



Influence of *The Bible* Upon English Words

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Abstract

The Holy Bible, which has been included on the list of World Cultural Heritages, is the source of western culture, has had a profound influence on all aspects of the social life of the western countries. A large number of English words and allusions are from *The Bible*, and these words and allusions is a key to understanding and studying western languages and culture. Therefore, discussing the profound influence of *The Bible* upon English words at this level is of great significance. This paper begins with the English words sourced from *The Bible*, and then probes into the influences upon the English language. This thesis can increase the readers' Bible knowledge, eliminate the cultural barrier in trans-cultural communication and make readers understand and use English language to make trans-cultural communication better. Through this thesis, we can view the Holy Bible's great influence in the Western countries from another angle, and we also can get a new field and a new way of viewing and analyzing the Holy Bible. Meanwhile, this thesis is helpful for us to analyze and study English language. Especially, it is greatly helpful to study the developing process and features of English language, and the origin of English words.

Key words: *The Bible*; English; Words; Influence

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INTRODUCTION

The Bible, which is a classical work of the Christianity, is also a precious inheritance of the Hebrew culture. The Christianity culture has permeated deeply into the English language; it has influenced English words, idioms and mottoes very much. *The Bible* records the conditions and local customs and practices of the ancient people, society, and polity, military and so on, among which philosophy and theology have been spread broadly, which has brought huge influences on the world especially on the development, ideology and cultural conventions of the western society, and the influences are much more profound and widespread on the American and Britain languages. Particularly, the King James Bible published in 1611, with its brief but natural, specific but graceful language, keeping the essence of two ancient languages, Greek and Hebrew, making it be harmony with the style of the English, it specified and unified the English language, broadened the use of English, and enriched the English language greatly. For centuries, *The Bible* has been widely spread and referenced by people; it is of great importance in the formation process of the English language, it is the treasure house of English words, idioms, allusions and mottoes.

Xu Guozhang had pointed out that people learning foreign languages should be cultural people, if teachers just teach language, and students just learn grammar, words and so on, the teaching process would be a process of building castles in the air, which is a mistake of the teaching of foreign language. Wang Zuoliang had also indicated that in the process of cross-cultural communication, the translators should really be men of culture, it is not enough for them to master just two languages, and no one can really master the language without understanding the related social cultural. Therefore, it is unshirkable for teachers to carry out the culture teaching in English language teaching activities, and students should attach importance to learning the culture of *The Bible* contained in the language.

Many people are using *The Bible* as their scriptures and a guide of their future behavior. We can say that Bible is a history: it records the past of the Western countries, the Mid-east, and particularly the Jewish people's growth and experiences. The Bible is a philosophical book. It includes many ancient minority groups' thoughts on the meaning of humanity, and the origin and the development of the universe. The Bible is a book of culture: it is the repository of myths, legends, fables, idioms, and provides endless resources for European and American culture, the music of the 17th and 18th centuries, the Renaissance, as well as for the paintings and sculptures of the Baroque time. And *The Bible*, is the soul of English language, for it has continues numerous idioms and sayings to the English language. It is not exaggerating to say that poor understanding of *The Bible* and its culture means ignorance of Western culture and languages. Only with a good command of its meaningful words and expressions can we learn English better.

1. HISTORY OF ENGLISH VOCABULARY

English is the most influential and internationalized language. In terms of its genetic stock, English is a member of the Germanic group, and belongs to a still larger family of languages called Indo-European.

The history of English is generally divided into three periods by linguistics: Old English Period (450-110 A.D.), Middle English Period (1100-1500 A.D.), and Modern English Period (1500 A.D.-).

The oldest form of English, known as Anglo-Saxon or Old English, dating from the beginning of the language to about 1100 A.D., retained the basic grammatical properties of the Germanic branch of the Indo-European family. There were two important historic events brought great influence upon English vocabulary during the old English period. One is the introduction of Christianity into English. In 597 A.D., a priest named Augustine from Rome came to Britain to preach Christianity, followed by the Roman culture accompanied by a number of Latin words, the language of Church.

The Middle English period, from about 1100 to 1500 A.D, was marked by a great extension of foreign influence on English, principally as a result of the Norman Conquest of 1066, which brought English under the rule of the French speakers. The English language, though it did not die, was for a long time of only secondary importance in political, social, and cultural matters. French became the language of the upper classes in England. The lower classes continued to speak English, but many French words were borrowed into English.

English eventually reestablished itself as the major language of England, but the language did not lose its habit of borrowing and many foreign words became naturalized in Middle-English, especially loanwords taken

from Old French and Middle French (such as date, escape, infant, and money) or directly from Latin (such as alibi, library, and pacify).

Modern English, from about 1500 to the present, has been a period of even wider borrowing. English still derives much of its learned vocabulary from Latin and Greek. And we have also borrowed words from nearly all of the languages in Europe, though only a few examples can be given here. From Modern French we have words like bikini, cliché, and discotheque, from Dutch, easel, gin, and yacht. From Italian we have taken carnival, fiasco, and pizza, as well as many terms from music (including piano). Portuguese has given us cobra and molasses, and the Spanish of Spain has yielded sherry and mosquito, while Russian, Czech, and Yiddish have given us czar, robot and kibitz.

And in the modern period the linguistic acquisitiveness of English has found opportunities even farther afield. From the period of the Renaissance voyage languages of discovery through the days when the sun never set upon the British Empire and up to the present, a steady stream of new words has flowed into the language to match the new objects and experiences English speakers have encountered all over the globe. English has drawn words from India (bandanna), China (kung fu), and Japan (tycoon), as well as a number of smaller areas in the Pacific (amok and orangutan from the Malay language and ukulele from Hawaiian). Arabic has been a prolific source of words over the centuries, giving us hazard, lute, magazine, and a host of words beginning with the letter a, from algebra to azimuth.

English has also added words to the vocabulary in a variety of ways apart from borrowing. Many new words are compounds of existing words (like humble pie) or coinages without reference to any word element in English of other languages (like googol and quark). Many words derive from literary characters (like ignoramus and quixotic), figures from mythology (like hypnosis and panic), the names of places (like donnybrook and tuxedo), or the names of people (like boycott and silhouette).

No language is static, and in time new words come into being and old ones are no longer commonly used, some even become obsolete or vanish. But many words or expressions have survived through the test of time and become a fixed part of the English vocabulary. Many words from *The Bible* are still used today.

2. ENGLISH NOUNS RELATED TO THE BIBLE

There are many nouns originated from *The Bible*, people's name, animal name, plant name, place name and so on. They are very important in the Western culture. Now, let's begin with the proper nouns.

2.1 Biblical Proper Nouns and English Words

A proper noun is the name of a particular person, place, organization, or thing. Proper nouns begin with a capital letter. Examples are “Adam”, “Eve”, and “Judas” and so on. Here are many proper nouns from *The Bible*.

2.1.1 People’s Names Originated from *The Bible*

Some names of the people in *The Bible* have already been used as common nouns, to symbolize the same crowd of people with the same characters. “Judas” is one of followers of Jesus, later he sold Jesus and became a betrayer of Jesus. “Judas” came into a synonym of a betrayer. So there is a related phrase on Judas, “Judas’ kiss”, or “the kiss of Judas”, which means “an iron hand in a velvet glove”; “Apostle Paul”, means “a lot of warm-hearted dreamer”. Adam is no longer the Adam in the Garden of Eden. We use this word to point to the original people in the world. So, in English, the often-used words “not know someone from Adam”, means not knowing someone at all. A person with great patience is described as “as patient as Job”.

Adam: First, in *The Bible*, the God, Jehovah first mentioned to create the first man Adam. He stole eating the fruit in the tree of knowledge, fearing of being caught by the God, he swallowed it in a hurry. When the God got to know, he drove both Adam and Eve out of the Garden of Eden Paradise. Then there is coming to be the phrase “Adam’s Apple”.

Joseph: The son of Jacob and Rachel. Jacob liked him very much, and made him a coat, which caused his ten half-blooded elder brother of jealousy. So he was sold to an Egypt businessman by his elder brothers, then the businessmen sold him to the Egyptian pharaoh’s guard, framed by the bodyguard’s wife, he was thrown into prison, but later he was active in the oneiromancy of the pharaoh, then he was designated as the prime minister. For meeting the famine, his brothers also came to Egypt, happened to meet Joseph, the prime minister, he made it up, banqueted his brothers. After Joseph died, Jews in Egypt were more and more unwelcomed, even in the enslaved status.

Mary: The mother of Jesus Christ, known as the Virgin Mary, Maria was not married, but she conceived and gave birth to a son and the God names him Jesus Christ. Most countries in the era were counted from the year Jesus Christ was born.

Judas: Judas was one of the twelve disciples of Jesus Christ. One day he met the pontiff who hated Jesus very much, and asked what he would get if he took Jesus to them, and then they gave him thirty pieces of silver. After that, Judas always looked for a chance to betray Jesus until he helped the pontiff’s men arrest Jesus later. He betrayed Jesus, so no people would have this name today in the Western world because it is symbolic of betrayal and conspiracy.

2.1.2 Place Names Originated from *The Bible*

In *The Bible*, Jerusalem, the sacred place of Islam Judaism and Christianity are often appeared in the daily English, which points to the place that people aspiring to go. Young couples also compare their little warm house as “the garden of Eden”, the paradise full of romance and sense of love. The dishonest person is compared as Crete, because “the Cretans are all liars”. Jericho is an ancient city in the north of Death Sea in the West Asia. According to Samuel, the Old Testament, the envoy of David, the king of the old Israel, got halfly-shaved of his beard by the new king Haman. He was ashamed to face his people. David told him to stay at Jericho, and be back when his beard grew longer. Now, Jericho becomes sarcasm of a far place or the remote penal colony or a seclusion place, like “Go to Jericho!” (Means “go to hell”; get away from me); “From Jericho to June” (means a long way). Babel, in the Old Testament, after the flood, the later generations of Noah, moved eastwards to “The land of Shinar”, planned to build Babel. The God was so angry with their fanciful illusion. So he changed people’s languages causing them unable to communicate with each other, so that they were unable to cooperate. Thus, Babel failed to be built. In English, people widen the word Babel as i) mess; ii) a place full of mess, like “a perfect Babel (means a mess)”; iii) extraordinarily high building; iv) an empty plan.

2.2 Biblical Animals and Plants and English Words

Some animals and plants in *The Bible* are endued with specific meaning in certain ways. These correlative expressions to animals and plants are now widely used in virtually all sorts of literatures.

The lost sheep: It comes from the story of the rancher who lost his sheep and found them later. The Holly Bible tells the story like this.

Then drew near unto him all the publicans and sinners for to hear him. And the Pharisees and scribes murmured, saying, this man receiveth sinners, and eateth with them. And he spake this parable unto them, saying, What man of you, having hundred sheep, if he lose one of them, doth not leave the ninety and nine in the wilderness, and go after that which is lost, until he find it? And when he hath found it, he layeth it on his shoulders, rejoicing. And when he cometh home, he calleth together his friends and neighbours, saying unto them, Rejoice with me; for I have found my sheep which was lost. I say unto you, that likewise joy shall be in heaven over one sinner that repenteth, more than over ninety and nine just persons, which need no repentance. Either what woman having ten pieces of silver, if she lose one piece, doth not light a candle, and sweep the house, and seek diligently till she find it? And when she hath found it, she calleth her friends and her neighbours together, saying, rejoice with me; for I have found the piece which I had lost. Likewise, I say unto you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth. (*The Holly Bible, King James Version, Luke 15*)

Jesus mentioned this phrase several times in chapter 15 of Luke and now it is taken to refer to those young people who have gone astray in their life.

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