for what son is there whom his father does not discipline?</i>

**Table 7: Hebrews 12:7 in selected traditional English translations of the Bible**

The quotations in Table 6 show some of strategies applied by translators aiming at introducing gender-neutral language into the Bible. The original expression 'son(s)' is converted into 'child' or 'children'. In the original text, as well as in the formal translations God is called 'father'. However, some of the inclusive versions avoid this word, substituting it with 'parent' (for instance, CEV, or NRSV(C)).

## Conclusions

This article presents different approaches to translating the Bible into English. First, denominational and theological traditions of translating the Scriptures are discussed. Here, the main differences concern the contents of the Bible, which, in fact, is a collection of books, written over a period of around one thousand years, in several different languages. The most important approaches concern the issue of language. The formal equivalence translations emphasize the importance of the original text structures and semantics, whereas the dynamic equivalence versions concentrate more on the meaning itself than on the form. In both groups some versions can be classified as extreme in the adopted translation strategy, whereas others can be classified as optimal, trying to be faithful to the original text and remain readable to the contemporary reader at the same time. The last issue discussed in the paper refers to the problem of inclusive language in the English Bible translations. This approach aims at adjusting the language of the Bible to today's society, which is sensitive to any forms of discrimination, even at the cost of the original meaning of Scripture.

It is worth noticing that all the approaches discussed in our paper tend to overlap with one another. The choice of formal or dynamic equivalence, as well as the introduction of gender-neutral language depends on the denomination of the translators and their theological background. It is the Protestant translations that apply the highest degrees of dynamic equivalence, resulting in extremely free paraphrases of the Bible, whereas the Catholic translators keep their work within certain limits, imposed on them by their religious leaders. Also, it can be observed that inclusive language is unlikely to appear in the formal English

translations, which follow strictly the original language forms with reference to gender. Openness to this question is generally combined with the dynamic equivalence in translation.

On the one hand, such a great diversity of English Bibles may cause confusion among believers or non-believers desiring to read the Scriptures. On the other hand, however, the variety of the translations which take into account such issues as theological traditions, formal and dynamic equivalence, or gender-neutral language allows readers to personalize their contact with the text according to their beliefs, sensitivity, language competence and the purpose of biblical studies. Definitely, the affluence in approaches to translating the Bible into English may contribute remarkably to better understanding of Scripture in today's world.

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