

CHAPTER 1

Whatever Happened to Theolinguistics?

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In the beginning, we are told, was the Word. So however we interpret that sentence, it is evident that language is inevitably going to be prioritised in religious enquiry. Linguistics is the science of language. We might therefore expect a branch of that subject to develop whose remit is the investigation of all aspects of religious language. And so it proved to be. It is called theolinguistics.

Or, perhaps I should say, *was* called. For the flurry of interest which accompanied the first mentions of this subject in the 1980s seems to have largely disappeared. I continue to include the term in my various writings, so that, for example, in the sixth edition of my *Dictionary of Linguistics and Phonetics* (Crystal 2008) you will see an entry as follows:

theolinguistics (*n.*) A term which has been used for the study of the relationship between language and religious thought and practice, as illustrated by ritual, sacred texts, preaching, doctrinal statements and private affirmations of belief.

But note the 'has been used'. In all the other domains of applied linguistics listed in my dictionary (such as forensic linguistics, clinical linguistics, and educational linguistics) there are hundreds of professional linguists exploring the relationship between language and the associated area (law/crime, disability in spoken or written language, language teaching and learning in schools). Each domain has its courses, conferences, textbooks, academic journals, and professional bodies. Little of this has happened in the case of theolinguistics.

A word about 'professional linguist'. A distinction must be made between people who have a general interest in language, or for whom language is an important but subordinate element in their professional expertise, and linguists, in this sense, whose training places language and languages centre stage. It is a bit like the distinction between people who can cook and chefs, or people who can drive and car mechanics, except that language is far more complex and multi-faceted than cooking and driving—to my mind, the most complex behaviour known to humanity, with its

dozens of sounds, thousands of grammatical constructions, millions of words, and an indefinite and probably infinite number of uses. Linguistics is the science of all of that, and linguistics is what linguists, in this sense, do.

The 'interest' group, of course, comprises everybody: I have never met anyone who was not interested in language and how it works. And certainly, when it comes to the study and practice of religion, language is a major topic in the professional lives of theologians, biblical scholars, liturgists, preachers, missionaries, and others. But there is a big difference between those whose knowledge of language forms just one element in their intellectual domain, or whose expertise is wholly in relation to a single language or set of languages (such as the Biblical languages) and those where linguistics forms the central pillar of their intellectual life, and where all of the 6000 or so languages in the world provide the subject-matter. The primary aim of linguistics is to establish general principles for the study of all languages and to determine the universal characteristics of human language as a biological phenomenon. Its remit is therefore large, covering everything from the origins of language to the way languages die, from language acquisition in babies to language senescence in the old. The detailed description of individual languages forms an important part of this task, and this includes the relating of linguistic features (of pronunciation, orthography, grammar, vocabulary, and patterns of discourse) to the temporal, regional, social, occupational, and individual situations in which language is used. Given the number of religions in the world, and the number of their language-using adherents, we would thus expect the study of religious language to form an important and burgeoning part of linguistics. This has happened with the study of the language of science; we might expect it to have happened with the study of the domain that is most often juxtaposed with science.

There is, after all, no shortage of religious subject-matter crying out for analysis using the theories and methods of linguistics. From a linguistic point of view, the study of religious language will always have two sides: within an individual language, the formal identification of those features which distinguish this variety from all other varieties in that language; and the functional identification of the contexts in which the variety is used, and which promote diversity in its use. At a more advanced level, a comparative dimension is present, in which one would compare and interrelate the formal and functional properties of the way religious experience is treated across several languages. The aim would be to work towards a theory of religious language—to determine the universal features of linguistic expression that characterise religious discourse, to relate these to the other aspects of human behaviour explored by such fields as psychology and anthropology, and to establish fruitful connections between its findings and the other domains of religious studies. This is what people who called themselves theolinguists would be expected to do. And there was a moment in living memory when it seemed as if it was going to happen.

1 THE BIRTH OF THEOLINGUISTICS

The term *theolinguistics* was not around when I first started writing about religious language. There is no use of it in my *Linguistics, Language and Religion* (Crystal 1965).

I talk a lot about 'theophoric language' in that book, but don't use the later term. It simply wasn't the parlance of the day. None of the so-called 'hyphenated terms' that would one day identify branches of linguistics (socio-linguistics, psycho-linguistics, neuro-linguistics, etc.) had yet become established. I saw the study of religious language from a linguistic point of view as essentially a branch of stylistics, and that is how it appears in a later book (Crystal and Davy 1969). The only feature of my 1965 book which would make it mentionable in any history of linguistics is that, being written for the Roman Catholic firm of Burns and Oates, in their *Faith and Fact* series, it was given official permission, the 'Nihil Obstat' and the 'Imprimatur'—I think the only book with linguistics in its title ever to be so designated!

I was by no means the only linguist interested in religious language in the 1960s. It would have been surprising if it were otherwise, as language had become a real talking-point in that decade. The breathtaking consequences of Vatican II (1962–5) were being assimilated, including a transformation of liturgical language and a new appreciation of the role of the vernacular. John Robinson, the Bishop of Woolwich, was making headlines with his proposals about the need for a new God-language in *Honest to God* (1963). A. Q. Morton was making headlines with his stylometric investigations into the Pauline Epistles. A. J. Ayer and the logical positivists were still propounding a philosophy in which language played a central part. Recent textual discoveries, notably the Dead Sea Scrolls, were being made available. And the *Jerusalem Bible* arrived (1966).

Within linguistics, the 1960s was also a crucial decade. Linguistic theory had taken a giant leap forward in 1957, with the publication of Noam Chomsky's *Syntactic Structures*, and the 1960s proved to be a period of radical rethinking about the aims and methods of the subject. The first undergraduate degree courses in the subject appeared in Britain (1965), along with the first popular introductions to the subject, including my own (Crystal 1968, 1969). The Linguistics Association of Great Britain, founded in 1959, started to hold annual conferences. *The Journal of Linguistics* began publication in 1964. It was all happening.

Linguists evidently began thinking seriously about the way their subject could contribute to the study of religion, the evidence being the books which started to appear in the early 1970s. William J. Samarin, for example, professor of anthropology and linguistics at Toronto, and the author of books on field linguistics and African languages, published his investigation into glossolalia, *Tongues of Men and Angels* (1972). Felicitas D. Goodman brought anthropology and linguistics together in her cross-cultural approach to the same topic, *Speaking in Tongues* (1972). Samarin then organised a conference on Sociolinguistics and Religion in 1972, one of the annual linguistics meetings held at Georgetown University, Washington, the outcome being the anthology *Language in Religious Practice* (Samarin 1976). Other conferences exploring a linguistic approach were also being held early in that decade, such as the session on 'A Sociolinguistic Examination of Religious Behaviour' at the annual meeting of the Society for the Scientific Study of Religion, held in Chicago in 1971. And we must not forget those people with an earlier philological training who began to explore religious language in new ways, such as the Old Testament scholar James Barr in *The Semantics of Biblical Language* (1961), who at one point (p. 24)

regrets 'the failure to relate what is said about either Hebrew or Greek to a general semantic method related to general linguistics'.

The term *theolinguistics* was introduced by the Belgian linguist Jean-Pierre van Noppen in 1981, inspired by John Robinson's earlier use of *theography*, and formed the title of a collection of papers called simply *Theolinguistics*. In his preface, van Noppen (1981) introduces the new label:

The pluridisciplinary field of investigation offered by the linguistic articulation of religious belief and thought—a notion condensed, in a Western perspective, in the neologism *theolinguistics*—raises a number of issues that are, at least, far from being exhausted. The new term covers an area of interest with a history as old and respectable as Man's attempt to voice, with the means of conception and expression at his disposal, his understanding of the divine . . . but it is meant to refer more specifically to the interest in language whose origins can be traced back to the turn of the century, and which was to result in the church-wide debate over religious language—a debate which gained momentum on the eve of the 'Death of God' movement and which, unabated by more recent trends on the theological scene, claimed for years a priority in theological thought. (pp. 1–2)

He identifies, along with theologians and philosophers, linguists, psychologists, anthropologists, and sociologists as relevant contributors to this subject, and adds:

A credible theolinguistics can only grow out of the various disciplines' mutual awareness of each others' methods and standards . . . the theologian should not work with obsolete conceptions of language, nor the linguist hold naive or fallacious views of theology; and neither should build his argument on unstable philosophical premisses [*sic*]. (p. 2)

The twenty-one papers in the volume were certainly interdisciplinary, with the contributors displaying backgrounds in semiotics, philosophy, theology, literary criticism, psychology, and linguistics. Apart from van Noppen himself, the linguists involved were myself, Jean Dierickx, Eugene Nida, Marie-Louise Rotsaert, and William Samarin. The theologian F. W. Dillistone concludes his opening paper to that volume with the sentence: 'Theolinguistics is one of the most urgent and yet most demanding disciplines of our time' (van Noppen 1981, p. 20).

2 LATER DEVELOPMENTS

Theolinguistics 1 was a promising start, and two years later a second volume appeared, *Metaphor and Religion (Theolinguistics 2)*, focusing on a single theme, metaphor in religious discourse (van Noppen 1983). This time the linguists were less prominent: apart from van Noppen, only two out of the fifteen contributors could be said to be card-carrying linguists, Nicole Delbecque and János Petőfi. This set the tone for the way the subject developed over the next decades. The early development

of an academic subject is driven by personalities, and van Noppen's own interest in metaphor—reinforced by the new attention being paid to this topic within linguistics at the time, notably in *Metaphors We Live by* (Lakoff and Johnson 1980)—heralded one road which became quite well-trodden.

Another popular road was a focus on discourse. Discourse analysis, defined by Michael Stubbs (1983) in an influential book as 'the sociolinguistic analysis of natural language', arose when linguists became dissatisfied with approaches which concentrated solely on the analysis of single sentences. It became evident that conversations, narratives, and other forms of connected speech and writing were the norm in communicative behaviour, and this led to a fresh focus on the analysis of utterances and texts in real contexts. Analogous interests, especially by ethnographers and sociologists (such as Erving Goffman), introduced a cross-disciplinary perspective which went under various labels, such as conversation analysis and text linguistics, but the outcome for theolinguistics was a renewed exploration of the properties of religious discourse. This change of orientation is well reflected in two of my own articles. In 1964 I wrote an article called 'A liturgical language in a linguistic perspective' (Crystal 1964). Twenty-five years on, I entitled a contribution to a new anthology, 'A liturgical language in a sociolinguistic perspective' (Crystal 1990).

Probably the most important manifestation of the new orientation was the series which began to appear in the 1990s, published by the German firm of Peter Lang, called *Religions and Discourse*, with the following remit:

Religions and Discourse explores religious language in the major world faiths from various viewpoints, including semiotics, pragmatics and cognitive linguistics, and reflects on how it is situated within wider intellectual and cultural contexts. In particular a key issue is the role of figurative speech. Many fascinating metaphors originate in religion e.g. revelation as a 'garment', apostasy as 'adultery', loving kindness as the 'circumcision of the heart'. Every religion rests its specific orientations upon symbols such as these, to name but a few. The series strives after the interdisciplinary approach that brings together such diverse disciplines as religious studies, theology, sociology, philosophy, linguistics and literature. . . .

The link with *Theolinguistics 2* is clear, and is reflected in the opening two titles of the series, which were a selection of the papers delivered at the 25th LAUD symposium on 'Metaphor and Religion'. (LAUD, Linguistic Agency University Duisburg, began in 1973 as an innovative collaboration between linguistics groups at the German universities of Trier, Duisburg, and Landau.) The titles of both volumes show the earlier influence: *Metaphor, Canon and Community* (Bisschops and Francis 1999) and *Metaphor and God-talk* (Boeve and Feyaerts 1999). The third volume also provided continuity with the theolinguistics initiative, being written by van Noppen (*Transforming Words*, 1999), who used a discourse perspective to investigate the early Methodist revival. The fifth, too, had a linguistics orientation, Noel Heather's *Religious Language and Critical Discourse Analysis* (2000)—the 'critical' in the title reflecting a movement in the subject which aims to reveal hidden power relations and ideological processes at work in texts. (A 'critical discourse analysis' studies the

relationship between discourse events and sociopolitical and cultural factors, especially the way discourse is ideologically influenced by and can itself influence power relations in society.) And there was one other: volume 15 in the series, a conference proceedings edited by Kurt Feyaerts, *The Bible through Metaphor and Translation* (2003).

But that was it. There was never a *Theolinguistics* 3, though van Noppen did collate several of the theolinguistic articles in a German translation a few years later (1988). And gradually, work from a linguistics stable became less prominent in the *Religions and Discourse* series. There were (by early 2016) fifty-five books in the series, and only the above five come from people in whose background linguistics plays a central role. Of the others, according to the publisher's identification of books by the academic discipline of the authors, there are forty with a background in theology, ten in literature, six in gender studies, four in the history of religions, two in philosophy, and one each in psychology and cultural studies (some authors have more than one background). Moreover, given the potentially broad reach of theolinguistics as a whole, these five works explore only two themes: metaphor and discourse. And these emphases continue in later papers. Van Noppen (2011), for example, reflects on what he calls a 'critical theolinguistics'. He reminds his reader of the original subject, 'the study of the *logos* about *theos*: a science whose object is God as *word*, not as *being*', and he summarises its emphasis to date:

In our regions the discipline has tended to focus mainly (though not exclusively) on Christian language use, whether descriptive (*about* the divine, as in sermons, creeds or 'theography' . . .) or ascriptive (addressed *to* the divine, as in hymns or prayers). . . . As a branch of linguistics, theolinguistics calls for a discourse approach inasmuch as religious language is best described and assessed within a context of belief where its utterances are regarded as meaningful.

And he goes on to talk about how 'the discourse-minded theolinguist' aims to establish a meaningful relationship between texts and their social conditions, and of course (bearing in mind the 'critical' in his title) to expose any misuses of religious discourse.

To briefly illustrate his approach: he contrasts George H. Bush's inaugural address, in which he asked God to 'make us strong to do your work'—the underlying assumption being that the nation's fate is determined by divine providence—with Rev. Gene Robinson's invocation before Barack Obama's inaugural, 'Hold him in the palm of your hand, that he might do the work we have called him to do', and points out that 'the difference in the source of the calling ("You, God" or "We the People") invests the president-elect with a very different brand of power'. Other examples of the way critical theolinguistics operates would be the analysis of how individuals select scriptural passages to support their different ideological positions, the implications of using gendered pronouns with reference to God (*he/she/it*) in a society where feminist issues are prominent, and the evaluation of the historical versus the mythological content of scriptural passages—a perspective which comes to the fore when considering the creationist/evolutionist debate. The approach draws attention

to the need for two perspectives: 'we need not only the semantics of discourse (i.e. what the words and sentences mean), but also the pragmatics of discourse (what the words and sentences *do* for people)' (van Noppen 2011).

3 FRESH PERSPECTIVES

Now, I do not for one moment wish to minimise the insightful contributions that can be found in a discourse-oriented approach to religious language. I totally agree that, ultimately, all language analysis has to be discourse-related. But this must not be taken to mean that there is no role for the 'non-discourse-minded' theolinguist. After all, it is not as if the within-sentence nuts and bolts of religious language have all been described for the wide range of varieties of religious language that exist—let alone for the vast range of languages that have as yet received no exploration of their religious expression at all. Even in relation to English, there are still very few empirical studies of the detail of what actually happens—in pronunciation, orthography, grammar, and vocabulary, to take just these four areas—when people engage in religious discourse. And theolinguists need, above all, to avoid a solely Anglocentric view of religious language—or, a fortiori, an Indo-European one.

This last point needs exposition. It is a truism of comparative linguistics that the languages of the world express a mosaic of visions of what it means to be human. Although languages have a great deal in common, as evidenced by the equivalences achieved by successful translation, it is also clear that languages display varying amounts of uniqueness. We acknowledge this whenever we find it necessary to apologise for an inexact translation of one language into another, or fall back on such expressions as 'the French have a word for it'. No one has yet quantified the amount of cultural uniqueness expressed by a language. It will vary depending on the amount of linguistic and cultural distance between the speech-communities (the gap between, say, English and French is going to be much smaller than that between English and Chinese). But almost certainly religious expression will form an important part of the linguistic distinctiveness that reflects cultural identity. A sense of the scale of the challenge is provided by Section 1 of the *Concise Encyclopedia of Language and Religion* (Sawyer and Simpson 2001), where sixty-two entries summarise the role of language in many of the world's religions and religious movements (African traditional religions, Australian aboriginal religions, the Baha'i Faith, Kwanzaa, Macumba, Melanesian religions . . .). I should be surprised if there was a substantial bibliography of descriptive linguistic studies for most of the sixty-two topics, and I suspect that in some cases no linguistic work would have been done at all. William Samarin was one who was able to comment on religious language in such 'exotic' (to Western ears) contexts as Swahili and Sango, but few of us are able to match his range. There is probably much more going on in the theolinguistic world (in Poland and Slovakia, for example) than is represented by the literature in English, and at some point any arguments about the scope and future of theolinguistics will need to take these studies into account.

Even if we stay within the familiar world of English linguistics, there is still a great deal of basic descriptive work on religious language that remains to be done. English is now a global language, used by over two billion people in every country on earth. One of the most notable developments, over the last 50 years, has been the growth of what are often called 'new Englishes'. We have long been used to the fact that British English and American English are different dialects—different in sounds, spellings, grammar, and vocabulary—and most of these differences are now well understood, and recorded in dictionaries, grammars, and manuals of style. But today, these are but two of a panoply of varieties that can be found all over the globe. Following political independence, the nations that had used English in the colonial era immediately began to adapt the language to reflect their local identity. Thousands of new words entered their usage, as can be seen today in the various dictionaries (of Jamaican English, Ghanaian English, Singaporean English, and so on) that have been compiled. These 'new Englishes' added to the 'old Englishes' that had been around for a much longer period, such as Australian, South African, and Indian English. The result is a modern language which now exists in dozens of different varieties around the English-speaking world. Several academic journals, such as *English World-Wide* and *English Today*, focus on describing the differences in form and use displayed by these varieties. Religious language is bound to have been affected by these local pressures, but so far, hardly any study of indigenous adaptations in this domain has taken place. In all the eighty-four issues to date (as of 2016) of *English World-Wide*, there is not one major study of religious expression in a 'new English'.

Diversity is one side of the coin of linguistic description; the other side is language change. Even if there had been a theolinguistic study of one of these varieties in, say, 1980, the results would need re-assessing thirty years on. Only dead languages do not change. And living languages can change at a surprising rate, especially these days as a result of the Internet. Moreover, not only do the forms of the language change (new words, pronunciations, grammatical patterns), but attitudes to those forms change. A usage that one generation hates for its novelty can become established by later generations, and receive no criticism at all. Who would now believe that the word *balcony* once had its stress on the middle syllable [bal-coh-nee], and that people then could not stand the newfangled pronunciation [bal-co-ny]? Every generation has its likes and dislikes about language. And every generation is a mixture of generations, with young and old having different likes and dislikes. Taking all these attitudes into account must be one of the biggest challenges facing those, such as translators and liturgists, having to provide texts for religious communities, or those, such as preachers and missionaries, who have to talk to them.

I say 'must be' because I do not know if many of those involved in the professional presentation of religious language are very aware of the issues, or even of the extent to which there is a problem. Take, for example, the 2012 Roman Catholic translation of the Mass, which introduced a raft of changes to the vernacular version that had been in use after Vatican II. The extent and character of the changes took everyone by surprise, and generated huge amounts of criticism and controversy. I have been able to read only a tiny part of the correspondence elicited by the translation, but my impression is that reactions to individual points of usage (both positive and

negative) varied greatly from country to country—which is exactly what one would expect, in light of the above. At least in 1967, when English was about to replace Latin, the International Committee on English in the Liturgy printed booklets with alternative translations to gauge public reaction, and asked linguists to analyse the findings. I do not know of any such activities having taken place in relation to the current translation, or whether the translators were even aware of the huge diversification that had happened to English over the past 40 years. Nobody was talking about global varieties of the language in the 1960s. It is a major talking point now, and it would form an important element in any revitalised theolinguistics of English. Analogous concerns, though not on such a global scale, of course affect all internationally used languages.

4 THE ROLE OF PRAGMATICS

Another major change in the linguistic climate since the 1980s, and one which is highly relevant for theolinguistics today, is the development of the subject now known as pragmatics. This has already been mentioned in relation to the work of van Noppen and the critical discourse analysts, but it is such an important addition to the metalanguage of linguistics that it needs some further exposition. Van Noppen's definition of the pragmatics of discourse ('what the words and sentences *do* for people') emphasises one aspect of the subject. Pragmatics today actually encompasses three. I define it as the study of the *choices* we make when we use language, of the *intentions and assumptions* behind those choices, and the *effects* that the choices convey. Anyone familiar with the pragmatics literature written since the subject first achieved definition within linguistics (during the 1980s) will have encountered a diversity of treatments, because some authors focus on the choices, some on the intentions, and some on the effects. An emphasis on *doing* relates chiefly to the latter. The point loomed large in the early pragmatics literature, which paid particular attention to the notion of 'speech acts'—the actions performed by utterances, such as promising and resigning, or (in religion) christening and marrying.

Here's an example of how each of the three aspects operates. In a language like French (and, of course, in religious language in English), there is a distinction between second-person pronouns. It is not enough to learn that in French *tu* is singular and *vous* is plural. That would be to take a purely grammatical view of the contrast. From a pragmatic point of view, we need to know that, when one speaks French, one has a choice. We may address a single individual as *tu* or *vous*, and the choice is constrained by several factors. A pragmatically aware description of these pronouns would point out that adult French people use *tu* chiefly when talking to children, to animals, to intimates, and (if you are Protestant) God; *vous* is used elsewhere. That is the choice available to them. But in a real interaction, two other questions remain: what does a speaker intend by using *tu*, and what would be the effect of so doing? Pierre meets Marie. Pierre likes Marie. He decides to address her with *tu* (the French have a verb for this, *tutoyer*). His intention is clear. But what will be Marie's reaction? If she

responds with *tu*, the effect is as Pierre intended. If she slaps his face, it is not. There is often a mismatch between intentions and effects.

Transferring this example to the liturgical issue above, there was clearly a considerable distance between the intentions and assumptions made by the liturgical translators and the effects their choices had on large numbers of the Mass-attending public. After the event, various newspapers and journals debated the reasons behind the choices—such as the desire to follow more closely the original Latin text (as with the response *And with your spirit* replacing *And also with you*, reflecting *Et cum spiritu tuo*). Arguments for and against alternative translations took up a great deal of column space. But by then it was too late, for none of this removed the upset that many people felt. Such debates should have been held a long time before the final decisions were made, and with due diligence, taking into account any differences of usage among the main international varieties of English. A modicum of pragmatic linguistic awareness introduced at the right time could have resulted in a more positive climate.

5 AN ILLUSTRATION

Looking back at the theolinguistic literature to date, one gets the impression that the subject is only concerned with abstract, open-ended, and theologically profound subject-matter, and with the elucidation of questions which may not be wholly answerable (Crystal 1976, 1981). But many interesting questions about religious language are much more concrete, determinate, and definitely answerable, as several case studies have illustrated.

Take, for example, the question of how far religious language permeates everyday language, generalising the question from ‘metaphors we live by’ to all linguistic features. To what extent does modern English, when used in non-religious contexts, display vocabulary, idiom, grammar, and style that can be traced back to a religious source, such as a particular translation of the Bible? The question was formally raised in relation to the 400th anniversary of the King James Bible in 2011. Just how much influence did this translation have? The exaggerations at the time were widespread. In an article in *The Tablet* (3 April 2010) called ‘England’s gift to the world’, MP Frank Field (the director of the 2011 Trust established to coordinate the anniversary celebrations) quoted the novelist and media pundit Melvyn Bragg as saying that the King James Bible (KJB) is ‘quite simply the DNA of the English language’. It was a striking metaphor, but a hugely misleading one. DNA is in every cell we possess; but the KJB is by no means in every word we write. A great deal of mythology about biblical language was in circulation at that time.

It was time for a linguistic analysis, and I report here the outcome of a lexical study. A search in the *Oxford English Dictionary* to identify the presence of words that have their first recorded usage in the KJB resulted in a very small total (forty-seven, according to the latest revision). A search for the idioms found in the KJB that continue to be used in present-day English produced a larger but still (to most people) surprisingly small total (257). However, neither total should surprise us. We need to recall that the aim of the

translators, as they say in their Preface, was not to make a new translation, 'but to make a good one better, or out of many good ones, one principal good one'. They had little choice in the matter, as the guidelines for their work, which had been approved by the King, required them to use the Bishops' Bible (in the 1602 edition) as their first model, making as few alterations as possible; and, when this was found wanting, they could refer to earlier versions. Unlike Shakespeare, they were not great innovators, so the number of neologisms was never going to be large, as can be seen from the list of first recorded usages (the three asterisked items also appear in another 1611 publication):

abased (as an adjective), accurately, afflicting (as a noun), algum ('algum tree'), anywhither, armour-bearer, backsliding (as an adjective), battering-ram, Benjamite, catholicon, confessing (as a noun), crowning (as an adjective), dissolver, dogmatize, epitomist, escaper, espoused (as an adjective), exactress, expansion, Galilean (as a noun), gopher, Gothic (as an adjective), grand-daughter, Hamathite, infallibility*, Laodicean (as a noun), lapful*, light-minded, maneh (Hebrew unit of account), miscarrying (as an adjective), Naziriteship, needleworker, night-hawk, nose-jewel, palmchrist, panary ('pantry'), phrasing (as a noun), pruning-hook, rosebud, rose of Sharon, Sauromatian, shittah (type of tree), skewed, taloned* (as an adjective), way-mark ('traveller guide'), whosoever, withdrawing (as an adjective)

In relation to idioms, the important point to note is that most of them do not originate in the King James translation at all. Rather they are to be found in one of the translations that appeared in the preceding 130 years—Wycliffe's translation (the first into English, in 1388), Tyndale's translation of the New Testament and the first six books of the Old (1526–1530), the Bishops' Bible (1568), the Geneva Bible (1560), and the Douai-Rheims (1582 New Testament, 1609–1610 Old Testament). Tyndale is especially important. Only eighteen expressions are stylistically unique to the King James Bible:

east of Eden, know for a certainty, how are the mighty fallen, a still small voice, the root of the matter, to every thing there is a season, much study is a weariness of the flesh, beat their swords into plowshares, set thine [your] house in order, be horribly afraid, lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, get thee behind me, suffer little children, no small stir, turned the world upside down, a thorn in the flesh, unto the pure all things are pure, let us now praise famous men

Every other idiomatic expression is shared with at least one of the earlier translations. In many cases, it is found in all of them—such as *milk and honey* or *salt of the earth*. The full description is given in the appendix to Crystal (2010).

Once the basic descriptive material is laid out (the 'what'), we can begin to analyse it in terms of the temporal, regional, social, occupational, and personal factors which account for its character (the 'when', 'where', and 'who'), and here of course several interesting questions arise. To take just one that came up at the time: how does Douai-Rheims stand compared to the other versions? Is there evidence in this solidly Protestant Bible of a Catholic influence on present-day idiom? The examples suggest

that there is. Gordon Campbell, in his historical account of the KJB (2010), draws attention to the scholarly background of the Douai-Rheims translators, along with the kind of insights obtained from their use of the Latin Vulgate. Their Old Testament was published too late for it to have had as much influence as their New Testament, but Campbell illustrates several clear links. And there is a clear connection between Douai-Rheims and the present day with respect to idiomatic expressions.

There are twenty-seven instances where an expression appears in the KJB and one of the other translations. Of these, one is in Tyndale, five are in the Bishop's Bible, and ten are in Geneva, but eleven are in Douai-Rheims:

- white as snow (Numbers)
- whips . . . scorpions (1 Kings)
- tell it not . . . publish it not . . . (2 Samuel)
- woe is me (Psalms)
- of making many books there is no end (Ecclesiastes)
- sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof (Matthew)
- what God hath joined together, let no man put asunder (Matthew)
- many are called, but few are chosen (Matthew)
- render . . . unto Caesar the things which are Caesar's (Matthew)
- whited sepulchres (Matthew)
- see through a glass darkly (1 Corinthians).

The KJB translators must certainly have read their Douai-Rheims *Matthew*, and the scattering of other parallels suggests that they saw some of the Old Testament material too. Coincidence might account for one or two cases of identity, but hardly eleven.

Also interesting are the cases where we have a modern biblical idiom that does not appear in the KJB at all. There are just seven of these, and three of them are found in exact form in Douai-Rheims only:

- the way of all flesh [the others all have 'earth' for 'flesh']
- let your light shine [the others say 'let your light so shine']
- charity covers [covereth] a multitude of sins [Tyndale, Geneva and Bishops all have 'love' for 'charity'; Wycliffe has 'charity' but talks about 'the' multitude of sins].

I conclude that there has been a limited but definite Douai-Rheims influence on modern English idiom.

Accurate description and analysis of the linguistic features of a text and of its geographical and temporal provenance is a *sine qua non* of theolinguistic enquiry, but no linguist should stop with questions of 'what', 'when', 'where', and 'who'. They must also explore 'how' and 'why'—an explanatory phase—and this often requires an investigation of a psycholinguistic nature. In relation to the KJB, given that relatively

few people in the early 1600s had the literacy skills to read it, and noting that most of a congregation would have been exposed to its language auditorily through church attendance, we have to ask if there were features of the spoken language that would have aided the transmission of the idioms into popular consciousness. Rhythm is the obvious candidate, for a great deal of research in psycholinguistics has shown that one of the important functions of rhythm is to aid auditory memory. We remember a text we have heard in short grammatical 'chunks'—and if the number of content words (i.e. meaning-carrying words, excluding the words that show the structure of the sentence) in those chunks exceeds five, most people have difficulty.

This is a regular experience when during a church service we try to repeat a response—for example, to a psalm—without reading it from a crib sheet. As long as the response is five short content words or less, we have no problem. Anything over this, and we struggle to remember it. Compare these, taken from the Mass—I underline the content words:

The Lord is my light and my help (*Second Sunday of Lent, Year C*)—three content words, no problem.

I will walk in the presence of the Lord in the land of the living (*Second Sunday of Lent, Year B*)—five content words, still no problem

Your ways, Lord, are faithfulness and love for those who keep your covenant (*First Sunday of Lent, Year B*)—seven content words strain our ability

Most responses are, mercifully, short.

The same principle applies to biblical idioms. Virtually all the idioms that show the influence of the Bible are short: the average length of all 257 expressions is 4.3 words—within that comfortable chunking length. And when we examine individual instances, we can see the way in which usage has favoured that norm. Take *fly in the ointment*. This does not in fact turn up in any biblical translation. The KJB has

Dead flies cause the ointment of the apothecary to send forth a stinking savour.

Compare this with the earlier versions:

Wycliffe: flies that die, lessen the sweetness of ointment.

Geneva: dead flies cause to stink, and putrefy the ointment.

Bishop's: a dead fly doth corrupt sweet ointment.

What is the difference? The other translations separate the critical words, *flies* and *ointment*. King James brings them together: 'flies cause the ointment'. This puts them into the same chunk of working auditory memory: they are more likely to be retained by the listener. And it is then a relatively short step for the forces of analogy to operate to adapt the phrasing to one of the commonest rhythmical patterns in English:

flies cause the ointment > flies in the ointment > fly in the ointment

Compare *bee in the bonnet, head in the sand, stain on the character*, and hundreds more. It does not happen straight away: it took nearly a century before we find the first recorded instance of *fly in the ointment*.

The idioms total means that we must not exaggerate the influence of the KJB on English, as was repeatedly done in the lead-up to the anniversary celebrations. It is true to say, as several commentators do, that no other literary source has matched this edition for the number of influential idioms that it contains; but it is not true to say that the KJB originated all of them. Rather, what it did was popularise them. It gave the idioms a widespread public presence through the work being 'appointed to be read in Churches', and it enabled them to be retained in the auditory memory of the congregations through their rhythmically succinct character. The result was that an unprecedented number of biblical idioms captured the public imagination, so much so that it is now impossible to find an area of contemporary expression that does not from time to time use them, either literally or playfully. We find them appearing in such disparate worlds as nuclear physics, court cases, TV sitcoms, recipe books, punk rock lyrics, and video games, and being adapted in all kinds of imaginative ways to suit their new settings. A banking crisis produced 'Am I my Lehman Brothers' keeper?' A political confrontation produced 'Bush is the fly in Blair's ointment'. The KJB was never 'authorised' (despite its popular name) in any legal sense, but no other translation reached so many people over so long a period, or generated so many variations.

6 THE FUTURE OF THEOLINGUISTICS

The KJB study illustrates, from a concrete and relatively straightforward linguistic domain, the stages through which a theolinguistics moves. The first stage—also emphasised by van Noppen (2011, p. 29)—is to provide a corrective to misleading ideas about the nature of religious language: in the above, the exaggerated claims for KJB influence on everyday speech. This can only be done by the meticulous and time-consuming process of gathering empirical data—here, involving a reading of the whole of the KJB to identify all the relevant idioms (for no comprehensive collection had been made before), and then a re-reading to check that none had been left out. We are talking about the best part of a million words, but corpora of this size are these days a normal part of linguistic investigation. One of the things that theolinguistics can do is replace anecdotal and impressionistic accounts of a use of religious language by gathering corpora of a sufficient size to warrant valid descriptive statements.

The next stage is description (the 'what'): the data—words, idioms, grammatical patterns, sounds, and so forth—have to be given a precise description using one of the models available in linguistics. For the lexicon or the orthography of a language, this is often a simple listing of relevant usages; for grammar and pronunciation, a sophisticated descriptive apparatus may need to be employed. In cases where a language has received little or no description, the theolinguist may need to carry out basic investigative work, even to the extent of devising an alphabet to write the

language down, as has often happened when missionary organisations engage in the task of Bible translation with unfamiliar languages.

The third stage is analytical: the formal patterns established by the description need to be related to the temporal (the 'when'), regional, social, occupational (the 'where'), and personal (the 'who') variables that we know condition usage. In the illustration, this involved a comparison of idiomatic expressions in texts belonging to different religious traditions. The risk, always, is premature generalisation, given the wide range of genres that comprise the repertoire of religious language—prayers, hymns, sermons, divinations, blessings, scriptural texts, ritualised events (healings, weddings, funerals . . .), and much more, all of which have to be seen within the context of differing traditions and settings. These variations are the phenomena which keep sociolinguists and stylisticians happily occupied, and sociolinguistic and stylistic perspectives have formed a major part of theolinguistic enquiries to date (see, e.g., Crystal 1976, 1998; Holt 2006; Hammond 2015).

The fourth stage is explanatory (the 'how' and 'why'), which in the illustration involved considerations of a psycholinguistic nature. It is at this stage that 'a credible theolinguistics' (as van Noppen put it above) reaches out to the other disciplines involved in the study of religious language. The further implications of the *Douai/KJB* question, for example, go well beyond the expertise of theolinguists and must be debated by others. But the provision of empirical evidence, and the identification of relevant factors, are things that theolinguists can provide to help take that debate forward. I very much hope, therefore, that the subject has a future that lives up to the promise it displayed in the 1980s. All we need is for a few more linguist labourers to enter the theolinguistic vineyard.

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