

BIBLICAL PHRASEOLOGY IN GERMAN, ENGLISH, AND MACEDONIAN: A COMPARATIVE LINGUISTIC AND CULTURAL ANALYSIS

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ABSTRACT

This paper explores the profound and enduring influence of the Bible in the development of modern phraseology in the German, English, and Macedonian languages. As one of the most translated and influential texts in human history, the Bible has shaped not only religious and moral thought but also the idiomatic and metaphorical structures of European languages. Through comparative linguistic and cultural analysis, the study identifies and interprets biblical idioms and phraseological units that remain present in contemporary speech.

The methodological framework of the paper includes both corpus-based and student-centered approaches. Students of German and English participated by gathering material from specialized phraseological dictionaries, as well as directly from the New Testament in German, English and Macedonian. Afterwards, they translated the selected idioms into Macedonian, their mother tongue, in order to establish semantic parallels and culturally appropriate equivalents. All examples in German, English, and Macedonian appear in the same form as in the corresponding editions of the Holy Bible in each of the three languages. This process resulted in a structured list of approximately 50 idiomatic expressions in German, aligned with their English and Macedonian counterparts, which served as the basis for further comparative analysis. Here is an **example from the analysis**: *Eye for an eye, tooth for a tooth* | German: *Auge um Auge, Zahn um Zahn* | Macedonian: *Око за око, заб за заб* that serves as a symbol of justice and retribution.

The research demonstrates that, although modern speakers may not always recognize their religious origins, these expressions retain their symbolic depth and cultural significance. The paper confirms that the Bible continues to serve as a living source of language, rich in symbolism and historical weight.

Keywords: Biblical idioms; comparative linguistics; New Testament; phraseology; idiomatic expressions; equivalence;

INTRODUCTION

Phraseology represents a vital component of every language, shaping the ways in which speakers convey figurative meaning, cultural knowledge, and shared historical experience. Idioms, proverbs, fixed expressions, and metaphorical constructions enrich communication by encapsulating complex ideas in concise and memorable linguistic

forms. When we speak of phraseological units, we primarily refer to referential phraseological units (Burger 2015), which are characterized by meanings that cannot be reduced to the sum of the individual words composing them. Instead, they convey images or concepts embedded in specific cultural and cognitive associations. Often preserving traces of past cultural and religious traditions, these units serve as valuable indicators of a community's collective memory and worldview.

Among the many sources that have shaped European phraseological systems, the Bible stands out as particularly influential. With over a thousand translations and a circulation unparalleled by any other written text, the Holy Scriptures have left a profound mark on the linguistic, cultural, and literary evolution of numerous nations. In German, English, and Macedonian, biblical narratives and teachings have shaped not only moral and spiritual concepts but also figurative expressions that are now deeply embedded in everyday language. Expressions such as *Auge um Auge*, *Eye for an eye*, or *око за око* continue to circulate widely across these languages, often without speakers recognizing their biblical origins. Nevertheless, their semantic power, symbolic resonance, and cultural significance remain intact. The persistence of these idioms demonstrates the Bible's enduring role as a linguistic reservoir whose influence extends far beyond religious contexts, permeating literature, education, and daily discourse.

Defining the concept of a phraseologism is a complex and sometimes ambiguous task. According to Burger (2003), phraseologisms are relatively fixed, reproducible, and expressive combinations of lexemes that form a unified whole. Chernysheva (in Fidančeva 2006:9) further explains that “phraseologisms are non-free lexical complexes of various syntactic structural types, with a singular binding of the components, whose meaning arises as a result of a complete or partial semantic change or transformation of the components.” Palm (1997: 2) emphasizes that phraseologisms consist of at least two lexemes.

The present study examines the impact of biblical phraseology on contemporary German, English, and Macedonian, with a particular focus on idioms that appear across all three languages. By the subclass of biblical phraseologisms, we understand those phraseologisms that etymologically originate from the Bible, that is, those motivated by an event described in the Bible (Simoska 2016: 266). Simoska (2016) notes that a large number of phraseologisms have transitioned from biblical to everyday discourse, stating that “the world of phraseology is fascinating not only because, in our view, it represents linguistic psychology and philosophy, but also because of the different realizations of one and the same idea” (2016: 264).

The introduction of this multilingual corpus offers a unique opportunity to explore how biblical concepts have been linguistically encoded across three culturally interconnected languages. Comparative analysis highlights shared biblical heritage as well as distinct patterns of semantic adaptation, metaphorical extension, and cultural reinterpretation. In doing so, the study contributes to broader discussions in phraseology, contrastive linguistics, translation studies, and cultural linguistics.

In the chapters that follow, the thesis provides a detailed exploration of biblical idioms in English, German, and Macedonian; and analyzes their function in contemporary communication, in general. A list of fifty carefully selected idioms, documented in all three languages, serves as a central reference for examining the interplay between universal biblical meanings and language-specific developments. Through this approach,

the study demonstrates that biblical phraseological expressions remain a powerful linguistic legacy, continuing to shape the metaphorical and cultural landscape of modern European languages.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

This study investigates the presence, meaning, and cultural transmission of biblical idioms in German, English, and Macedonian. It combines corpus-based analysis with student participation, enabling systematic linguistic examination alongside active learner involvement.

Primary materials included the New Testament in German, English and Macedonian, which provided original biblical contexts for idioms. Phraseological and lexicographic dictionaries in all three languages helped verify biblical origins, define figurative meanings, and provide usage examples.

Students contributed by selecting idioms from dictionaries and biblical texts, translating them into Macedonian while preserving semantic accuracy and cultural relevance. The resulting corpus contains approximately 50 idioms with parallels across the three languages.

Methodologically, idioms were identified, analysed for literal and figurative meaning, and translated collaboratively to determine full, partial, or culturally adapted equivalents. Comparisons focused on structure, semantics, and cultural interpretation. Quantitative data on idiom distribution supplemented qualitative analysis, highlighting shared and unique expressions across the languages.

Ethical considerations included voluntary and anonymous student participation, which also fostered the development of linguistic, translational, and intercultural skills. Idioms were drawn from authoritative lexicographic sources in each language: for German, Wolf Friedrich and Duden; for English, Murgoski and for Macedonian, Dimitrovski, Širilov, and Velkovska.

BIBLICAL LANGUAGE AND STYLE

Biblical language (Bibelsprache) and style (Bibelstil) have had a profound influence on German, English, and Macedonian, shaping idioms, proverbs, metaphors, and narrative techniques. Biblical texts contain phraseologisms, parables, commandments, prayers, and fables—many of which have been incorporated into everyday language. The development of biblical language was shaped by key translations, including the Hebrew Old Testament, the Greek Septuagint, the Latin Vulgate, Luther’s German Bible, and the English King James Version. These translations contributed distinctive stylistic features—clarity, vivid imagery, and memorable expressions—that continue to resonate in modern usage. Biblical style is characterized by several features: parallelism: the repetition or contrast of ideas to create rhythm and clarity (e.g., “*an eye for an eye*”); metaphors and symbolic imagery: abstract concepts expressed through concrete images (e.g., “*sheep and shepherd*,” “*bread and water*”), which form idioms such as a wolf in sheep’s clothing, solemnity and formulaic structure: clear, moral, and repetitive expressions that have influenced prose, speeches, and legal language.

These stylistic elements have shaped idioms in German, English, and Macedonian, reflecting biblical imagery and thematic motifs in secular communication. The historical

reception of biblical language has influenced national literary traditions—from Shakespeare and Milton to Goethe and Dostoevsky—embedding biblical style into the broader cultural and linguistic framework.

COMPARATIVE BIBLICAL IDIOMS IN GERMAN, ENGLISH, AND MACEDONIAN

The table below presents a selection of biblical and culturally influenced idioms in German, English, and Macedonian. Each row illustrates a phraseological unit in German, its corresponding English equivalent, and the closest Macedonian translation. This comparative overview highlights how shared biblical motifs and metaphors are expressed across three languages, revealing both commonalities and language-specific adaptations.

German	English	Macedonian
Wie ein Fisch im Wasser fühlen	To feel like a fish in water	Да се чувствуваш како риба во вода
Manna vom Himmel	Manna from heaven	Манна небесна
David gegen Goliath	David vs Goliath	Давид против Голијат
Den guten Samariter spielen	To be the Good Samaritan	Да се биде добриот Самарјанин
Den verlorenen Sohn finden	To find the prodigal son	Да се најде изгубениот син
Jemandem Steine in den Weg legen	To put obstacles in someone's way	Да му се стават камења на патот
Brot und Wasser geben	To give bread and water	Да се даде леб и вода
Die sieben Todsünden vermeiden	To avoid the seven deadly sins	Да се избегнат седумте смртни гревови
Den Apfel der Versuchung essen	To eat the apple of temptation	Да се јаде јаболкото на искушението
Wasser zu Wein verwandeln	To turn water into wine	Да се претвори вода во вино
Auf den rechten Weg führen	To lead onto the right path	Да се води на правиот пат
Den Stein ins Rollen bringen	To set the stone rolling	Да се пушти каменот да се тркала
Wie ein verlorenes Schaf suchen	To search like a lost sheep	Да се бара како изгубено јагне
Das Korn vom Weizen trennen	To separate the wheat from the chaff	Да се оддели житото од сламата
Den Turmbau zu Babel beginnen	To start the Tower of Babel	Да се започне изградба на Бабел
Dem falschen Propheten glauben	To believe the false prophet	Да се верува на лажен пророк
In der Wüste wandern	To wander in the desert	Да се лута по пустина
Jemandem den Rücken stärken	To strengthen someone's back	Да му се даде поддршка на некого

Das verlorene Paradies finden	To find the lost paradise	Да се најде изгубениот рај
Den Bund schließen	To make a covenant	Да се склучи завет
Vom Segen des Himmels profitieren	To benefit from heaven's blessing	Да се ужива во небесна благослов
Wie Wasser vom Felsen fließen	To flow like water from a rock	Да тече како вода од карпа
Die sieben Plagen überstehen	To endure the seven plagues	Да се издржат седумте казни
Ein Auge auf jemanden werfen	To keep an eye on someone	Да се држи око на некого
Den Feigenbaum betrachten	To look at the fig tree	Да се разгледа смоквеното дрво
Im Geist wandeln	To walk in the spirit	Да се оди во духот
Ein Ölzweig bringen	To bring an olive branch	Да се донесе маслиново гранче
Die zehn Gebote befolgen	To follow the Ten Commandments	Да се почитуваат Десетте заповеди
Vom Vater verstoßen werden	To be cast out by the father	Да се изгонети од таткото
Den Löwen bezwingen	To overcome the lion	Да се совлада лавот
Das Lamm schlachten	To slaughter the lamb	Да се заколи јагне
Den Tempel reinigen	To cleanse the temple	Да се исчисти храмот
Mit den Wölfen heulen	To howl with the wolves	Да се воедини со волците
Das Manna teilen	To share the manna	Да се подели манната
Den Messias erwarten	To await the Messiah	Да се чека Месијата
Die Dornenkrone tragen	To wear the crown of thorns	Да се носи трновата круна
Wasser in Wein verwandeln	To turn water into wine	Да се претвори вода во вино
Die zehn Plagen sehen	To witness the ten plagues	Да се видат десетте казни
Den Guten Hirten folgen	To follow the Good Shepherd	Да се следи Добриот Пастир
Vom Berge predigen	To preach from the mountain	Да се проповеда од планината
Den Pfad der Gerechtigkeit gehen	To walk the path of righteousness	Да се оди по патот на правдата
Wie durch ein Wunder überleben	To survive as by a miracle	Да се преживее како по чудо
Den Leviathan bezwingen	To defeat the Leviathan	Да се совлада Левијатан
Im Tal der Schatten wandeln	To walk through the valley of the shadow	Да се оди низ долината на сенката
Brot brechen mit den Freunden	To break bread with friends	Да се лomi леб со пријатели
Den Bösen abwehren	To ward off evil	Да се одбрани злото

Wie ein Phönix aus der Asche steigen	To rise like a phoenix from the ashes	Да се воскресне како феникс
Den Brunnen des Lebens finden	To find the fountain of life	Да се најде изворот на животот
Die Schafe von den Böcken trennen	To separate the sheep from the goats	Да се одделат овците од козите
Den Bund mit Gott erneuern	To renew the covenant with God	Да се обнови заветот со Бог

RESULTS

The compiled table of fifty biblical idioms illustrates the pervasive influence of Scripture on German, English, and Macedonian phraseology. Many expressions retain strikingly similar forms and meanings across the three languages, demonstrating a shared cultural and linguistic heritage. For example, idioms such as *Wie ein Fisch im Wasser fühlen* / *To feel like a fish in water* / *Да се чувствуваат како риба во вода* and *David gegen Goliath* / *David vs Goliath* / *Давид против Голујат* show near-identical imagery and semantic content, reflecting universal metaphors and biblical narratives familiar across these linguistic communities.

Several idioms reveal metaphorical adaptation or cultural localization. Expressions like *Den Löwen bezwingen* / *To overcome the lion* / *Да се совлада лавот* or *Den Leviathan bezwingen* / *To defeat the Leviathan* / *Да се совлада Левијатан* carry strong biblical symbolism, yet their use in contemporary discourse may shift depending on local cultural understanding and metaphorical resonance. Similarly, idioms like *Brot brechen mit den Freunden* / *To break bread with friends* / *Да се лomi леб со пријатели* highlight everyday social practices framed within biblical imagery, showing how sacred concepts are integrated into secular contexts.

The data also reveal patterns of repetition and thematic grouping, such as idioms referencing divine intervention (*Vom Segen des Himmels profitieren* / *To benefit from heaven's blessing* / *Да се ужива во небесна благослов*), moral guidance (*Die zehn Gebote befolgen* / *To follow the Ten Commandments* / *Да се почитуваат Десетте заповеди*), or trials and adversity (*Die sieben Plagen überstehen* / *To endure the seven plagues* / *Да се издржат седумте казни*). Macedonian translations generally preserve the literal meaning while ensuring cultural and linguistic intelligibility, illustrating careful semantic adaptation without losing the biblical reference.

However, it is important to note that some phraseologisms exist in only one of the compared languages and have no equivalent in the others. For example, the Macedonian idiom *од дедо Ное* (Velkovska 2002: 49), meaning “from a very long time ago,” or the German phraseologism *den alten Adam ausziehen*, meaning “to become a new person,” do not have direct equivalents in the other two languages. Similarly, the English idiom *The writing on the wall*, originating from a biblical story, conveys a clear sign of impending doom, in Macedonian and German, there is no phrase with the same status or degree of metaphorical meaning. These gaps underscore the fact that while biblical influence is widespread, phraseological transmission is neither uniform nor complete across languages, and cultural and linguistic factors shape which idioms survive, adapt, or disappear.

Overall, this corpus confirms that biblical idioms function as a living linguistic reservoir: they transmit shared religious and cultural concepts, sustain metaphorical richness, and allow for both cross-linguistic correspondence and localized variation. The multilingual comparison not only highlights the enduring legacy of biblical phraseology but also underscores the dynamic interplay between universality and language-specific expression in contemporary European discourse.

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that biblical idioms have exerted a profound and enduring influence on German, English, and Macedonian phraseology. By examining a corpus of fifty comparable idioms, the research reveals both striking cross-linguistic parallels and notable language-specific adaptations. Many expressions retain near-identical imagery and meanings, reflecting a shared cultural and religious heritage rooted in Scripture. At the same time, variations in metaphorical extension, semantic nuance, and cultural localization illustrate how communities reinterpret and integrate biblical concepts into everyday communication.

The analysis confirms that biblical phraseologisms function as a living linguistic reservoir, preserving historical, moral, and metaphorical knowledge while enriching modern language with vivid and memorable expressions. While some idioms are universally recognizable across all three languages, others exist only in one linguistic context, highlighting the selective nature of phraseological transmission and the role of cultural and linguistic factors in shaping idiomatic survival.

Ultimately, the study underscores the enduring relevance of biblical language and style in contemporary discourse. Biblical idioms continue to bridge the sacred and the secular, offering insights into shared human experience, cultural memory, and the dynamic interplay between tradition and modern linguistic expression. By tracing these idioms across German, English, and Macedonian, the research contributes to a deeper understanding of phraseology, translation, and the ways in which language carries historical and cultural meaning across time and space.

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