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## BRIDGING THE SACRED AND THE ACCESSIBLE: A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF TRANSLATION STRATEGIES AND AUDIENCE RECEPTION IN MODERN BIBLICAL ADAPTATIONS

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*This article examines translation strategies and audience reception in modern adaptations of biblical texts. The study comparatively analyzes methods such as text simplification, illustrations, and emoji integration to improve accessibility for different age groups. The findings show that the most effective adaptation combines simplified language with visual support while preserving the sacred meaning of the original text.*

**Keywords:** Bible translation, children's literature, Skopos theory, emoji transcreation, linguistic simplification, audience reception, theological content adaptation.

### **Introduction**

Many of us have wondered: How do we, translators, handle the task of adapting the biblical text to a younger audience?

After all, it is quite difficult, considering the fact that we have to respect the faithfulness of the original text.

But are those translations considered to be appropriate for the audience of all ages, and not just children alone? In this article, we will examine this crucial aspect together.

Centuries ago, translators faced a unique challenge when they had to adapt complex concepts, such as names and ideas from the Bible, for a young audience. Young readers often found it hard to comprehend concepts such as redemption,

grace, or even salvation because these ideas are quite abstract and difficult to imagine and visualise at their age. Nowadays, some biblical vocabulary and names are difficult to pronounce and/or unfamiliar to the young audience. This article considers the appropriate translation and procedures utilised in the adaptation of the Bible for children.

The goal of this article is to explore the obstacles and strategies associated with the adaptation of the Bible for children, paying particular attention to how translators adapt complex theological content for young minds. Through a combination of content analysis and expert consultation, this study will identify common translation techniques, problems, and ethical considerations in the translation process.

**In terms of reading and language development, young children go through various stages, as outlined by Retief (1990: 36):**

0-5 years old: Preschool reading (picture books)

6-8 years old: Beginner reader (picture books)

9-11 years old: Transitional age from picture books

12 years and older: Children's literature

In middle age, children tend to have significant speech development, not only in terms of vocabulary and sentence construction but also in terms of language adaptation to different contexts. For example, by school age, children begin to understand figurative language such as comparisons and metaphors. Preschoolers can understand phrases such as “clouds look like castles,” while school-age children can understand expressions such as “the sun looks like a piece of hot coal” or “a heart of gold” (Mussen, Conger, Kagan & Huston, 1990).

This understanding of the stages of language development is crucial when considering how to simplify biblical texts. Translators should take into account that very young children are mostly at the stage of preschool reading when images play an important role, and language should be simple, specific, and direct.

Here is an example of simplification using the translation methods:

Original text:

*“The Lord is my light and my salvation - whom shall I fear? The Lord is the stronghold of my life - of whom shall I be afraid?” - Psalm 27:1*

Simplified Version

***“God is my light and my safe place -why should I be scared? God keeps me strong - who can make me afraid?”***

**Analysis:**

In children’s literature, Skopos theory allows translators to adapt text with a greater freedom, and we have used this theory for the target audience. The idea was to make the verse simple and meaningful for children while keeping the main theme. This included:

Simplification of vocabulary: Difficult words such as “salvation” and “fortress” have been replaced with phrases like “safe place” and “gives me strength”, which appear more compelling to a younger audience. The structure of the text was changed

in accordance with the tone of communication, which made it more understandable and accessible.

The main meaning has been preserved: the emphasis on God's protection and power has been preserved in accordance with the theological essence of the verse.

### **Innovative suse of transcription and emoji (transcreation)**

The emojis effectively complement the text for beginner readers (5+), acting as visual helper that enhance the comprehension and entertainment from reading. For example, an illustration of 🌟 (Star/Light) accompanied the descriptions of Christmas, providing both engagement and symbolic understanding. Although this strategy has been praised for its creativity, reviews have shown its lack of applicability to older age groups (16+), emphasizing the need for audience-specific approaches.

### **Translation Method: Emoji Integration**

This translation uses visual transcription in accordance with the combination of the simplified version of the text using the Skopos theory

Emoji replacement: Emojis such as 🌟 (Star/Light), 🛡️ (Shield/Protection), and 😨 (Sad/fear) replace or complement words such as "light", "protection" and "fear". This gives a visual cue to a reader, so they would understand what the text is about.

Simplification of the sentence structure: In order to match the level of understanding in adolescence, the phrase has been simplified and has become more colloquial.

Original text:

*“The Lord is my light and my salvation—whom shall I fear? The Lord is the stronghold of my life—of whom shall I be afraid?” — Psalm 27:1*

Emoji version:

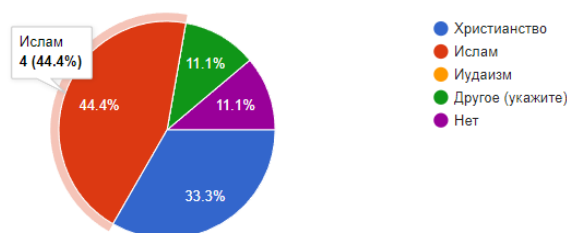
*God is my 🌟 (light) and my 🛡️ (protection)—why should I be 😨 (feared)?  
God is my 💪 (strength)—who can make me 😨 (afraid)?*

### **The Survey**

Before we dive into the results of our survey, we must remind you that all participants were from different religious groups:

Какое у вас религиозное вероисповедание?

9 responses



Христианство (Christianity) - 33.3% of respondents

Ислам (Islam) - 44.4% of respondents

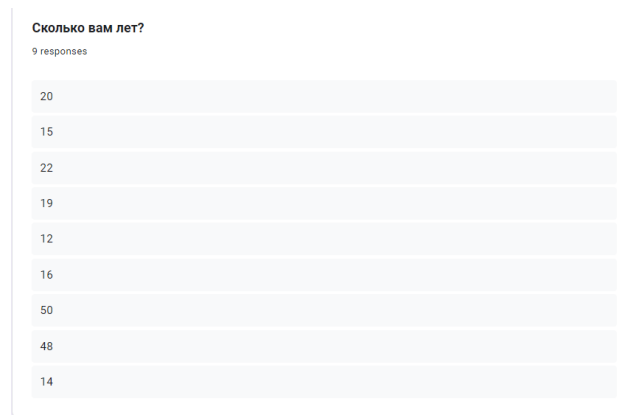
Иудаизм (Judaism) - 0% (not represented)

Другое (Other) - 11.1% of respondents

Нет (None) - 11.1% of respondents

The largest group in the survey is Islam, 44.4%, followed by Christianity at 33.3%. "Other" and "None" each account for 11.1%, while Judaism received no responses. It's shown on the chart that the responses were relatively broad, and since we're focusing on the Christian Bible, we considered it objectively fair to at least mention the religious group they're from, and while the study is focused on the Christian Bible, the inclusion of people with non-Christian backgrounds is still vital for assessing the 'accessibility' of the text to the general public

We have also received quantitative feedback from people of all ages (14-50)



How old are you?

9 responses:

1 – 20

2 – 15

3 – 19

4 – 12

5 – 16

6 – 50

7 – 48

8 – 14

While the study was aimed towards the younger audience, an older audience's response is just as crucial in choosing the preference over the versions of the Bible - it expands our perspectives.

We then asked them to choose the most appropriate version of the Bible.

**Какой перевод Библии вам больше всего понятен?**

**1. Оригинал:**

«И, посоветовавшись, царь сделал двух золотых тельцов и сказал [народу]: не нужно вам ходить в Иерусалим; вот боги твои, Израиль, которые вывели тебя из земли Египетской.»

(3 Книга Царств, глава 12)

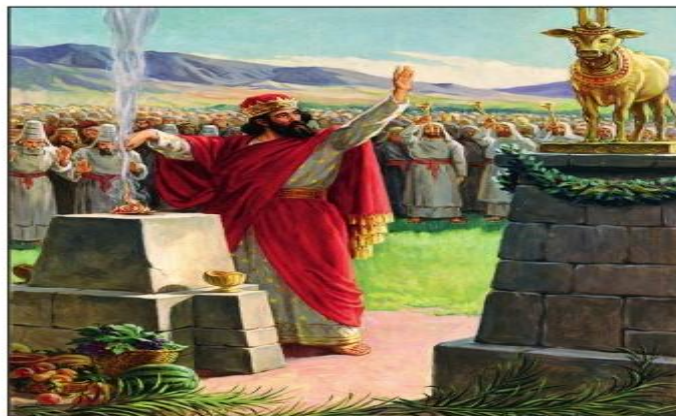
**2. Упрощённая версия:**

«Царь сделал два золотых идола и сказал людям: “Вам больше не нужно ходить в Иерусалим. Вот ваши боги, которые вывели вас из Египта.”»

**3. Версия с эмодзи:**

«👑 Царь создал 🐂🐂 из золота и сказал: “Не ходите в Иерусалим 👤. Вот ваши боги ✨, которые вывели вас из Египта 🇪🇬”»

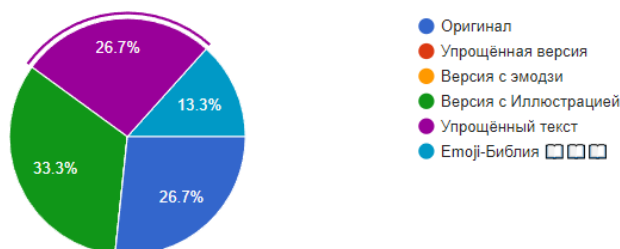
**4. Версия с Иллюстрацией:**



И, посоветовавшись, царь сделал двух золотых тельцов и сказал [народу]: не нужно вам ходить в Иерусалим; вот боги твои, Израиль, которые вывели тебя из земли Египетской. (3 Кн. Царств, гл. 12)

Approximately 33.3% of people would rather read the version of the bible with illustrations  
 26.7% for the simplified version  
 26.7% for the original version  
 13.3% for an emoji version

15 responses



The results confirm a clear preference for a Bible that features illustrations (33.3%). Interestingly, the simplified and original versions received equal support at 26.7% each, while the emoji version trailed at only 13.3%. It wasn't surprising to see this decline for the emoji version, after all, the survey was conducted with a broader audience.

At the end of the survey, each participant was given a choice to leave their feedback, and so far, we've collected 12 comments.

Есть ли у вас какие-либо дополнительные комментарии?

12 responses

Нет
Хотелось бы вместо Емоji перевода читать текст с иллюстрациями (картинки).
Упрощённый и с иллюстрацией мне больше нравится
Я думаю что эмодзи библия - чушь.
5
нету
Всё понравилось и понятно
Нет
Нет

Question: Do you have any additional comments?

12 responses

1 - "No"

2 - "I would prefer to read the text with illustrations (pictures) instead of the *Emoji translation.*"

3 - "I like the simplified version with illustrations better."

4 - "I think the *Emoji Bible* is nonsense."

5 - "No comment"

6 - "I liked everything, and it was clear."

7 - "No."

8 - "No."

Считаете ли вы, что эмодзи являются подходящим инструментом для объяснения библейских текстов детям?

8 responses

Я считаю, что да детям легче воспринимать такую информацию
Не подходит
Нет
Думаю да
Нет, не согласен. Он скорее смешно передает смысл
Да
5
Не знаю

Do you think emojis are a suitable tool for explaining Bible texts to children?  
8 responses:

1 - *“Yes, I think it is easier for children to understand information presented this way.”*

2 - *“This doesn't fit.”*

3 - *“No.”*

4 - *“I think so.”*

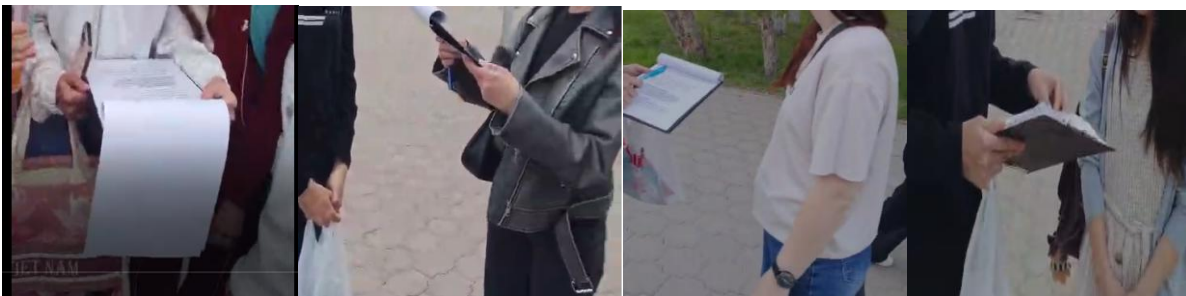
5 - *“No, I disagree. It rather ridiculously conveys the meaning.”*

6 - *“Yes”.*

7 - *“5”*

8 - *“I don't know.”*

Furthermore, we've conducted a similar anonymous survey in a local park, involving 8 participants aged 6-16, with responses collected in the presence of their parents or guardians. It contains just the poll between all the versions of the bible (The Original, Simplified, Emoji version and finally a version which includes the illustration). Unlike the online survey, which included a broader age range, we've collected the responses from the primary target audience of the study.



All participants in this survey showed a preference for the simplified version of the text. Another participant during our survey shared that the simplified version reminds them of the history book. The other participant has told us that the Emoji Bible is suitable for children aged from 4-6. We were not able to film the participants during the survey, as they only agreed to photo documentation as proof.

#### Analysis of Survey Results

The results of both of these surveys show an impressive trend: people prefer the simplified and illustrated versions over the emoji-based approach. While the study aimed to find the most "compelling" way to reach children, the Emoji Bible actually failed receiving the lowest rating (13.3% in the first survey and 0% in the second). Some respondents felt that emojis might help a 4-year-old understand basic emotions, but most saw the approach as theologically "thin" or just plain inappropriate. The simplified version was the clear winner, especially in the second survey where it reached 100%. One participant pointed out that combining simple text with pictures will achieve a satisfactory result for comprehension. This actually backs up Retief's (1990) stages of development - older kids need more than just icons, they need a clear

language. While the tools like emojis are "modern," they risk stripping away the depth that makes a sacred text what it is.

### **Conclusion**

This study confirms that the most efficient way to adapt a biblical passage for a younger audience is through combining the simplified version and add an illustration. While the Emoji Bible was designed to increase "comprehensibility," the survey data proves that even "beginner readers" respect the faithfulness of the original text. Overall, translation strategies cannot be applied uniformly across all ages. Based on the clear preference for simplified text in our second survey, we have concluded that most effective "transcreation" of the text must respect the boundaries of the reader without oversimplifying sacredness. Future translations should focus on this combined version (simplification + illustration) using visuals to support comprehension rather than replacing the text entirely - to ensure that the Bible remains both sacred and accessible to the next generation.

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## СОЕДИНЕНИЕ САКРАЛЬНОГО И ДОСТУПНОГО: СРАВНИТЕЛЬНОЕ ИССЛЕДОВАНИЕ СТРАТЕГИЙ ПЕРЕВОДА И ВОСПРИЯТИЯ АУДИТОРИЕЙ В СОВРЕМЕННЫХ БИБЛЕЙСКИХ АДАПТАЦИЯХ

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*В данной статье рассматриваются стратегии перевода и особенности восприятия современных адаптаций библейских текстов различными аудиториями. В исследовании сравнительно анализируются методы упрощения текста, использования иллюстраций и эмодзи для повышения доступности содержания. Результаты показывают, что наиболее эффективным способом адаптации является сочетание упрощённого текста и визуального сопровождения при сохранении сакрального смысла.*

**Ключевые слова:** перевод Библии, детская литература, теория Скопос, транскреация эмодзи, лингвистическое упрощение, восприятие аудиторией, адаптация теологического содержания.

## КИЕЛІЛІК ПЕН ҚОЛЖЕТІМДІЛІКТІ ҰШТАСТЫРУ: ҚАЗІРГІ ЗАМАНҒЫ КИЕЛІ КІТАП БЕЙІМДЕЛІМДЕРІНДЕГІ АУДАРМА СТРАТЕГИЯЛАРЫ МЕН АУДИТОРИЯ ҚАБЫЛДАУЫН САЛЫСТЫРМАЛЫ ТҮРДЕ ЗЕРТТЕУ

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**Ғылыми жетекші: Смагулова Г.Ж.**

*Бұл мақалада Інжіл мәтіндерін қазіргі аудиторияға бейімдеудегі аударма стратегиялары мен олардың қабылдану ерекшеліктері қарастырылады. Зерттеу барысында мәтінді жеңілдету, иллюстрациялар мен эмодзилерді қолдану сияқты тәсілдердің балалар мен ересек аудиторияға әсері салыстырмалы түрде талданды. Нәтижесінде қасиетті мәтіндердің мағынасын сақтай отырып, қарапайым әрі көрнекі бейімделген нұсқалардың ең тиімді тәсіл екені анықталды.*

**Кілт сөздер:** Киелі кітап аудармасы, балалар әдебиеті, Скопос теориясы, эмодзи транскреациясы, лингвистикалық жеңілдету, аудитория қабылдауы, теологиялық мазмұнды бейімдеу.