

# Chapter 11

## Language and Religion



*In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God. All things were made by him; and without him was not any thing made that was made (King James Bible, 1769, John, 1:1–3).*

The importance of studying language in order to understand social phenomena is not new. The last decades have witnessed a growing academic interest in the study of language and of discourse analysis in the social sciences (Heracleous, 2006). Consequently, “. . .language (and language use) is increasingly being understood as the most important phenomenon, accessible for empirical investigation, in social and organizational research” (Alvesson & Karreman, 2000, p. 1126).

In this sense, studying language in practice has played an important role since ancient times. The biblical citation at the beginning of this section, first written thousands of years ago, directly links language to the Creation and the divine. This notion is currently recognised in systemic approaches to language, where “language is action” and “creates realities” (Foucault, 1972; Echavarria, 2006, pp. 34–36).

Austin (1962) also challenged the traditional notion of “to say something is just to state something” and instead posited that “to say something. . .is to do something” (p. 12). Likewise, “language is not a medium for representing the world, but for intervening in it” (Argyris et al. as cited in Romme, 2003, p. 563). These notions have led to recognising the prominent role of language as a means of shaping institutions and society. Furthermore, ample theoretical and empirical evidence points to language as a suitable proxy for culture (Stulz & Williamson, 2003; Grinblatt & Keloharju, 2001; Ronen & Shenkar, 1985; Hofstede, 1980 as cited in Volonté, 2015, p. 83). Language, religion, and legal origins are all highly correlated and associated with particular institutional performances (Chakrabarti et al., 2008; Volonté, 2015; Mazar, 2008).

## **11.1 The Role of the Bible in Shaping Language and Societies**

The Bible has been translated into numerous vernacular languages:

### ***11.1.1 German***

Several studies have discussed the profound influence of the Reformation on the spread and standardisation of the German language through Luther's translation of the Bible (Volz & Greenslade, 1963; Besch, 1999; Greenslade, 1963). It was mainly through the vernacular translation of the Bible that people learned to read and that human capital was enhanced. This process has resulted in higher literacy rates among Protestants to this day (Becker & Woessmann, 2009). Consequently, the language of Luther's translation became more than part of German national heritage, first for Protestants, and later penetrating every German-speaking home (Ritter, 1963).

### ***11.1.2 English***

Similarly to German, the English language had almost no prestige before the Protestant Reformation. Later, different dialects and different Bible translations challenging the unity of the English kingdom motivated King James to commission a scholarly and reputable translation of the Scriptures. The Authorised (King James) Version (KJV) has served ever since as a unifier and dominant cultural conditioner in English-speaking thought, language, and literature (Lewis, 1969; McGrath, 2001; Daniell, 2003).

### ***11.1.3 Other Native Languages***

Bible translations have helped to keep alive native languages otherwise threatened with extinction across the world (Moor & Voinov, 2015).

### ***11.1.4 Latin, Roman Empire, and Roman Catholicism***

The Roman Empire spread Latin. Celtic speakers, for example, adopted the Latin imperial language and thus gave birth to French (Moor & Voinov, 2015). Moreover,

Latin never died but evolved into Roman languages descending from Vulgar Latin (e.g. Spanish, French, Italian, Portuguese, Rumanian, Catalan, Romansh) (Wright, 1988). Furthermore, the Roman Church-State inherited Latin as its official language. However, the Vulgate Latin translation of the Bible only became official for Roman Catholicism at the Council of Trent (1545–1563), which was prompted by the Protestant Reformation. The Latin translation was intended only for the clergy and theologians (Lampe, 1969).

Consequently, the Roman Church-State condemned—and sought to impede—any effort to bring the Holy Scriptures within reach of common people, in order to prevent what happened in Germany and England. The fate suffered by those Reformers who translated the Bible into Spanish (Reina and Valera) was a common one: They were persecuted and exiled from Spain (Hauben, 1967).

To uphold the Catholic Church-State, the governments of several Latin American countries banned Protestant services and the printing of the Bible in Spanish until the last century (Gill, 1998). Thus, the influence of the Bible on Latin languages has been limited. Figure 10.1 illustrates one example: The content of the Roman Catholic Catechism Decalogue in “Catholic” languages (e.g. Spanish and Portuguese) differs from that in “Protestant” languages (e.g. English and German). In “Protestant languages” the Ten Commandments in the Catholic Catechism resemble more the Bible’s wording (King James Bible, 1769, Exodus 20, 1–17) than in “Catholic languages” (Sect. 10.4.1.1).

### Empirical Expectation

- 11). *I expect German and English-speaking countries to be more competitive/transparent than those speaking Roman languages. German and English are associated with the Reformation, whereas Roman languages are associated with the status quo of the Roman Empire, i.e. Roman Church-State.*

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