

# THE ROLE OF THE BIBLE IN LANGUAGE STANDARDIZATION PROCESSES: THE CASE OF WELSH

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Bible translations have played a central role in language standardization processes, because the Bible's unique authority as a text favoured the selection of the variety used in the Bible as a language standard and because the wider distribution the Bible enjoyed compared to other texts, in particular in Renaissance and Reformation Europe, then facilitated the diffusion of a biblical language standard. This article examines the role of the Bible in language standardization processes focusing on a historical case study of Welsh. The language of the first complete Welsh Bible translation in 1588 is widely recognised to have formed the basis of standard literary Welsh, yet there has to date not been a systematic investigation of how the Welsh biblical standard developed or came to be adopted. The article reassesses the traditional, but unsubstantiated view that the language of the 1588 Bible translation was based on an existing medieval poetic literary standard and advances an alternative hypothesis that the biblical standard was essentially shaped by the process of revision of earlier translations, as the 1588 and ultimately canonical translation represented a reaction against the linguistic inconsistencies and idiosyncrasies of earlier translations of the New Testament and Psalms.

**Key words:** language standardization, codification, sociolinguistic variation, Bible translation, Welsh

## 1 Introduction: the Bible and language standardization

Bible translations have played a central role in language standardization processes, reflecting their often uniquely influential position as texts (Burke 2004: 103).<sup>1</sup> Because of the Bible's authoritative status, the language variety of the Bible translations could become a *de facto* standard, achieving to an extent

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*selection* and *codification*, the first two stages in Haugen's four-stage standardization model (Haugen 1972 [1966], 2012 [1987]), simply by virtue of being used in the Bible, without necessarily being part of a deliberate language planning process. Further, the Bible was also privileged compared to other texts in terms of its diffusion, typically being among the first books to be printed in many vernacular European languages after the introduction of printing in late 15<sup>th</sup> or in the 16<sup>th</sup> century and benefitting from larger and more frequent print runs (Wright 2012: 68; Nevalainen 2014: 124). Besides written channels, the language of the Bible was diffused verbally in church services – with additional prestige conferred by the authority of the clergy – as well as in more informal family and group worship, where it was also accessible to the non-literate. The impact and reach of the language of the Bible was further amplified by the widespread use of more popular religious works (catechisms, practical treatises, books of hymns and carols), whose language was often in turn based on or influenced by that of the Bible, not only as part of regular religious activity, but also in special evangelization and literacy campaigns aimed at the wider population. These particular historical and cultural circumstances favouring the diffusion of the Bible therefore meant that the language variety of the Bible translations could also achieve to a large extent the next and third stage, *implementation* (or *acceptance*) in Haugen's standardization model, again without the need of a deliberate language planning process. On the other hand, the development and maintenance of a biblical language standard cannot be taken for granted, since the very authority invested in the Bible could lead to linguistic conservatism. If the language of the Bible became ossified while spoken varieties continued to evolve, the increasing divergence between the spoken varieties and the biblical standard could result in the language of the Bible becoming less accessible and ultimately in its prestige being undermined.

This article examines the role of the Bible in one early modern standardization process, that of Welsh, the vernacular language indigenous to Wales. The focus of the discussion, using Welsh as a mini case-study, is on how a de-facto codification or recodification can take place when selecting the linguistic variety used in Bible translations and on how this variety comes to be more widely diffused. Standardization is often envisaged to a large extent as a deliberate process, in general because it has been associated with language planning; Haugen's revised model of standardization (Haugen 2012 [1987]) is in fact expounded in a chapter entitled Language Planning. More specifically, codification has been associated with linguistic prescription, in particular in Haugen's model of standardization; Ayres-Bennett (2020: 183) notes that Haugen "seems to consider codification and prescription as broadly interchangeable, suggesting that the typical products of codification are a prescriptive orthography, grammar and dictionary." However, as Deumert (2004) has argued, standardization need not take place only as a result of "deliberate intervention":

Language standardization, understood as a process of variant reduction, does not only

include deliberate intervention by regulating authorities (such as language societies and academies, individual dictionary and grammar writers and also government institutions; i.e. the imposition of uniformity through authoritative acts), but also processes of cumulative micro-accommodation, levelling and dialect convergence, which are the outcome of the everyday linguistic activities of individuals. (Deumert 2004: 3.)

In the case of Welsh, we appear to see the emergence of a literary standard in the early modern period through progressive linguistic convergence by individual writers with the language of the Bible as a model, but without deliberate language planning. In terms of the codification of the language, while there was a medieval grammatical tradition based on bardic grammars as well as a humanist grammatical and lexicographical tradition in the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries, grammars and dictionaries, the archetypical codification texts, seem to have played a less direct and significant role in the development of the Welsh literary standard than the early modern Bible translations.

Language standardization can be seen as a continuum, that is as a process which can be realized to varying degrees and so, following Joseph (1987: 3–7), I will maintain a terminological distinction between, *standard languages*, on the one hand, which reflect a more complete realization of standardization, and *language standards*, on the other hand, which reflect a more intermediate stage of standardization. A *standard language* is defined by Swann et al. as:

a relatively uniform variety of a language which does not show regional variation, and which is used in a wide range of communicative functions (e.g. official language, medium of instruction, literary language, scientific language, etc.). Standard varieties tend to observe prescriptive, written norms, which are codified in grammars and dictionaries. Swann et al. (2004: 295.)

Swann et al. define a *language standard* as:

a linguistic variety which (a) is relatively uniform, and (b) functions as a measure (or standard) against which the quality of an individual's speech is evaluated. However, language standards lack the overtly prescriptive norms and codification characteristic of standard varieties. (Swann et al. 2004: 176.)

The article is structured as follows. In the next section (2), I present the historical context of the early modern Welsh Bible translations and the key issues the article seeks to examine. Next, in section 3, I examine the evidence for the development of an early modern Welsh biblical literary standard; I reassess the traditional view in Welsh scholarship that the language of the 16<sup>th</sup> century Welsh Bible translations was based on an existing poetic literary standard and advance an alternative hypothesis that while the biblical standard emerged from an existing, long-standing literary tradition, it was shaped by the specific and chance circumstances of the Bible translations themselves, in particular by the process of revision of earlier translations, as the later, ultimately canonical translations represented a reaction

against the linguistic inconsistencies and idiosyncrasies of earlier ones. In section 5, I then discuss the significance of the Welsh Bible translations for the standardization of Welsh, examining, on the one hand, the diffusion of the biblical standard in the 17th century and, on the other, the impact of the Bible translation on the status and position of the Welsh language.

## **2 The Welsh Bible translation and its historical context**

The first complete Welsh Bible translation by William Morgan in 1588 (Morgan and National Library of Wales 1987 [1588]), following William Salesbury's 1567 Welsh New Testament and Psalms (Salesbury 1567; Richards and Williams 1965 [1567]), took place at a key turning point in the history of Wales, coming not long after the Union of England and Wales in 1536 as well as the Protestant Reformation. The 1536 Act of Union of England and Wales fully integrated Wales into the Kingdom of England and established legal and administrative uniformity throughout England and Wales, with English law the only applicable law and English the sole official language of law and administration. Welshmen were only able to hold public office in Wales if they spoke English and risked the forfeiture of their function for using Welsh (Roberts 1989: 28). Although Wales had never been a unified state and had already ceased to be an independent polity – since King Edward I of England's conquest in the 13th century when Wales became part of the crown dominion of England – Wales had enjoyed considerable autonomy. At the time of the Union with England, Wales was also overwhelmingly monoglot Welsh-speaking, and there was a thriving Welsh-language literary tradition (Jenkins, Suggett, and White 1997: 48–55). Following the union with England, however, there was a real risk of the complete anglicization of Wales: the Act of Union not only imposed English as an official language in Wales but also relegated the status of Welsh and set in train the gradual anglicization of the Welsh gentry (Davies 2014: 36). The potential anglicizing effect of the 1549 Act of Uniformity, which imposed the English Book of Common Prayer as the sole legal form of worship and therefore English (instead of Latin) as the sole language of worship in the new Protestant Church of England was even more far-reaching, though, as it affected not just the gentry but the population as a whole. Nevertheless, the impact of the Act of Uniformity was short-lived; a 1563 Act of Parliament authorised the translation of the Bible into Welsh, motivated ultimately by the more urgent desire to promote the unity of faith in the kingdom over the unity of language (by enabling monoglot Welsh-speakers to access the word of God until such time as they could learn English), and so Welsh, while banished from other areas of official public life, became the predominant language of worship of the Protestant, Anglican Church in Wales.

The 1588 Bible translation, as revised in 1620 and in continuous use until a new translation was published in 1988 (Cymdeithas y Beibl 1988), is generally recognised to have formed the basis of standard literary Welsh (Lewis 1987: 13; Jones 1998: 268; Robert 2011: 135). The Bible translation is also, as a corollary, widely

credited with saving the Welsh language itself, by preventing its fragmentation into largely mutually unintelligible dialects lacking any social prestige (Jones 1998: 8, 219; Davies 2014: 39; Llewellyn 2018). This widely-held view of the central importance of the role of 1588 Bible translation in the standardization of Welsh is encapsulated in the following quotation from Miguélez-Carballeira et al. (2016):

/.../ such was the exceptional status of this 1588 Bible, that it created a standard literary language that nourished and inspired a huge corpus of Welsh literature for the next three centuries, its impact reflected in the fact that the Welsh came to be known as ‘a nation of one book’. In short, this single translation is credited with ensuring the very survival of the language to the present day. (Miguélez-Carballeira, Price, and Kaufmann 2016: 128.)

There is also a widely-held view that the 1588 Bible translator William Morgan modelled his language on that of the existing literary standard of Welsh strict-metre poetry, in particular the language of poetry in the *cywydd*<sup>2</sup> metre (Lloyd-Jones 1938: 29–31; Parry 1979 [1944]: 152; Lewis 1987: 13; Jones 1998: 266; Robert 2011: 135; Davies 2014: 39). Strict-metre poetry, or *canu caeth* in Welsh, was the most prestigious class of poetry, practised by professional poets in the courts of the medieval Welsh princes and then, after the Edwardian conquest of Wales, patronised by the Welsh gentry at least as late as the 16th century (Suggett and White 2002: 63; Fulton 2011: 201); *canu caeth* had already been the subject of codification in medieval bardic grammars (Williams and Jones 1934; Lewis 1997). However, despite the importance of the early modern Bible translations in the development of standard Welsh, the processes of standardization itself in the medieval and early modern period have not been systematically researched.

### 3 Development of a Welsh literary standard based on the Bible

#### 3.1 Were the Welsh Bible translations based on an existing poetic literary standard?

The traditional view that the Welsh Bible translators, especially William Morgan, based their language on an existing poetic literary standard seems a priori plausible, since strict metre poetry was arguably the most prestigious written form of the language – more so than the popular free-metre poetry or prose – and it was also extensively codified. All the medieval Welsh grammars were bardic grammars with a focus on metre and those of the humanist grammarians of the 16th and 17th century (Gruffydd Robert, Siôn Dafydd Rhys, Henry Salesbury and John Davies, cf. Poppe (2004: 131–132)) were also indebted to the poetic tradition, citing their examples from strict metre poetry. John Davies (together with Richard Parry) also

<sup>2</sup> The *cywydd* is defined in Evans and Fulton (2019: xix) as “one of the most popular of the twenty-four metres practised by the professional poets of medieval Wales, particularly associated with the period after the Poets of the Princes, that is, c. 1300-1500”.

co-edited the 1620 Bible, a revised version of William Morgan's 1588 Bible, and the language he describes in his 1621 grammar matches that of the 1620 Bible, with only relatively minor differences too from that of the 1588 Bible.

However, the hypothesis of poetic linguistic influence on the Bible translations has not been systematically investigated: it is not actually clear what poetic linguistic features the Bible translators are supposed to have adopted, how they are believed to have done this, or even to what extent there was a poetic standard distinct from a prose one. In particular, no detailed comparison has been made of the language of the William Morgan Bible and that of 16<sup>th</sup> century or earlier strict metre poetry. Such a comparative analysis is actually far from a straightforward task, since editions of 16<sup>th</sup> century as well as earlier strict metre poetry are typically normalised using the orthography of modern standard literary Welsh, which has in turn been influenced by the language of William Morgan's Bible, so there is an inherent danger of circularity. Then, there is the question of how William Morgan could have modelled his language on that of strict metre poetry, for example could it have been on the basis of manuscripts he had access to, poetry he heard recited, assistance from contemporary poets he knew or on the basis of bardic grammars? It is likely that William Morgan would have had access to manuscript copies of strict metre poetry and he also knew contemporary poets, in particular Edmwnd Prys, who later produced a Welsh metrical version of the Psalms (published in the 1621 Welsh *Book of Common Prayer*) and who also hailed from the same area of northwest Wales and was a contemporary of his at St John's College, Cambridge (Williams 1989: 365, 371). The challenge, however, in basing a literary standard on a body of texts is that Morgan would have to reconstruct a standard from a disparate and potentially linguistically non-uniform corpus. Basing a standard on a grammar would be more straightforward, since the alphabet (a key element of orthography) and grammatical forms are presented systematically and in an easy-to-find manner. However, apart from Gruffydd Robert's 1567 grammar (Robert and Williams 1939 [1567]), all the humanist grammars were printed after the 1588 Bible. Gruffydd Robert's grammar, moreover, had a limited circulation and impact in contemporary Wales, as Robert was a Catholic recusant in exile in Italy and his grammar was printed there (Price 2019: 185–187). The orthography of the 1588 Bible also differs in some significant respects from that of Gruffydd Robert's grammar, so the grammar is also unlikely to have provided a comprehensive linguistic model for William Morgan.

### 3.2 William Morgan's 1588 revision of the 1567 New Testament and Psalms

William Morgan only translated from scratch the Old Testament and Apocrypha in 1588, but revised the earlier 1567 Welsh New Testament (edited and mostly translated by William Salesbury, but with contributions from Richard Davies and Thomas Huet) as well as the Psalms (translated by William Salesbury and published in the Welsh *Book of Common prayer*). In revising the 1567 New Testament

and Psalms, William Morgan was not devising a language standard from scratch but was in many cases choosing between existing orthographical and morphological variants in the 1567 texts. The language and in particular the orthography of the 1567 New Testament and Psalms was inconsistent in that it included new idiosyncratic forms devised by Salesbury, archaic forms, colloquial forms and higher register forms all side by side (Mathias 1970: 66–68). A consequence of Salesbury’s idiosyncratic language was that the 1567 New Testament and Psalms were difficult for his compatriots to read and understand. Not only did he deviate from traditional well-established forms, but his orthography was also less transparent and more remote from the spoken forms than existing usage, since, for instance, he did not consistently mark initial consonant mutations (as illustrated in example a. in Table 1). The 1567 New Testament and Psalms were badly received notably because of their idiosyncratic language. The contemporary Welsh writer and translator Morris Kyffin stated that “there was so much corrupt language and so many foreign words in the printed version that no true Welshman could bear to hear it” (Gruffydd 1988: 15; Williams 1908 [1595]: x) [translation by Professor R. Geraint Gruffydd], while John Penry, the Welsh protestant reformer and martyr, noted that the Welsh New Testament was “not vnderstoode of one among tenne of the hearers” (Penry 1588: 11; Gruffydd 1988: 15).

The goal of the 1567 Bible translators had been to translate the whole Bible into Welsh, but they did not manage to complete the task, it is believed because of a translation dispute between the two main translators, William Salesbury and Richard Davies (Gruffydd 1988: 17). When Morgan later took up the baton, he had the opportunity not only to translate the missing Old Testament and Apocrypha, but also to revise the New Testament and Psalms, not least their language (Thomas 1976: 348–358; 1988: 162–173). Morgan seems to have reacted against the linguistic inconsistencies and idiosyncrasies – both in his revised translation of the New Testament and Psalms and in his original translation of the Old Testament – by being scrupulously consistent in his own language. Examples of the kinds of linguistic revisions Morgan made are illustrated in Table 1 and in examples 1 to 6. In all the types of linguistic revisions illustrated, there was variation between different orthographical or grammatical forms in the 1567 New Testament and Psalms, and Morgan chose to use one of the variants consistently in his 1588 Bible. The variation in the 1567 New Testament and Psalms had diverse sources. In some cases, such as the use of different graphemes <v> and <f> to represent the sound /v/, as illustrated in example a. in Table 1, the variation reflected existing instability in Welsh orthography; the 1567 Bible shows both <v> and <f>, while the 1588 Bible consistently has <f>. In other cases, we see variation between a traditional form and an innovative, idiosyncratic form introduced by Salesbury, such as between *y* (the traditional, Middle Welsh form) and *ei* (coined by Salesbury and probably influenced by Latin *eius* “his, her, its”) for the third person possessive pronouns “his, her, its”, as illustrated in example c in Table 1. In this particular case, Morgan actually adopted Salesbury’s innovative form *ei* “his, her, its”, which had the advantage of being more orthographically distinctive, as <y> also denoted,



and still does in Modern Welsh, the definite article.

<i>Feature</i>	<i>1567</i>	<i>1588</i>	<i>Reference</i>
a. Initial consonant mutations: lenition of /d/ <d> > /ð/ <dd>, e.g. after preverbal particle <b>a</b> in <i>Subject +a+ Verb</i> constructions ( <i>dywedodd</i> > <b>a ddywedodd</b> )	Sometimes not marked, i.e. <d> <i>Yr Iesu a atepawdd ydd-wynt,</i> <i>ac a dyuot</i> and PRT say.3SG. PST	Consistently marked as <dd>: <i>Iesu a'u hattebodd hwynt,</i> <i>ac a ddywedodd</i> and PRT say.3sg.PST	“Jesus replied to them and said” (John 6:26)
	Sometimes marked (<dd> or <ð>): <i>A'r Iesu a ddyuot wrthynt.</i> Say\3SG.PST to-3PL	<i>a'r Iesu a ddywedodd wrthynt</i> say.3SG.PST to-3PL	“and Jesus said to them” (Matthew 21:6)
b. Orthographic representation of /v/	Variation: <v> - <i>danvon</i> <f> - <i>danfon</i> ”	Consistency: <f> - <i>danfon</i> <f> - <i>danfon</i>	“send” (Matthew 23:34), »send« (James 2:25)
c. 3 <sup>rd</sup> person possessive pronoun <y> vs. <ei>	Both <y> and <ei> used <i>y lwybrau ef</i> his paths he	<ei> used systematically: <i>ei lwybrau ef</i> his paths he	“his paths” (Mark 1:3),
	<i>carrae ei escidiae.</i> thongs his sandals	<i>carrae ei escidiau</i> thongs his sandals	“the thongs of his sandals” (Mark 1:7)

**Table 1:** Examples of orthographic inconsistency in 1567 NT and Psalms revised in 1588 Bible

In other cases still, we see variation in grammatical endings or usage between traditional forms and innovative forms and usage, where the innovative forms reflect recent linguistic changes; six such changes are illustrated in examples 1 to 6 below.

1. The reduction of word final unstressed /-nt/ to /-n/, affecting inter alia 3<sup>rd</sup> person plural verbal endings (the -NT variable); 1a shows the reduction in the 1567 texts, while 1b shows the conservative form. The 1588 Bible consistently has the conservative form.

	<i>1567</i>		<i>1588</i>	
a.	<i>vvy</i>	<i>ddaeth-an</i>	<i>hwy a</i>	<i>ddaeth-ant</i> “they came” (Matthew 14:34)
b.	<i>hwy a</i>	<i>ddaeth-ant</i>	<i>hwynt hwy a</i>	<i>ddaeth-ant</i> “they came” (Mark 3:13)
	They [PRT]	come\3PL.PST	They PRT	come\3PL.PST



2. The loss of final /-v/ (<f>), affecting the 1st person singular present/future verbal conjugations (-a vs. -af) (the -AF variable); 2a shows the loss of /-v/ in the 1567 New Testament, while 2b shows the conservative form. Again, the 1588 Bible consistently has the conservative form.

1567	1588	
a. <i>mi ladd-a y phlant</i> I kill.1SG.FUT her children	<i>mi a ladd-af ei phlant hi</i> I PRT kill.1SG.FUT her children she	“I will kill her children” (Revelation 2:23)
b. <i>mi a bwr-af hi</i> I PRT throw.1SG.FUT her	<i>mi ai bwri-af hi</i> I PRT.her throw.1SG.FUT her	“I will throw her onto the bed” (Revelation 2:22)

3. The reduction of final unaccented /-ai/ to /-e/, affecting inter alia 1st person singular past verbal conjugations (the -AIS variable); 3a below shows the <-es> form in the 1567 New Testament, while 3b shows the conservative form <-eis>. The 1588 Bible again consistently has the conservative form, though with different orthography <-ais>.

1567	1588	
a. <i>mi a glyw-es</i>	<i>mi a glyw-ais</i>	“I heard” (Revelation 5:13)
b. <i>mi y glyw-eis</i> I PRT hear.1SG.PST	<i>mi a glyw-ais</i> I PRT hear.1SG.PST	“I heard” (Revelation 6:1) (Thomas 1976, 350)

4. Again, the reduction of unaccented /-ai/ to /-e/, but as reflected in the 3<sup>rd</sup> person singular imperfect tense ending. The 1567 Bible has three variants of this ending: <-ei>, <-ai> (the conservative forms) in 4a and 4b, and <-e> (the innovative form) in 4c, while the 1588 Bible this time consistently shows the innovative form <-e>.

1567	1588	
a. <i>val na all-ai 'r Iesu</i> so that NEG can. 3SG.IMPERF	<i>fel na all-e 'r Iesu</i> so that NEG can. 3SG.IMPERF	“so that Jesus could not...” (Mark 1:45)
b. <i>Ac ny all-ei ef</i> And NEG can.3SG.IMPERF	<i>Ac ni all-e efe</i> And NEG can.3SG.IMPERF	“And he could not...” (Mark 6:5)
c. <i>Mal y gall-e</i> so that PRT can.3SG.IMPERF	<i>fel y gall-e</i> so that PART can.3SG.IMPERF	“so that he could...” (1 Peter 3:18)

5. The partial loss of the preverbal particle *a* in Subject + *a* + Verb constructions. In the 1567 New Testament and Psalms, we find three variants: omission (1a. and 2a. above), retention with the traditional grapheme <a> (1b., 2b., 3a. and 3b. above) and retention with grapheme <y> (3b. above). In the 1588 Bible we find consistent retention of *a* with the orthography <a> (examples 1a., 1b., 2a., 2b., 3a. and 3b. above).

6. The loss of the preverbal particle *y(r)* in Adverb + *y(r)* + Verb constructions – in the 1567 New Testament and Psalms the particle *y* is sometimes omitted and other times retained, while in the 1588 Bible *y* is consistently retained.

	1567	1588	
a.	<i>yntho ymddiriedaf</i> In.him trust.1SG.FUT	<i>ynddo ef yr ymddiriedaf</i> In.him trust.1SG.FUT	“In him I trust” (Psalms 18:2)
b.	<i>arna-ti y dyry y tlawt</i> on-2SG PRT gives the poor	<i>arnat ti y gedy y tlawd ei obaith</i> on-2SG PART leaves the poor his hope	“The hapless commits himself to you” (Psalms 10:14)

### 3.3 Reaction against linguistic inconsistency in the 1567 New Testament and Psalms

In the case of five of the six features reflecting recent linguistic change illustrated in examples 1 to 6, Morgan consistently chose the more conservative forms or usage, and in the case of one (example 4) Morgan chose the innovative form. The one innovative form in the sample – the 3<sup>rd</sup> person singular of the imperfect in <-e> – was in fact subsequently eliminated and replaced by the conservative form in <-ai> in the 1620 revised version of the Bible (Thomas 1976: 418). In choosing mostly the conservative forms, Morgan may have been guided by the fact the conservative forms also appear to be the commoner forms in the 1567 New Testament and Psalms. In addition, Morgan may have chosen to use the conservative forms because he perceived the innovative forms to be more colloquial and informal. The -NT, -AF and -AIS variables in example 1-3 are indeed some of the features which distinguish Modern colloquial from literary Welsh today (i.e. colloquial -*n*, -*a* and -*es* vs. literary -*nt*, -*af* and -*ais*). Strict metre poetry could possibly have influenced Morgan’s perception of conservative forms of the -NT, -AF and -AIS variables as more formal and prestigious, if the conservative forms can be demonstrated to have been significantly more frequent than the innovative forms in strict metre poetry (which cannot necessarily be assumed to have been the case), and if Morgan was himself sufficiently exposed to strict metre poetry. Morgan could, for instance, have had access to manuscripts containing strict metre poetry or have heard strict metre poetry recited; as the -NT, -AF and -AIS variables occur in word endings, they were relatively frequently incorporated into rhyming schemes. The conservative forms of the -NT, -AF and -AIS variables were not exclusively or intrinsically poetic, and moreover Morgan would have been even less likely to find evidence to support the use of the other linguistic features (*ei* “his, her, its”, the retention of the preverbal particles *a* and *y*) in strict-metre poetry. The *ei* form was specifically an innovation of Salesbury not found in earlier strict-metre poetry, while the retention of the preverbal particles *a* and *y* was not a salient feature of strict metre poetry, as the verbal constructions in which they are found are less common than in prose texts and the particles do not seem to have

been consistently retained in strict-metre poetry either. There are other linguistic features of the 1588 (and indeed the 1567) Bible, which are not discussed here, but which could potentially be attributed to the influence of strict metre poetry. These include a pattern of compound word formation used by William Morgan to coin new terms which Thomas (1988: 211) argues was based on strict metre poetry, and the more frequent use of verb-initial order the poetic books of the Bible (the 1567 Psalms and in particular the 1588 Psalms and Song of Songs) compared to the prose books, which, as I argue elsewhere (Currie 2016), may have been adopted to give a poetic quality to a prose translation of Biblical Hebrew poetry. Verb-initial order (specifically the use of finite verbs in absolute-initial position in positive declarative main clauses) had been rare in prose prior to the 16<sup>th</sup> Bible translations but common in strict metre poetry and may therefore have been perceived as a poetic feature which could be exploited for stylistic effect. Overall, however, strict metre poetry is unlikely to have been more than a contributory factor influencing Morgan's linguistic choices, rather than a comprehensive linguistic model.

If we can infer a guiding principle behind William Morgan's linguistic choices in the 1588 Bible, which in turn decisively shaped Modern standard literary Welsh, it seems to be this: he seems to have reacted against the orthographic, morphological and grammatical inconsistencies in the 1567 New Testament and Psalms, chose generally the commoner and more conservative variants in the 1567 translations and then used them consistently in his revised translations of the New Testament and Psalms as well as in his original translation of the Old Testament. The language of the 1588 Bible translation thus emerged out of an existing, long-standing literary tradition, but was crucially shaped by the specific and chance circumstances of the Bible translations and retranslations themselves.

## 4 Impact of the Welsh Bible translations

### 4.1 Diffusion of the biblical literary standard

A prerequisite for the Welsh Bible becoming a linguistic model for later writers was the positive reception of the 1588 Bible translation (Williams 1997: 217). Morris Kyffin, for instance, who excoriated the quality of the language of the 1567 Welsh New Testament in his introduction to his Welsh translation of John Jewell's *Apologia Ecclesiae Anglicanae* (*Apology of the Church of England*), lavished praise upon Morgan's translation: "Dr William Morgan has recently translated the whole Bible: an indispensable, outstanding, godly and learned work, for which the Welsh can never thank him as much as he deserves" (my translation) (Williams 1908 [1595]: ix-x). However, the implementation of a biblical literary standard was not imposed in a top-down manner in early modern Wales, but resulted from individual writers' adoption of linguistic features from the Bible as opposed to competing variants. The existence of a Bible translation alone was not sufficient for the diffusion of a biblical literary standard, notwithstanding the inherent authority of the Bible as a text. A

significant factor facilitating the diffusion of the biblical literary standard was the printing of a cheaper, portable edition of the Bible for the first time in 1630, as well as service and prayer books. The earlier Bibles were expensive, large format editions intended only for use in church and so would have been accessible as a written text primarily to a limited subsection of the clergy.

Exposure to the Bible did not necessarily mean systematically adopting it as a linguistic model, though. Surviving Welsh manuscript sermons by 17<sup>th</sup> century church ministers testify to this fact. As church ministers, the preachers necessarily had access to the Welsh Bible and indeed they refer to and quote from it, however we find considerable linguistic variation between individual preachers. Table 2 presents the summary findings of a comparison of the language of six 17th century manuscript sermon collections with that of the 1588 and 1620 Bibles, based on the linguistic features already analysed (in Tables 1 and examples 1-6 above). While the orthographic features are consistently shown in all collections of sermons, the morphological and syntactic features are not. At one extreme, we have the sermons of John Piers, the rector of Caerwys and Llandderfel in Northeast Wales (in MS NLW 12205), which show all the selected linguistic features of the Bible, and the sermons of Samuel Williams, the vicar of Llandyfriog, Cardiganshire (in MS Cwrtmawr 253), which shows all the features except the systematic retention of the preverbal particles *a* and *y(r)*. At the other extreme, the language of William Williams' sermons (in MS NLW 73A), which, according to annotations in the manuscript, were preached in the parish of Llanafan, Breconshire, South Wales in 1629, diverges quite markedly from that of the Bible. In addition to having the innovative, more colloquial forms of the -AF and -NT variables, William Williams' sermons are full of dialectal forms (characteristic of South Wales), colloquialisms, English borrowings (which also tended at the time to be more frequent in less formal registers) as well as Latin quotations and phrases.

The orthographical features were arguably easier to standardize in that they are salient, easy to identify and did not necessarily conflict with spoken usage. The selected morphological and syntactic features, on the other hand, were conservatisms where the language of the Bible would likely have diverged from that of the spoken usage of the preachers and their congregations. The two selected syntactic features are the most complex and least salient since they involve not simply linguistic form but frequency of use. The Bible shows a more consistent and frequent retention of the preverbal particles *a* and *y* than most other contemporary texts (and presumably informal speech). So, in order to adopt such syntactic features, writers would first need to deduce the pattern of use in the Bible and then consciously apply it in their own writing, as John Piers seems to have done. The more systematic adoption of linguistic features from the Bible by John Piers and Samuel Williams may also have been influenced by the intended purpose of these manuscript sermons, which may not have been only or primarily for preaching to a congregation, but rather as learned exegeses to assist the preacher in interpreting the biblical passages in question (in the case of John Piers) or indeed for publication

	1588/ 1620	1629–30	MID C17TH	1665– 76	1675– 76	1683-89	LATE C17TH
	Bible	William Williams	John Piers	John Jones	Anon.	John Griffith	Samuel Williams
		NLW MS 73A	NLW MS 12205A	Cardiff MS 2.219	NLW MS 3B	Bangor MS 95	Cwrtmawr MS 253
<b>ORTHOGRAPHIC FEATURES</b>							
Consistent use of <f> for /v/	√	√	√	√	√	√	√
Consonant doubling for fricatives <ll> <ll>, <ff> /f/ and <dd> /ð/	√	√	√	√	√	√	√
ei (+lenition) “his”; ei (+spirant mutation) “her”	√	√	√	√	√	√	√
<b>MORPHOLOGICAL FEATURES</b>							
-Af 1ST SG indic. pres./fut. (-AF variable)	√	Partially	√	Partially	Partially	Partially	√
-ais/-aist (not -es/-est) in 1st/2nd SG PAST	√	√	√	Partially	√	Partially	√
-nt 3PL verbal form (-NT variable)	√	Partially	√	√	√	√	√
<b>SYNTACTIC FEATURES</b>							
Retention of preverbal particle <i>a</i>	√	Partially	√	√	Partially	Partially	Partially
Retention of preverbal particle <i>y(r)</i>	√	Partially	√	√	Partially	√	Partially

**Table 4:** Variation in adoption of features from Bible in selected 17<sup>th</sup> century manuscript sermons

(in the case of Samuel Williams); neither John Piers’ Welsh sermons in NLW MS 12205A or Samuel Williams’ sermons in Cwrtmawr MS 253A show annotations indicating that they were preached. William Williams’ use of more colloquial and dialectal language, on the other hand, may have been motivated by a desire to accommodate to his congregation, but equally may indicate that he was less familiar with literary Welsh or not have perceived Welsh to have been a language of learning on the same level as English or Latin.

This illustrative (though limited) sample of manuscript sermons provides some evidence of the diffusion of a Biblical literary standard through the adoption of

linguistic features from the Bible by later writers, but the variation between individual writers shows that this diffusion was not a uniform or automatic process. Where a literary standard is adopted using a written text as a model but without a centralised implementation process to guide it, individual writers have to first deduce the salient features of the model in order to adopt it. Not all features are equally salient or straightforward to adopt and are accordingly adopted to varying degrees. Moreover, individual writers had a choice of linguistic variables, between those of the biblical literary standard and more colloquial variants. The Welsh biblical literary standard thus had fuzzy boundaries, comparable to what has been observed for other language standards, for example by Ammon (2003: 8) for Modern German and Brown (2020) for Renaissance Italy.

#### **4.2 Impact of the Bible translations on the social position of Welsh**

While the positive reception of the 1588 Bible translation, including its language, facilitated its adoption as a literary standard, the impact of the Welsh Bible on the development of the Welsh language was amplified by specific historical circumstances. The Bible was translated into Welsh at a turning point in the history of the Welsh language when Welsh was potentially on the cusp of a long-term decline. At the same time, there was a risk of a break in the Welsh literary tradition: in strict metre poetry as the result of a decline in patronage by the Welsh gentry and in prose because of broader social, political and cultural change with the Reformation, dissolution of the monasteries, which had been a focal point of medieval Welsh literary culture, and the associated loss of many manuscripts. A new Welsh humanist tradition emerged in the 16<sup>th</sup> century and the Bible translations can be seen as part of this new prose tradition (Parry 1979 [1944], 151–171; Price 2019). While the new prose tradition that emerges is not exclusively religious by the 17<sup>th</sup> century religious prose, in particular printed practical devotional texts aimed at converting or instructing the wider public (from various denominational perspectives: Anglican, protestant non-conformist or puritan, and Catholic recusant) largely predominate. The Welsh Bible was at the centre of this religious prose tradition, as a source of inspiration as well as a religious and cultural reference point. Without the Welsh Bible translation, it is questionable to what an extent a new Welsh prose literary tradition would have developed and been maintained (Currie 2022, 61–62).

The impact of the Welsh Bible translation on the status of the Welsh language was also amplified by the fact that Welsh became the main language of worship in Wales. Had English been adopted as the official language of worship in the new protestant Church in Wales as in England, which had been a real possibility, the language's status would have been considerably weaker and its longer-term survival more precarious. Worship in English would have encouraged and facilitated widespread bilingualism and in turn a language shift to English. The use of Welsh as the language of worship provided a boost to the social status of Welsh and

encouraged the wider use and cultivation of the language, including the development of an abundant practical, devotional literature in Welsh (catechisms, worship guides, hymns, prayers as well as treatises and polemical works) to support worship in church and in the home.

Possibly the most far-reaching impact of the Bible came as a result of its use in popular literacy campaigns. The success of the voluntary circulating schools set up by Griffith Jones in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, which sought to enable the wider population to become literate by teaching them to read the Scriptures in their mother tongue, was such that not far off over 40% of the population of Wales (an estimated 200,000 out of 489,000) is thought to have attended the schools and acquired some literacy in Welsh, as a result of which, according to Suggett and White (2002: 72), “Wales could be counted amongst the most literate countries in Europe.”

## **5 Epilogue: the historical instability of language standards and standard languages**

Despite the association of standardization with achieving linguistic “uniformity across space” and “fixity over time” (Burke 2004, 89), language standards and standard languages are, paradoxically, not themselves stable. The social, political and cultural circumstances which once favoured the development of a particular dialect or variety as a language standard may change over time and result in the erosion of the erstwhile standard’s status. A key factor which contributes to the potential instability of language standards, in particular for minoritised languages, is external linguistic competition with another, politically and socially dominant vernacular, in Welsh’s case with English. When the authority of the standard of a dominant language is challenged, the standard itself typically evolves or is adapted. When, on the other hand, the authority of the language standard of a minoritised language is challenged, it may be replaced altogether by another language, such as the dominant language with which it is in competition (Costa, De Korne, and Lane 2018, 9; Darquennes and Vandenbussche 2015, 5). We see this in the history of Welsh. A medieval Welsh literary standard had developed, but as the language became minoritised following the union with England, the Welsh literary standard faced the threat of being supplanted by English. However, the translation of the Bible into Welsh and the use of Welsh as the language of worship facilitated the development of new literary standard. Welsh also maintained its position as the community language of most of Wales until the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. In present day Wales, though, where Welsh is not only a minoritised language but also a minority language spoken by only 19% of the population according to the 2011 census (ONS 2013), the risk of the complete displacement of the language by English has never been greater. While the development of a biblical literary standard helped Welsh to survive and thrive both as community language and as a language of culture in the centuries following the union with England, one of the consequences of the development of the biblical literary standard is a significant divergence between the



modern standard literary and colloquial languages. Such a divergence is more critical for a minoritised language like Welsh, all of whose speakers are also bilingual in English and use the language in varying degrees of diglossia with English, since the literary standard may be less accessible and harder to master for Welsh speakers than standard English, if they are less exposed to standard literary Welsh.

The language of the 1588 Bible was already at its inception divergent from the contemporary colloquial language. Over time the divergence between the language of the Welsh Bible and the colloquial language increased, as the language of the Bible remained fixed (until a new translation in modernised language appeared in 1988), while the colloquial language continued to evolve. One of the most significant areas of divergence was word order. Modern Welsh has verb-initial or Verb-Subject-Object (VSO) word order, which is regarded as a characteristic feature of the language in contrast to the Subject-Verb-Object (SVO order) of English. The 1588 and 1620 Bibles have predominant SVO word order in most books of the Bible, though show frequent VSO order in poetic books of the Old Testament such as the Psalms. The difference between the word order of the 1588 Bible and Modern Welsh can be attributed to linguistic change over the intervening centuries, as shown by Willis (1998) and Currie (2013), and the Bible is indeed one of the innovative texts in this change, as certain books of the Bible such as the Psalms were the first continuous prose texts in Welsh to have frequent VSO word order (Currie 2016). However, since VSO word order was perceived by many as a permanent, defining characteristic of Welsh, the language of the 1588 Bible translations came to be widely criticised for using an un-Welsh, translation-influenced word order. Fowkes (1993) even argued that because of its deviant, non-VSO word order, the 1588 Bible should not even be considered as the basis for standard Welsh. Fowkes' criticism of the language of the 1588 Welsh Bible illustrates the inherent instability of language standards, and in particular ones based on the Bible: the very authority of the Bible which helps establish its language as standard can lead to conservatism and to divergence from the ever evolving spoken varieties, which in turn can diminish the accessibility of the Bible and undermine its linguistic authority.

## **6 Conclusion**

Bible translations can play a central role in language standardization because of three key factors. First, the unique authority of the Bible as a text confers on the language variety used in the Bible a particular advantage for selection and codification as a language standard. Second, the Bible typically benefited from a wider distribution compared to other texts, through printing and in church services, which favoured the diffusion of a biblical language standard. Third, canonical vernacular Bible translations, as was the case in Renaissance and Reformation Europe, often coincided with other important developments, such as the introduction of printing and the functional expansion of vernacular languages at the expense of Latin, which

in turn amplified the linguistic impact of the Bible translations. In the case of Welsh, the Bible translations played a particularly significant role in the standardization of the language, since following the Union of England and Wales when English became the official language of law and administration as well as over time the language of choice of the Welsh gentry, religion was the primary public and official domain where Welsh held its own. The use of Welsh as the language of worship not only reinforced the central role of the Welsh Bible in Welsh cultural life, but also helped to consolidate the social position of Welsh at a time when English was otherwise increasingly dominant. However, despite the fact the Bible is widely recognised to have provided the basis of modern standard literary Welsh, there has not to date been any systematic research into how the biblical standard developed or subsequently came to be adopted. This article has re-examined the traditional, but largely unsubstantiated view that the language of the 16th century Bible translations, in particular William Morgan's first complete Welsh translation of the Bible in 1588, was based on an existing poetic literary standard. While the Welsh poetic tradition is likely to have contributed to the shaping of the language of the 1588 Bible – possibly more directly by influencing Morgan's, like Salesbury's, more frequent use of verb-initial word order in the poetic books of the Bible and more indirectly by influencing Morgan's perception of certain linguistic variants as more prestigious than others – above all the emerging biblical literary standard seems to have been shaped by the specific circumstances of the Bible translations, in particular by Morgan's revision of the 1567 New Testament and Psalms. Morgan seems to have reacted against the linguistic inconsistencies and idiosyncrasies of the earlier translations by being scrupulously consistent in his own translation, tending to choose the conservative variants over more colloquial ones, and these choices, particularly in orthography and morphology, established the basis for modern standard literary Welsh. The development and diffusion of a language standard based on the Bible, as here in the case of Early Modern Welsh, is also of interest for standardization theory more generally as an example of standardization processes – selection, codification and implementation – taking place without deliberate planning, whereas Haugen's model of language standardization tends to assume a top-down process with a central role for language planning. While language planning has played a crucially important role in the standardization of present day Welsh (Lewis 1987; Jones 1998: 270–293; Robert 2011), standard literary Welsh developed in the early modern period largely without deliberate planning, thanks to the specific circumstances of the Welsh Bible translations and their role in Welsh culture.

### Abbreviations

FUT	Future tense
IMPERF	Imperfect tense
PL	Plural
PRT	Preverbal particle
PST	Past tense
SG	Singular

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NLW MS 3B

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### **Vloga Svetega pisma v procesih jezikovne standardizacije na primeru valižanščine**

Prevodi Svetega pisma so imeli ključno vlogo v procesih jezikovne standardizacije, saj so v Svetem pismu uporabljene različice spričo njegove edinstvene avtoritete pogosto obveljale kot standardne, obenem pa je bilo Sveto pismo kot besedilo bolj razširjeno kot drugi teksti, še posebej v Evropi v času renesanse in reformacije, kar je pripomoglo ne le k oblikovanju, temveč tudi k razširjanju na Svetem pismu temelječega jezikovnega standarda. Članek proučuje vlogo Svetega pisma v procesih jezikovne standardizacije, pri čemer se osredotoča na zgodovino valižanščine. Jezik prvega integralnega prevoda Svetega pisma v valižanščino iz leta 1588 na splošno velja za temelj standardne književne valižanščine, čeprav doslej še ni bilo sistematične raziskave o tem, kako se je svetopisemski standard razvil oziroma se uveljavil. Prispevek kritično obravnava tradicionalno, vendar nedokazano stališče, da je bil jezik Svetega pisma iz leta 1588 osnovan v srednjeveškem književnem standardu, uveljavljenem v pesništvu. Namesto tega predlaga alternativno domnevo, in sicer da je svetopisemski jezikovni standard rezultat procesa predelave zgodnejših prevodov, v odnosu do katerih prevod iz leta 1588, ki je naposled postal kanoničen, predstavlja reakcijo, s tem da se izrecno opredeljuje do jezikovnih nedoslednosti in idiosinkrazij, značilnih za zgodnejše prevode Novega testameta in Psalmov.

**Ključne besede:** jezikovna standardizacija, kodifikacija, sociolingvistična variantnost, prevajanje Svetega pisma, valižanščina