

## PEOPLES OF THE BOOK: FROM BIBLE TRANSLATION TO NATIONALISM

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Spring Semester

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Office Hours: TBA

This course offers a historical overview, a multidisciplinary analysis, and a cultural critique of the triangular relationship of religion, language and nationalism. It is centered on the enormous global Bible translation project that is connecting all sides of this triangle. Due to the complexity of the topic, this course is reading-intensive, but previous knowledge of the Bible or any specific languages itself is optional.

We begin with an introduction exploring Jewish and Christian approaches to religion. Jewish studies scholars with their specific sensibility to all three sides of the triangle can provide valuable theory and models, specifically in connection to the Hebrew language and the role of the Bible in human culture in general. Introductory focuses will be on concepts such as authenticity, authority, canonization, civic religion, cultural transfer, essentialism, gendering of education, literacy, sacred texts, *translatio studii*, and translation myths.

This is followed by a historical overview and brief analysis of the waves of Jewish and Christian Bible translations since antiquity, with comparative references to the Qur'an and Muslim contexts.

We then turn our attention to concrete case studies and examples of the actual linguistic and structural impact that Bible translation has already had on languages. The prime implication is the very idea of a fixed "linguistic standard," expressed, for instance, in strict spelling and pronunciation rules. The impact of Bible translation is furthermore evident on linguistics as a whole, notably in terms of academic reference tools. For example, the global *Ethnologue* project of Bible translation and language categorization is shared by Christian missionaries and academic linguists. We also find that specific Bible translations are central to defining communities, via real or imaginary links between religion, language, and nationalism. In fact, communities do not actually have to use the Bible, and it can still define their linguistic or national characteristics and boundaries, such as in the case of Muslim-majority Indonesia, where the official language is based on the world's first colonial translation (Malay, from 1629).

As Bible translation is reaching a historical peak since the twenty-first century, through systematic attempts of providing the book in all human languages, the restructuring of global knowledge via a Biblical filter reaches near-universal proportions. Questioning the powerful ideas of a single national linguistic standard and a fixed sacred text canon opens up a discussion of the triangular relationship between language, nationalism and religion in practice. How can future language communities and contain, and enable members to practice, more than one, or even any number of linguistic standards or religious identities?

Assessment:

Minor assignments: Reading Presentation 20%

Mid Term: Quiz 10%

Final requirement: Paper 6-10 p., Seminar paper 18-25 p., or Referat 8-13 pages long (double-spaced, excluding bibliography) 50%

Participation: 20%

Attendance:

Attendance is mandatory. Students are permitted a maximum of three absences without penalty. Any additional absences will affect the final grade and may result in failure of the course.

Academic conduct:

Plagiarism is taken extremely seriously. Any instance of academic misconduct which includes: submitting someone else's work as your own; failure to accurately cite sources; taking words from another source without using quotation marks; submission of work for which you have previously received credit; working in a group for individual assignments; using unauthorized materials in an exam and sharing your work with other students, will result in failure of the assignment and will likely lead to further disciplinary measures.

March 9: ***Who are the Peoples of the Books?***

Mar 11: ***Patterns in the Humanities? Discussion***

<https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2019/nov/12/history-as-a-giant-data-set-how-analysing-the-past-could-help-save-the-future>

Mar 16: ***Basic Concepts: Religiolinguistics***

Hary, Benjamin and Martin Wein, 2013, "Religiolinguistics: On Jewish-, Christian-, and Muslim-Defined Languages." *International Journal of the Sociology of Language* 220 (Spring, 2013): 85-108.

Mar 18: ***The Politics of Sacred Text Translation***

Wein, Martin and Benjamin Hary, 2014, "Peoples of the Book: Religion, Language, Nationalism, and the Politics of Sacred Text Translation." In *Judaism, Christianity and Islam: Collaboration and Conflict in the Age of Diaspora*. Sander L. Gilman, ed. Hong Kong: Hong Kong UP, 1-34.

Mar 23/25 off

**?March 27, Friday Tour: Bible Lands Museum, Jerusalem and Hebrarabic Linguistic Workshop?**

Mar 30: ***Jewish Identities in Flux: A Prototype***

Charmé, Stuart Z., 2000, "Varieties of Authenticity in Contemporary Jewish Identity." *Jewish Social Studies* 6/2: 133–155.

Funkenstein, Amos, 1996, "The Dialectics of Assimilation." *Jewish Social Studies* 1/2: 1–14.

April 1: ***Global Overview***

Smith, Anthony D., 2003, *Chosen Peoples*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Fishman, Joshua A., 1997, *In Praise of the Beloved Language: A Comparative View of Positive Ethnolinguistic Consciousness*. Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter.

April 20: Erev Yom Hashoah

? April 22: ***Case Studies: Arabic and the Quran***

Ferguson, Charles, 1968, "Myths about Arabic." In *Readings in the Sociology of Language*, edited by Joshua Fishman, 375–81. The Hague: Mouton.

Hary, Benjamin, 2003, "Judeo-Arabic: A Diachronic Reexamination." *International Journal for the Sociology of Language* 163: 61–75.

Apr 27: Erev Yom Hazikaron

Apr 29: Yom Haatzmaut

May 4: ***Case Studies: European Languages and the Bible/Midterm***

Crowley, Tony, 1989, *English and the Politics of Language*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

Wein, Martin, 2009, "Chosen Peoples—Holy Tongues: Religion, Language, Nationalism and Politics in Bohemia and Moravia in the Seventeenth to Twentieth Centuries." *Past and Present* 202: 37–81.

**May 6: *Film*: Samaritan, Julien Menanteau, France 2018, and Optional Special Event TBA?**

**May 8, Friday Tour: Jerusalem Old City, Ramadan and Meah Shearim**

May 11: ***Case Studies: India***

Grierson, G. A., *Linguistic Survey of India, 1898-1928*, <https://archive.org/details/LSIV0-V11>

May 13: ***Case Studies: Africa***

Noss, Philip A., 2004, "Traditions of Scripture Translation: A Pan-African Overview." In *Bible Translation and African Languages*, 7–24. Ed. by Gonsell L. O. R. Yorke and Peter M. Renju. Nairobi, Kenya: Acton Publishers.

Wendland, Ernst R., "The Challenge of Bible Translation in Africa Today," *WLQ*: Volume 80, No. 4.

May 18/20 off

**?May 22, Friday Tour: Jerusalem Day and Eid al Fitr?**

May 25: Student Projects Presentation

May 27: Student Projects Presentation

June 1: Student Projects Presentation

June 3: Student Projects Presentation

June 8: Student Projects Presentation

June 10: Student Projects Presentation

June 15: ***Conclusions***

June 17: ***Fieldwork Preparation***

**June 19-20: Fieldwork Weekend TBA**