

“Et ouvrant sa bouche, il les enseignait en disant”  
“And he opened his mouth and taught them saying”

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**Résumé :** *La première partie de l'article décrit de nombreuses expressions bibliques liées à l'image de la bouche et construites sur la base d'une métaphore notionnelle BOUCHE EST UNE OUVERTURE. La deuxième partie présente une analyse critique de quatre fragments tirés des deux Testaments dans douze traductions anglaises contemporaines de la Bible développant cette métaphore. On y montre qu'un juste choix d'une technique de traduction ainsi qu'une réalisation efficace d'une équivalence appropriée doivent s'appuyer sur une analyse et une comparaison attentives des systèmes notionnels de la langue source et de la langue cible.*

**Mots-clés :** *la Bible, traduction, bouche, métaphore*

**Abstract:** *This paper provides an overview of rich biblical imagery related to the mouth, built around the conceptual metaphor MOUTH IS AN OPENING, followed by a critical analysis of four text units from both Testaments employing the basic extensions of this metaphor in the renderings of twelve contemporary English versions of the Bible. It is demonstrated that the meaningful choice of translating techniques and the type of equivalence pursued in translation must be based on a thorough examination and comparison of the conceptual systems of the source and target languages.*

**Key words:** *Bible, translation, mouth, metaphor*

Considering the predominantly oral character of the Jewish and early Christian literary tradition, it is only natural that one of the major biblical images should be that of the mouth. Indeed, mentions of the mouth, as well as the related organs: the lips and tongue, are found abundantly throughout the Bible in a variety of contexts, testifying of a remarkable phraseological and metaphorical potential of this concept. Some biblical expressions employing the image of the mouth are easily understood cross-culturally - and, consequently, translated - as referring to the universal and fundamental human experience of eating, drinking, and speaking. However, it seems that much of the mouth imagery is largely culture-specific and, as such, may pose a challenge in translation. The purpose of this article is therefore two-fold: (1) to offer a conceptual and cultural overview of biblical phrases, idioms, and metaphors related to the

mouth, and (2) to analyze their selected translational renderings into English in terms of the communicative effect against the background of phraseology shaped by conceptualization.

## I.

The usual Hebrew word for mouth, *peh*, appears around five hundred times in the Old Testament (OT). Its Greek counterpart is *stōma*, found profusely both in the Septuagint as the typical rendering of *peh* and in the New Testament (NT) - almost eighty times. Since there is a striking phraseological and metaphorical correspondence between both words, chiefly attributable to strong Jewish influences present in the Greek Bible, it seems plausible to discuss them jointly as a single Semitic concept. Consequently, even though the scope of this analysis for the sake of brevity shall be limited to the Greek language and, within that domain, mostly to the noun *stōma*, the Hebrew background of this notion must be constantly borne in mind.

Biblical references to the mouth may be divided into several principal categories that are both distinct and related to one another. The common element is the underlying conceptual metaphor MOUTH IS AN OPENING; the differentiation results from various metaphorical extensions of this fundamental image.

### 1.1. Mouth as the organ for eating and drinking

Unlike the classical Greek ideas stressing the opposition between the body and the soul, and consequently, the sacred and the profane - a distinction later enthusiastically embraced by Christianity - the ancient Hebrew anthropology is surprisingly holistic. Most of the Torah is very practical in nature, reflecting the assumption that the spiritual reality is inherently intertwined with and essentially manifested in the material world.<sup>1</sup> Therefore, the concept of the mouth as an opening combined with anthropological ideas firmly rooted in human physicality yields the metaphorical image of a man as a material container that is fed - or, to retain some conceptual coherence, filled - through the opening of the mouth.

The resulting imagery of food entering one's mouth is found in a number of passages, both in the OT, e.g. Ezekiel 4:14: "No unclean meat has ever entered my mouth" (NAS<sup>2</sup>), as well as the NT, e.g. when Jesus directly draws on this anthropological concept saying that "it is not what enters into the mouth that defiles the man" (Matthew 15:11, NAS) or when Peter echoes Ezechiel's words: "Nothing impure or unclean has ever entered my mouth" (Acts 11:8, NIV).

It should be noted that in all the passages mentioned above the idea of food entering the mouth always has a ritual and religious aspect, which illustrates Jewish holistic anthropology. But the mouth is not only the place where the clean or unclean foods enter the body; it is also where liquids can be spewed forth (Maahs, 1995:429), both literally and metaphorically, as when Christ says to the believers in Laodicea: "So, because you are lukewarm—neither hot nor cold—I am about to spit you out of my mouth" (Revelation 3:16, NIV). Thus the

physical activity of swallowing or spitting out becomes symbolic for acceptance or rejection, respectively, while the mouth itself is often pictured as the center of taste, and - figuratively - discernment (Beck, 1962:454), e.g. “How sweet are your words to my taste, sweeter than honey to my mouth!” (Psalm 119:103, NIV).

## 1.2. Mouth as the organ of speech

The second basic extension of the metaphor MOUTH IS AN OPENING, and certainly the most prevalent one, is connected with viewing the mouth as the organ of speech. Just as a physical opening lets out the contents of a container, it is through the mouth that words come out. “The opening of the lips appears as a door that can be opened or closed and out of which words proceed directly from the heart, the room to which the door leads. The door is only the outer façade; what is inside is what counts” (Rylen *et al.*, 1998:515). This image has a number of aspects, discussed subsequently below.

(a) On the most literal level, if the mouth is the opening for words, expressions like “full of words” (e.g. Job 32:18, NIV) or “sealed lips” (e.g. Psalm 40:9, NIV) are clearly quantitative, standing for linguistic abundance or shortage, i.e. wordiness or silence. Surely enough, this differentiation is not devoid of an evaluative aspect, which, however, is not unequivocal: both to speak when one should rather be silent and not to speak when one should rather proclaim God’s works is equally disgraceful.

(b) Likewise, the image of permanently sealed or closed mouth corresponds to speechlessness or silence. E.g. it is said of Zechariah, the father of John the Baptist, punished for his unbelief with a temporary inability to speak, that eventually “his mouth was opened and his tongue was loosed, and he began to speak” (Luke 1:64, NIV).

Reversing the perspective in the image of words coming out of the mouth, it may be argued that just as an opening provides access to the interior of a container, the mouth reveals the character of the inner person; it “becomes a window through which the soul may be viewed” (Ryken *et al.*, 1998:575). As such, the mouth “stands ... quite near to mankind’s essential being” (Maahs, 1995:428), giving a true expression of one’s disposition, e.g. happiness - “Then our mouth was filled with laughter” (Psalm 126:2, NAS); aggression - “They opened their mouth wide against me” (Psalm 35:21, NAS); courage - “My mouth speaks boldly against my enemies” (1 Samuel 2:1, NAS); arrogance - “Do not let arrogance come out of your mouth” (1 Samuel 2:3, NAS); thankfulness - “With my mouth I will give thanks abundantly to the LORD” (Psalm 109:30, NAS); corruption and dishonesty - “His mouth is full of curses and deceit and oppression” (Psalm 10:7, NAS); purity and innocence - “And no lie was found in their mouth; they are blameless” (Revelation 14:5, NAS) (Maahs, 1995:428).

In short, as Jesus once put it, “the mouth speaks out of that which fills the heart” (Matthew 12:34, NAS). This is why “Hebrew poetry often uses the words *mouth* and *heart* as synonymous parallels” (Ryken *et al.*, 1998:575), e.g. “But

the word is very near you, in your mouth and in your heart, that you may observe it” (Deuteronomy 30:14, NAS); “The heart of the righteous ponders how to answer, but the mouth of the wicked pours out evil things” (Proverbs 15:28, NAS). At the same time, it should be noted that in Hebrew anthropology the heart is not merely the center of emotions - that role was typically assigned to kidneys - but represents the “mind, character, disposition, and inclination” (Holladay, 1988:171).

Sometimes the mouth is figuratively presented in opposition to the heart, as in Isaiah 29:13: “The Lord says: ‘These people come near to me with their mouth and honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me’” (NIV). Hypocrisy consists of “a lack of agreement between the heart and the mouth” (Maahs, 1995:428), hence the frequent synecdoche of a truthful or false mouth (e.g. Job 27:4; Psalm 31:18; 120:2; Malachi 2:16) - an image particularly powerful in oral societies, where spoken commitments are binding, therefore oaths and testimony must be handled cautiously (Ryken *et al.*, 1998:575).

Since the mouth reveals moral character, the cleansing of the mouth symbolizes inner purification, as in Isaiah 6:6-7: “Then one of the seraphim flew to me with a burning coal in his hand, which he had taken from the altar with tongs. He touched my mouth with it and said, ‘Behold, this has touched your lips; and your iniquity is taken away and your sin is forgiven’” (NAS) (Ryken *et al.*, 1998:575). Likewise, Jesus juxtaposes the image of the mouth as the organ of speech, revealing the true human character, with the previously mentioned image of the organ for eating and drinking when he claims that “It is not what enters into the mouth that defiles the man, but what proceeds out of the mouth, this defiles the man” (Matthew 15:11, NAS).

As the entrance into the inner person, the mouth is also connected with thought and knowledge, e.g.: “This book of the law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do according to all that is written in it” (Joshua 1:8, NAS). It may be argued that “in the background of such references lies the practice in an oral culture of remembering a text by reciting it” (Ryken *et al.*, 1998:575).

(c) To be described as “somebody else’s mouth” means to convey that person’s message. This image is used both with reference to God, who puts his words in the human mouth (e.g. Isaiah 51:16) and speaks through the mouths of his chosen ones (e.g. Acts 4:25), as well as on the human level, as when God commands Moses: “You are to speak to [your brother Aaron] and put the words in his mouth; and I, even I, will be with your mouth and his mouth, and I will teach you what you are to do. Moreover, he shall speak for you to the people; and he will be as a mouth for you” (Exodus 4:15-16, NAS).

(d) The mouth is often represented as a separate, rational, moral agent, quite independent of the person who owns it - sometimes so much so that its owner is at odds with it (Ryken *et al.*, 1998:515). E.g. Job is told by one of his friends that his own lips testify against him (Job 15:6). Therefore, the

mouth - or the tongue - may need to be guarded and watched (Psalm 141:3; Proverbs 13:3), bridled like a horse (James 1:26), controlled like a rudder (James 3:4), or extinguished like a fire (James 3:5).

(e) Furthermore, the Bible by way of anthropomorphism refers to the mouth of God as an organ of speech by which he reveals himself, (Maahs, 1995:429), as in the well-known statement: “Man does not live by bread alone, but man lives by everything that proceeds out of the mouth of the LORD” (Deuteronomy 8:3, NAS; c.f. Matthew 4:4; Luke 4:4).

(f) Finally, in agreement with each of the above variations of the image of the mouth as an organ of speech, *stōma* can metonymically refer to speech itself (Radl, 1990:279), e.g. “by the mouth of two or three witnesses every fact may be confirmed” (Matthew 18:16, NAS); “By your own words [*stōma*] I will judge you, you worthless slave” (Luke 19:22, NAS); “For I will give you utterance [*stōma*] and wisdom which none of your opponents will be able to resist or refute” (Luke 21:15, NAS).

### 1.3. Mouth in a non-human context

The concept of the mouth as an opening is sometimes carried beyond the human context. Thus *peh* or *stōma* are used with reference to animals: the beak of a dove (Genesis 8:11), jaws of a lion (Psalm 22:21; Daniel 6:22), the mouth of a donkey (Numbers 22:28), horse (James 3:3), and fish (Matthew 17:27). Moreover, inanimate things and abstract phenomena are also described as having a mouth. The earth figuratively opens its mouth to receive Abel’s blood (Genesis 4:11) or to swallow victims of an earthquake (Numbers 16:30) and Sheol - the land of the dead - is said to devour people with its mouth (Psalm 141:7; Isaiah 5:14). Mouth is also found in mentions of caves (Joshua 10:18), lions’ dens (Daniel 6:17), wells (Genesis 29:2ff), rivers (Joshua 15:5), gorges (Jeremiah 48:28), sacks (Genesis 42:27f) and the womb (Hosea 13:13) (Maahs, 1995:429). All these references, subsumed under the overarching metaphor MOUTH IS AN OPENING, reveal an anthropocentric perspective in perception and conceptualization.

Interestingly, sometimes the edge of a sword is also literally called *stōma* (e.g. Luke 21:24, Hebrews 11:34), either because of the perceived likeness to the shape of the tongue or by reference to the frequent biblical image of a mouth likened to a sword (e.g. Job 5:17; Psalm 57:3; Isaiah 47:2; Revelation 2:16), which, “like the jaws of a wild animal, devours people” (Danker 1994:947). This is symbolically congruous with the apocalyptic vision of the glorified Christ out of whose mouth “came a sharp two-edged sword” (Revelation 1:16; 19:15, 21).

### 1.4. Idiomatic usages and gestures

Some aspects of the image of the mouth outlined above are further employed in idiomatic expressions. God’s words of Moses, “with him I speak mouth to mouth, even openly, and not in dark sayings” (Numbers 12:8, NAS), present the mouth as the place where honest, intimate and uninterrupted communication takes place, which in present-day Western culture roughly corresponds to the concept of a “face to face” conversation (Maahs, 1995:429). “To declare something with

one mouth” (cf. 1 Kings 22:13) is, in contemporary English terms, “to speak with one voice”; the idea of unity prevails in this idiom even when no verbal activity is meant, e.g. “They gather themselves together to fight with Joshua, and with Israel - one mouth” (Joshua 9:2, YLT).

Finally, some attitudes and emotions may be symbolically expressed by means of gestures involving the mouth. Kissing, especially the hand (e.g. Job 31:27; 1 Kings 19:18), was an ancient form of adoration, although the erotic use of the mouth in kissing is also noted (Song of Solomon 1:2) (Maahs, 1995:429). Putting one’s mouth in the dust (e.g. Lamentations 3:29) is a gesture of repentance and self-abasement while laying one’s hand over the mouth (e.g. Job 21:5; 29:9; 40:4) in order to block it from speaking is a sign of meekness, awe, and possibly shame (Maahs, 1995:429) (unlike in the present-day Western culture in which the same gesture typically expresses fear or surprise).

## II.

Having outlined the most important aspects of biblical imagery related to the concept of the mouth, let us turn to selected English translations of some of its specimens representing each of the categories described above. In the subsequent analysis the central issue is by far the degree of congruity of certain elements of the respective conceptual systems of the source and target languages and cultures. As has been demonstrated, the Jewish conceptual metaphor *MOUTH IS AN OPENING*, capable of a number of extensions, is reflected in rich phraseology, symbolism, and idiom, both in Hebrew and Greek. Thus, two major questions to be answered below are: (1) whether and to what extent this imagery is conceptually and culturally congruent with contemporary English phraseology and (2) what communicative effect results when translators retain, abandon, or replace the numerous and varied biblical references to the mouth.

In order to prevent this analysis from exceeding acceptable space limits, the number of Bible versions examined here has been narrowed down to twelve relatively recent translations diversified in terms of translation philosophy, date of publication, and confessional background. These include the CJB (1998), ESV (2001), GNT (1992), MES (2002), NAB (1991), NET (1998), NIV (1984), NJB (1985), NKJV (1982), NLT (2004), NRSV (1989), and NWT (1984). For the sake of simplicity, when discussing OT passages the text of the Septuagint shall be referred to.

### 2.1. Daniel 10:3, [*arton epithumiōn ouk ephagon*] kai kreas kai oinos ouk eisēlthen eis to stōma mou

English translations:

- (a) [... no meat or wine] came/enter(ed) ([in]to) my mouth/lips (CJB, ESV, NAS, NET, NKJV, NRSV, NWT);
- (b) [... no meat or wine] crossed my lips (NLT);
- (c) [... no meat or wine] touched my lips (NIV);
- (d) I touched [no meat or wine] (NJB);
- (e) I did not eat [... any meat, drink any wine] (GNT);
- (f) I ate [only plain and simple food, no ... meat or wine] (MES).

On the basis of an extensive search in the British National Corpus (BNC)<sup>3</sup> it must be concluded that the concept of the mouth as an opening for food is practically absent from contemporary English phraseology. The few references to something “entering one’s mouth” never occur in standard descriptions of eating and drinking; moreover, in several instances they indicate something untypical or unpleasant (e.g. hair or water while swimming). Interestingly, in the even less frequent image of something “coming into one’s mouth,” the inside-to-outside perspective typically prevails, i.e. the mouth is not viewed as an entrance but as an exit (for saliva or, figuratively, the heart “leaping to one’s mouth”). Thus, the renderings listed in (a) above, found in eight out of twelve examined versions must be considered conceptually incongruent in the target language, which results in definite foreignization of the respective translations.

Renderings (b) and (c), though retaining the mention of the lips, are based on metaphorical extensions of established phraseological patterns. The expression “to cross one’s lips” - conceptually analogous to the much more frequent “to cross one’s mind,” does occur in English but only with reference to speaking or smiling, which again involves the inside-to-outside perspective, essentially incongruent with the idea of eating and drinking. Likewise, the image of something touching one’s lips in the literal sense typically refers to kissing and in the prevailing figurative sense to smiling. As a result, both (b) and (c) are metaphorically intelligible but appear as peripheral - or at least definitely non-standard - within their respective categories.

The last three renderings (d)-(f) are undoubtedly the most natural conceptually against the background of contemporary English phraseology. The metonymical reference to eating as touching, particularly in negative constructions, emphasizes the voluntary character of the activity, which perfectly fits this particular context focused on fasting. Finally, two versions completely abandon metaphorical imagery in favor of explicit references to eating and drinking. The fact that these are the most paraphrastic translations within the researched corpus additionally confirms that metaphors employed by renderings (a)-(c) may be perceived as foreign and potentially confusing in English (although it could also be argued that the foreignizing effect of renderings [a]-[c] results from the attempts to preserve the parallelism of the entire verse).

## 2.2. Joshua 10:18, [... *kulisate lithous*] *epi to stōma tou spēlaiou*

English translations:

- (a) ... against/over/to the mouth of the cave (CJB, ESV, MES, NAS, NET, NIV, NJB, NKJV, NRSV, NWT);
- (b) ... in front of the entrance to the cave (GNT);
- (c) [cover] the opening of the cave (NLT).

Ten out of the twelve examined versions, including the most paraphrastic one (i.e. MES), unanimously speak of the “mouth of the cave” in this verse, even though non-metaphorical descriptions are clearly available, as evidenced by the two remaining renderings (b) and (c). This remarkable unanimity may indicate

that the conceptualization of openings in the ground as mouths is to a significant degree present in contemporary English usage. Indeed, a sequence of queries in the BNC has demonstrated that metaphorical references to the openings of both caves and tunnels as “mouths” are more common than the non-figurative “entrances” or “exits.” Consequently, it may be concluded that in this case the conceptual and phraseological convergence between the source and target language enables literal translation without any substantial change in meaning.

### 2.3. Second Corinthians 6:11, *To stōma hēmōn aneōgen pros humas [Korinthioi, hē kardia hēmōn peplautuntai]*

English translations:

- (a) We have spoken frankly/freely/openly/honestly [with/to you] ... (CJB, ESV, GNT, (b) NET, NIV, NJB, NKJV, NLT, NRSV);
- (c) Our mouth has spoken freely to you ... (NAS);
- (d) Our mouth has been opened to YOU ... (NWT);
- (e) I long for you to enter this wide-open, spacious life (MES).

This verse contains an obvious parallelism in which the reference to the opening of the *stōma* (mouth) is juxtaposed with the image of a widely open *kardia* (heart), which corresponds to the Jewish conviction concerning the harmony of these two organs and their respective functions in the context of moral integrity, as indicated in 1.2(c) above. However, only two versions hold on to a reference to the mouth and only one of them does it literally, i.e. without any mention of speaking; the vast majority abandon the image of the opened mouth whatsoever in favor of non-idiomatic expressions - which is particularly striking against the fact that all of them (except for the MES which offers an extremely paraphrastic rendering, completely detached from the original imagery), preserve the parallel concept of the widely open heart. On the basis of this prevalent tendency we may observe that while the metaphor of the open heart is generally perceived as congruent with English conceptual anthropology, the image of the open mouth representing frank and honest speech is highly unfamiliar and as such is carefully avoided by most surveyed translations, including those pursuing formal equivalence elsewhere. Moreover, it may also be hypothesized that the image of someone’s open or opening mouth in biblical writings carries some paralinguistic significance, as evidenced by the prevailing non-figurative references to honesty, frankness, and openness (renderings [a]-[b]), i.e. qualities typically communicated through paralanguage. This realization leads us to the last passage considered here.

### 2.4. Matthew 5:2, *kai anoixas to stōma autou edidasken autous legōn*

English translations:

- (a) And He/he opened His/his mouth and taught them, saying (ESV, NKJV);
- (b) [and] He/he opened His/his mouth and began to teach/teaching them, saying (NAS, NWT);
- (c) Then he began to speak, and taught them, saying (NRSV);

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- (d) Then/and he began to speak. This is what he taught them (CJB, NJB);
- (e) Then/and he began to teach them [by] saying (NET, NIV);
- (f) ... and taught his climbing companions. This is what he said (MES);
- (g) ... and he began to teach them (GNT, NLT).

This and the preceding verse form a narrative introduction to what is commonly known as the Sermon on the Mount, probably the most famous exposition of Christian morality and ethics. Surrounded by crowds, Jesus climbs the hillside, sits down, and is approached by his disciples - only then does he begin to speak. It seems that the author of the Gospel is carefully and skillfully setting the stage for Jesus' speech by means of this suspense-building description, culminated in the phrase “and he opened his mouth and taught them saying.” Scholars agree that this solemn Semitic formula,<sup>4</sup> based on the image of the mouth as the metaphorical opening revealing one's character, disposition, and wisdom, is “used to call attention to something especially significant that is said” (Maahs, 1995:429; cf. Radl 1990:279). As such, it should be considered a technique by means of which a vital paralinguistic message regarding both the authority of the speaker and the momentousness of his words is conveyed in Jewish narratives.

Among the analyzed English versions there is a considerable variety in handling this aspect. The first four translations are extremely literal in reproducing the original wording (renderings [a-b]), including the reference to the opening of the mouth - an image, as we noted above, practically meaningless to the contemporary English reader and possibly perceived as repetitious. Interestingly, two of these versions, the ESV and the NKJV, offer a functional translation of a similar phrase in the passage discussed before (see 2.3) but fail to do so in this context, possibly because of the reference to Jesus calling for a more formally equivalent translation technique. In the next three versions the mention of the opening of the mouth is deciphered as meaning “to begin to speak,” though the rendering (c) introduces only a partial improvement over the previous ones: the impression of repetitiveness remains as this short verse includes three synonymous forms (*speak, taught, saying*). The renderings (e) and (f) retain two elements related to speaking while (g) has only one, which certainly yields more natural English structures but also ones deprived of the original solemnity. It seems that some balance between the unnaturalness of renderings (a)-(c) and the excessive straightforwardness of (e)-(g) has been achieved in (d) thanks to isolating the phrase “and he began to speak” into a separate sentence, thus emphasizing the intransitivity of the verb and, indirectly, the dignity of the activity referred to. Nevertheless, considering the wealth of the paralinguistic message conveyed by this Semitic phrase one can hardly contend that the various attempts of rendering it into English come anywhere close to the original idea in terms of the achieved effect. After all, the forcefulness of the paralinguistic message lies precisely in its paraverbal character which cannot be fully compensated by verbal means.

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As Roman Jakobson famously put it, “the meaning of any word or phrase is definitely a ... semiotic fact” (1959/2000:113); therefore, meaningful translation must involve an analysis of signs and concepts (rather than mere words and images) in both the source and the target language. Insights into the conceptual

system of the source language aid the translator in an accurate perception of the original message within its cultural setting while the awareness of conceptual and phraseological matter in the target language enables him or her to recreate that message accordingly. Thus, semantic correspondence in translation is directly proportional to the degree of congruity between the respective conceptual systems manifested in phraseology, metaphor, and idiom.

On the basis on the above discussion of the biblical imagery related to the mouth, it would seem that as long as the two systems are convergent, literal translation is commendable (e.g. *the mouth of the cave*, see 2.2); elsewhere, conceptual and idiomatic equivalence should be pursued (e.g. *to speak honestly* rather than *\*to open one's mouth*, see 2.3). This simple methodology, in order to produce a coherent and meaningful translation, needs to be applied consistently, even though it will necessarily result in the partial or complete loss of certain elements related to the formal properties of the source text, such as parallelism (2.1 and 2.3) or the paralinguistic message (2.4). However, the authors of most English Bible versions examined here are apparently unwilling to make an unambiguous choice between exegetical usefulness achieved by formal equivalence, and communicative transparency resulting from a functional approach. This may be partly attributed to quasi-doctrinal convictions in which the "faithfulness" of a translation is still strongly associated with formal correspondence,<sup>5</sup> and partly to commercial considerations behind attempts to produce a versatile Bible version targeting the broadest readership possible. Sadly, the idea of *complete equivalence*, proposed by some versions advertised as seeking "to preserve accurately all the information in the text while presenting it in a good literary form" (*Preface* to the NKJV) cannot be reasonably sustained against the linguistic evidence. Translation is ultimately about choice; choice necessarily entails leaving something behind.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> This is particularly apparent in ceremonial laws in which ritual defilement and cleansing are strictly related to physical acts as well as in the conviction that one's conduct is ultimately rewarded or punished in one's earthly life (which coincides with very scarce and vague Jewish beliefs regarding the afterlife).

<sup>2</sup> For the sake of concision, the following abbreviations have been used with reference to the respective English translations of the Bible: CJB (The Complete Jewish Bible), ESV (The English Standard Version), GNT (The Good News Translation), MES (The Message by Eugene H. Peterson), NAS (The New American Standard), NET (The New English Translation), NIV (The New International Version), NJB (The New Jerusalem Bible), NKJV (The New King James Version), NLT (The New Living Translation), NRSV (The New Revised Standard Version), NWT (The New World Translation), YLT (Young's Literal Translation).

<sup>3</sup> Data cited herein has been extracted from the British National Corpus Online service, managed by Oxford University Computing Services on behalf of the BNC Consortium. All rights in the texts cited are reserved.

<sup>4</sup> The Semitic character of this formula is further reinforced by the repetition of the conjunction at the beginning of the subsequent clauses, which is very typical of Hebrew narratives.

<sup>5</sup> An excellent refutation of this fallacy in the Polish context has recently been offered by Marek Piela (2003) in *Grzech dosłowności we współczesnych polskich przekładach Starego Testamentu*. Kraków: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Jagiellońskiego.

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