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FROM FORMAL EQUIVALENCE TO READER-ORIENTED REFORMULATION: TRANSLATION STRATEGIES FOR BIBLICAL AND THEOLOGICAL TERMINOLOGY IN SELECTED POLISH BIBLE VERSIONS

Bible translation is one of the most complex areas of translation studies because it involves not only linguistic transfer but also theological meaning, cultural tradition, stylistic convention, and reader reception. Biblical and theological terms are especially sensitive translation units. They often carry doctrinal, symbolic, historical, and intertextual meanings that cannot be reduced to simple dictionary equivalents. For this reason, the translation of terms such as *laska*, *przymierze*, *sprawiedliwość*, *zbawienie*, *grzech*, *Duch*, *ciało*, *dusza*, *Kościół*, *Prawo*, *prawda*, and *Słowo* requires a systematic analysis of translation strategies.

The present paper examines translation strategies used in rendering selected biblical and theological terminology in three Polish Catholic Bible versions: Biblia Jakuba Wujka (1599), Biblia Tysiąclecia, and Biblia Warszawsko-Praska. The study adopts a diachronic and synchronic perspective. The diachronic perspective enables comparison of the historically foundational Wujek Bible with later modern Polish versions. The synchronic perspective allows for comparison between Biblia Tysiąclecia and Biblia Warszawsko-Praska as two modern Polish translations that differ in their degree of terminological conservatism, readability, and reader orientation.

The theoretical framework of the study is grounded in descriptive-comparative translation studies. Nida's distinction between formal and dynamic equivalence provides a useful starting point for identifying whether a translation preserves traditional verbal form or shifts toward communicative naturalness and equivalent effect [6]. Toury's concept of translation norms helps explain why translation choices are shaped by historical, cultural, and target-system expectations rather than by purely individual preference [9]. Nord's functionalist approach is also relevant because Bible translation cannot be separated from the intended function of the target text and its addressee [7]. Additional Polish studies on biblical style, modernisation, and Bible translation tradition show that the language of Polish biblical translation is shaped by a constant tension between sacred continuity and contemporary accessibility [1; 4; 5].

The corpus consists of selected passages from the Old and New Testaments corresponding to key biblical and theological terms. The analysed semantic clusters include divine naming, covenant, grace, mercy, blessing, righteousness, faith, spirit, flesh, soul or life, sin, salvation, truth, holiness, Passover or Pascha, law or commandment, church or assembly, and word or Logos. The study does not aim to analyse the full biblical text. Instead, it uses a purposively selected set of terminological cases in which translation differences are especially visible and methodologically relevant.

The first major strategy identified in the corpus is formal-equivalent rendering. This strategy is visible where a version preserves a traditional term or formula, especially in passages of high theological or liturgical significance. For example, expressions such as *Słowo*, *Baranek Boży*, *grzech świata*, *Błogosławieni*, *królestwo niebieskie*, *prawda*, *droga*, *prawda i życie*, and

przymierze show a high degree of continuity across the versions. Such terms are not easily replaced because they function not only as lexical items but also as elements of Polish biblical and liturgical memory.

The second strategy is controlled modernisation. This is especially characteristic of *Biblia Tysiąclecia*. The version frequently updates archaic language while preserving a high biblical register and traditional theological terminology. For example, older forms such as *zakon* or *żywot* may be replaced by *Prawo* and *życie*, but the passage's theological structure remains stable. This shows that modernisation does not automatically mean dynamic or free translation. It may also serve to preserve the theological category in a form understandable to contemporary readers.

The third strategy is reader-oriented reformulation. This strategy is especially visible in *Biblia Warszawsko-Praska*. The version often expands compact biblical expressions, clarifies implicit logical relations, and makes the sentence more accessible to modern Polish readers. For example, a compressed image may be transformed into a more explanatory construction; an abstract theological term may be rendered through a concrete action; or a more community-oriented expression may replace a traditional institutional term. Such choices increase readability, but they may also lead to semantic narrowing or interpretative shift.

The fourth strategy is explicitation. Explicitation occurs when one version makes explicit a semantic element that remains less visible in another version. This may be useful for contemporary readers who lack a historical, cultural, or theological background. However, explicitation is not neutral. It always selects one interpretative direction and may reduce ambiguity. In Bible translation, this is particularly important because ambiguity, symbolic density, and layered meaning often belong to the theological force of the text.

The fifth strategy is functional concretisation. This is visible when a theologically dense term is rendered in a more concrete, immediately understandable expression. For example, a term from the semantic field of salvation may be rendered as "help" or "liberation" in a specific narrative context. Such a solution may be communicatively effective because it helps the reader understand what happens in the passage. At the same time, it may weaken the connection between the immediate narrative event and the broader theological vocabulary of salvation.

The sixth strategy is contextual terminological variation. The same version may preserve a traditional term in one context but replace it in another. This is especially important when comparing *Biblia Tysiąclecia* and *Biblia Warszawsko-Praska*. For instance, the term *Kościół* may be preserved in a foundational ecclesiological passage but replaced by *społeczność* in a communal-disciplinary context. Similarly, the term *zbawienie* may be preserved in a clearly theological passage but rendered through a more functional expression elsewhere. This suggests that reader-oriented translation does not operate mechanically. It depends on the function of the passage and on the translator's interpretation of the term's contextual role.

The analysis also shows that translation strategies vary across semantic fields. Christological and liturgical terms are relatively stable. This includes *Słowo*, *Baranek Boży*, *prawda*, *grzech świata*, and *królestwo niebieskie*. By contrast, terms related to grace, favour, divine mercy, salvation, righteousness, and ecclesiology exhibit greater variation. For example, the field of grace may be rendered through *laska*, *życzliwość*, *upodobanie*, or *dobroć*, depending on the version and context. Such variation does not necessarily indicate inconsistency; rather, it reveals different translational priorities.

One of the most important findings is that the distinction between formal equivalence and reader-oriented reformulation should not be treated as a rigid binary. The corpus shows a continuum of strategies. A translation may preserve a key theological term while modernising syntax. It may use a reader-friendly phrase while retaining a traditional biblical formula. It may be formally conservative in a Christological passage and dynamically reformulated in a narrative or ethical passage. Therefore, the translation strategy must be identified on a case-by-case basis.

The diachronic analysis shows that the Wujek Bible functions as an important source of Polish Catholic biblical style. It preserves archaising forms and sacred register, but it also establishes a terminological core that continues to influence later versions. Modern Polish translations do not simply replace the Wujek tradition; they selectively preserve, update, standardise, and reinterpret it. This is particularly evident in the shift from archaic lexical forms to modern Polish expressions while maintaining central theological concepts.

The synchronic analysis shows that Biblia Tysiąclecia and Biblia Warszawsko-Praska represent two different models of modern Polish Bible translation. Biblia Tysiąclecia usually favours controlled terminological continuity and compact biblical style. Biblia Warszawsko-Praska more often favours reader-oriented clarity, explicitation, and contextual reformulation. However, this distinction is not absolute. In some cases, Biblia Warszawsko-Praska is more traditional than Biblia Tysiąclecia, especially where it preserves a classical biblical formula or a theologically precise term. Conversely, Biblia Tysiąclecia may introduce semantic shifts in individual cases.

This point is methodologically important. It would be weak to label one version simply as “literal” and the other as “free”. The real difference lies in how each version negotiates theological precision, readability, accessibility, tradition, and function. In applied translation studies, such a conclusion is valuable because it demonstrates that translation strategy is not an abstract label attached to a whole translation. It is a pattern of local decisions made across specific terms and contexts.

The paper contributes to applied linguistics and translation studies in three ways. First, it shows that biblical terminology can be analysed through a clear descriptive-comparative framework. Second, it demonstrates the usefulness of combining diachronic and synchronic perspectives in translation research. Third, it confirms that terminological variation in Bible translation should be interpreted not only lexically, but also functionally, stylistically, and culturally.

In conclusion, the translation of biblical and theological terminology is a strategic process in which translators balance formal continuity, semantic precision, reader accessibility, and theological tradition. The selected Polish Bible versions show that translation strategies are not fixed once and for all at the level of an entire translation. They emerge in specific decisions concerning terms and passages. For this reason, the movement from formal equivalence to reader-oriented reformulation should be understood as a continuum of translational behaviour rather than as a simple opposition between literal and free translation.

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