

tradition, at its strongest in the case of familiar words of Jesus as in the Decalogue, may be pressing in the direction of formal correspondence. Or translators, unable themselves to understand the reason for the alternation of "thou" and "you" in the text, may be passing the problem on to their readers, most of whom will be unqualified even to address it, and who will therefore tend, in the case of most receptor languages, to perceive the text through a mist of unnaturalness.

To sum up: First, we recommend that translators or revisers of functional equivalent translations consider, in consultation with potential readers, whether or not the alternation of "thou" and "you," in the Sermon on the Mount and comparable passages elsewhere in the Bible, has in the receptor language some positive effect, such as an increase of emphasis where the equivalent of "thou" forms is used. Second, if not, we recommend that "you" forms be considered for consistent use in passages where a group of people is addressed.

### Abbreviations

ERV	English Revised Version (1885)
FRCL	La Bible en français courant (1997)
SPCL	Dios habla hoy (1983)
GECL	Gute Nachricht Bibel (1997)
EB	Die Bibel nach der Übersetzung Martin Luthers (1985)
ITCL	Parola del Signore (1985)
PV	Parole de Vie (2000)
RV95	Santa Biblia Reina-Valera 1995

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## THE GOSPEL IN SLANG: with Special Reference to the Contemporary Polish Context

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Recent months have seen renewed interest in the issue of translation of the Bible into non-standard varieties of Polish, both as a result of the publication of several rather innovative versions and, perhaps even to a greater extent, because of the animated debates they triggered in academic as well as ecclesiastical circles. Various theological, philosophical, and linguistic issues resurfaced as questions related to the nature of the Scripture, the hermeneutical process, and the translator's role and freedom were brought into the discussion—some of them rarely noticed or seriously considered so far in the Polish context. In the following paragraphs, my purpose is twofold (hence the division into two major sections). I will first outline the scope of the debate, indicating the chief points of contention, and then offer a brief critical analysis of one of the most controversial among the new Polish Bible versions, entitled *Dobra czytanka wg św. ziom'a Janka* (lit. *The*

*Good Reading according to St. Pal Johnny*;<sup>1</sup> hereinafter referred to as *Good Reading*) in an attempt to relate it to both the praise and criticism it has received.

## I.

### Comments of the Commission on Religious Language

It seems that the controversy over some new Bible versions properly began with the announcement of “Comments on the Contemporary Translations of the Bible into the Polish Language”<sup>2</sup> by a group of scholars affiliated with the Commission on Religious Language, a body of the Council for the Polish Language.<sup>3</sup> This document, consisting of only a few pages, brought forth strong criticism against “publications presented to the reader as translations of the Holy Scriptures into dialects and regional or social varieties of Polish.” What follows is a summary of the most important items.

The Commission noted “certain terminological abuses” manifested in using the designation “translation” with reference to texts produced on any other basis than “the original languages of the Bible,” in defiance of the official recommendation of the Second Vatican Council.

Further, the very purposefulness of “translations” (more legitimately conceived of as “paraphrases” or “approximations”) into dialects and languages of a limited social range was questioned. Specifically, it was pointed out that “Bible translations into the literary Polish language, approved by church authorities and recognized by philologists, used in the liturgy and teaching are not—in spite of their stylistic specificity—so illegible as to warrant additional translation into an allegedly more comprehensible language.” Since the purpose of the biblical text is to be viewed not only in communicative but also educational terms, the features of the traditional biblical style should be employed in order for the reader to “encounter a language different to that surrounding him in the everyday reality (advertisements, politics, media).”

The Commission expressed its “utmost concern” with reference to the translational attempts into regional dialects and slang, both on the theological and religious as well as linguistic and philological levels, providing several examples drawn from actual versions. Regarding the *Good Reading*, it was stated that using the word *impra* (youth party) in connection with *wino* (wine) may imply that “the Gospel describes meetings . . . typical of slang users.”

It was concluded that any such “translational” attempts did not result in greater accessibility of the Bible but rather put it at the risk of “linguistic trivialization” and involved the threat of “thoughtless confusion of the sacred and the profane,” in addition to having “no literary merits.”

The Commission also made a legal comment, pointing out that even though according to the Code of Canon Law the translation and publication of the Bible

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1 Detailed information regarding the *Good Reading* may be found online at <http://www.ziomjanek.pl>.

2 *Uwagi o współczesnych przekładach Biblii na język polski* [online]. <http://www.rjp.pl/?mod=kr&type=jrel&id=120>.

3 The Council, established in 1996 by the Polish parliament, is a national body of 38 scholars (predominantly linguists but also representatives of other disciplines, such as physics, computer science, medicine, literature, history of art, philosophy, logics, and law) as well as prominent authors, actors, and journalists. As a consulting and advisory institution, the Council addresses any issues related to the use and development of the Polish language.

must be approved by a conference of bishops, some parish priests, particularly in the Podhale region, use unauthorized “translations” in liturgy.

Finally, the Commission emphasized that its intention was not to “hinder initiatives aimed at expressing the mystery and beauty of the Bible in the language relevant to contemporary challenges and needs” but rather ensure that those initiatives would comply with theological, translational, and stylistic demands which can only be satisfied by “joint efforts of Bible scholars and philologists.”

### “The First Contact Bible”

Considering the forcefulness of some of the objections presented above, it is little wonder that they were not left without a response. Before long, *Tygodnik Powszechny*, a weekly magazine associated with the intellectual and cultural wing of the Roman Catholic Church, published a strongly polemical article entitled “The First Contact Bible”<sup>1</sup> by priest Andrzej Draguła, an assistant professor at the University of Szczecin, personally involved in youth ministry. Arguing from a pastoral and evangelistic perspective, Draguła challenged the basic position of the Commission regarding the special status of biblical language, pointing out that the style of Christ’s preaching was not fundamentally different from the language he used in ordinary discourse. In response to the Commission’s objection to the “thoughtless confusion of the sacred and the profane,” he claimed that the biblical reality does not know this division; moreover, the Scriptures, rather than introducing unnecessary and destructive discontinuity between the two spheres, should provide a bridge between the history of salvation and one’s own spiritual pilgrimage. He also noted that the archaizing, high style of language used in numerous Bible translations seems odd to contemporary readers who derive their linguistic taste largely from advertisements, newspapers, and popular literature.

In particular, Draguła responded to the objections raised by the Commission with reference to the *Good Reading* by demonstrating that in spite of numerous slang expressions used in place of traditional renderings, the hip-hop version of the gospel does retain most “religious” notions referring to the supernatural reality, such as “Spirit,” “Kingdom of God,” “Son of Man,” “only begotten Son,” “salvation,” and “believe,” alongside with some well-established biblical phrases, such as “be born of water and the spirit,” “be born again,” “raise the serpent in the wilderness,” and “have eternal life.” The attempt to translate the Bible into contemporary youth slang does not, in his opinion, violate the principle of faithfulness to the content of the sacred text because it seeks to establish a linguistic and theological continuum between the biblical and the contemporary world. Finally, he proposed that for people who would not start reading the Bible in traditional translation, a simplified or adjusted version may become the “first contact Bible.”

### “The First or Last Contact Bible?”

The very next issue of *Tygodnik Powszechny* brought a reply from the other side of the debate. Stanisław Koziara, a linguist and member of the Commission on Religious Language as well as signer of the said Comments, in his article “The

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1 “Biblia pierwszego kontaktu,” *Tygodnik Powszechny* no. 47 (2941), 20 November 2005.

First or Last Contact Bible?”<sup>1</sup> reacted to some of the doubts raised by Draguła, especially with reference to the *Good Reading*. Addressing the issue of the linguistic continuum between *sacrum* and *profanum*, Koziara argued that since “the existence of a separate experiential class of the sacred and non-sacred is a universally distinguishable cultural category . . . corresponding to linguistic behavior,” the two spheres ought not to be confused. In his opinion, this undesirable confusion results from the juxtaposition of lexical elements representing the low (i.e., colloquial) and high language registers, which, however unwillingly, corroborates the division into the religious and the secular.

Koziara questioned the conviction that “the way to overcome the barrier of incomprehension that hinders contemporary religious communication, including the reading of and listening to the Bible, is to discover a language which will eliminate this detachment” as well as the opinion regarding the “allegedly commonly understood language in which the books of the Bible, and particularly the New Testament, were written.” He noted that the gospels repeatedly record the difficulties experienced by the disciples when trying to grasp the sense of Christ’s parables and yet none of them requested a “translation” into a contemporary slang used by fishermen or shepherds.

From the linguistic point of view, he emphasized that slang as a non-standard variety of language is characterized by exclusive vocabulary, strong expressionism tinted with humor and certain coarseness, as well as more or less deliberate secrecy, which altogether make it a closed code, as opposed to the open (i.e., literary) language, corresponding to biblical Polish. He also noted the role of the sixteenth century translation by Jakub Wujek in molding the Polish biblical style manifested in its unique lexis, syntax, and phraseology.

Finally, at the climax of his argument, Koziara stated: “The Bible is a temple of the Word to which you have to climb up the stairs. What you need is a guide who can find the right keys to the door of the temple . . . Reading the comments of priest Draguła one can conclude that the author, instead of keys, offers picklocks which can only damage the door.” In short, rather than seek ways of phrasing the text of the Bible in a familiar language, one should turn for help to modern “scribes”—linguists, exegetes, and preachers—who can properly expound the meaning of the Scripture.

### “Translators and Prophets”

Two weeks later there came another response from a priest, theologian, and translator, Tomasz Węclawski. His insightful article “Translators and Prophets”<sup>2</sup> opened with a significant observation that underlying the debate surrounding some modern translations of the Bible into Polish are two separate questions: (1) a technical one, regarding the methodology (and, consequently, quality) of translation, and (2) a theological one, concerning the attitude toward the word of God, as communicated by the Scripture.

With respect to the former issue, Węclawski outlined the two basic theories of equivalence, differentiating between them in terms of the kind of access to the source text they offer to the reader, either by introducing him “into the tone and

1 “Biblia pierwszego czy ostatniego kontaktu?”, *Tygodnik Powszechny* no. 48 (2942), 27 November 2005.

2 “Tłumacze i prorocy,” *Tygodnik Powszechny* no. 50 (2944), 11 December 2005.

flavor of the original, into the world of its colors and smells, signs and expressions, linguistic figures and styles (formal equivalence)” or by “bringing a translation of the intentions, content, and possible influence of the original into the reader’s world (dynamic equivalence).” While endorsing formal equivalence as the primary translational method to be complemented rather than replaced by dynamic equivalence and essentially criticizing the use of a language variety “adjusted” to the reader, be it a dialect or slang, Węclawski noted that in Bible translation a third—and, in his opinion, the most inadequate—translational technique is often applied, involving attempts to “consecrate” the translated text according to the contemporary ideas of sacredness, resulting in the elevated, highly liturgical style. However, the good news (most evidently according to Mark) was conveyed and recorded in non-elevated language and whoever elevates it in translation faces the charge of injustice not only toward the source text but also toward the reader, who is forced to accept the translator’s idea of the text and its correct reception.

Against this realization, applicable not only to particular Bible translations but to the whole “sacramental style” of the ecclesiastical life, Węclawski noted that the gospel in hip-hop slang should still be considered a translation (though a somewhat unsuccessful one) rather than illegitimate interpretation. Interestingly, its communicative unsuccessfulness resulting from strong sociolinguistic markedness—and not from using a language variety inherently inappropriate to convey the sacred content—is in his view shared by a number of traditional translations in their overly elevated style. With reference to Koziara’s objection against the desecration of the religious language and confusion of the sacred and the profane, he pointed out that all books of the Bible give ample evidence of “desecration” of what was commonly regarded as sacred and impervious. Therefore, it may be that “a foolishly ‘consecrating’ version betrays the translated Word not less than a ‘desecrating’ one.”

### “Full Power Spirit”

Wojciech Kudyba, a lecturer of contemporary literature, in his article “Full Power Spirit”<sup>1</sup> published in the new year’s issue of *Tygodnik Powszechny* redirected the discussion into the original course characterized by a pragmatic focus by pointing out that at stake is the form and language of evangelism in contemporary culture. Acknowledging the scope and pace of cultural changes as well as the massive expansion of the popular culture, which broadens the chasm between the religious and the everyday language, he saw the need for dialogue, not only in order to restore the lost communicativeness of religious discourse but also to “evangelize” the pop culture. He opposed the fear of “impure elements defiling religious speech,” voiced by some scholars, by showing that it is based on a simplification ignoring the linguistic situation: “Religious convictions are always communicated in a social context. Obviously, formal situations demand the high style which, in turn, seems artificial in informal contexts . . . . An even more important element of the said social context is the recipient. Hardly anyone would insist on banning ordinary language when preaching to children, soldiers or prisoners.”

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1 “Full Power Spirit,” *Tygodnik Powszechny* no. 2 (2948), 8 January 2006.

Consequently, Kudyba challenged the opinion that speaking about God in everyday language inevitably results in the trivialization of the truth about him, claiming that “the process of stripping the religious notions of their deeper meanings occurs more often than it is typically assumed: not on the level of speaking about religious issues in ordinary language but rather whenever religious language is used to describe the ordinary,” as when, e.g., ice cream is advertised in terms of a temptation to succumb to. He offered a crucial differentiation between advertisements referring to religious notions and evangelistic endeavors employing techniques typical for advertising and discarded the former but embraced the latter.

At the same time, Kudyba criticized the attempt to translate the gospel into hip-hop slang as “indefensible”—not from the linguistic or theological but strictly an evangelistic perspective—pointing out that the excess of slang modifications necessarily leads to grotesque results: in his opinion “the text [of the *Good Reading*] may incite various kinds of laughter (from a friendly smile to a mocking grin) but does not encourage a serious response.”

### “Gospel for Pals”

The debate concerning the various aspects of Bible translation held in *Tygodnik Powszechny* was concluded by Andrzej Draguła three months after his first article was published. His second paper, “Gospel for Pals,”<sup>1</sup> was largely a report of a panel discussion held in Gdańsk and featuring the authors of the *Good Reading*. The identity of the translators was disclosed; the nicknames Garfield and Trooskafka were found to conceal three young women: Beata Lasota, Asia Rafał, and Basia Sieradz. Regarding the rationale behind the project, they said that it was their fascination with and commitment to the gospel that had led them to present it in a down-to-earth way that would appeal to young people. Consequently, the slang translation did not have academic or linguistic ambitions but was driven pragmatically by “faith and a need to evangelize by sharing the Word of God.”

As concerns the actual translational choices, Draguła noted that, on the one hand, the style of the *Good Reading* may seem rather artificial because of the excess of slang expressions but, on the other hand, a number of phrases suggested by the authors are very evocative and seem to aptly convey the gist of the original text (among the latter, he listed *zsiomować się* [to become one’s pal] as an accurate rendering of σκηνῶω in John 1.14, traditionally translated as *zamieszkać* [to dwell among]). Admitting that the text may be in need of a number of corrections, he posed a more general question about the necessity to prepare a translation into contemporary everyday language, one comparable to the Living Bible in English.

Stressing the theological legitimacy of the attempts aimed at bringing the gospel closer to everyday reality, he noted that the risk of trivialization of the biblical message is much broader: “The coexistence of the Gospel with the pop-culture or slang is just as dangerous as its coexistence with folklore or naïve piety.” He argued that even though such translational techniques may deform the gospel, they can also—if used competently—prove very helpful in teaching and preaching. Finally, Draguła admitted that behind his battle for the slang version of the Bible is his concern about the evangelistic strategy of the Church toward the youth.

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1 “Ewangelia dla ziomali,” *Tygodnik Powszechny*, no. 9 (2955), 26 February 2006.

## II.

Having indicated the major issues raised in the recent discussion regarding the translation of the Bible into Polish hip-hop slang, let us turn to the text itself. The second part of this article is meant to offer a brief critical review of the *Good Reading*, especially concerning the purpose specified by the authors as consisting of “updating the language while preserving the message of the Bible/Gospel of John as faithfully as possible.”<sup>1</sup>

Until this day only the first four chapters of the Gospel of John have been released, and the following study shall naturally be confined to this sample. Wherever possible—and reasonable—I have striven to provide English translation of the items referred to; elsewhere short descriptive explanations must suffice. To translate Polish hip-hop slang into the corresponding variety of English would be a major project in itself, far exceeding my competence; this is not my present purpose. Rather, I have tried to convey the unique connotations of the words and phrases used by the Polish authors, sometimes at the expense of the grammatical or stylistic demands of good English.

### Format

The format of the hitherto published part of the *Good Reading* does not differ significantly from that of traditional translations. The division into chapters and verses is retained and section headings are provided. Unlike in most Catholic versions, the text is not accompanied by annotations or comments, and cross-references are given only when there is an explicit quotation (as in 1.23).

Obviously, the most conspicuous characteristics of the *Good Reading*, and ones that make it unique among the other Bible versions, have to do with the lexical adaptations introduced by the translators; and it is to them that we will devote the most attention. Generally speaking, the lexical and stylistic choices may be grouped into two partially overlapping categories, namely, those including renderings (1) representative of the hip-hop slang, and (2) typical for colloquial usage, discussed subsequently below.

### Slang usage

The slang expressions found abundantly in the *Good Reading* are typically single words and only rarely longer units, which generally make them relatively easy to understand, even for the reader unfamiliar with the hip-hop slang. A vast majority of them have been derived from words representing standard register whose meaning has been modified as a result of morphological transformations (such as affixation or augmentation) or metaphorical extension. Let us take a closer look at several selected examples.

The very first slang expression, appearing in the title and a number of times in the text, is *ziomek*, often in the augmentative form *ziom*, etymologically traceable to *ziemia* (land) and in standard Polish designating a compatriot; in hip-hop slang the meaning of *ziom(ek)* is defined in strictly social terms as an indication of familiarity and/or group membership, resembling English terms “pal,” “buddy,”

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1 From private correspondence with the authors.

or “mate.”<sup>1</sup> In the *Good Reading*, *zjom* is used of John (the Evangelist), the apostles (including Andrew and Peter), Nicodemus, as well as generically of man (e.g., 4.37, “one *zjom* sows and another reaps”), and in the plural of people (e.g., 2.23; 3.22). Against this rich and diversified use, one can share Draguła’s appreciation for the evocativeness of the verbal form *zjomowało się z nami* (became our pal) at 1.14. Several other slang expressions, although void of the positive connotations present in *zjom(ek)*, are: *gostek* and *gościu* (the former a diminutive and the latter a deformed nominative of *gość* [guest], itself used colloquially of Jesus in 4.42) as well as three variant forms *koleś*, *kolo*, and *koleżka* (the first two augmentatives and the last a diminutive of *kolega* [colleague]) as well as *klient* (lit. “client”), all of them in meaning approximating the neutral “guy” in English.

Another evocative expression contributing to the communicativeness of the *Good Reading* is definitely *bez ściemy*. Derived from the reflexive *ściemniać się* (to get/grow dark), first transformed into a transitive verb with the meaning “to deceive/fool somebody,” and subsequently into the nominal form *ściema* (falsehood, deceit, sham), *bez ściemy* pragmatically may often correspond to “no kidding” in English but is far more powerful because of the underlying metaphor equating truth with light and falsehood with darkness. Consequently, when the Word is described in the Prologue (1.14) as *wypełnione taską* (full of grace) and *bez ściemy* (traditionally translated *prawdą* [of truth]), John’s earlier statements about the light shining in the darkness and overcoming it (1.4-9) are forcefully echoed. The other two occurrences of this expression in both nominal and verbal forms are found in 1.48, when Jesus describes Nathanael as a real *zjom* of Israel in whom there is no *ściema*, and in 3.33, . . . *potwierdził, że Bóg nie ściemnia* (. . . has certified that God does not cheat), every time indirectly referring to the imagery of the light, so crucial in the Fourth Gospel. A synonymous yet more commonly used slang phrase is *bez kitu* (lit. “without putty,” meaning “truly/really/no kidding”), occurring both as an expression of emphasis when the Samaritan woman urges Jesus to give her the living water (4.15) or when the Samaritans declare that Jesus is the savior of the world (4.42) as well as a translation of Jesus’ ἄμην ἄμην. The latter, in conjunction with a slang word for “say” at 1.51 and 3.5, results in a very crispy phrase *bez kitu wam/ci nawijam* for ἄμην ἄμην λέγω ὑμῖν/σοι, perhaps one of the most suggestive idioms illustrating the stylistic flair of the version.

Slang equivalents have been offered for a number of verbs of speaking and thinking, such as *zagaduje* (originally colloquial for “accost”; slang meaning simplified to “tell”) for λέγω (1.31, 38, 43; 2.5; 3.2, 26); *zapodaje* (*podaje* [gives/serves/passes] combined with the intensifying prefix *za-*, yielding a broad meaning of either “says” or “gives”) for λαλέω in 3.34 (as well as δίδωμι in 4.14n); *nawija* (lit. “to coil,” in slang metaphorically extended to mean “speak” or “preach”) for λέγω (1.30, 51; 2.22; 3.3, 12; 4.42); *czaił/przyczaił/sczaił/obczaił* (derived from *czaić się* [to lie in wait for], adopted in slang to mean “understand/grasp” or “say,” often combined with prefixes emphasizing the completeness of the action) for εὐρίσκω (2.13), γινώσκω (2.25), ἀποκρίνομαι (4.17) and λέγω (4.34, 48). Likewise, common verbs of movement—typical for

1 Interestingly, what was initially a self-description soon developed into a generic term, and presently *zjom* is not only used connotatively but also denotatively, especially in the augmented form *zjomal*, to refer to representatives of the hip-hop subculture.



gospel narratives—have also been rendered in slang, most often by *wbijąć/wybijać/przebijać się* (lit. “to drive oneself in/out/through [like a nail],” used with reference to almost any kind of movement, sometimes specified by prepositional prefixes), offered as the rendering of ἀναβαίνω/καταβαίνω as well as of ἔρχομαι and its derivatives, thus becoming one of the most frequently used slang verbs (fifteen occurrences in four chapters).

A large number of non-standard expressions used in the *Good Reading* are direct borrowings from English which have been grammatically and/or orthographically assimilated into Polish while retaining the core of the original meaning, though often tinted with a foreign tone characteristic of slang. These include, e.g., *na full* (completely, to the brim) in the description of the filling of the water containers in Cana; *hardkorowe* (extreme, great, marvelous) with reference to Jesus’ miracles; *halo* (derived from “hello”) used to introduce an important statement; *text* (from “text”) meaning “phrase”; *pliz* (from “please”) as an expression of urging; *przylukał* (derived from “look”) meaning “noticed” or “spotted”; and *master* and *boss* as titles of respect used by the disciples and Nicodemus to address Jesus.

In addition to the phrases mentioned above, the *Good Reading* abounds in numerous other slang expressions contributing to the sociolinguistic markedness of the version, some of them corresponding to elements of the source text, such as e.g. *impra* (youth party) for γάμος (wedding) in Cana, or *hajs* (money) for κέρμα (coin) scattered by Jesus in the temple, and others introduced without any textual support but simply in pursuit of greater expressiveness and naturalness of the language, as when Jesus having healed the official’s son says to him *wrzuc na luz* (lit. “put it in the neutral [gear],” meaning “don’t worry/take it easy”) or when Philip, telling Nathanael about meeting the Messiah, exclaims *jaka jazda!* (lit. “what a ride!”, meaning, “how exciting!”).

### Colloquial usage

The unique flair of the *Good Reading* is also created by the prevalent use of elements typical of colloquial discourse, both on the lexical and grammatical (predominantly syntactic) levels. In addition to expressions clearly classified as slang, the translators make frequent use of words and structures especially characteristic of spoken Polish and representing low language register but not confined to a particular social group. These include phrases like, e.g., *ostro się napocili* (lit. “sweated hard,” coll. for “worked hard”), *gadał* (coll. for “spoke”), *poszedł siedzieć* (lit. “went to be seated,” coll. for “was imprisoned”), *ledwo zipał* (lit. “was hardly breathing,” coll. for “was very tired” or “was [almost] dying”), and the adverb *normalnie* (lit. “normally,” coll. for “actually/really/truly”) used for emphasis: “*Ej gościu, normalnie jesteś prorokiem!*” (Hey, buddy, you really are a prophet!; 4.19). As far as syntax is concerned, there is a strong tendency to start sentences with markers of informality typical of spoken discourse, such as *A . . .* (“And . . .”; corresponding to the introductory *kai* in the Greek), *Bo . . .* (“Cause . . .”), *W sumie . . .* (lit. “in total,” meaning “as a matter of fact”), *Jak . . .* (lit. “how,” coll. for “if/when”) and especially “*To . . .*” (coll. for “so/and/then”). Over and over again, relative clauses of purpose are introduced by *coby . . .* (so that) and concluded with question tags such as *[no] nie?* (ain’t it?), representative of uneducated rural speech.

In several passages the colloquial style gets so intense that, in spite of the unquestioned evocativeness often typical of coarse language, it may perhaps be considered offensive to some segments of the Polish-speaking community, e.g., when it is said of the Word whose “own people did not accept him” (1.11, NRSV) that they *się na niego wypięli* (lit. “turned their rear side on him”) or when it is declared that “whoever believes in the Son has eternal life” (3.36, NRSV) but the one who go *olewa* (lit. “pisses him”) will not see eternal life.

### “Religious” language

What is particularly interesting is the approach to words and phrases which over centuries have acquired religious or theological significance. With regard to a number of them the authors of the *Good Reading* have striven to find contemporary equivalents in order to emphasize the original sense or simply avoid using established Christian terminology. Thus, instead of *zmartwychwstał* (lit. “was resurrected”), they prefer *ożył* (came [back] to life) for ἠγέρθη ἐκ νεκρῶ in 2.22; rather than of *zbawienie* (salvation) they speak of *ratunek* (rescue) when σωτηρία or σωτήρ are referred to (4.22, 42); they translate ἀμαρτία as *wina* (guilt/blame) and not traditionally as *grzech* (sin). Moreover, when handling words whose translation has historically stirred controversies, the authors bravely render μόνουγενής as *jedyny* (the only one; 1.14) *numer jeden* (number one; 1.18) and *jedynak* (the only child; 3.16, 18), disregarding the time-honored rendering *jednorodzony* (only begotten); likewise, in translating βαπτίζω they alternate the conventional *chrzczyć* (baptize) with the literal *zanurzać* (immerse), the latter being free of the sacramental overtones but also challenging, deliberately or not, the Roman Catholic practice of baptism by sprinkling.

At the same time, a number of traditional and culture-bound notions have been retained. We repeatedly read of the plotting *faryzeusze* (Pharisees), the upcoming *święto Paschy* (Passover), Jesus as *Mesjasz* (Messiah) and *prorok* (prophet) full of God’s *łaska* (grace) of whom John came to *zaświadczyć* (testify) so that others would *dać mu wiarę* (lit. “give faith to him”). The first-century rural setting of the gospel is perpetuated in Jesus’ mentions of *figowiec* (fig tree) and in his teaching allegorically referring to *żniwa* (harvest) and *plon* (crop). There is also a clearly noticeable restraint in the translation of classical verses such as 3.16, in which all key words have been rendered in standard language—*pokochał* (loved), *świat* (world), *dał* (gave), *ukochanego* (beloved), *jedynaka* (only child), *uwierzy* (believes), *nie umarł* (shall not die), *żył wiecznie* (shall live eternally)—even though elsewhere slang or colloquial counterparts to some of them have been offered. Against the background of some expressions found in the *Good Reading*, it would almost seem more natural to find “*Bo Bóg tak pokochał ten rewir, że normalnie zapodał swojego wypasionego dzieciaka, coby każdy ziom, co da mu wiarę, nie wykitował, ale skutecznie życie bez ściemy, czaisz?*” or something to that effect (in this case I shall not venture a translation; anyone familiar with an English slang shall aptly substitute his or her own version).

### Concluding remarks

Against this somewhat sketchy and necessarily fragmentary analysis there arises a question whether the purpose of the authors, consisting of “updating the language” on the one hand and “preserving the message of the Gospel of John as

faithfully as possible” on the other, has been achieved. The answer, in my opinion, is rather equivocal.

Some solutions offered by the authors clearly enhance the communicativeness of the text, particularly from the point of view of younger readers deprived of or rebelling against substantial theological background. Colorful slang expressions like *zziomować się* or *bez ściemy*, paired with simplified lexis, colloquial syntax, and a general tendency to avoid traditionally “religious” terms, undoubtedly make the message of the gospel more relevant and appealing to the target audience. At the same time, a number of notions rooted in the ancient Jewish context, such as, e.g., *faryzeusz*, *Pascha*, or *Mesjasz*, have not been dealt with, probably for fear of too serious an intervention into the text of the Scripture.<sup>1</sup> This apparent unwillingness to offer dynamic equivalents for some terms results in considerable stylistic incoherence of the *Good Reading*, especially in conjunction with some dynamic elements, such as, e.g., *nie jestem [mu] godny nawet sznurówek w adidasach zawiązać* (lit. “I am not worthy to even undo the laces of his adidas shoes” [1.27]; in colloquial Polish “adidas” functions as a generic name for “sports shoes”) or *handlowali obrazkami, koralikami i innymi gadżetami* (were selling pictures, beads, and other gadgets [2.13]). Summing up, the *Good Reading*, in spite of a large number of innovative (and sometimes provocative) renderings, does not seem to mark a major breakthrough in contemporary Bible translation and the dispute it has recently incited in the Polish context should probably be attributed to a relative stylistic homogeneity of the existing versions. It may be that Poland is simply facing the same discussion that some years ago agitated the English-speaking church in response to the texts produced by Clarence Jordan, Kenneth Taylor, Andy Edington,<sup>2</sup> or, more recently, Eugene H. Peterson.

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The ultimate evaluation of the *Good Reading* or similar projects as legitimate or successful Bible versions depends on a number of assumptions concerning the nature and role of the Scripture. As we have seen in the debate outlined in the first part of this article, the perspective of linguists and scholars will differ significantly from that of evangelists because of their divergent objectives. The former are naturally concerned about preserving the style of what they view as a literary, cultural, and theological monument while the latter stress the need to make the message of the Bible relevant to the contemporary reader on every possible level. Both perspectives, and many others, clearly have some merits, and their adherents should not try to ridicule one another in light of their own hierarchy of values, as was often the case during the said debate. Specimen of one category cannot be meaningfully compared with representatives of another without first establishing a common set of criteria, which in the Polish context does not seem to have been sufficiently done.

It has been noted by a researcher of the Polish translations of the gospels that “in the popular religious awareness . . . a translation of the Bible is oftentimes

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1 That these (and other) potentially problematic notions may be dynamically handled in translation has been evidenced, e.g., by Clarence Jordan, who in his *Cotton Patch Version* speaks of a *committee of preachers and deacons*, the *annual convention*, and the *Leader*, respectively.

2 [Edington self-published selected portions of the NT in colloquial language entitled *The Word Made Fresh* in 1972. He later published various editions of both the OT and the NT. –ed.]

identified with the original.”<sup>1</sup> This observation to a certain extent helps understand one aspect of the dispute held in *Tygodnik Powszechny*. Some contributors, especially those advocating the “conservative” position, seem to (consciously or not) cherish the diachronic idea of Bible translations superseding rather than complementing one another. However, a glance at the last several decades, especially in the English-speaking world, leads one to believe that the days when a single Bible translation was used by Christian believers regardless of denominational or sociolinguistic differences—as once was the case with the Authorized Version—are probably never to return. On the contrary, there is an increasing tendency to “personalize” and “customize” the Bible, as proven by the commercial success of the multiple editions of the New International Version and especially the New Living Translation targeted at various age, social, and professional groups. (Whether the *Good Reading*, as of today incorporating four chapters of a single gospel, deserves the name of a Bible version—and the excitement worthy of one—is yet another issue.)

The authors of the *Good Reading* assert that their work “is not intended to become an official translation”; rather it is “directed to a clearly defined reader, so it may not be entirely coherent linguistically, methodologically or theologically.”<sup>2</sup> As we have seen, its coherence and consistency, as well as the accuracy of a number of translational solutions, could certainly be improved (which is *notabene* also true of other versions in varying degrees) and whether it has fulfilled its intended purpose is difficult to assess without conducting focused research. Quite regardless of that, it has certainly succeeded in stimulating animated discussion among Polish linguists, theologians, and preachers, and more importantly, has contributed to raising the popular awareness regarding some of the issues involved in Bible translation, which may be its single most important effect.

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## **WORLDVIEW ANALYSIS: An Exegetical Tool for Bible Translation (Part 1)<sup>3</sup>**

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### **Introduction**

One of the topics of discussion in current lexicography and semantics is the degree in which so-called encyclopedic knowledge needs to be included in a dictionary or lexicon. Encyclopedic knowledge is usually defined as information that is not describing the linguistic meaning of lexical items, but rather the extralinguistic aspects (Gouws, 1989:186). In order to have a more accurate picture of what

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1 Bożena Szczepińska. *Ewangelie tylekroć tłumaczone . . .* (Gdańsk: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Gdańskiego, 2005), 25.

2 From private correspondence with the authors.

3 [For a more thorough discussion of this topic, see the author’s *Semantics, World View and Bible Translation* (Sun Press, 2006). –ed.]