KING JAMES BIBLE: LANGUAGE AND TIMES

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When King Edward VI died in 1553, nothing worth remarking had been done as regards the translation of the Bible since the publication of the *Great Bible* in 1539 under his father Henry VIII. What doctrinal policy the King would have pursued had he lived longer cannot be known. Now the crown went to Henry and Catherine's daughter, Mary, a devout Roman Catholic. Therefore, with the accession of Mary all the Reformation policy was reversed: it was to undo all that had been done by her father and brother and restore the Church of England to communion with Rome. She started by dropping the title of "Supreme Head of the Church of England", and intended to re-establish a religious policy in accordance with the teaching of Rome. On the whole, this policy met with acquiescence of the people, who, on one hand, were still familiar with the old ways before the breach with Rome, and, on the other, the theology of the reform did not greatly interest the working man of the sixteenth century, much in the same way as theology does not interest the technical man of the twentieth century.

As to the work of the Bible translation, some of the men most closely associated with it, like John Rogers and Thomas Cranmer, had to purge their sin by being executed; others, like Coverdale, fled to the Continent.

Latin, not English, was the official language of Roman liturgy, and therefore, a sign of communion with Rome. But, even so, no express steps were taken against the English Bible known as the *Great Bible*, which was set up by Henry VIII in 1538. There was, indeed, much burning of Bibles during Mary's reign, but the position of the Great Bible was not assailed by any royal proclamation. Due, perhaps, to the fact that Queen Mary had been associated with the *Great Bible* during her father's reign, as Dr. Mozley points out (Bruce, 1979: 85), she nourished in her heart a certain tenderness for this version, which may have accounted for her unwillingness to condemn it by any proclamation.

At Mary's death in 1558, it was Elizabeth, the daughter of Henry VIII and Ann Boleyn, her half sister thereof, who ascended the throne. Elizabeth proceeded immediately to pass the Act of Supremacy, which revived Henry's attitude towards Rome and imposed an oath upon ecclesiastical and lay people acknowledging her, not as "supreme head", but as "supreme governor" of both church and state, which might sound milder, but amounts to the same, and thus the new reform started.

There had not been any work of Bible translation during Mary's reign, but the English scholars, exiled in Germany, followed the example of John Calvin and other leading theologians of the Protestant Church, and, under the leadership of William Whittingham, produced a revision of the Bible, which appeared in 1560 and is known as the *Geneva Bible*.

The *Geneva Bible* represented a thorough revision of the *Great Bible*, won widespread popularity and became the household Bible of English speaking Protestants, most probably because its notes represented a more radical reformed viewpoint than that of the Elizabethan religious settlement. It was never appointed to be used in the churches of England, although it was from the beginning in the churches of Scotland, where the Reformation was influenced by the Calvinism of Geneva. Even if its excellence as a translation was acknowledged by those who disagreed with the theology of the translators, the *Geneva Bible* did not fit the Anglicanism, specially because of the outspoken Calvinism and its annotations.

The Archbishop of Canterbury started procedures for a new version to be made and entrusted it to a body of Bishops. The result was the *Bishops' Bible*, based on the *Great Bible* and departing from it only where it did not accurately represented the original.

The whole history of the Bible translation into English is a history of successive revisions and corrections. After following the process of so many translations, after so much work done on the same matter, the striking thing is that no one was good enough. The best one was still to come, the one to endure the passage of time, the one still in use in churches as well as at home, the one to cover all times, from King James to the present, and surely for many years to come; it is the so called *King James Bible*, or the *Authorized Version*.

On the death of Queen Elizabeth in 1603, James VI of Scotland was invited to unite the crowns of England and of Scotland. The Anglican Church stood for the ideals which appealed most to the new king. He had no sympathy

with Rome, and he had seen enough of Scottish Presbyterianism to know that Puritans would do him no good. He found plenty of people within the established Church to support both his theories and his policy about religious affairs. Furthermore, he intended to base his claim to supremacy on theological grounds, on the Divine Right of Kings. For him, monarchy and episcopacy stood together. The king ruled by divine right, and it was the duty of the Church to support him as he would support the Church: "No Bishop, no King", but also "No King, no Bishop" (Moorman, 1980: 222).

Some months after his coming to England, James summoned a conference of churchmen and theologians at Hampton Court. That is where the resolution was taken "that a translation be made of the whole Bible, as consonant as can be to the original Hebrew and Greek; and this is to be set out and printed without any marginal notes, and to be used both as the Church's Bible and as the people's Bible" (Bruce, 1979: 96). No one would object to notes intended to make the sense plainer, but notes reflecting sectional points of view in theology or church policy would limit the usefulness of a version intended for all the English people.

When the new version was published, it bore the title:

The Holy Bible, Conteyning the Old Testament and the New: Newly Translated out of the Originall tongues, with the former translations diligently compared and revised, by his Majesties speciall commandement. Appointed to be read in Churches. Imprinted at London by Robert Barker, Printer to the Kings most Excellent Majestie. Anno Dom. 1611.

The quality of the Book needs neither commendation nor praise. This version is still used with preference to any other in English speaking countries, even though the gradual evolution of language and changes in English usage have made its language increasingly remote and archaic, especially to those people who have not the appropriate literary equipment. But the English speaking people, as a whole, do prefer it to any other updated version such as the *New English Bible*. They do appreciate the rhythm of its language, which is a faithful witness to the period in the evolution of English known as "Early Modern English", and, on the other hand, they consider it as essential a part of the national culture as the works of Chaucer and Shakespeare (Partridge, 1973).

I am dealing now with some of the most salient features of the language of the *King James Bible*, so that the potential reader may be provided with a kind of introduction, and, if it is the case, have a further insight into the structure of Biblical English as it was in the Renaissance and still in use today.

In the Renaissance period, the plural and the possessive forms are identical. There is, therefore, the base form "boy" and a plural and possessive "boys". While in present English four different forms are distinguished by spelling: "boy", "boy's", "boys", "boys'". The possessive form of the nouns , both singular and plural, is regularly made up of the -es morpheme, represented in spelling by -s or -es. The use of the apostrophe as a mark of the possessive singular does not become common until the late 17th century, and the use of it for the possessive plural not until the 18th century (Barber, 1976: 198).

Things being like that, it is obvious that the apostrophe cannot appear in the *King James Bible*, published in 1611. But, curiously enough, if we open any of the editions currently in use today, we will discover that the apostrophe does appear, normally attached to proper names and personal nouns. To show that, it may suffice to read the parable of Lazarus, where it appears up to three times.

> desiring to be fed with the crumbs which fell from the rich man's table [...]
> was carried by the angels into Abraham's bosom [...]
> that thou wouldest send him to my father's house [...] (Lc. 16, 19-31).

The explanation of this apparent anomaly must lie on the fact that there was a revision of the whole Bible and it was newly printed as the *Revised Version* in 1885. Even if the directives for the revision were "to introduce as few alterations as possible into the text of the *King James Bible*" (Partridge, 1973: 164), some obsolete of confusing expressions were brought up to date, among which the genitive form and the neuter possessive of the third personal pronoun ("its" instead of "his") must be counted. In support of this hypothesis, I had the opportunity of inspecting one of the few copies of the very original edition kept at London University Library, and that is where the identical morpheme for the genitive and the plural can be found; there is no distinction

in the pronunciation though (except the plural of a few nouns formed by stem change): "the rich mans table", "into Abrahams bosome", "my fathers house" (passim). The same can be seen in the very title itself quoted above: "by his *Majesties* speciall commandemant", "Printer of the *Kings* most Excellent Majestie".

With the loss of inflections, a new prepositional system started developing to replace the old cases in the structure of the sentence. Most probably, the "of" preposition holds the highest degree of frequency, and one of its functions is to indicate the genitive apart from other cases, mainly the ablative. As Brook says, "the of-phrase has been constantly encroaching on the genitive in -s, and in present day use the latter is almost confined to persons and personified objects" (1958: 115). We may well disagree to Brook's expression "almost confined", because it is currently used, for instance, with temporal nouns. But, as regards the *King James Bible*, the "of" construction is much commoner than the -s genitive, and it is also found with personal nouns, for example, "the servants of the householder" (Mt. 13, 27), and with personal names, such as "the love of God", or "the sonnes of Noah" (Gn. 9, 18). Nevertheless, the highest degree of frequency is also due to its fulfilling other functions that in present English are held by other prepositions, such as "by", "about", "from", "for", "with", "over", and these must be gleaned from the context; for example, "the sonnes of Noah that went forth of the Arke" (from) (Gn. 9, 18); "the men asked him of his wife" (about) (Gn. 26, 7); "when thou art bidden of any man to a wedding" (by) (Lc. 14, 8).

The system of personal pronouns. It is such a wide subject that I am limiting myself to the point considered as one of the most striking features of the *King James Bible*, namely, the personal pronouns of the second person. It is well known (Barber, 1976) that during the 16th century there were still two different pronouns of the second person: the so called forms in "thou" (thou, thee, thy, thine), and "ye/you" for the plural. It was not possible to use "thou" as a plural. In the singular, "you" was the polite form used by inferiors to superiors, and, on the other hand, "thou" was used by superiors to address a social inferior. In the plural, "ye" had been the nominative form and "you" the accusative, but during the century, "you" was increasingly used as a nominative, and "ye" became the variant of "you" either as nominative or accusative. According to Barber (1976: 209), there was an apparent anomaly in prayers, because God is always addressed as "thou" even if he is both our

king and our father, and in either capacity he ought to be addressed as "you", which is seen as an example of liturgical conservatism, "for it is normal", Barber concludes, "for the language of worship to resist change and so become archaic" (ibid.).

Liturgy, or the language of worship, derives from the Bible, and it is the language of the *King James Bible* that I am dealing with now. Actually, although it was published in the beginning of the 17th century, and by then the forms in "thou" are said to have fallen into disuse, all these forms, as well as the form "ye" as the only nominative, are invariably present:

> Son, remember that thou in thy lifetime receivedst thy good things [...] I pray thee, therefore, father, that thou wouldest send him to my father's house (lc. 16, 19-31).
> Take that thine is and go thy way; I will give unto this last even as unto thee [...] Is thine eye evil because I am good? (Mt. 20, 1-15).

But I do not think that the "apparent anomaly" should be explained by appealing to "liturgical conservatism". In fact, the forms in "thou" were also used to indicate intimacy, affection, tenderness, deep feelings; and that is what you do when you say your prayers and address your father, God, from the inner of your heart. It must be so, because the British still love slipping into these forms when they pray, for instance, the "Our Father [...] hallowed be thy name, thy kingdom come [...] ". And, even the translators of the *New English Bible* keep the forms in "thou" just when dealing with those passages that express a direct prayer, such as the "Our Father" (Mt. 6, 9), or "The Pharisee: I thank thee, O God, that I am not like the rest of men [...] " (Lc. 18, 10, 11), or when Jesus prays in Gethsemane: "My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass me by. Yet not as I will, but as thou wilt" (Mt. 26, 39).

Nevertheless, we may accept that there appear signs of conservatism in the use of "ye" as nominative and "you" as accusative, for instance: "I know you not. Watch, therefore, for ye know neither the day nor the hour" (Mt. 25, 11-13), and also in the use of "thine" as a possessive as well as a determiner alternative to "thy" when the following word starts by a vowel, as in "take that thine is and go thy way [...] is thine eye evil because I am good?" (Mt. 20, 14, 15).

Another linguistic feature worth remarking is made up of personal morphemes of the verbs. The second person morpheme of the present and simple past is -est, which appears both in its full form and in its syncopated form as -st. The latter is commoner in the past tense, especially when it ends in -ed. The verb "to have" appears with the contracted form "hast", although "havest" is occasionally found, and the verb "to be" has the form "art" and, occasionally, "beest". These morphemes follow the process of the pronoun "thou", and they are always present when "thou" is regularly used, as it happens throughout the *King James Bible:*

> Whatsoever thou spendest, when I come again I will repay thee. Which now of these three, thinkest thou, was neighbour unto him that fell among the thieves? (Lc. 10, 35, 36).
> Thou never gavest me a kid, that I might make merry with my friends. But as soon as this thy son was come, which hath devoured thy living with harlots, thou hast killed for him the fatted calf [...] Son, thou art ever with me, and all that I have is thine (Lc. 15, 29-31).

The third person morpheme of the present tense is -eth, occasionally, -th. It is the standard inflexion at the beginning of the period, but it is gradually supplanted by the -es morpheme, which we use today. By the end of the 16th century both of them occur freely, but there is a tendency to use -es in less formal styles of writing and -eth in formal ones.

In the *King James Bible,* -es morpheme does not occur, not even as a variant, which must be interpreted as a sign of -eth being more formal and dignified. For example:

> This man receiveth sinners and eateth with them. What man of you, having an hundred sheep, if he lose one of them, doth not leave the ninety and nine and go after that which is lost, and when he hath found, he layeth it on his shoulders ... and when he cometh home, he calleth his friends [...] likewise joy shall be in heaven over one sinner that repenteth (Lc. 15, 2-7).

As regards the primary auxiliaries, let's point out a couple of features. The compound tenses are formed with the auxiliary "have" as today, but, when intransitive verbs occur, the auxiliary "be" is used instead of "have": "thy brother is come, and thy father hath killed the fatted calf [...] as soon as this thy son was come, which hath devoured thy living with harlots [...]". (Lc. 15, 27-30).

It is currently admitted that in Early Modern English the insertion or omission of auxiliary "do" was not strictly regulated, as it is today , but it could be inserted or omitted at will. Therefore, interrogative and negative sentences could be formed either with or without "do", and "do" could be used in affirmative sentences without giving them emphasis (Barber, 1976). Once the regulating process started taking place by the middle of the 16th century, there used to be some stylistic differences between forms with and without "do"; that is to say, the regulated use of "do" is more typical of a colloquial style, while its use at will is more literary. Most probably, this is the reason why the *King James Bible,* as it is a high level literary work, does not offer a regulated presence of "do". If anything, we may say that it does not normally appear neither in affirmative sentences for emphasis nor in interrogative and negative ones as a device, unless the double quality is given together; that is, a sentence takes "do" if it is interrogative and negative at the same time. Which can be illustrated as follows:

How much owest thou unto my lord? (Lc. 16, 5).
Lord, when saw we thee an hungred and fed thee? [...].
When saw we thee a stranger and took thee in? (Mt. 25, 37, 38).
Verily I say unto you, I know you not (Mt. 25, 11).
And from within shall answer and say, trouble me not (Lc. 11, 7).
What man of you, having an hundred sheep, if he lose one of them, doth not leave the ninety and nine and go after that which is lost? Either what woman having ten pieces of silver, if she lose one piece, doth not light a candle, and sweep the house? (Lc. 15, 4-8).

By inversion we mean the use of a word order in which the verb precedes the subject, as it occurs in the examples above, which is normal in interrogative sentences, apart from the use of "do" or not, but it is not so in declarative sentences. When an object is added, we have what is called, in present English, "Straight Word Order: S-V-O", and inversion is normally limited to sentences beginning with a negative or restrictive expression. But, in the Renaissance period, other types of word order were also common, namely, V-S-O, O-V-S. The former very often occurred when the sentence began with an adverb or adverbial phrase, and the latter when the object was placed first for linking or emphatic reasons. There was not, therefore, such strict a regulation as in present English, and the word order was much freer, or it occurred in free variation from pattern to pattern. Which may be illustrated as follows:

> Then said Jesus unto him, Go, and do thou likewise (Lc. 10, 37).
> Therefore is the kingdom of heaven likened unto a certain king [...] So likewise shall my heavenly Father do also unto you, if ye from your hearts forgive not every one his brother their trespasses (Mt. 18, 23, 35).
> Afterward came also the other virgins, saying, Lord, Lord, open to us (Mt. 25, 11).
> Wh[...] these things do the nations of the world seek after (Lc. 12, 18, 30).

At the time of putting an end to this paper, I am fully aware that many other interesting topics, such as the relative pronouns, or the modal auxiliaries, or the subjunctive, or the prepositions, or the whole structure of the sentence [...] remain untouched waiting for another opportunity.

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