

Seek, and you shall find: English biblical elements in speeches in the European Parliament and their interpretation into Slovene and French

Katarina Čobec 

University of Ljubljana, Slovenia



ABSTRACT

The Bible is the most frequently quoted text in European languages. In English, it is the King James Bible that has had the greatest cultural influence, mainly because it provided the language with hundreds of idiomatic expressions. Biblical quotations and expressions are also used in politics. The study reported in this article identifies the English biblical elements in the plenary sessions of the European Parliament (EP) from 2019 to 2024 in order to analyse their interpretation into Slovene and French. Quotations were identified by searching the EP corpus with keywords that can introduce biblical references, while biblical expressions were identified using a predefined list. Six examples of quotations and 41 different biblical expressions were identified. The accuracy and completeness of the analysed interpretations shed light on the biblical knowledge of the interpreters, who come from two countries with different cultural backgrounds but similar regulations on religious education in public schools, and both facing growing religious illiteracy. The results show that French interpreters fare slightly better than Slovene ones, and that while a satisfactory interpretation is possible without knowledge of the biblical reference, the overall quality of the message is much better when the interpreter is aware of it.

Keywords: biblical quotations, biblical expressions, biblical knowledge, European Parliament, interpretation strategies

Iščite in boste našli: angleški biblijski elementi v govorih Evropskega parlamenta in njihovo tolmačenje v slovenščino in francoščino

IZVLEČEK

Biblija je najpogosteje citirano besedilo v evropskih jezikih. Na angleški jezik je najmočnejše vplivala *Verzija Kralja Jakoba*, ki je jezik obogatila s stotinami idiomatičnih izrazov. Biblijski citati in frazemi se uporabljajo tudi v politiki. Članek obravnava angleške biblijske elemente (citrate in frazeme), ki so bili uporabljeni na plenarnih zasedanjih Evropskega parlamenta v obdobju 2019–2024, in njihovo tolmačenje v slovenščino in francoščino. Iskanje citatov v korpusu EP je potekalo s pomočjo ključnih izrazov, ki lahko uvajajo biblijske reference, iskanje frazemov pa na podlagi vnaprej pripravljenega seznama. Najdenih je bilo šest citatov in 41 različnih frazemov. Analiza primerov in tolmaških strategij nudi vpogled v biblično znanje tolmačev, ki prihajajo iz držav z različnim

kulturnim ozadjem, a podobno zakonodajo o poučevanju verskih vsebin v javnih šolah in vse večjo religijsko nepismenostjo. Rezultati kažejo, da imajo francoski tolmači nekoliko več bibličnega znanja kot slovenski. V primerih vidimo, da je sporočilo sicer mogoče ustrezno pretolmačiti tudi brez poznavanja biblijskega elementa, da pa je tolmačenje celovitejše, če tolmač pozna biblijski citat ali frazem.

Ključne besede: biblijski citati, biblijski frazemi, biblično znanje, Evropski parlament, tolmaške strategije

1. Introduction

Christianity has shaped Europeans' perceptions of time and people, and influenced European architecture, art, literature, and everyday language (Hill 2006; Davie 2000). Out of all Christian writings, it is the Bible that has played the most important role in the field of language. *The King James Bible* (1611), although not the first translation of the Bible into English, is considered to be the book that has had the greatest influence on English, and Crystal (2010, 258) even argues that there is "no other book that has provided the language with so many idiomatic expressions".

Because of the importance of biblical phraseology, linguists study the use of Christian terminology outside the religious context (Földes 1990; Kržišnik 2000, 2008, 2013; Crystal 2010; Fedulenkova 2020; Reznikov 2020). The use of the Bible in politics is also a topic of various studies. Scholars have examined the use of the Bible in contemporary political discussions as seen in the media (Stenström 2023), or in discussions in national parliaments (Løland 2023).

This study focuses on biblical elements in the discussions in the European Parliament (EP) and is motivated by the following research questions: Which biblical elements are used by English-speaking speakers in the EP? What interpretation strategies are used by Slovene and French interpreters for biblical elements? Are there differences in Slovene and French interpretation of biblical elements?

In order to answer these research questions, we first identified English biblical elements in the speeches of the EP plenary sessions. After these elements were identified, the Slovene and French interpretations were analysed to determine what strategies the interpreters use to deal with biblical elements in the fast and dense speeches typical of the EP. The collected data were then used to analyse differences in the level of biblical knowledge among Slovene and French interpreters.

Slovene and French were chosen mainly because of specific similarities and differences in the cultural context. Slovenia is a post-communist country, whereas France is an old democracy. Nevertheless, France is the country where the process of secularization

began in Europe, starting in 1789 and culminating in 1905 with the passage of a law on the separation of Church and state, which eventually extended to all European countries (cf. Rémond 2005). Religious education was already removed from republican public schools at the end of the 19th century and was absent from state schools for almost an entire century (Davie 2000, 92). In recent decades, however, the growing awareness of religious illiteracy (Davie 2000, 93) has led decision makers to promote the teaching of *fait religieux*, or religious facts or information about religions taught not as a special subject but across different disciplines (history, literature, art, etc.; Carpentier 2007). In Slovenia, religious education was banned from public schools by the communist regime in 1952. In 2005, an elective subject called *Verstva in etika* (religion and ethics) was introduced in grades seven through nine, and the law does not contain any provisions on religious education within the framework of other subjects (Ivanc 2011). From a legal point of view, therefore, religious education in public schools is similar in France and Slovenia (Kodelja 1999, 153). One notable difference concerns private (in both countries mostly Catholic) schools: in Slovenia, only around 1% of school-age children attend a private elementary school and around 7% of pupils attend a private secondary school (Eurydice 2023), whereas in France around 17% of pupils attend private schools (elementary or secondary; Vie publique 2023).

In the following sections, first the differences between biblical quotations and biblical expressions are explained. The article then describes the context of interpretation in the EP. The most extensive part of the article is devoted to the presentation of the corpus and the methodology, the quantitative analysis of the examples, and the discussion of the most important examples, followed by some concluding remarks on how the biblical elements are treated in French and Slovene.

2. Biblical quotations and expressions

Of all texts, the Bible is certainly the most frequently quoted in all European languages, although in some more than in others. The reason for the strong influence of biblical texts is that they have been around for a very long time and have a very large and diverse readership or audience. In addition, their content is human-centred (covering ethics, morality, and basic human law; Kržišnik 2000, 68). The different degrees of influence and the variants that exist in different languages are due to two main reasons. The first reason lies in the channel of reception. In Catholic countries, biblical texts were accessible mainly in spoken form; that is, through the medium of speech and hearing, by listening to and reproducing sermons and scriptures (Kržišnik 2008, 41). Protestants, on the other hand, tended to develop a culture of reading and studying the Bible. Snelling (2009, 93) emphasizes the familiarity of those born and raised in

the Protestant world with sacred texts, whereby regular study of Scripture in Sunday school was an undisputed part of life. The second reason lies in the different translations that were produced at different times in history that were more or less crucial for language development (Reznikov 2020, 116). The poetic creativity of the respective Bible translator also led to the development of interlingual variants (Földes 1990, 60).

When studying biblical elements in general, a distinction has to be made between quotations and expressions. Crystal (2010, 5) describes biblical quotations as “powerful and memorable sentences which have entered the stylistic consciousness of [English] speakers all over the world ... and people using them are normally aware of their biblical origin”. Quotations are likely to be used in elevated styles of the language and in religious contexts (Crystal 2010, 257). Reznikov (2020, xi) speaks about direct or indirect quotations, which is of relevance for this study, in which the rare quotations are rather indirect. He also emphasizes that quotations are linked to a religious topic, which is not the case in the EP speeches (see Section 5).

Biblical expressions – or what Kržišnik (2000) calls biblical set phrases – are further divided by Kržišnik into biblical established quotations and biblical phrases, the criterion for the distinction being the (non)recognition of the source. The established quotation also “preserves the sense granted to it in the original context whereas the phrase has its own meaning, and it acquires its sense in each new context” (Kržišnik 2000, 79). Crystal (2010) arbitrarily uses the terms *expression*, *phrase*, or *idiom* when discussing biblical expressions that have become an integral part of English. Reznikov (2020, xi) further explains that, for the majority of native speakers, the origin of these expressions is unknown or irrelevant, their meaning has often changed, they are used in a variety of non-religious contexts, and they are often subject to modern adaptations.

“These adaptations provide the best evidence of lasting biblical influence,” argues Crystal (2010, 7), showing the full range of non-biblical contexts in which they are used in modern English. One of the most popular areas, according to Crystal, is also politics. In press titles, various reports, commentaries, and some famous political speeches, he identified about 25 different English biblical expressions used in political contexts. In the context of discussion in the European institutions, which is the type of discourse this study is focusing on, Crystal (2010, 216) identifies only one example: “And if a kingdom be divided against itself, that kingdom cannot stand”, which was used in the discussion about the ratification of the Constitution of the European Union.

In the context of this study, I use the term *biblical quotations* when we speak of random biblical elements, more or less direct quotations or references to biblical stories, events or parables. In this case, the biblical source is clearly recognizable and is always

explicitly mentioned by the speakers. I use the term *biblical expressions* when we are talking about expressions/phrases/idioms that have become an integral part of the language and are not used by the speakers with a conscious biblical reference.

3. Simultaneous interpreting in the European Parliament

The EP plenary speeches explored in this study have several specific aspects that need to be addressed. First, there are tight rules about speaking time: Members of the European Parliament (MEPs) have one to five minutes at their disposal and seek to use their speaking time to the maximum. Normally, they prepare written texts and read them very fast, and their speeches are also characterized by information density (Vuorikoski 2004; Altenberg 2015). Second, although the EP is an extremely multilingual institution, where the interpretation in all 24 official languages of the EU is guaranteed, there seems to be a more or less widespread conviction among the speakers that English is the most suitable means of communication (Graves, Pascual Olaguíbel, and Pearson 2022, 111). It should be emphasized that the English used in the EP is mainly spoken by non-native speakers, and this is even more the case since the UK left the EU. In 2024, only 20 (out of 720) MEPs are from a country where English is an official language (i.e., Ireland and Malta; European Parliament 2024a). Graves, Pascual Olaguíbel and Pearson (2022, 112) point out that interpreting from non-native English has a clear impact on interpreters. Bartłomiejczyk (2017, 177) also highlights the difficulties in interpreters' everyday work, including speed, reading out speeches that were not previously available, poor use of non-native language, puns, and literary quotations. Biblical quotations undoubtedly belong to this last group of difficulties.

Third, the professionalism of the interpreters themselves must also be taken into account. There are about 275 staff interpreters in the EP's interpreting service (European Parliament 2024c), but the service also uses external accredited interpreters. To enter the profession, each applicant must pass an inter-institutional accreditation test or a competition. Freelance interpreters are on an equal footing with staff interpreters, and none of the sessions in the EP are reserved for staff interpreters. However, plenary sessions are, where possible, reserved for interpreters who have already gained at least one year of professional experience in the EP's interpreting service (Altenberg 2015; Graves, Pascual Olaguíbel, and Pearson 2022). With regard to the overall duration of presence in the EP, it should be noted that the French booth has existed since the establishment of the Common Assembly of the European Coal and Steel Community in 1958, because French is one of the four languages of the six founding states, whereas the Slovene booth was established in the course of the 2004 enlargement process (European Parliament 2024c; Graves, Pascual Olaguíbel, and Pearson 2022, 104).

4. Method

4.1 The corpus

To answer the research questions, speech fragments in English containing biblical elements were needed, as well as the transcripts of their interpretation into Slovene and French. The corpus of the EP offers the possibility to search for such instances. It is accessible via a public website (European Parliament 2024b) intended for all citizens of the EU. Among other things, it contains the transcripts of the speeches of the plenaries, known as *verbatim* reports. It should be noted that these texts are not faithful transcripts of the speeches made, because they may differ slightly from what was actually said. They also do not take into account the characteristics of oral speech, such as hesitations, false starts, self-corrections, pauses, and so on (Bartłomiejczyk 2017, 166; Lambertini 2023, 221). Nevertheless, this feature was not an obstacle to this research because the focus was on lexical items with full meaning, which presumably are not omitted in the *verbatim* reports. The transcripts of the speeches are linked to the videos and the interpretation in all working languages. Because the corpus does not contain transcripts of the interpretation, this was prepared by the researcher herself (see Section 4.3).

This study focused on the plenaries of the five-year period from 2019 to 2024, which comprised 257 days of plenary sessions. The website does not provide any information about the number of words in the corpus. However, it can be assumed that the quantity of text present in the five-year period is large enough to obtain representative data. The EP corpus platform offers the possibility to choose the parliamentary term period, session dates, the names of the speakers, and one or more words in the titles of the plenary sessions or in the texts of the speeches. This study is based on this last feature: a search by (key)words.

4.2. Identification of English biblical quotations and expressions

Following the example of Lambertini (2023) for identifying Italian and French proverbs in speeches at plenary sessions of the EP, a two-step procedure was chosen.

In the first phase, the aim was to track down random biblical elements that might be used by speakers. These could be (in)direct quotations or more or less complete descriptions of various events, stories, wisdom, or parables from the Bible. These types of biblical elements were identified by searching for words that could introduce sentences with these elements. The words were the following: *Bible*, ten synonyms of the word *Bible* taken from the Cambridge Thesaurus, the adjective *biblical*, important biblical personalities (e.g. *Jesus*, *Paul*), and the most cited biblical books (e.g. *Genesis*,

Psalms). Only four different keywords provided concrete results (for further analysis, see Section 5.1).

The second phase concentrated on biblical expressions. As already emphasized, these are expressions that have fully entered the English language, and the perception of their biblical origin has largely been lost (Crystal 2010, 5). Two lists of biblical expressions were combined, comprising 257 expressions in total. To start, the list of 130 expressions from the pan-European dictionary of biblical idioms (Adamiia et al. 2019) was checked, and this contains biblical phrases, idioms, and proverbs in nineteen languages, including English, Slovene, and French. An important feature of this list is that the expressions are present in all the languages studied, and so interpreters are expected to use the equivalent expression in the target language. This first list was supplemented with the remaining biblical expressions from David Crystal's book (Crystal 2010), whereby equivalence was not always possible because sometimes the expression only exists in English. The search in the second phase yielded 94 examples of 41 different expressions and idioms (for further analysis, see Section 5.1).

It is worth noting that the search by keywords in the EP's corpus of *verbatim* reports does not produce direct results. The hits point to the discussion in which the word in question was used. For each discussion, one has to search further (using the search function Ctrl+F) to find a speaker that used the keyword(s). Only then is it possible to listen to the speaker's contribution and the interpretation of his or her speech.

4.3. Organization of data

The various data obtained were organized in spreadsheets with columns for the following items: keyword; the speaker, political affiliation, date and topic of the speech; the transcript of the original speech fragment; the transcript of the interpretation; the interpretation strategy; rendering of the message; and the presence of hesitation marks or pauses. One spreadsheet was created for the Slovene interpretation and another for the French interpretation.

The keyword makes it possible to see which biblical elements are found in concrete examples of use in the speeches at the plenary sessions. Keywords were used in the first part of research to find random quotations, and biblical expressions were used in the second part, where the aim was to find examples with the exact expressions or their variants.

The transcripts of the original speech fragments were copied from the website. For the purpose of this study, they are limited to the close context that precedes or follows the biblical element.

The transcripts of the interpretation follow the transcription conventions used by Lambertini (2023, 236). They are orthographic, and statements are written in standard notation, with minimal use of punctuation. The / symbol indicates the end of a portion of an utterance or a complete utterance based on the speaker's prosody. Semi-verbal and nonverbal events are marked (hesitations, pauses with indication of length, self-corrections, word fragments, vowel prolongation, and unintelligible passages).

The interpretation strategy is the most important column in terms of data analysis. The various definitions of interpretation strategies are adopted from Barik ([1971] 1994), who was the first to develop a general classification of the three most common situations in which the interpreter's version departs from the original speech: omissions, additions, and errors (Barik [1971] 1994, 121), along with several subcategories. Other researchers followed his coding scheme and adapted it to their specific needs and situations (cf. Altman 1994; Falbo 1998). This was also done in this study, in which the focus is on interpreting specific lexical items (i.e., biblical elements). The following categories of language departures from Barik's coding scheme were identified: omissions (including partial omissions), substitutions (including minor semantic errors and mild phrasing changes), and errors. For substitutions, the subcategory of substitution without idiomatics was introduced for cases in which the biblical idiom was interpreted correctly, but not with a corresponding idiom in the target language. This is distinguished from reformulation, a strategy that is suitable and necessary when there is no corresponding idiom in the target language. An important category was, of course, equivalence, which is not a language departure, and is therefore not mentioned by Barik.

Rendering of the message is the feature that reflects the overall comprehensibility of the interpretation in a wider context, not just the biblical element. If the biblical element is translated with a minor semantic error or mild phrasing changes or sometimes even omitted, this does not always affect the overall meaning of the speech fragment dealt with (cf. Barik [1971] 1994). The rendering of the message can therefore be successful (no loss of meaning), partially successful (little change in meaning), or unsuccessful (definite loss of meaning). These categories were defined based on Dose (2017, 80–81), with the partially successful rendering in the target language added.

The presence of hesitation marks/pauses immediately before the biblical expression can be understood as a sign of increased cognitive load for the interpreter. Triggers that are known to increase cognitive load are the delivery rate, lexical density, and proportion of numbers (Plevoets and Defrancq 2018, 5). In the case at hand, it is the presence of rhetorical elements that requires the mobilization of specific linguistic

and extralinguistic knowledge that in some cases may lead to hesitations and/or pauses.

The data collected and organized in the manner described above provided information about the concrete English biblical elements used in the EP speeches, their interpretation into Slovene and French, and the strategies used by Slovene and French interpreters. The quantitative analysis of the collected data, which was performed manually, helped to identify the differences in Slovene and French interpretation. Finally, some illustrative examples provided insights into the biblical knowledge of certain interpreters.

5. Results and discussion

5.1 English biblical quotations and expressions

In response to the first research question regarding which biblical elements are used in English speeches in the EP, several biblical quotations and expressions were extracted from the EP corpus. The search for random biblical quotations yielded six different examples, generated by four keywords (*Bible*, *New Testament*, *biblical*, and *Genesis*).

The search for biblical expressions resulted in 94 examples, which were analysed based on 41 different biblical expressions (see Table 1). The most productive expression is *cornerstone*, with 138 hits, followed by the variants of *set thine house in order* (26 hits) and *scapegoat* (17). If a particular expression generated more than five hits, only the most representative examples were analysed. If five or fewer hits were obtained, all examples were analysed. Sometimes, however, there was no video with interpretation and the analysis of the interpretation was not possible.

Table 1. English biblical expressions in the speeches of the EP (2019–2024).

Biblical expression	Number of hits / examples analysed	Biblical expression	Number of hits / examples analysed
<i>cornerstone</i>	138 / 7	<i>thou shalt not</i>	2 / 1
<i>set thine house in order</i>	26 / 4	<i>lambs to the slaughter</i>	1 / 1
<i>scapegoat</i>	17 / 6	<i>Garden of Eden</i>	1 / 1
<i>go the extra mile</i>	10 / 3	<i>to wash one's hands</i>	1 / 1
<i>see eye to eye</i>	8 / 3	<i>the land of milk and honey</i>	1 / 1
<i>the letter and the spirit</i>	7 / 5	<i>a millstone around one's neck</i>	1 / 1
<i>stumbling block</i>	7 / 4	<i>the promised land</i>	1 / 1
<i>the powers that be</i>	6 / 1	<i>to see the speck in another's eye and ignore the log in one's own</i>	1 / 1

Biblical expression	Number of hits / examples analysed	Biblical expression	Number of hits / examples analysed
<i>to follow in the footsteps of somebody</i>	6 / 4	<i>to wipe off the face of the earth</i>	1 / 1
<i>David and Goliath</i>	5 / 5	<i>if the blind leads the blind, both shall fall into the ditch</i>	1 / 1
<i>drop in the ocean</i>	4 / 2	<i>faith, hope and charity</i>	1 / 1
<i>shall come to pass</i>	4 / 3	<i>physician, heal thyself!</i>	1 / 1
<i>eye for an eye</i>	4 / 4	<i>a bottomless pit</i>	1 / 1
<i>flesh and blood</i>	3 / 2	<i>holier than thou</i>	1 / 1
<i>from the bottom of one's heart</i>	3 / 1	<i>a shining light</i>	1 / 1
<i>God forbid</i>	3 / 1	<i>a voice in the wilderness</i>	1 / 1
<i>the signs of the times</i>	2 / 2	<i>golden calf</i>	1 / 1
<i>wolves in sheep's clothing</i>	2 / 2	<i>love thy neighbour</i>	1 / 1
<i>to move mountains</i>	2 / 2	<i>Babel</i>	1 / 0
<i>one's left hand does not know what one's right hand is doing</i>	2 / 2	<i>and the word was made flesh</i>	1 / 0
<i>as a man sows so he shall reap</i>	2 / 2		

Twenty of the 41 English expressions are included in the pan-European dictionary of biblical phrases (Adamia et al. 2019), six additional expressions have a corresponding expression in Slovene, and five in French according to monolingual dictionaries of Slovene and French (Fran 2023; Larousse 2024). There are 15 Slovene and 16 French expressions for which there is no corresponding idiomatic expression in the target language and that have to be reformulated in the interpretation.

5.2 Interpretation into Slovene

After identifying biblical quotations and expressions, the interpretation strategies into Slovene and French were analysed to answer the second research question. In the Slovene interpretation, in examples with random quotations, a complete or partial omission was found in all six interpreted examples. In one case with partial omission (Example 1), the message was still successfully rendered; in all other examples, the omission impaired the overall meaning of the speech fragment. Signs of hesitation and pauses were observed in four cases, two of which showed serious comprehension difficulties.

Example 1

OR: I advise them to *re-read the Book of Genesis. It was mankind eating the apple, and mankind will continue to be tempted.*

INT SL: *vendar preberite genezo / tam piše / da so ljudje podvrženi skušnjavam*

[but read Genesis / it says / that humans are subject to temptations]¹

► partial omission, partially successful message rendering

In examples with biblical expressions having a corresponding expression in the TL, 61 different examples were found, of which 55 were analysed because six videos (and hence six interpretations) were missing. In a good 32% of examples, the biblical expression was retained and translated with the corresponding Slovene phrase (Example 2). In another third of the examples, a great loss of idiomatic character was noticed, despite a correct translation (Example 3, see Table 2). Nevertheless, the message was successfully rendered in 74% of cases because minor semantic errors and mild phrasing changes do not significantly affect the overall meaning (see Table 3). In one instance (example 4) the message was unsuccessfully rendered because of an error. Hesitation marks and/or pauses before the biblical expression are present in a third of all the cases (see Table 4), regardless of their strategy or the final outcome. In this context, it is interesting to note that the Slovene interpreters had slight difficulties with *scapegoat* in all the examples analysed, but in the end the Slovene equivalent *grešni kozel* was always found.

Example 2

OR: Well, we learned that we can *move mountains* when we need to.

INT SL: *naučili smo se / da lahko premikamo gore če želimo*

[we have learned / that we can move mountains if we want to]

► equivalence, successful message rendering

Example 3

OR: and last, but not least, ensure policy coherence, so the *left hand knows what the right hand is doing.*

INT SL: *in kjer bomo imeli politiko / hm / ki bo razumna / tako da bomo vsi vedeli / kaj se dogaja / da bomo sodelovali*

[and where we will have a policy / um / that is sensible / so that we all know / what is going on / so that we work together]

► substitution without idiomatics, successful message rendering

1 Gloss translations in square brackets are by the author of the article.

Example 4

OR: The Commission's EUR 7 million is *a drop in the ocean*.

INT SL: *kje je teh sedem milijonov*

[where are these seven million]

► omission and error, unsuccessful message rendering

Table 2. Interpretation strategies in examples with biblical expressions having a corresponding expression in the TL.

Interpretation strategy	TL = Slovene (55 examples)	TL = French (58 examples)
Equivalence	18	33*
Substitution (without idiomatics)	17	6
Reformulation (using a similar idiomatic expression)	0	3
Omission	9	8
Partial omission	2	1
Minor semantic error	6	2
Mild phrasing change	2	2
Error	1	3

* One of them is equivalence with addition.

Table 3. Rendition of the message in examples with biblical expressions having a corresponding expression in the TL.

Rendition of the message	TL = Slovene (50 speech fragments)	TL = French (53 speech fragments)
Successful	37	43
Partially successful	6	2
Unsuccessful	7	8

Table 4. Hesitation marks and/or pauses in examples with biblical expressions having a corresponding expression in the TL.

	TL = Slovene (50 speech fragments)	TL = French (53 speech fragments)
Hesitations	10	6
Pauses	3	0
Both	3	1
None	34	46

There were 35 examples of biblical expressions without a corresponding expression in the TL, of which 31 were analysed because four videos were missing. Among the strategies, the presence of equivalence may sound surprising, considering that there is no corresponding expression in Slovene. However, this is related to two expressions: *David and Goliath* and *the signs of the times*, which as such do not exist in the Slovene dictionary (Fran 2023), which was the basis for the discernment. The predominant strategy in this section was reformulation (Example 5), sometimes accompanied by idiomatic expressions that have a similar meaning to the biblical expression in English (Example 6; see Table 5). The success rate in rendering the message was similar to the previous section (see Table 6); there were no pauses and hesitation marks were less common, too, appearing in just over a quarter of the cases (Example 7; see Table 7).

Example 5

OR: Mercifully, and by the Grace of God, the predictions have not *come to pass*, and, so far, Africa has not witnessed the dire scenes that we feared.

INT SL: *hvalabogu se te napovedi niso uresničile / in zaenkrat Afrika ni bila priča temnim scenam ki smo se jih bali*

[thank God these predictions did not come true / and so far Africa has not witnessed the dark scenes we feared]

► reformulation, successful message rendering

Example 6

OR: Before taking others to task, I strongly recommend we *get our own house in order* first.

INT SL: *zato bi vas najprej pozval / da najprej pometemo pod lastnim pragom*

[so I would ask you first / to sweep under our own doorstep first]

► reformulation (using an idiomatic expression with a similar meaning), successful message rendering

Example 7

OR: It stores 140 tonnes of plutonium, but it has been described as *a bottomless pit* of hell, money and despair.

INT SL: *kjer je skladiščenih hm 140 ton plutonija / in hm velja za peklensko luknjo*

[where 140 tonnes of plutonium is stored / and um is considered a hellhole]

► mild phrasing change, successful message rendering

Table 5. Interpretation strategies in examples with biblical expressions without a corresponding expression in the TL.

Interpretation strategy	TL = Slovene (31 examples)	TL = French (28 examples)
Equivalence	6	0
Substitution (without idiomatics)	0	2
Reformulation	11	9
Reformulation (using a similar idiomatic expression)	2	6
Omission	7	2
Partial omission	0	0
Minor semantic error	2	1
Mild phrasing change	3	4
Error	0	4

Table 6. Rendition of the message in examples with biblical expressions without a corresponding expression in the TL.

Rendition of the message	TL = Slovene (31 speech fragments)	TL = French (28 speech fragments)
Successful	22	21
Partially successful	5	1
Unsuccessful	4	6

Table 7. Hesitation marks and/or pauses in examples with biblical expressions without a corresponding expression in the TL.

	TL = Slovene (31 speech fragments)	TL = French (28 speech fragments)
Hesitations	8	4
Pauses	0	0
Both	0	0
None	23	24

5.3 Interpretation into French

In the interpretations into French, in examples with random quotations, the interpretation was correct in half of the cases, whereas the other half contained errors. The errors led to unsuccessful rendering of the message, with one exception in which the gist of what was said was well preserved despite the error. Hesitation marks and

pauses were present in half of the cases, but there is no correlation with a particular type of interpretation strategy, and it is impossible to claim that this is a consequence of the biblical content.

Example 8

OR: But it reminds me of *the Bible and our Lord speaking about the talents. One had the five talents, another had three, another had one. He was very happy with those who use their talents, but he nearly blew the head off the person who didn't.*

INT FR: *ça me rappelle la bible / Dieu qui parlait des talents / cinq talents pas un ni deux ni trois / il était très content de ces (.) talents / et il a failli décapiter celui qui n'était pas content de cela*

[it reminds me of the Bible / God talking about the talents / five talents not one nor two nor three / he was very happy with those (.) talents / and he nearly beheaded the one who wasn't happy about it]

► error, unsuccessful message rendering

Example 9

So you want to convert this debate about climate change into a theological argument. *The Bible says that God created the earth and the man, but gave the man the power to work the earth and make a living out of that work. So what you're proposing right now here is clearly violating God's command to respect the earth, but to use it.*

INT FR: *donc vous voulez en faire un argument théologique / alors vous devez donner à l'homme la possibilité de travailler la terre et d'en vivre / c'est cela que dit la Bible / et ce que vous proposez ici va à l'encontre des commandements*

[so you want to turn it into a theological argument / so you have to give man the chance to work the land and live off it / that's what the Bible says / and what you're proposing here goes against the commandments]

► partial omission and mild phrasing change in the first part, omission of the final part (to respect ...); partially successful message rendering

Biblical expressions having a corresponding expression in the TL were found in 64 different examples, of which 58 were analysed because six videos (and interpretations) were missing. As far as interpretation strategies are concerned (see Table 2), the use of the equivalent French biblical expression was very high, at more than 50% of cases. It is also noted that in three cases similar idiomatic expressions were used

(Example 10), which is not the case in the Slovene examples. The presence of three errors should also be emphasized (Example 11), as there were no such errors in the Slovene examples. However, the success rate in rendering the message (see Table 3) was higher than in Slovene, and the presence of hesitations and pauses was kept to a minimum (see Table 4).

Example 10

OR: ... that democracy is the *cornerstone*, or transparency and access to documents is the *cornerstone*, in democracy.

INT FR: *concernant le fait que la transparence et l'accès aux documents c'est la clé de voûte de la démocratie*

[concerning the fact that transparency and access to documents is the cornerstone of democracy]

► similar idiomatic expression (the equivalence would be *la pierre angulaire*), successful message rendering

Example 11

OR: And it's not surprising to Israel, which Iran wants to wipe off the face of the earth.

INT FR: *pas plus qu'à l'Iran qui veut chager la face du monde*

[any more than Iran, which wants to change the face of the world]

► error; unsuccessful message rendering

Biblical expressions without a corresponding expression in the TL were found in 33 different examples, of which 28 were analysed because five videos (and interpretations) were missing. The predominant strategy in this section was also reformulation, six times even with an idiomatic expression (Example 12, see Table 5). Four errors were also identified (none were found in the same category in Slovene) (Example 13). The French interpreters successfully rendered the message in three-quarters of the cases examined (see Table 6). In this category, too, the signs of hesitation were kept to a minimum (see Table 7).

Example 12

OR: I am glad to note that Parliament and the Commission once more *see eye to eye* in this.

INT FR: *je suis ravie d'apprendre que le Parlement et la Commission une fois de plus (.) sont sur la même longueur d'ondes*

[I am delighted to learn that the Parliament and the Commission are once again (.) on the same wavelength]

- reformulation with an idiomatic expression, successful message rendering

Example 13

OR: ... Palestinians are losing their lives – 30 000 people! It is not just a number, but real individuals of *flesh and blood*.

INT FR: *les vies palestiniennes disparaissent l'une après l'autre / trente mille déjà / le tribut en sang est immense*

[Palestinian lives disappearing one by one / thirty thousand already / the blood toll is immense]

- error, unsuccessful message rendering

5.4 Slovene versus French interpretation

The last research question concerns the differences between Slovene and French interpretations in terms of biblical elements. Regardless of the category (random biblical quotations, biblical expressions with or without a corresponding expression in the TL), fewer omissions can be observed in French on the one hand and more errors on the other. At the same time, French interpreters generally use more idiomatic expressions; they are not only better at finding the biblical equivalent in their language, but they also use idiomatic expressions that are not present in the original speech. Although there is a loss of idiomatic elements in Slovene, the rendering of the overall message is similar in both target languages (the difference is 7%). Every omission and every minor semantic error (e.g., an unusual collocation) does not necessarily lead to a definite loss of meaning. However, real errors (e.g., false meaning) always led to an unsuccessful interpretation. Based on the analysis, it can be assumed that French interpreters are braver and prefer to risk making a mistake rather than omit what they have heard. Slovene interpreters, on the other hand, are more inclined to leave elements of the speech out. As far as hesitation and/or pauses are concerned, these are observed almost 20% more frequently in Slovene interpreting. However, there is no direct correlation between hesitations and the accuracy of the interpretation.

The following examples were selected for their relevance or particular interest in the context of the study. They illustrate various situations that are treated differently by Slovene or French interpreters. Some of them offer an indication of the biblical knowledge of a particular interpreter.

The first two examples come from the category with the random quotations, in which biblical knowledge is of particular importance. The reference is longer and, in both

cases, refers to a specific Gospel story. In Example 14, the Slovene interpreter has serious difficulties, which are expressed by the sign for a long pause: (...). He omits the entire biblical reference and summarizes it with *to je nemogoče* [that is impossible]. The French interpreter, on the other hand, translates the biblical passage accurately and completely.

Example 14

OR: I have seen that the Commission will use a multiplier of 45! *Even Jesus in the New Testament was not capable of doing that: a multiplier of 45 when he multiplied the fishes and the bread.* But the Commission is on that track, and that's not ...

INT SL: Sedaj gre za / hm / (.) multiplikacija kar za 45 / to je nemogoče / (...)

Komisija se je odločila na to- za to pot / [Now it's a / um / (.) multiplication by as much as 45 / that is impossible / (...)]

The Commission has decided on this- for this path / [et puis avec un multiplicateur de 45 on propose d'apporter la solution / *mais même Jesus dans le Nouveau euh Testament n'avait pas un multiplicateur de 45 / lorsqu'il a multiplié la quantité de pain et de poisson* [and then with a multiplier of 45 we propose to provide the solution / *but even Jesus in the New uh Testament didn't have a multiplier of 45 / when he multiplied the quantity of bread and fish*]

Example 15 is a metaphor connected with the Nativity story. The Slovene interpreter retains only the basis of the biblical reference (*beg Marije pred Herodom* [flight of Mary from Herod]) and omits the entire metaphor, whereas the French interpreter, although showing some biblical knowledge, compounds his own (inaccurate) interpretation with an addition and also loses the entire metaphor.

Example 15

OR: An image that strikes me as almost *biblical*, as *thousands of Marys hide with their newborns, evading King Herod in basements, subway stations and other stables.*

INT SL: to je slika ki se mi zdi skorajda: *biblična* / (.) gre (.) skoraj (.) da: za: *beg Marije pred Herodom* /

[this is a picture that seems to me almost *biblical* / (.) it is (.) almost (.) about the flight of Mary from Herod]

INT FR: c'est une image presque *biblique* / *ce sont presque des Madonnes qui sont en train de donner naissance à leurs enfants / comme Marie le fit / alors que le roi Herode régnait sur la Judée*

[it's an almost *biblical image* / *they're almost Madonnas giving birth to their children* / *as Mary did* / *when King Herod ruled over Judea*]

The following six examples contain well-known biblical expressions with varying degrees of awareness of their origin. *A voice in the wilderness* (Example 16) is translated literally into Slovene and not with the corresponding expression *glas vpijočega v puščavi*. A more serious error is the omission of what precedes the expression (*naming them in here ...*), thus losing the essence of the message. In French, this part is retained, but the expression itself (*au nom d'une véritable jungle* [in the name of the real jungle]) is an attempt to say something appropriate, but it gives the sentence a different meaning. In both cases the interpreters do not translate using the biblical expression.

Example 16

OR: How many Yemeni children have been orphaned and starved? These are war crimes, too. But naming them in here makes you *a voice in the wilderness*.

INT SL: koliko je otrok v Jemnu / ki so sirote / ki trpijo / ampak to je le *glas v divjini*

[how many children there are in Yemen / who are orphans / who are suffering / but that's just *a voice in the wilderness*]

INT FR: combien (.) d'entre eux et il s'agit des crimes de guerre également / et les nommer ici revient à s'exprimer *au nom d'une véritable jungle*

[how many (.) of them and these are war crimes too / and to name them here is to *speak in the name of the real jungle*]

An eye for an eye is a very productive expression with many adaptations and wide applicability, as Crystal (2010, 59) explains, who also mentions a famous line by Gandhi: *An eye for an eye makes the whole world blind*. It is this sentence that is echoed in all four examples analysed with this expression. One would expect an accurate translation, yet three of the four Slovene interpreters omitted the expression (see Example 17, in which the interpreter only speaks about solidarity), and only one interpreted it with the TL equivalent, whereas the result in the French booth was the opposite (three equivalences and one omission). One French interpreter even added *dent pour dent* [a tooth for a tooth], which is a biblical continuation of *an eye for an eye*.

Example 17

OR: But it has to be a Europe based on solidarity and knowing that, as always, *an eye for an eye* will only turn this world into blindness.

INT SL: ampak pri tem moramo hm se opreti na našo solidarnost in na solidarnostna načela / hvala

[but we have to rely on our solidarity and solidarity principles / thank you]

INT FR: mais cette Europe doit se fonder sur la solidarité / en sachant que *œil pour œil* rendra le monde entier aveugle

[but this Europe must be based on solidarity / in the knowledge that *an eye for an eye* will make the whole world blind]

In Example 18, two expressions with partly overlapping meanings are used, *the land of milk and honey* and *the promised land*. The same variants also exist in Slovene and French, but in French the first variant, *pays de lait et de miel*, is rare and is described in Adamia et al. (2019) as bookish and sublime. It is therefore not surprising that the second variant, *la terre promise*, is used in French in both cases. In the Slovene interpretation, one finds the Slovene literal equivalent of *the land of milk and honey*, whereas *the promised land* and its larger context are reformulated. Neither the French nor the Slovene interpreter included *Moses* in the interpretation.

Example 18

OR: Madam President, I voted in favour, as for many Brexiteers the WTO has become *the land of milk and honey*, with Donald Trump in the role of *Moses*, leading the British people to *the promised land* of global free trade.

INT SL: glasovala sem za / saj je za številne zagovornike Brexita / STO *dežela* (...) *kjer se cedita hm med in mleko* / in Donald Trump naj bi bil (.) utelešenje obljube o prosti trgovini /

[Thank you very much / I voted yes / because for many Brexiters / the WTO is a land (...) of milk and honey / and Donald Trump is presumed to be (.) the embodiment of the promise of free trade]

INT FR: j'ai voté en faveur de cette résolution / en effet pour de nombreux pro-brexit les Etats-Unis sont *la terre promise* avec Donald Trump qui mènerait le peuple britannique vers *la terre promise* du libre-échange [I voted in favour of this resolution / indeed for many pro-Brexit the United States is the promised land with Donald Trump who would lead the British people to the promised land of free trade]

To see the mote (the speck, the splinter) in another's eye and ignore the beam (the log, the plank) in one's own is an expression that, according to Crystal (2010, 139), has had little influence outside of the religious context, mainly in literary and rhetorical

settings. In Example 19, the message of the original utterance is only approximately reformulated in Slovene; in French, on the other hand, the equivalent biblical expression is correctly used (after a long pause and a hesitation).

Example 19

OR: So, we have to give up the habit to *notice the speck in one eye, but to ignore the log in our own*.

INT SL: ni nujno da se vedno vmešavamo v ostale države / morda bi bilo tudi dobro / da uredimo zadeve pri nas

[we don't always have to interfere in other countries / it might be a good idea / to sort things out at home]

INT FR: donc il va falloir arrêter (...) de euh *voir la paille dans l'œil de l'autre et ignorer le poutre qui est dans le nôtre*

[so, we're going to have to stop (...) *seeing the mote in the other's eye and ignoring the beam in our own*]

Two commandments were also found in the speeches: The first, *love thy neighbour*, as Crystal (2010, 246) explains, is a version of the golden rule and can therefore be used in different circumstances. The second is the fifth commandment of the Decalogue, *thou shall not kill*. In Example 20, the biblical elements are used as quotations with a clear biblical reference. In French, *love thy neighbour* is simply omitted, and the reformulation of the last sentence seems to be a result of comprehension difficulties. In Slovene, *love thy neighbour* is translated literally, which is an awkward and incorrect translation. *Ne ubijaj*, on the other hand, is the Slovene wording of the fifth commandment.

Example 20

OR: Is that in line with family values and respect for the love of one's home? What about '*love thy neighbour*'? Is cluster bombing residential areas compatible with the commandment '*thou shalt not kill*'?

INT SL: kako pa je s tistim / *ljubite svojega soseda* / ali je bombardiranje hm civilnih področij skladno / s tisto zapovedjo *ne ubijaj*

[how about / *love thy next-door neighbour* / is the bombing of civilian areas compatible / with the commandment *thou shalt not kill*]

INT FR: est-ce que ce sont là les valeurs de la famille et de l'amour de la patrie / est-ce que bombarder des zones résidentielles c'est compatible avec les valeurs que la Russie prétend défendre

[are these the values of the family and love of country / is bombing residential areas compatible with the values that Russia claims to defend]

Faith, hope, and charity (Example 21) is a biblical trio from the last sentence of St. Paul's 1 Corinthians 13. Everyone with biblical knowledge knows this passage and this trio. For someone unfamiliar with biblical texts, the word *charity* can be a stumbling block. In modern English, this word often has an institutionalized sound and includes concepts such as benevolence and fair-mindedness (Crystal 2010, 248). Today, the English translator of St. Paul would have to use the word *love*. The Slovene interpreter obviously had difficulties with *charity* and ended up translating it as *milost* [grace]. The context was translated correctly. This does not apply to the French interpretation. The omission of the fact that these were names of the airplanes is more serious for rendering the message than the use of *espoir* instead of the synonym *espérance*, which is the usual term in this phrase.

Example 21

OR: ... when all that remained were their three barely functioning planes that they called *Faith, Hope and Charity* – named after what they were fighting for, after what was at stake.

INT SL: vse kar jim je ostalo so bila tri komaj delujoča letala ki so jih poimenovali *vera upanje in hm milost* / poimenovali so jih po vrednotah / za katere so se borili in ki so bile na kocki

[all they had left were three barely functioning planes which they called *Faith Hope and um Grace* / they named them after the values / they fought for and which were at stake]

INT FR: il nous restait *la foi l'espoir et la charité* / et nous nous sommes battus / nous avons continué à nous battre

[we were left with *faith hope and charity* / and we fought / we kept on fighting]

6. Conclusions

Regarding the occurrence of English biblical elements, two facts are surprising. First, the number of random biblical quotations is very small. In 257 days of plenary discussions, the Bible was intentionally quoted in English only six times. One possible reason for such a low number is mentioned in Bartłomiejczyk (2017, 167): “a lexeme-based electronic search will not identify more obscure or veiled references potentially present in the corpus”. Another possible reason could lie in the fact that the vast majority of MEPs and their guests that give speeches in English are not native speakers, and so their English is less idiomatic. It is, as defined by Graves, Pascual Olaguíbel and Pearson (2022, 112), a “new form of Euro-English, based on new norms and rules”.

Second, compared to the examples of biblical expressions in political contexts listed in Crystal (2010), the results of this study show a completely different picture. With the exception of *scapegoat*, *sheep (lambs) to the slaughter*, *wolf in sheep's clothing*, *a millstone around one's neck*, and *as you sow, so shall you reap*, none of the 25 political biblical idioms mentioned by Crystal were found in the corpus of the study. The biblical expressions identified also differ from examples in similar articles (Stenström 2023; Løland 2023) and from the researcher's personal expectations.

The most revealing examples are those in which the biblical origin is clearly recognizable to anyone with at least basic biblical knowledge. They offer some clues for answering the question of whether there are differences between Slovene and French interpreters in terms of their biblical knowledge. Both the quantitative analysis of the data and the individual cases show that the scales are tipping slightly to the French side. Considering that EP interpreters are generally highly professional and able to interpret a message in its entirety, the omissions and alterations of biblical elements show a certain difficulty or lack of knowledge in this specific area. As the results of the analysis show, it is possible to provide a satisfactory interpretation even if the interpreter does not know the biblical reference, but if, on the contrary, the interpreter knows the background or the specific expression in the source and target languages, the overall quality of the rendering of the message in the TL is much better and contributes to a better overall understanding of the given speech. This seems to prove, once again, how important it is for conference interpreters to have broad general knowledge, which also includes religious literacy.

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About the author

Katarina Čobec is Teaching Assistant at the Department of Translation Studies, Faculty of Arts at the University of Ljubljana, where she teaches French, German and conference interpreting. Her entry into the research sphere is her PhD, where she is focusing on biblical elements in the speeches of the European Parliament and their interpretation for four languages: English, French, German and Slovene. She is also a conference interpreter with work experience in the European Union institutions and in the free market.