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THE KING JAMES BIBLE AS NORM-MAKER: COSERIAN AND TRANSLATION THEORY PERSPECTIVES

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ABSTRACT. ***The King James Bible as Norm-Maker: Coserian and Translation Theory Perspectives.*** This paper analyses the King James Version (KJV) of the Bible as a central site for the creation and negotiation of linguistic norms in the history of English, foregrounding the theoretical insights of Eugeniu Coşeriu on linguistic competence and normativity. By integrating his framework with Gideon Toury's norm theory from Descriptive Translation Studies and Lawrence Venuti's account of translation as a culturally productive practice, the article contends that the KJV operated simultaneously as both a transmitter of biblical content and a generative force for new idiomatic and stylistic patterns in English. The analysis situates the KJV within its seventeenth-century English context and demonstrates that translation is an activity capable of forming and institutionalising linguistic norms, rather than a simple reproductive act. Through three case studies of idiomatic expressions and the additional analysis of syntactic and stylistic features, the present work shows how the KJV's legacy is best understood as the result of creative, institutionally mediated processes that continue to inform English linguistic conventions. Coşeriu's concept of normativity is shown to be helpful for understanding how translation practices can lead to the emergence and codification of new language patterns. The article concludes that the KJV exemplifies the productive, norm-generating potential of translation and affirms the continued relevance of Coşeriu's theoretical perspective in the study of linguistic and translational phenomena.

Keywords: *King James Version, Coşeriu, linguistic norms, translation theory, English standardisation*

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REZUMAT. ***Biblia King James, forță creatoare de norme: Perspective coșeriene și perspective traductologice.*** Acest articol analizează Biblia King James ca spațiu central al creării și negocierii normelor lingvistice în istoria limbii engleze, punând accent pe contribuțiile teoretice ale lui Eugeniu Coșeriu privind competența lingvistică și normativitatea. Prin integrarea cadrului coșerian cu teoria normei din Descriptive Translation Studies (Studii traductologice descriptive) propusă de Gideon Toury și cu abordarea lui Lawrence Venuti privind traducerea ca practică productivă din punct de vedere cultural, articolul susține că Biblia King James a funcționat atât ca mijloc de transmitere al conținutului biblic, cât și ca forță generatoare de noi modele idiomatice și stilistice în limba engleză. Analiza plasează Biblia King James în contextul Angliei secolului al XVII-lea și arată că traducerea nu este un simplu act reproductiv, fiind mai degrabă o activitate capabilă să cristalizeze și instituționalizeze norme lingvistice. Prin analiza a trei studii de caz referitoare la expresii idiomatice, precum și a unor trăsături sintactice și stilistice, lucrarea de față demonstrează că moștenirea Bibliei King James trebuie înțeleasă ca rezultatul unor procese creative și instituționale care încă influențează convențiile lingvistice ale limbii engleze. Conceptul de normativitate, în accepțiunea coșeriană, se dovedește a fi util pentru înțelegerea modului în care practicile de traducere pot genera și codifica noi modele de limbaj. Articolul concluzionează că Biblia King James exemplifică potențialul productiv și normativ al traducerii și afirmă relevanța continuă a perspectivei teoretice coșeriene în studiul fenomenelor lingvistice și traductologice.

Cuvinte-cheie: *Biblia King James, Coșeriu, norme lingvistice, teoria traducerii, standardizarea limbii engleze*

1. Introduction

The translation of the King James Version (KJV) of the Bible occupies a foundational position in the linguistic, literary, and overall cultural history of the English-speaking world, functioning as a primary locus for the manifestation and transmission of linguistic norms. Since it was published in 1611, the KJV has been widely acknowledged as both a religious and linguistic artefact, due to its influence on the expressive repertoire of English through its idiomatic innovations, syntactic formalisation, and distinctive stylistic register. This article undertakes an examination of the KJV as a site for the negotiation and consolidation of linguistic norms, positioning its analysis at the juncture of three principal theoretical frameworks: Eugeniu Coșeriu's tripartite model of linguistic competence, Gideon Toury's Descriptive Translation Studies and norm theory, and Lawrence Venuti's theories of domestication and cultural politics in translation.

The significance of the KJV within the tradition of English Bible translation is, beyond the function of its religious or doctrinal content, grounded in its singular role in standardising forms of English idiomaticity, lexical choice, and subsequent stylistic canonisation. The present article, therefore, focuses on the question of how translation participates in the productive formation, rather than just the reproduction, of linguistic and cultural norms. Coşeriu's model, as elaborated by Kabatek and others, distinguishes between universal elocutional competence, language-specific idiomatic competence, and the creative, textually realised expressive competence of individual speakers or writers. In Coserian terms, competence operates alongside norm, understood as the socially shared and conventional realisation of manners of speaking which mediate between the abstract system and concrete discourse. This is important for translation because many target choices instantiate norm-regulated usage, including both canonical routines and non-canonical, idiomatic turns, indicating speaker attitude or style (Coşeriu 1997).

These distinctions provide an analytical framework for surveying the KJV's double movement: its transmission of inherited biblical content and its transformative role in generating new forms of idiomatic and stylistic usage within English. As section 2.1 demonstrates, this stratification of linguistic knowledge allows for a rigorous differentiation between features of biblical translation that are universally intelligible, those that are proper to English as a linguistic system, and those that emerge through certain textual or discursive practices.

Coşeriu's theory of *norma*, developed in *Sistema, norma y habla* (1952), defines the norm as a socially constituted regularity, an objectively observable pattern that speakers follow by virtue of belonging to a linguistic community, rather than a codified rule of "correct" usage. It thus describes how people *actually* speak, not how they should, with "normal" and "abnormal" as its operative poles rather than "correct" and "incorrect." This living, traditional usage precedes and informs later codification, mediating between system and discourse. Within Coşeriu's tripartite model of competence, the norm anchors idiomatic competence, guides expressive performance, and operates under the universal conditions of elocutional competence. In translation, this means that equivalences are above all equivalences of discourse, being guided not by abstract system constraints, but by the norm of idiomatic, stylistically appropriate expression. Therefore, translators work through two types of operations: *transposición*, when a ready, norm-congruent equivalent exists, and *versión*, when creative reformulation is required to preserve function or effect (Coşeriu 1997). These textual operations reveal how translation can itself become normative, and how renderings like

those of the King James Version eventually enter the expressive repertoire of a language and redefine what counts as idiomatic within it.

In addition to the Coserian frame, the present paper adopts Toury's model of translation as a norm-governed and norm-generating activity, which attends closely to the regularities and conventionalities emerging within specific translational contexts. Toury's theory, as detailed in section 2.2, conceptualises translation as a form of cultural intervention that is always integrated within a dynamic field of operational, preliminary, and initial norms. Of particular relevance is Toury's argument that translation tends, over time, to become more standardised within the target language, producing what he terms "growing standardisation" and "interference", and in so doing further engraining specific idiomatic and syntactic forms within the receiving culture. Venuti's theoretical contribution is employed to accentuate the political and institutional dimensions of these processes: translation is conceived as a site of negotiation between the pressures of domestication, whereby foreign elements are made to conform to target language norms, and the potential for creative resistance or foreignisation.

The historical and institutional context of the KJV, presented in section 3, grounds the subsequent analysis in the material realities of early seventeenth-century England: a translation produced by a committee, under royal commission, and intended as a revisionary rather than an entirely original text. The KJV's status as both a religious document and a commercially driven publication is foregrounded, alongside its dual function in consolidating both doctrinal authority and linguistic prestige. This institutional backdrop provides the foundation for the article's methodological focus on idiomatic and lexical norms, as explored in section 4. Through case studies of phrases such as "the powers that be", "by the skin of my teeth", and "the writing on the wall", the article demonstrates how the KJV's translational strategies naturalised, domesticated, and finally canonised previously foreign or opaque linguistic forms.

Ultimately, the argument advanced throughout this paper is that the KJV stands as a paradigmatic example of translation as a productive, norm-creating activity. Its legacy, it is contended, can be rigorously understood through the convergence of Coșeriu's competence model, Toury's norm theory, and Venuti's account of domestication. The article aims to show that it is precisely through translation, when conceived not as passive transmission but as a generative, institutionally mediated intervention, that linguistic, idiomatic, and stylistic norms are continually formed, contested, as well as transmitted within the evolving history of English.

2. Theoretical Framing

2.1. Coşeriu's Threefold Model of Linguistic Competence

Coşeriu's linguistic theory is constructed upon a critical departure from the Saussurean dichotomy of *langue* and *parole*, elaborating a triadic structure of linguistic knowledge grounded in the productive and dialogic realities of actual speech (*enérgeia*). Kabatek emphasises that for Coşeriu, "we must depart from the spoken word and look at the language not from the point of view of the system, but from the point of view of the production, of the *enérgeia*, from the real dialogic and spoken activity of the speaker" (Robu and Kabatek 2017, 141). This orientation is situated within a broader stratification of linguistic phenomena, articulated at universal, historical, and individual levels, each hosting distinct manifestations of linguistic competence. It is important to note that Coşeriu (1992) initially uses "linguistic knowledge" and subsequently "linguistic competence" in his theory of speaking. Thus, linguistic competence is conceived as multidimensional: there are universal pragmatic features, historically developed grammatical realisations, and particular textual traditions, as demonstrated by phenomena such as politeness, which traverse all three domains (Robu and Kabatek 2017, 148; Coşeriu 1992).

Coşeriu's model specifically identifies three primary kinds of linguistic knowledge, each corresponding to a different level of language activity. Firstly, elocutional knowledge (elocutional competence) is described as "everything that applies in principle to all languages independently of their respective linguistic structures, that is, a number of principles of thought and the general knowledge of the world". For instance, the deviance of an utterance such as "The five continents are four" is not rooted in language-specific rules, but in universal cognitive principles. Similarly, statements that defy empirical reality ("This tree sings" or "I boiled the piano") are excluded by elocutional competence, not by the internal system of a particular language (Coşeriu 1985, xxix–xxx; Coşeriu 1992).

Secondly, idiomatic knowledge (idiomatic competence) refers to the mastery of rules and conventions proper to a particular language. This competence encompasses both grammatical and lexical regularities, as well as accepted patterns of expression. For example, while "to go by train" is standard in English, German requires a different construction with the verb "*fahren*"; grammaticality, collocation, and idiomaticity are thereby grounded in language-specific systems (Coşeriu 1985, xxx; Coşeriu 1992).

Thirdly, expressive knowledge (expressive competence) is the capacity to produce meaning at the individual, discursive level, realised in the deployment of language in particular texts and contexts. This level is not restricted to systemic or conventional rules but is oriented towards the creative, context-dependent

construction of meaning. Thus, the appropriateness or deviance of forms such as the French "*Bon matin*" for "good morning" is determined not by language-wide grammatical rules but by textual norms and traditions of discourse within the speech community (Coşeriu 1985, xxx; Coşeriu 1992). Coşeriu summarises this tripartition as involving the universal capacities of language ("elocuțională" – elocutional), community-specific linguistic competence ("idiomatică" – idiomatic), and the creative, individual realisation of meaning in texts or discourse ("expresivă" – expressive) (Coşeriu 2009, 13–15).

Willems and Munteanu (2021) distil Coşeriu's framework as one that distinguishes between (1) universal, non-language-specific knowledge (elocutional), (2) historical, language-specific knowledge (idiomatic), and (3) individual, discourse-specific competence (expressive) (Willems and Munteanu 2021, 7–8). These map onto three kinds of meaning: designation (universal), signified (language-specific), and text meaning (individual or discourse-specific) (Willems and Munteanu 2021, 8). Later Coserian work and recent systematisations have shown that this tripartite architecture can be applied to a broad range of linguistic phenomena, including translation understood as a textual activity and linguistic change described as renewal in functioning (see Coşeriu 1985; Coşeriu 1991; Coşeriu 1992; Coşeriu 1997; Willems and Munteanu 2021; Varga 2021).

Coşeriu's concept of norm, developed in *Sistema, norma y habla* (1952, 53–54), departs from both prescriptive and evaluative approaches to grammar by defining norma as a social reality rather than a set of imposed rules. For him, the norm is an objectively observable pattern within a linguistic community, one that speakers follow by virtue of belonging to that community, not because it has been codified as a rule of "correct" speech. Coşeriu stresses that the norm describes how speakers *actually* use language, not how they should use it; its oppositional values are "normal" and "abnormal," not "correct" and "incorrect". Notably, he posits that while normative and prescriptive forms may coincide, they often diverge, since the collectively practised norm typically anticipates later codification. In this sense, the norm represents the living, traditional usage that precedes formal regulation and functions as a stabilising yet evolving intermediary between the linguistic system and individual expression. Kabatek (2020, 132–139) later also points out this generative aspect, arguing that such collectively maintained regularities support the diachronic consolidation of linguistic tradition. In Coşeriu's architecture, the norm is the historically shared regularity that anchors idiomatic competence, constrains and guides expressive competence in discourse, and operates under the universal conditions of elocutional competence, thereby mediating between system and individual speech.

In translation, many target solutions are *equivalencias de traducción* (equivalences of translation), which, as Coşeriu explains, are above all equivalences of discourse. That is, equivalences in the actual use of languages rather than at

the level of their abstract systems. For Coşeriu, the translator's guiding question is not what the system allows, but rather *how one would say this in the same situation*, namely, what the norm of the language authorises as idiomatic or stylistically appropriate. Hence the centrality of norm-regulated usage in explaining the effectiveness and later conventionalisation of certain renderings (Coşeriu 1997, 171–172). He also distinguishes two families of operations: *transposición* (transposition), when an idiomatic, norm-congruent target language unit exists, and *version* (version), when the translator must reformulate beyond ready-made idioms to preserve sense, function, or effect. Both are fully textual operations, and their assessment is inherently discursive (Coşeriu 1997, 173). This model predicts that a translation like the KJV can become a norm-maker: once its solutions are conventionalised as idiomatic routines, later speakers and writers treat them as the way English just *says* things.

Recent scholarship confirms that Coşeriu's framework remains highly relevant within contemporary translation studies. Varga (2021) documents a sustained increase in references to Coşeriu across major linguistic and cultural traditions between 2017 and 2021, identifying 45 research outputs and over 230 citations engaging explicitly with his theory. The most frequently cited concepts include the meaning–designation–sense triad, the assertion that languages cannot be translated, only texts can, and the principle of translation as a textual, discursive act grounded in the distinction between system, norm, and speech. Varga concludes that Coşeriu's ideas continue to inform current debates on equivalence, translatability, and the epistemological status of translation as a meaning-making practice.

2.2. Descriptive Translation Studies and Norm Theory

Toury's Descriptive Translation Studies (DTS) provides a foundational framework for understanding translation as a norm-governed, culturally situated activity. He asserts that translational behaviour is regulated by socially determined expectations: "The claim that, being a culturally-determined kind of activity, translation is basically norm-governed, is closely related to the observation that this activity is inherently (that is, non-arbitrarily) characterised by immense variability, both across cultures (in space or time) as well as within single ones" (Toury 2012, 61). Toury's descriptive norms and Coşeriu's norm are not coextensive, but they do meet in practice: both track socially shared regularities in realised discourse. Coşeriu's focus on discursive equivalence explains why "idiomatic" target language forms recur and sediment, while Toury's historical-descriptive programme shows how recurrences of this type stabilise as translational norms. This combined view helps to clarify how KJV solutions passed from committee choices to conventional English phraseology.

Regarding translation norms, Toury elaborates three main types: initial, preliminary, and operational. The initial norm concerns the translator's macro-level orientation, whether to favour adequacy (source-text orientation) or acceptability (target-culture orientation) (Toury 2012, 79–80). Preliminary norms pertain to selection and policy, addressing what texts are chosen for translation and whether indirect or mediated translation is tolerated (Toury 2012, 82). Operational norms direct the concrete decisions within the translation process, governing issues of completeness, segmentation (matricial norms), and the selection or replacement of linguistic material (textual-linguistic norms) (Toury 2012, 83). Toury also focuses on the inherent instability and contextual specificity of norms, allowing for multiple, even competing, norm systems (Toury 2012, 86–87).

Toury further introduces two empirical "laws" of translational behaviour: the law of growing standardisation, according to which "in translation, source-text textemes tend to be converted into target-language (or target-culture) repertoremes" (Toury 2012, 303). This reflects a tendency for translated texts to become more standardised, privileging habitual, institutionalised options in the target language. The law of interference states that "phenomena pertaining to the make-up of the source text tend to force themselves on the translators and be transferred to the target text, whether they manifest themselves in the form of negative transfer (i.e., deviations from normal, codified practices of the target system), or in the form of positive transfer (i.e., an increase in the frequency of features which do exist in the target system and can be used anyway)" (Toury 2012, 310–311). Both laws are theorised as tendencies, modulated by cognitive and socio-cultural factors.

Venuti's conceptual dichotomy of domestication and foreignisation frames the ethics and politics of translation. Domestication is an "ethnocentric reduction of the foreign text to [target] cultural values", while foreignisation registers difference and resists dominant norms (Venuti 2008, 15–16). The history of Bible translation, for example, demonstrates how religious and institutional norms have influenced what is considered "accurate", and how institutional validation can override strict adherence to the source text (Venuti 2021, 15). Venuti's model positions translation as a site of negotiation between institutional, cultural and, evidently, linguistic values. On a Coserian reading, Venuti's opposition between domestication and foreignisation can be reinterpreted in terms of norm-regulated usage: domestication aligns with transpositions that conform to the target language's established norms, while foreignisation corresponds to versions that stretch or remodel those norms to accommodate the source text's discourse. Both processes are therefore discursive, not systemic, and reveal how cultural and linguistic norms jointly determine what later becomes accepted or conventionalised (Coşeriu 1997).

In this respect, the King James Version, as an institutional translation, is paradigmatic. Its operational and stylistic norms are deeply embedded in the cultural and religious context, affecting both the material realisation and the authority of the translation itself.

3. Historical-linguistic Background of the KJV

The historical and linguistic circumstances of the King James Version (KJV) point to a translation motivated by political, ecclesiastical, and cultural forces. Commissioned in 1604 by King James I, it aimed to address dissatisfaction with earlier translations, notably the Geneva Bible, which was perceived as politically subversive due to marginal notes critical of monarchical authority (McGrath 2001, 141; Campbell 2010, 32–36). The translation emerged from the Hampton Court Conference, convened to mediate between reformist Puritans and advocates of a hierarchical Church of England, revealing its political and religious significance (Hamlin and Jones 2010, 6).

Roughly fifty scholars, grouped into six committees based in Westminster, Oxford, and Cambridge, undertook the translation (McGrath 2001, 178–182; Norton 2005, 5–9; Hamlin and Jones 2010, 7). These scholars included both bishops and moderate Puritans, supervised by prominent academics such as Lancelot Andrewes (Hamlin and Jones 2010, 7; Campbell 2010, 33–36). Rather than producing an entirely new work, their task was explicitly revisionary: to improve upon the Bishops' Bible while consulting multiple sources, including Tyndale's translations, the Geneva Bible, Coverdale's work, and even the Catholic Rheims New Testament (Hamlin and Jones 2010, 7; Norton 2005, 9; McGrath 2001, 176). In Coserian (1997) terms, the committees' pursuit of idiomatic dignity positioned their renderings to enter English as norm-regulated usage, which later writers and speakers could reproduce as the idiomatic way to say things.

Significantly, the KJV was not funded directly by the Crown. Instead, financial responsibility fell to Robert Barker, the King's Printer, who was granted exclusive printing rights, thereby bearing the considerable cost of approximately £3,500 with support from private partners John Bill, Bonham Norton, and John Norton (McGrath 2001, 198–199; Norton 2005, 12–15). The translation thus existed simultaneously as an officially sanctioned religious document and a commercially viable publication dependent on market dynamics rather than direct state patronage.

This duality as a religious and linguistic-cultural artifact is consistently emphasised across accounts. The KJV was indeed a foundational scriptural text for English Protestantism, but it also significantly influenced English linguistic

identity and cultural heritage, determining literary style and vernacular expression for centuries (McGrath 2001, 260–261; Campbell 2010, 1–3; Hamlin and Jones 2010, 1–2, 12–13).

Translation choices within the KJV were methodically governed by stylistic, doctrinal, and rhetorical aims. The translators were explicitly instructed to preserve traditional ecclesiastical vocabulary, such as using "church" instead of the Puritan-preferred "congregation", which reflected a doctrinal alignment with established Anglican practice (Campbell 2010, 14, 35–36). Moreover, marginal notes were strictly limited to clarifying the original Hebrew or Greek terms in the source text without doctrinal commentary, directly countering the Geneva Bible's interpretative annotations (Norton 2005, 8, 37–38; Campbell 2010, 37).

The translators aimed for solemnity and rhetorical clarity, not colloquial immediacy, balancing fidelity to original texts with established ecclesiastical tradition (McGrath 2001, 176). The translation's preface explicitly states their goal as enhancing existing translations rather than creating an entirely new one, captured in the phrase: "to make a good one better, or out of many good ones, one principal good one" (Hamlin and Jones 2010, 7; Campbell 2010, 35). This approach shows an awareness of the translation's position within a continuous tradition of English Bible-making. The translators' instructions also reveal the doctrinal priorities of the Anglican Church. For example, they were guided by notions favouring meanings endorsed by early church fathers and doctrinal conformity, which directly opposed Puritan preferences for scriptural primacy over ecclesiastical tradition (Campbell 2010, 36). Furthermore, practical constraints such as retaining the established chapter and verse divisions introduced by Robert Estienne, first incorporated into English in the Geneva Bible of 1560, drew attention to how traditional textual organisation was preserved, encouraging memorisation and public reading (Campbell 2010, 36).

The KJV drew extensively on earlier translations, especially Tyndale's, from which substantial sections were adopted verbatim, reflecting continuity in textual and doctrinal traditions. Estimates indicate that in certain portions, Tyndale's influence comprises approximately ninety percent of the text (Hamlin and Jones 2010, 3). The Geneva Bible also had substantial influence through its Roman typography and chapter and verse structure, although its doctrinal notes provoked official disapproval (Hamlin and Jones 2010, 4–5).

Ultimately, the KJV's institutional endorsement and its strategic doctrinal neutrality allowed it to replace previous translations gradually, solidifying its position by the Restoration of Charles II in 1660. Its extensive adoption was driven not merely by authoritative decree but significantly by economic and

practical considerations linked to Bible production and distribution (Norton 2005, 47; Hamlin and Jones 2010, 8). Thus, the KJV's translation choices, governed by stylistic clarity, doctrinal orthodoxy, and rhetorical force, consolidated its status as a foundational religious text and a cornerstone of English cultural and linguistic tradition.

4. Idiomatic and Lexical Norms in the KJV

4.1. Case Study: "The powers that be" (Romans 13:1)

The phrase "the powers that be", originating from Romans 13:1, is noted by McGrath (2001, 264) as a distinctive coinage popularised by the King James Version (KJV). However, Crystal clarifies that its linguistic roots actually trace back to Tyndale's New Testament and were subsequently maintained by the Geneva and Bishops' Bibles — specifically, Crystal contends "those things that be" in Wycliffe's translation, as well as Douai-Rheims's "those that are" were both "bland". The idiom's endurance in English usage can be attributed to its grammatical uniqueness, particularly the archaic subjunctive form "be", which lends it a degree of stylistic compactness and resonance resistant to morphological alteration. Consequently, humorous parodies such as "the flowers that be" emphasise the idiom's fixed linguistic structure and its iconic status within English idiomatic usage. According to Crystal, the idiom has also evolved to adopt ironic and subversive undertones, often employed in contemporary discourse as a means to critique established authority. Its semantic ambiguity, especially regarding the multifaceted concept of "powers", facilitates this adaptability across diverse contexts, from political commentary to literary satire (Crystal 2010, 165).

This phrase is a *transposition*, in Coserian (1997) terms, as English has a ready idiomatic template that the KJV fortifies; its afterlife shows the solution functioning as norm-regulated usage rather than an ad-hoc coinage. Further, in relation to Coșeriu's theory of idiomatic competence, this expression exemplifies how translation can integrate originally foreign syntactic structures into the receiving language's idiomatic inventory. Venuti's (2008, 15–16) notion of domestication further explains this phenomenon, describing it as a translation strategy through which culturally and linguistically foreign elements are reconfigured to conform with target-language norms. In this respect, "the powers that be" is a clear instance of domestication, transforming a foreign Semitic syntactic construction into a distinctly English idiom, seamlessly absorbed into everyday language.

4.2. Case Study: "By the skin of my teeth" (Job 19:20)

McGrath (2001, 263) identifies "by the skin of my teeth" as a Hebraic idiom naturalised through the KJV, notable for its poetic ambiguity and expressive force. Crystal (2010, 84–85) explores the interpretive complexity of this phrase, emphasising the literal translation of the original Hebrew metaphor despite its anatomical implausibility, as teeth possess no skin. The expression's enigmatic imagery has elicited extensive speculation about its intended meaning, ranging from survival by the narrowest margin to hypothetical references to gums or other oral features. Crystal (2010, 84) further attributes the phrase's lasting impact to its metaphorical opacity, whereby semantic ambiguity reinforces affective resonance. Its prosodic rhythm, particularly the fluent construction "of my teeth" enhances its memorability, distinguishing the KJV rendering from less fluid predecessors such as Coverdale's and the Bishops' Bibles.

This expression is, in Coserian (1997) terms, a *version*, since there is no pre-given target language routine to slot in, so the KJV's creative reformulation becomes the idiom that later English conventionalises, moving from non-canonical markedness into norm. This case can also be interpreted as an example of Coşeriu's (1985, xxx) concept of expressive competence, defined as the ability to generate affectively meanings extending beyond literal semantic content. Similarly, Kabatek (2020, 132) discusses how expressive meanings tend to surpass lexical semantics, evoking emotional and figurative depth. Consequently, "by the skin of my teeth" embodies expressive competence, transforming a perplexing Hebrew image into an idiomatic formulation that powerfully conveys existential precariousness and emotional intensity.

4.3. Case Study: "The writing on the wall" (Daniel 5)

The idiom "the writing on the wall", originating from Daniel 5, is a practical lens for examining the distinction between idiomatic and expressive competence as delineated in Coşeriu's theoretical framework discussed in section two of this paper. As McGrath (2001, 264) note, this idiom embodies the metaphorical power and lasting figurative appeal that biblical language can achieve in English. However, Crystal (2010, 126–127) clarifies that the precise wording familiar to contemporary speakers, "the writing on the wall", does not appear verbatim in the KJV or earlier biblical translations. Instead, it evolved from interpretative traditions concerning the episode of Belshazzar witnessing a supernatural hand inscribing a divine warning upon the palace wall. From the perspective of idiomatic competence, the phrase has become a stable linguistic element with a fixed semantic role. It has developed an autonomous meaning detached from its scriptural origins, commonly deployed in English to signify

an omen of impending failure or catastrophe. This idiomatic dimension reflects its full integration into English usage, such that its historical and textual references have faded from general consciousness (Hamlin and Jones 2010, 271). Expressive competence, on the other hand, relates specifically to the idiom's ability to evoke emotional intensity and rhetorical effect beyond mere semantic clarity. The dramatic imagery inherent in the original biblical context of an enigmatic hand inscribing doom imbues the phrase with emotional resonance and symbolic potency. Crystal (2010, 127) points to its expressive efficacy in contemporary discourse, especially in rhetorical questions intended to transmit a sense of urgency or inevitable decline, whether referencing political contexts or institutional viability.

Therefore, in line with Coșeriu's distinctions, the idiom "the writing on the wall" simultaneously exemplifies idiomatic competencee through its stable, independent meaning within the linguistic system, and expressive competence through its potent metaphorical and affective resonance, retained vividly in modern usage despite the obscurity of its biblical origin. Furthermore, in this case, the textual effect relies on shared cultural knowledge, so in Coserian (1997) terms, the KJV delivers a *version* whose success resides in discourse: the phrase's uptake then normalises it as an idiomatic warning within the target language norm.

4.4. Normative Implications

The gradual naturalisation of idiomatic expressions originating from the KJV, as outlined by McGrath (2001, 259), exemplifies Toury's concept of operational norms (Toury 2012, 63), highlighting how repeated usage within public and private domains promoted the absorption of initially foreign linguistic structures into accepted language conventions. Kabatek (2020, 132) supports this process, emphasising how lexical restrictions and collocations become established through habitual community usage, strengthening the translation's normative impact.

Venuti's (2008, 1–6, 12–16) domestication theory further clarifies this phenomenon, describing how translations produce norms by seamlessly integrating foreign lexical and syntactic elements into familiar linguistic forms. Domestication creates an illusion of transparency, reducing perceived textual foreignness and reinforcing dominant target-culture values. The idiomatic stability achieved by phrases such as "the powers that be", "by the skin of my teeth", and "the writing on the wall" demonstrates precisely this process, wherein initially expressive or foreign source language elements become normative features of the receiving language through sustained exposure and acceptance. Hamlin and Jones (2010, 3) reinforce this analysis, observing how

KJV idioms have become central to English literary and cultural tradition, frequently losing explicit biblical associations and obtaining independent semantic status. Their continued use across diverse literary genres shows how translations can effectively rewrite linguistic norms, integrating expressive biblical idioms within the English idiomatic repertoire.

5. Syntactic Patterns and Stylistic Formalisation

5.1. Use of Inversion, Parallelism, and Archaisms

The King James Version (KJV) is widely acknowledged for its distinctive syntactic and rhetorical features, especially its consistent use of inversion, parallelism, and archaisms. These elements, as McGrath (2001, 264) argues, are integral to the translation's literary dignity and its ability to communicate theological gravity. The KJV's translators frequently chose to preserve Hebraic syntactic structures, often at the expense of idiomatic English fluency. In this way, fidelity to the source's rhythm and phrasing was held above the norms of vernacular English, resulting in a scriptural register that carries a substantial amount of solemnity.

From the perspective of linguistic theory, such strategies can be understood through Coşeriu's concept of elocutional competence, which denotes the realisation of universal grammatical and stylistic capacities within a specific textual tradition (Coşeriu 1985). The translators of the KJV exemplify this competence, as noted by McGrath (2001, 262–264), by closely adhering to the syntax and imagery of the Hebrew original, often maintaining the literal word order or semantic nuance of the source even when it produced what McGrath termed the "harsh dignity" of biblical diction. In Psalm 84:7, for instance, the phrasing "every one of them in Zion appeareth before God" shows much more structural fidelity toward the Hebrew original than the Geneva Bible's "till every one appeareth before God in Zion", displaying the KJV translators' partiality towards cadence and solemnity over idiomatic fluency. Similarly, in Isaiah 53:7, the KJV's "He is brought as a *lamb* to the slaughter, and as a *sheep* before her shearers is dumb" refines the Geneva Bible's "He is brought as a *sheep* to the slaughter, and as a *sheep* before her shearer is dumb" by introducing more lexical precision. Specifically, the Geneva translators rendered both Hebrew nouns (*seh,* meaning "lamb", and *rachel*, meaning "sheep") as "sheep", which created some degree of lexical uniformity, but limited nuance and Christological and sacrificial connotation, not to mention fidelity. Further, in Psalm 62:8, the KJV's singularisation "pour out your *heart* before him" replaced the Geneva

Bible's plural form in "pour out your *hearts* before him", therefore transforming a more literal rendering from the Hebrew original into a universalised idiom. The formalisation of phrase structure and cadence, as evident in Psalms, Proverbs, and the Gospels, exemplifies how the KJV elevated the English scriptural register by instantiating stylistically marked forms. McGrath (2001, 262–64) observes that the deliberate arrangement of language in the KJV produced not only theological clarity, but also a heightened sense of textual gravitas.

Crystal (2010, 196) draws attention to the unique syntactic and rhetorical structure of the Beatitudes, which are rendered in the KJV as "Blessed are..." followed by a noun or adjectival phrase and a theological consequence. This construction is marked by inversion, with the verb preceding the subject, a choice that lends a distinctive rhythm and authority to the clause. While earlier English translations also retained this structure, Crystal contends that the KJV canonised the form, establishing a paradigm of biblical parallelism that has endured in both religious and secular contexts. The repeated phrasing, as in "Blessed are they that mourn... the meek... the pure in heart...", introduced a model of balance and symmetry that transcended its theological origins to become a widely recognisable template for praise, satire, as well as cultural commentary (Crystal 2010, 196–97). Because this wording was received and circulated as the very wording of Scripture, it was repeated in preaching, public reading, and catechetical transmission, which transformed a marked Hebraic pattern into a socially shared, liturgically reinforced norm of English biblical style. The persistence of this syntactic model across versions and languages (including Romanian and Italian) may also reflect an early theological conviction that sacred phrasing should be preserved as faithfully as possible, lest one "add to or take away from" the word of God. In this sense, the Beatitudes' phrasing functioned as a normative template from its inception (the "word of God" itself), later sustained through institutional authority and collective habit. This process exemplifies Toury's observation that particular translations may come to occupy authoritative, law-generating positions within their host cultures.

The rhetorical cadence of the KJV has inspired both imitation and adaptation in modern English. Crystal (2010, 197) notes that contemporary headlines and cultural artefacts, such as Joan Baez's lyrics and medical articles titled "Blessed are the pacemakers", reflect the enduring influence of the original biblical structure. These adaptations reveal the capacity of the KJV's syntactic forms to inspire both reverence and parody, underlining their now embedded place in English expressive culture.

These developments can be best conceptualised as manifestations of elocutional competence: the patterned realisation of universal linguistic capacities in a culturally marked and stylistically elevated register. The KJV's deliberate

stylisation of inversion, repetition, and parallelism established a register that was doctrinally authoritative, as well as aesthetically resonant and enduringly influential within the English language.

Campbell (2010, 2) further characterises the KJV's prose as "resonant", frequently achieving the rhythm and compactness of poetry. The translation's syntax is "elevated", contributing to the memorability and authority of scriptural utterance. Adam's words in Genesis 3:12, "she gave me of the tree, and I did eat", are cited as an example of iambic pentameter, which shows the translators' sensitivity to poetic cadence (Campbell 2010, 2). Campbell (2010, 13) also identifies the "studied simplicity" of the KJV, an intentional emulation of Tyndale's accessible, yet dignified language, as a major factor in its continued cultural authority.

On a broader theoretical level, Kabatek (2023) situates such stylistic phenomena within the context of textual tradition. For Kabatek, archaism and formalisation are not incidental, but central to the authority and recognisability of religious texts. Therefore, the persistent use of inversion, archaism, and parallelism in the KJV is emblematic of a textual tradition that confers meaning through stylistic continuity and markedness.

In turn, Hamlin and Jones (2010, 9–10) add that the KJV translators sought "formal equivalence", maintaining the original structure of Hebrew and Greek as closely as possible. This resulted in features such as parataxis (repeated use of "and"), genitive constructions ("the face of the deep"), and retention of Hebraic vocabulary. The poetic features of Hebrew, especially parallelism, are evident in the Psalms and have shaped the language of later English literature and hymnody (Hamlin and Jones 2010, 4, 17). Inversion and archaisms, alongside biblical diction and rhythm, have since become characteristic of a recognisable biblical style in English (Hamlin and Jones 2010, 11–12, 17).

5.2. Impact on English Stylistic Norms

The enduring influence of the KJV on English stylistic conventions is manifest in a broad range of registers, from religious rhetoric to literary prose. McGrath (2001, 259) asserts that the language of the KJV, together with Shakespearean English, acquired cultural legitimacy and became foundational to the codification of literary English. Its idioms, rhythms, and formulae have contributed to the establishment of stylistic norms, especially in religious, ceremonial, and other similarly formal contexts.

A significant factor in the KJV's rhetorical impact is its lexical base, with ninety-three percent of its vocabulary deriving from native English (McGrath 2001, 262). This decision ensured that the translation remained accessible and

rhetorically potent, reinforcing its status as a linguistic and literary point of reference. Crystal (2010, 2) provides quantitative and qualitative analysis supporting the Bible's pervasive stylistic influence. He notes, with epistemic caution, that the KJV has contributed more idiomatic and quasi-proverbial expressions to English than any other literary source. Among the rhetorical devices influenced by the KJV is the balanced reversal or chiastic structure, as in "the last shall be first, and the first last" (Matthew 20:16), which is frequently adopted in contemporary journalism and cultural commentary (Crystal 2010, 164). Although Crystal limits the number of idioms directly attributable to the KJV to 257, he maintains that "the Bible reigns definitely supreme" in the domain of idiomatic expression (Crystal 2010, 258). The malleability of biblical constructions is further evident in secular adaptations, where phrases like "Blessed are the meek" are repurposed for parody or social commentary while retaining their original solemnity (Crystal 2010, 196–97). Further, Campbell (2010, 1) describes the KJV as "the most celebrated book in the English-speaking world", adding to its foundational role in informing the literary and rhetorical repository of English. Its stylistic authority is further attested by its use in state ceremonies and its reverence across denominational boundaries (Campbell 2010, 204, 274).

From a theoretical perspective, Coşeriu's conception of norm includes phonological and lexical realisations, as well as syntactic and stylistic features. Kabatek (2020, 132) similarly holds that norms are relevant at all linguistic levels, encompassing the traditional realisation of patterns in syntax and register. The stylistic influence of the KJV thus lies not in prescriptive codification, but in its repeated and adaptive citation across domains.

Venuti (2008, 4–6, 12–13) contributes a further dimension by linking the stylistic impact of translation to processes of domestication and the "regime of fluency". He contends that the stylistic registers of English prose and journalism, influenced in part by biblical translation, now privilege "plain styles" and "neutral transparent prose". Such preferences, reinforced by the KJV's stylistic models, have become dominant through the wider processes of standardisation and commodification in English publishing and mass communication.

Hamlin and Jones (2010, 11–17) confirm that the KJV's linguistic features have influenced the rhetoric, prose, and poetry of English writers across centuries, often valued for their aesthetic and authoritative resonance. The translation's style has been, and continues to be, imitated by later authors, thereby contributing to the codification of a literary English indelibly associated with biblical authority (Hamlin and Jones 2010, 12–13).

6. Translation as Norm-Creating Activity

In examining the translation of the King James Version (KJV) as a source of linguistic normativity, it is essential to foreground the theoretical convergence of Coşeriu's model of linguistic competence, Toury's theory of translation norms, and Venuti's account of translation as a creative, canon-forming practice, as explained in the theoretical section of this paper. This theoretical triangulation shows that translation, as exemplified by the KJV, functions as a generative rather than a reproductive process. More specifically, as one by which the expressive resources and regularities of a language are actively generated, stabilised, and finally crystallised.

Coşeriu's competence model positions linguistic activity as creative, socially shared, and norm-generating (1952, 1992). The threefold structure of system, norm, and speech frames translation as an operation situated not in the abstract linguistic system but in discourse, where norms are formed through collective use. In *Alcances y límites de la traducción* (1997, 172), Coşeriu extends this framework to translation itself, defining it as a textual operation in which the translator moves from *desidiomatización* (deverbalisation) to *idiomatización* (reverbalisation), thereby reconstituting sense within the idiomatic possibilities sanctioned by the target language's norm. Translation thus becomes an act of re-creation through which discursive equivalences are established, and new idiomatic conventions may emerge.

As Varga (2021) demonstrates, Coşeriu's conceptual method continues to inform contemporary translation studies, particularly through its influence on theories of equivalence, translatability, and textuality. She notes that the triadic model of meaning, designation, and sense, together with the principle that "languages cannot be translated, texts have to be translated", remains relevant to current research (Varga 2021, 106). Coşeriu's view of translation as a historically situated, norm-regulated act therefore bridges descriptive and functionalist paradigms: it situates creativity not outside linguistic constraint but within the evolving system of discourse-based norms that translation itself helps to generate. The history of the KJV, as traced by McGrath (2001, 260–63), supports this theoretical stance, as his analysis demonstrates that the KJV's authority was achieved not by imitatively reproducing original Hebrew and Greek, but by forging a distinctively English idiom and syntax. In his words, the KJV "gave peculiar connotations to many words and sanctioned strange constructions", thus instituting and stabilising novel linguistic forms within English (McGrath 2001, 263). This process entailed a balance between literalism and readability, the retention of Semitic idioms, and the creation of dignified and memorable phraseology. As a result, the outcome was the productive

enrichment and transformation of the English literary and idiomatic repertoire and not simply the transmission of biblical content.

Crystal's observations are also pertinent here. He notes that the expressions and idioms of the KJV have become so thoroughly integrated into English that their biblical provenance is frequently unrecognised, and that they function as naturalised elements of everyday language. The idioms presented in the three case studies discussed above, i.e. "the powers that be" (Romans 13:1), "by the skin of my teeth" (Job 19:20), and "the writing on the wall" (Daniel 5), now occur freely in secular discourse, in journalism and political commentary, and even in colloquial speech, and are often used by speakers who tend to be unaware of their biblical origin. Each has undergone semantic and stylistic generalisation: "the powers that be" now denotes authority in any institutional sense; "by the skin of my teeth" is used to express a narrow escape; and "the writing on the wall" indicates impending failure or decline. Moreover, the syntactic pattern particular to the Beatitudes ("Blessed are the meek…") has transcended its religious context, reappearing in headlines and popular culture ("Blessed are the geeks", "Blessed are the pacemakers") as both homage and parody (Crystal 2010, 196–97).

Crystal advances a critical distinction between idioms and quotations, stressing that idioms are absorbed into secular usage and ultimately become stylistically productive, whereas quotations preserve their religious framing (Crystal 2010, 89, 131–132). He concludes, "No other single source has provided the language with so many idiomatic expressions… when it comes to idioms, the Bible reigns definitely supreme" (Crystal 2010, 258), and attributes to the KJV the role of fixing these expressions in the collective memory of English speakers (Crystal 2010, 262). Although he does not explicitly invoke the concept of "norm creation", the empirical claims he advances support the assertion that translation, in the case of the KJV, produced enduring conventions of idiomatic usage.

The institutional and editorial dimensions of norm creation are also discussed by Norton (2005, 85–112), who presents the KJV as the product of ongoing standardisation through the agency of translators, printers, and editors. The "normalisation" of spelling, punctuation, and certain wordings, together with the continual adaptation of the text, establishes that the crystallisation of stylistic and lexical norms is a cumulative process involving multiple actors across time rather than a static or singular achievement.

Coşeriu's reflections on translation, while brief, are consistent with this picture. He contends that translation is directly concerned with the level of discourse rather than the particular language as such, and that its objective is not the reproduction of identical meanings, an impossibility given the language-bound character of meaning, but rather the expression of the same designation

and sense by means of different linguistic forms (Coseriu 1985, xxxiv). Translation, then, is productive in that it fosters new conventions at the level of discourse and register.

Toury (2012, 8, 64, 295, 300) advances the notion that translation is inherently norm-governed and, in practice, norm-creating. For Toury, the objective of descriptive studies is to reveal how particular translations assume positions of authority and regularity within the host culture, resulting in the formulation of probabilistic "laws" of translational behaviour. Such "regularities of behaviour in recurrent situations" confirm the generative role of translation in deeply affecting cultural and linguistic expectations.

Venuti repeatedly characterises translation as a productive activity that creates and stabilises linguistic and cultural norms (Venuti 2008, 14–19; 2021, 4–7, 18–19). He posits that translation constitutes an interpretive act, whereby a new chain of signifiers is constructed in the target language, replacing, rather than duplicating, the signifiers of the source. The KJV's status as a domesticating, canon-forming translation is interpreted by Venuti as paradigmatic of how translations form idiomatic and syntactic norms through institutional endorsement and widespread reception. The process is ongoing, involving a continual negotiation between the demands of fluency, readability, and the "visibility" or "invisibility" of the translator.

This orientation is further supported by the work of Willems and Munteanu (2021), who, following Humboldt, stress that linguistic activity, including translation, is fundamentally creative (*enérgeia*) and always exceeds prior knowledge or technique (*dýnamis*). The product (*érgon*) of this creative process is the emergence of new linguistic forms and conventions. Translation is, in this sense, an exemplary locus of norm-generation, producing, and not merely reproducing, linguistic resources.

Campbell (2010, 13–14) reinforces this argument through a detailed discussion of the transmission and transformation effected by the KJV. He documents how the KJV preserved the phraseology and style of Tyndale's New Testament and subsequently established these choices as the dominant idiom for subsequent translations. The language "lives on, preserved by the KJV", with particular expressions becoming embedded in English, their biblical origins forgotten, but their normative force intact.

Finally, Hamlin and Jones (2010, 1–2, 7–14) identify the KJV as the outcome of collaborative and cumulative translation processes that stabilised linguistic and stylistic norms. The ongoing adaptation and reception of the KJV, both in literary allusion and cultural practice, are examples of the productive and norm-creating nature of translation in the history of English.

7. Conclusion

The conclusion must return to the central thesis advanced throughout: that the translational activity embodied by the King James Version (KJV) of the Bible is most appropriately conceptualised not as a passive or reproductive transmission of pre-existing forms, but as a generative and creative process that is instrumental in the formation, transmission, and eventual consolidation of linguistic norms within English. As the analysis has demonstrated, the KJV's enduring legacy is inseparable from its dual function as a religious and linguistic artefact. Institutional endorsement and historical continuity have ensured that the translation's idiomatic innovations, syntactic choices, as well as stylistic registers have exerted a substantial influence on the expressive repertoire of English, with particular effect in the naturalisation and canonisation of distinctive biblical phraseologies.

Through the methodological prism of Coşeriu's tripartite model of linguistic competence, the article has sought to explicate the universal (elocutional), language-specific (idiomatic), and textually creative (expressive) dimensions of linguistic knowledge that underwrite both the process and the products of translation. The KJV, in this account, emerges as a site in which the abstract potentials of linguistic structure are selectively realised, mediated by the translators' engagement with historical conventions and the creative possibilities of English. The idiomatic competence of English is demonstrably expanded through the absorption and naturalisation of Hebraic and Greek elements; what were once "foreign" or non-native forms have, through the idiomatising and expressive procedures of translation, become integral components of the English linguistic system. This paper's analysis of such phrases as "the powers that be", "by the skin of my teeth", and "the writing on the wall" has explained the mechanisms by which translation introduces new forms and confers upon them a durable normative status. As a result, their biblical provenance is often disregarded in contemporary usage.

In Coserian terms, the KJV's impact is best explained as the discursive success of certain renderings, which translate texts rather than systems, and thereby consolidate norm-regulated usage. Some solutions are *transpositions* (ready idioms that the KJV fortifies), others are *versions* whose creative reformulation later becomes idiomatic; in both cases, equivalence is of discourse. This explains both the KJV's historical role as a norm-maker and the continued quotability of its English today (Coşeriu 1997). The approach is consistent with recent receptions that treat Coşeriu as a currently relevant framework for translation analysis (Varga 2021).

In reflecting on the application and limitations of the theoretical paradigms deployed, it is clear that Coşeriu's competence model provides a particularly useful analytic vocabulary for capturing the stratified processes involved in translation, especially in its attention to the intersection of system, norm, and textual practice. Nevertheless, as the analysis has shown, the phenomenon of norm-formation is not adequately understood without Toury's Descriptive Translation Studies and the notion of translation as a norm-governed and norm-generating practice. Toury's account of the initial, preliminary, and operational norms that structure translational behaviour, together with his formulation of the "laws" of growing standardisation and interference, constitute a pertinent empirical framework for tracing the ways in which the KJV's linguistic choices were regularised, transmitted, and then fixed within the conventions of English usage.

Venuti's theorisation of domestication and the politics of translation further expands on this account by insisting on the cultural and institutional character of translation. The processes of domestication, through which foreign forms are rendered familiar and institutionally legitimated, are presented as integral to the KJV's continuing impact. The creative aspect of translation, as discussed by both Venuti and recent work in linguistic norm theory, reframes the translator's agency as productive rather than merely reproductive: the translator participates actively in the formation and reorganisation of the receiving language and culture, generating new norms and expanding the expressive possibilities available to subsequent generations of speakers and writers.

The detailed examination of the article's case studies ("the powers that be", "by the skin of my teeth", and "the writing on the wall") demonstrates how each represents a distinctive process within this broader dynamic. The analysis has shown how the KJV, through acts of selective domestication, semantic revaluation, and stylistic canonisation, participates in the ongoing stratification of linguistic norms. These findings have broader methodological implications for the study of translation and linguistic change, indicating the need for a multidimensional and theoretically integrated approach that attends closely to the ways in which textual, institutional, and cultural forces relate.

In essence, the KJV is a paradigmatic instance of translation as a creative, institutionally mediated, and historically transformative activity. Its legacy is best understood through the merging of competence-based, descriptive, and cultural-political frameworks as articulated by Coşeriu, Toury, and Venuti. The continuing significance of the KJV in the development of English linguistic and cultural identity suggests that the study of translation-mediated normativity remains an open, dynamic, and contested field, in which the boundaries between transmission and innovation, reproduction and creativity, are themselves constantly subject to renegotiation.

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