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CONFESSIONALITY OF BIBLE TRANSLATIONS

The article deals with the question if the confessional view of translators can be revealed in translations of the Bible (on the material of Ukrainian Bibles).

Keywords: Bible, translation, Ukrainian language, confessionality

1. Problem. Multiple Bible translations in the same language are often discerned by attributing them to different confessional groups. Catholic, Protestant, Orthodox or Greek Catholic translations of the Bible are identified and sometimes also Jewish translations are mentioned with the open question if it is spoken about a so-called “Jewish Bible” (that is a translation without the New Testament and the Apocrypha) or if it is spoken about a translation from a certain Jewish theological point of view. Of course, this remark does not affect every publication on the theme to the same extent, but it can be stated that a history of Slavic Bible translations which would comprise all translations of Biblical texts in a given language regardless of their confessional attributes remains a task for Slavic philology.

A differentiation of Bible translations with reference to the religious confession of the translators without reference to linguistic features of the translation is not satisfying. We cannot assume that a translator of the sometimes complicated texts of the Bible will not compare all available to him translations in order to find out the best translational equivalent for a given wording in his target language. In not considering all possible assistive resources, a translator may have made use of, we are in danger to overlook possible inter-confessional or inter-religious (e.g. Jewish-Christian) inter-textual dependencies. Aside from the risk to miss intertextual dependencies of a given translation it also should be a methodological task, to classify texts in the first place by their content. In this paper some introductory remarks will be made towards the problem if and to what extent a confessional classification of Bible translations according to linguistic features is possible.

2. Method. At first it seems that a confessional classification of Bible translations should be no difficult task. During the protestant reformation the emerging communities demanded for own Bible translations even when

translations in the vernacular already have been available, as was the case in Czech or Poland for example. A quick look in those translations from the 16th century convinces us of their confessional orientation if we read the commentaries on the margins of the page to controversially between catholic and protestant theologians disputed quotations. It is an open question if the confessional orientation also is expressed in the translation itself. Hypothetically, it can be expected that choice between possible translational equivalents for a given word in the source text may be biased by confessional considerations. Additionally, a confessional difference between translations may also be found in the overall translational ideal aspired after by the translator. A translator of the Bible always has to decide whether to choose a lexical equivalent for a given word in the source text according to its respective local context or according to the principle to maintain a global equivalence by translating all occurrences of a given utterance in the source language with always the same utterance in the target language. Additionally, a translator has to decide whether to aspire for an intra-textual coherence or on the contrary to choose translational equivalents which are shared by other, extra-Biblical texts like liturgical formulations or catechetical tenets. Seeking a closed intra-textual coherence in translation means to conceptualize the ideal of a self-congruent book; seeking coherence with extra-textual usage means to conceptualize the ideal of various, but congruent testimonies. This is, of course, an exaggerated formulation, which is, as it would seem natural, not easily applied to “protestant” versus “catholic” translations. It seems expectable that the protestant slogan “sola scriptura” tends to more intra-textual coherence while the catholic emphasis on liturgy seeks more coherence with extra-biblical formulations. But at this point, an argumentative circle builds up. Many formulations in liturgy are paraphrased Bible quotations and it is not the liturgical formulation which influences the translation but on the other way around every new translation decides if it will be still in support of these liturgical formulations which have originated out of older translations. If the new translation is in support of the once introduced formulations the new translation sets itself basically into a certain text tradition. So, different translations may be different because a translator willingly is looking for a confessionally biased formulation or following a certain ideal of intra- or extra-textual coherence, but the different translations, once

having become part of different traditions, secondarily adopt the character as if they would have been originated out of confessional considerations. I would like to give examples for readings which are more or less apportioned to different “confessional” translations but hardly did originate out of confessional reasoning but out of text tradition (2.1 und 2.2) in contrast to the translation of an actually dogmatically important formulation (2.3).

2.1 Confession or tradition? In a previous article [1] it has been shown that sometimes even the translation of a single word may lead to major differences in the translations which more or less seem to express a confessional difference. An additional look into Ukrainian Bibles on the example of the translations for Mathew 12:45 gives more evidence to the hypothesis that we are dealing only secondarily with confessional differences.

Biblical Text ¹		Mth 12:45
Greek Byzantine Majority Text		καὶ γίνεται τὰ ἔσχατα τοῦ ἀνθρώπου ἐκείνου χεῖρονα τῶν πρώτων. Οὕτως ἔσται καὶ τῇ γενεᾷ ταύτῃ τῇ πονηρᾷ.
Vulgata		et fiunt novissima hominis illius peiora prioribus[.] sic erit et generationi huic pessimae

In Matthew 12:45 it is spoken about τὰ ἔσχατα which have an ambiguous reading firstly as adverb of time in the meaning “after that”, and, secondly, in the meaning “last point of time at all”, “the end” [cf. evidence for both meanings with reference to the New Testament in 2, p. 635]. A translator is faced with three possibilities to act: either to strengthen the adverbial reading or to strengthen the eschatological concept “end of time” or — if possible — to look for a similar ambiguous formulation in his target language. The third possibility, of course, is dependent on the linguistic possibilities of the target language and not always available. For example, the German adverbs “danach, hernach, später” will display no hint to eschatology, while adverbs like “endlich, schließlich, zuletzt” connote only the concept of a final ending and do not allow for an unmarked temporal interpretation. A very literal translation (as the German Elberfeld Bible² from 1905: “Das Letzte jenes Menschen wird

¹ Because here the Ukrainian translations are quoted according to electronic editions, I cite the Bible text in electronic form, too. Cf. <<http://biblehub.com>>; last visit 18.10.2016.

ärger als das Erste.”) may stress the eschatological meaning more than the source text intended. Luther, e.g., chose an unmarked adverb (“hernach”), while other translations regularly speak about “end” or “last state of affairs”.

The change between a temporal adverb and an allusion to eschatology is also seen in the Ukrainian translations³.

Bible Translations/Translators	year	Mth 12:45
M = Pilip Semenovych Moračevs'kyj	1861	і останнє чоловікові тому гірше буде, ніж перше. Так буде й з родом сим лукавим.
KP = Pantelejmon Oleksandrovyč Kuliš/ Ivan Pavlovyč Puljuj	1904	і буде останнє чоловіка того гірше ніж перше. Так станеть ся й кожду сьому лукавому.
O = Ivan Ivanovyč Ohijenko	1962	І буде останнє людині тій гірше за перше... Так буде й лукавому родові цьому!
CH = Ivan Sofronovyč Chomenko	1963	і останнє того чоловіка буде гірше, ніж перше. Так буде й з цим лукавим поріддям.”
D = Hryhorij Derkač/ Diana Derkač	1992	І буває для людини тієї останнє гірше першого. Так буде з цим родом лукавим”.
WBTC = World Bible Translation Center (“Easy Read”)	1996	Вони входять у ту людину і живуть у ній, і життя людини стає ще гіршим, ніж було. Це ж саме станеться з поганими людьми, що живуть тепер”.
UBS = Ukrainian Bible Society (translator Rafail Turkonjak)	1997	і кінець тієї людини буде гірший від початку. Так буде й цьому злomu родові.

² All translations except the Latin and the Ukrainian are quoted according to text modules in 'SWORD-format' for the programmes "MacSword/ Eloquent"; <<http://wiki.catug.org/Eloquent>>, last visited 18.10.2016.

³ I am using freely downloadable data files at <http://www.ph4.ru/eng-b4_index.php?l=uk&q=mybible>; last visit 18.10.2016. The years, accompanying the respective translations, show the copyright status of the electronic texts and do not necessarily reflect the first or last appearance of the translation in print. The abbreviations for the translations serve for reference in this article. I was unable to identify the translators names of WBTC; it is the Ukrainian version an firstly English "Easy Read" translation (or adaption) with a simplified language for the use of persons with anatomic handicaps in language acquisition.

Going through the Ukrainian translations only two of them avoid the adverb останне, which resembles the Russian последнее (1863). The two translational exceptions (WBTC and UBS) are issued by organizations which gather members from different Christian confessions. Because protestant denominations outnumber the two orthodox resp. catholic parties it could be assumed that international organizations are biased towards protestantism. But confessionality mainly is not at work, which shows the comparison between the adverbial translation in WBTC (“and human life becomes more bad than before”) and the eschatological translation in UBS (“the end becomes more badly than the beginning”). Especially D, a translation made by America based Ukrainian baptists, does not differ from the other Ukrainian translations.

The common solution of the Ukrainian translations (останне) resembles “последнее”⁴ in the Russian synodal translation from 1868, and both equivalents can be compared to Church Slavonic послѣднѣ (as in Codex Marianus). Giving the different “protestant” translations of D, WBTC and UBS and the similar “orthodox” resp. “greek-orthodox” Russian and Ukrainian translations we do not deal with actual confessional differences, but more probably with different translational traditions. Ukrainian translations, unrelated to confessionality, continue in the Ukrainian text tradition, while translations from anglophone countries continue in the text tradition of the King James Version (KJV 1769: “and the last state of that man is worse than the first”), which gives no room for an unmarked adverbial meaning. Only indirectly the reading variants can be attached to theologically relevant confessional point of view because there originated different text traditions out of once applied different translational techniques (*ad verbum*, e.g. Elberfeld 1905, or *ad sensum*).

2.2 Confession and source. Rather trivial but to note anyway is the fact that the different cultural development of the Western Latin and the Eastern Greek world caused different manuscript traditions in each region. Basically, translations of the New Testament differ in the question if they follow the Western “Alexandrian” or the Eastern “Byzantine” tradition. Sometimes the manuscript groups display heavy differences like in John 1:18:

⁴ As a temporal adverb “последнее” = “finally” also can appear today (e.g. “Последнее является самостоятельной, весьма интересной задачей ...”); cf. Russian National Corpus <<http://www.ruscorpora.ru>>; found 18.10.2016.

Biblical Text		Jh 1:18
Greek Byzantine Majority text		Θεὸν οὐδεὶς ἑώρακεν πώποτε• ὁ μονογενῆς υἱός, ὁ ὢν εἰς τὸν κόλπον τοῦ πατρὸς, ἐκεῖνος ἐξηγήσατο.
Greek Alexandrian text		Θεὸν οὐδεὶς ἑώρακεν πώποτε• μονογενῆς Θεὸς ὁ ὢν εἰς τὸν κόλπον τοῦ Πατρὸς, ἐκεῖνος ἐξηγήσατο.

It is quite a difference if Jesus is called the “only-begotten Son” (Byzantine reading) or the “only-begotten God” (Alexandrine reading) of God (!). Seven (M, KP, O, CH, D, WBTC, G) out of eight Ukrainian translations have “Son”, but the translation found in UBS follows the Alexandrian reading:

Bible Translations/ Translators	year	Jh 1:18
M	1861	Бога ніхто не бачив ніколи: Єдиnorodний Син, що в лоні Отцевім, Той виявив.
UBS	1997	Бога ніхто ніколи не бачив; але єдиnorodний Бог, який є в лоні Батька, - він визнав.

On the dogmatic level the change of “Son” to “God” makes no difference, because the Son of God as a hypostasis of the Trinity is at the same time God himself. But on the pragmatic level the textual difference seems to be a confessional marker, because the regional prevalence of the Byzantine manuscript group coincides with the regional prevalence of the orthodox confession, so that an Alexandrian reading seems specific to confessionality. Other objective characteristics of the Bible like the number and names of books and the sequence they appear in the Old Testament can have a confessional meaning, too (e.g. the canonicity of the Book of Tobit), but mostly are only indicative for the manuscript tradition of the source texts (e.g. the numbering of the Psalms).

2.3 Confession and Use. The envisaged usage of a text is always an aspect a translator has to be aware of. In the case of the Bible various typical circumstances the Biblical texts are experienced in must be considered.

Aside from private lecture Biblical texts have come to a certain form of usage for liturgical office during the Holy Mass. Practically, the whole

collection of texts, which goes under the name Bible, consists of singular texts or even singular passages, of which some are in much more common use than others. Because Christian practice reads the Old Testament mainly as prophecy for the coming of Christ, some texts, like Jeremiah, are much more often quoted than others, e.g. Habakuk, and some passages, like Genesis 1 and 2 (creation of the heavens and the earth) are much more often remembered than others (take random passages from Numbers referring to the laws for the community). Additionally, some texts have a fixed aesthetic meaning like the Psalms, which is confirmed by liturgical practice in singing the text in paraphrased form during the Mass. A third usage pattern of the Biblical texts show the letters of the Apostles which are read as moral exhortations, while, finally, the Gospels themselves are read and additionally commented in a sermon which treats their wording as not alterable.

Biblical texts differ in relation to their liturgical use which itself is dependent on the shape of liturgy in the respective Christian confession. But regardless individual manifestations in the use of Biblical texts in different Christian confessions obviously some quotations are much more often read, heard and remembered than others. So it is not promising to interpret every translational difference as confessionally based. For example, the Psalms are regarded as poetry and their verses in the various vernacular translations consequently have taken on the character of examples for prayers *per se*; hardly a translator will touch the stylistic form of the now naturalised wording of the Psalms just to underline a more literal meaning.

On the other hand, theological differences arise mainly by discussing sentences from the Gospels or the Apostolic Letters, and consequently in the first place it should be looked there to find formulations, where aspects of the translator's confession may be expressed in the wording of the translation itself. But the expectation to discover something unusual should not be stretched too far. Bible translators are not acting according to cultural sciences and theories like "dialogical translations". A prominent verse with heavy dogmatic weight is Mark 6:3 where it is spoken about a "brother" and "sisters" of Jesus. Obviously, a kinship of Jesus on biological level with other children from Mary would contradict the catholic and orthodox dogma that the Mother of God is the Everlasting Virgin.

Biblical Text		Mk 6:3
Greek Byzantine Majority text		Οὐχ οὗτός ἐστιν ὁ τέκτων, ὁ υἱὸς Μαρίας, ἀδελφὸς δὲ Ἰακώβου καὶ Ἰωσῆ καὶ Ἰούδα καὶ Σίμωνος; Καὶ οὐκ εἰσὶν αἱ ἀδελφαὶ αὐτοῦ ὧδε πρὸς ἡμᾶς; Καὶ ἐσκανδαλίζοντο ἐν αὐτῷ.

The Greek text displays ἀδελφὸς “Brother” (nom sg masc) and ἀδελφαὶ “Sisters” (nom pl fem), but ἀδελφὸς is used in the New Testament to not only point to kinship by consanguinity, but also to persons who metaphorically are named relatives because of their belonging to a certain group. KJV makes a difference in translating ἀδελφὸς in Mk 6:3 with “brother”, but translates the Ἄνδρες ἀδελφοί (vocativ pl masc, here addressing 120 persons) in Acts 1:16 with the alternate plural form “brethren”. The Ukrainian translations of Acts 1:16 change between Мужі брати! (KP, CH), Мужі-браття! (O, D, G), Мужі-братове! (UBS) and Брати мої (WBTC) and similar to KJV — taken out the “easy reading” of WBTC — utilise the morphological possibilities of the possible endings for collective meaning (the Russian synodal translation has the collective: мужи братия), or for a plural ending according to o- or u-stems. These changes between morphological possibilities cannot be interpreted as confessional variations. And pertaining to Mk 6:3 no Ukrainian translation⁵ renders ἀδελφὸς by another verb than “brother”.

However, in Romans 12:13 we hear in some translations of “brothers”, while most translations display — according to the Greek source — the word “holy (man)”.

Biblical Text		Rm 12:13
Greek Byzantine Majority and Alexandrian text ⁶		ταῖς χρείαις τῶν ἁγίων κοινωνοῦντες

Ukrainian translations do not diverge from Greek gen pl τῶν ἁγίων:

⁵ And no other, I am aware of; note only a different verse numbering in the German Elberfeld translation 1905.

⁶ Neither the internet based presentation of the texts, nor the authoritative edition[3] mention any reading variants..

Bible Translations/ Translators	year	Rm 12:13
M	1861	n .a. (only translation of the Gospels)
KP	1904	у потребибах сьвятих - подільчіві
O	1962	беріть уділ у потребах сьвятих
CH	1963	сьвятих у потребах спомагайте
D	1992	У потребах сьвятих беріть участь
WBTC	1996	Допомагайте сьвятим Божим людям у скруті
UBS	1997	беріть участь у потребах сьвятих, дотримуй- тесь гостинности.
G	2006	У потребах сьвятих беріть участь

It is not clear if the translational periphrase of WBTC (“holy men of God”) is motivated by the search for easy readable language or inspired by a specific group of translations which replace “holy (man)” by “brother”:

Bible Translations/ Translators	year	Rm 12:13
Twentieth Century New Testament (Britain)	1904	Relieving the wants of Christ’s People
Czech ecumenical translation	1985	Sdílejte se s bratřími v jejich nouzi
God’s Word to the Nations (Cleveland, USA)	1995	Share what you have with God’s people who are in need
German evangelical translation (Karl-Heinz Vanheiden)	2010	Nehmt Anteil an den Nöten der Gläubigen und helft ihnen!

In the case of Rm 12:13 it is hard to overlook that all translations (known to me) which write “believers”, “God’s people” or just “brothers’ as an equivalent for “holy (man)” can more or less associated with protestant translators or institutions and it is hard not to remember the protestant argument against the veneration of catholic Saints saying that every “believer” indeed is part of the community of “Saints”. In contrast to the previous example

(2.2) Rm 12:13 has not secondarily taken on the meaning of a confessional marker, because different confessions traditionally make use of different redactions of the text, but in Rm 12:13 no reading variants are extant in the source texts and the change from “holy” to “brother” can be considered one of the few examples where confessional reasoning seems to have influenced the wording of the translation itself.

3. Conclusion. Only for the sake of abbreviation we are talking about a Bible translation and its translator. In most cases more than one person has been at work in translating parts of the Bible. Even, if we can conclude that the resulting text of the respective translation has undergone an editorial unification, differences to other — also unified translations — may not necessarily reflect confessional differences. In most cases the differences in translations result from the use of different source texts rather than from confessional reasoning, but in some rare instances a confessional specific way of expressions is observable.

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ВЕРОИСПОВЕДАТЕЛЬНЫЕ АСПЕКТЫ В ПЕРЕВОДАХ БИБЛИИ

Не раз переводы Библии разделяются под взглядом различного вероисповедания их передодчиков. Сатья занимается проблемом доказывать вероисповедательную точку зрения переводчика в самом тексте перевода.

Ключевые слова: Библия, перевод, Украинский язык, вероисповедание (конфессия)