

Gratitude Expressions in Different Bible Translations

Nick Totten

In this article the author conducts a study on the differences in phrases that express gratitude used throughout different translations of the Bible. The author focuses on the King James, Wycliffe, Tyndale, and Douay-Reims translations of the Bible. Verses were selected on their use of present tense gratitude expressions. An online resource (biblestudytools.com) was used to compare parallel verses. The study showed differences in the use of gratitude expressions in the different versions of the Bible, and also found that all of the gratitude expressions were directed towards God. The author also noted there were limitations to the study, particularly as it was limited to sacred, religious texts, rather than the conversion from Middle English to Modern English.

Introduction

In 2002, Mattias Jacobsson from Uppsala University in Sweden wrote a paper about the function of the gratitude expressions *thank you* and *thanks* in Early Modern English. Jacobsson observed that *thank you* and *thanks* were used primarily to express gratitude in Early Modern English (as opposed to politeness markers) and that they were probably used the same way they are today, but the responses and the intensifiers were different. The study drew its data from the CED (Corpus of English Dialogues).

Reading Jacobsson's paper led me to wonder about the role of gratitude expressions in other contexts of historical English, particularly in the Bible. I wondered if I would find different results from Jacobsson's study if I conducted a similar search in the King James Bible, or any other translation from that time period. This was the question I had in mind as I conducted this study, drawing my data from the King James Bible and other translations.

For this study, I decided to examine gratitude expressions as they are found in the Old and New Testaments. To do this I compared the King James Version with three other translations from the Middle English and Early Modern English periods. I decided to compare the King James Version against the Wycliffe, Tyndale, and Douay-Reims translations. For the purposes of this paper, a gratitude expression is an utterance of gratitude given by the speaker, directly to the hearer, in the present tense to give thanks for something the hearer has done for the speaker's benefit. In this study, I hope to learn and explain about the development of gratitude expressions in the Bible in the Middle English and Early Modern English periods to the King James Version used today.

Method

To examine gratitude expressions in the Bible, it was necessary to locate each verse of scripture that held such expressions. To do that, I used the topical guide located in the LDS edition of the King James Version of the Bible. Each topic related to gratitude was searched. These topics were *gratitude*, *ingratitude*, *praise*, *prayer*, *rejoice*, *thank*, *thankful*, *thanks*, and *thanksgiving*.

I then looked at each verse that was listed under these topics to determine which verses contained gratitude expressions. Though there were many verses found that involved gratitude, most of them had expressions in the future tense or the past tense (He gave thanks, or I will thank thee). These verses were left out of the study because I wanted to focus on present tense gratitude expressions. There were also many verses that used praise. These were also left out of the study to specifically focus on how thank you/thanks was used. In the end, I found that there were twelve verses that held a gratitude expression according to the aforementioned definition.

After all the verses were found, I used the Parallel Bible tool found on biblestudytools.com to look up the Wycliffe, Tyndale, and Douay-Reims translations of each of these twelve verses. This allowed me to compare the verses that contained gratitude expressions from each of the different translations. Once all of the verses and their translations were collected, I organized them on a table for analysis, isolating the gratitude expression in each verse.

Analysis

I conducted a simple analysis by observing each gratitude expression and comparing the translations side by side. Below is a table of all the Bible verses with gratitude expressions used in this study in all four translations.

	Wycliffe (1382–95)	Tyndale (c. 1536)	Douay-Reims (1582–1610)	King James (1611)
Daniel 2:23	God of our fathers, I acknowledge to thee , and I praise thee...	(Not available)	To thee, O God of our fathers, I give thanks , and I praise thee...	I thank thee , and praise thee, O thou God of my fathers...
Matt. 11:25	In that time Jesus answered, and said, I acknowledge to thee , Father, Lord of heaven and of earth...	At yt tyme lesus answered and said: I praise ye o father lorde of heve and erth...	At that time Jesus answered and said: I confess to thee , O Father, Lord of Heaven and earth...	At that time Jesus answered and said, I thank thee , O Father, Lord of heaven and earth...

Luke 18:11	And the Pharisee stood, and prayed by himself these things, and said, God, I do thankings to thee...	The pharisee stode and prayed thus wth hm selfe. God I thanke the...	The Pharisee standing, prayed thus with himself: O God, I give thee thanks...	The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, God, I thank thee...
John 11:41	And Jesus lifted up his eyes, and said, Father, I do thankings to thee...	And Iesus lyfte vp his eyes and sayde: Father I thanke the...	And Iesus lifting up his eyes, and said: Father, I give thee thanks...	And Iesus lifted up his eyes, and said, Father, I thank thee...
Romans 1:8	First I do thankings to my God , by Jesus Christ...	Fyrst verely I thanke my God thorow Iesus Christ...	First, I give thanks to my God , through Jesus Christ...	First, I thank my God through Jesus Christ...
Romans 6:17	But I thank God...	God be thanked...	But thanks be to God...	Thanks be to God...
1 Cor. 1:4	I do thankings to my God evermore for you...	I thanke my God all wayes on your behalf...	I give thanks to my God always for you...	I thank my God always on your behalf...
1 Cor. 15:57	But do we thankings to God...	But thankes be vnto God...	But thanks be to God...	But thanks be to God...
2 Cor. 9:15	I do thankings to God...	Thankes be vnto God...	Thanks be to God...	Thanks be unto God...
1 Thes. 2:13	Therefore [and] we do thankings to God without ceasing...	For this cause thanke we god without ceasyng...	(Not available)	For this cause also thank we God without ceasing...
2 Tim. 1:3	I do my thankings to my God...	I thanke god...	I give thanks to God...	I thank God...
Rev. 11:17	and said, We do thankings to thee , Lord God almighty...	sayinge: we geve the thankes lorde God allmyghte...	We give thee thanks , O Lord God Almighty...	Saying, We give thee thanks , O Lord God Almighty...

The first thing I noticed was that all gratitude expressions found in the Bible are directed towards God, though the speakers in the text vary (Daniel, Jesus Christ, a Pharisee, Paul, and twenty-four elders). Every second singular pronoun used is the familiar *thee*, which indicates that the speakers in the Bible are meant to communicate a sense of familiarity and closeness with God.

Wycliffe has the expression *do thankings to* frequently. This is a complex transitive verb that appears to be unique to this transla-

tion. This seems to indicate that this phrase for gratitude was used during the Middle English period, though *thank* does appear in Romans 6:17. It could be that at the time the Wycliffe translation was created, the modern form *thank* was starting to appear and would eventually take over the old form *do thankings to*. This idea is supported by that fact that for every verse in Wycliffe that uses *do thankings to*, the later translations use *thank* or *give thanks*.

A few other forms of gratitude expressions are used in older translations and then replaced by modern forms in later translations. In Daniel and Matthew, Wycliffe uses the phrase *acknowledge to thee*. In Matthew, Tyndale uses *praise ye*. Also in Matthew, Douay-Reims uses *confess to thee*. These different forms seem to express not just gratitude to God, but also deference and reverence to Him, since these expressions in the Daniel and Matthew verses are also accompanied by *praise* in one form or another.

I also noticed the expression *God be thanked* and *thanks be to God* appears often. The verb phrase in Wycliffe *do thankings to* is often replaced by one of these two expressions in later translations. The phrase that uses *do* is replaced by a phrase that uses *be*. It is interesting that every usage of the expressions with *be* occurs in Paul's epistles (Romans, 1 Corinthians, 2 Corinthians, 1 Thessalonians, and 2 Timothy). This could reflect a unique writing style exhibited by Paul in the original manuscripts, and a choice by the translators to show that unique style in the phrases they used.

Conclusion

Based on the expressions found in these Bible translations, it seems that modern gratitude expressions were developing during Middle English (the time of the Wycliffe Bible) before they became the modern forms we use today. This is no surprise, since written English was undergoing standardization as the Middle English period led to the Early Modern English period. Unfortunately, the number of examples of gratitude expressions in this study is too small to make definite conclusions about how they developed over time. This study is also limited because it focused on written English in a sacred text. More studies could be made in other genres of written English such as correspondence, secular literature, and academic writings.

Works Cited

Jacobsson, Mattias. 2001. "Thank You and Thanks in Early Modern English." *ICAME Journal* 26, (2002): 63–80.

