



# Translational Contestation of Religious Concepts: A Case of Conversion Narratives

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## Introduction

This study brings together three areas: language, religion, and translation; consequently, it deals with interlocking linguistic, religious, and translational research questions. Broadly speaking, in the first area, it examines linguistic representations of a particular religious experience and linguistic markers of confessional affiliation. In the second area, it focuses on religious factors conducive to certain linguistic phenomena and translational practices. In the third area, it explores the role of translation in the process of religious identity construction and contestation. Of course, considering the scope of this research and the corpus on which it draws, these claims must be somewhat qualified and further contextualized. 'Language' shall hereafter be used predominantly (though not exclusively) with reference to the semantic level; 'religion' shall mostly refer to the confessional distinctions between Roman Catholicism and Evangelical Protestantism; and 'translation' shall only consider the English-Polish interface. Despite these caveats, it is hoped that insights from this case study will have broad relevance to the consideration of ideological and social aspects of translation at large because the particular phenomena explored here are illustrative of tendencies found across various linguistic and confessional contexts.

The corpus analyzed here includes two book-length autobiographical accounts of spiritual progress ultimately involving a faith passage. Originally written in English, and published in the United States, the texts were subsequently translated into Polish and published in Poland. These four texts originated in four different communities positioned against one another in terms of two parameters: language (S[ource]/T[arget]) and religion (E[vangelical]/C[atholic]). What the two source texts (S-E, S-C) have in common is the language and broad

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cultural setting; what sets them apart is the ideological perspective involved in the direction and nature of the spiritual progress described. It is precisely this ideological or confessional perspective, however, that each of them shares with its translation, regardless of the linguistic and cultural differences which constitute in turn a shared background for the two target texts (T-E, T-C). This network of relationships can be represented thus:

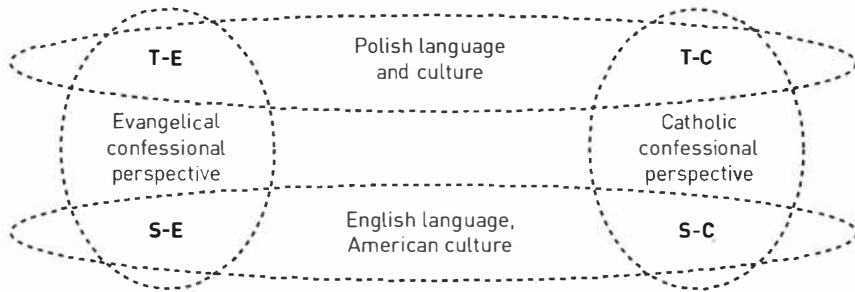


Figure 1. Linguistic, cultural, and confessional dynamics of analyzed texts.

This model sketches several lines of enquiry at the intersection of the three disciplines involved. (1) By focusing on the horizontal dimension (S-area; T-area) we might be able to determine the extent to which certain linguistic and conceptual patterns are shared within the respective languages and cultures, regardless of the confessional affiliation (from this perspective religion is viewed as a subcategory of culture). (2) By focusing on the vertical dimension (E-area; C-area) we might be able to reconstruct specific, conceptual, confessional frameworks shared across languages and cultures (culture is viewed here as a subcategory of religion). (3) A combined, multidimensional perspective might help us to understand the complex and dynamic relationship between language, religion, and translation. In particular, such a perspective may provide insight into (a) the role of translation in pursuing ideological aims derived from religion across linguistic and cultural boundaries, and (b) the role of religious ideology in stimulating and shaping certain translational practices.

As signaled above, the relationship between religion and culture is far from clear and its representation largely depends on one's research angle. For instance, in his book, *Language, Mind, and Culture*, Zoltán Kövecses briefly defines culture as 'a large set of meanings shared by a group of people' (2006, 335). Yet this—provided a specific understanding of 'meanings'—may also serve as a general definition of religion or of a confessional tradition. Likewise, E. B. Taylor's anthropological definition of culture as 'that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society' (Asad 1986/2009, 9) could be readily applied to an established religious system. Moreover, both religious culture and cultural religion are viable concepts, which demonstrate that the two spheres should rather be considered as overlapping, than as one engulfing the other. By exploring the linguistic and translational aspects of both, this study may also further understanding of their interconnectedness.

The theoretical background for analyzing the linguistic data shall be provided by the cognitive paradigm, in particular by cognitive semantics as developed by Lakoff (1987) and

Kövecses (2006), complemented by critical linguistics specifically concerned with the point of view, as elaborated by Simpson (1993). In line with this approach, language will be viewed here, 'as representation, as a projection of positions and perspectives, as a way of communicating attitudes and assumptions' (Simpson 1993, 2). Such an understanding of language leads directly to the consideration of power relations both within and between social groups. Therefore, in discussing translational data, I will be drawing upon theoretical frameworks specifically concerned with these phenomena; in particular, on narrative theory and its central notion of framing, recently introduced to translation studies by Baker (2006 and 2010).

## Source Texts

### *Ideological perspective and targeted readership*

The two source texts analyzed here are Bartholomew F. Brewer's *Pilgrimage from Rome* (1982), hereafter 'S-E', and Scott and Kimberly Hahn's *Rome Sweet Home. Our Journey to Catholicism* (1993), hereafter 'S-C'. These titles alone reveal a common conceptual background but also a significant difference in perspective. In both instances, the change in confessional affiliation and faith-based identity is conceptualized in terms of motion. Motion, of course, is a common conceptual metaphor of spiritual experience, found abundantly across a range of religious traditions. It is noteworthy, however, that both titles have chosen the horizontal profiling of this motion, despite the strongly evaluative character of the vertical axis (purely spiritual improvement without a necessary external manifestation has often been conceptualized in terms of the upward movement, including rising, climbing [a mountain or a ladder], ascending, elevation, etc.). As a result, the confessional and institutional aspects of the progress (rather than the spiritual ones) are foregrounded, especially against the common reference point, Rome. Both titles rely on this metonymic representation of the Roman Catholic Church, viewed as either the source (S-E) or destination (S-C) in the shared SOURCE-PATH-GOAL schema. This distinction reveals a substantial difference between the two books—not just in their confessional allegiance but in the overall ideological perspective. The image-schema underlying the concept 'pilgrimage' foregrounds the destination (often metaphorically identified with purpose); by combining it instead with the source ('from Rome'), the title of S-E violates the default salience of the structural elements of the schema, which results in a conceptual clash calling for a non-standard (e.g., humorous or sarcastic) interpretation of the entire scenario, further reinforced by typographic means<sup>1</sup>. By contrast, the title of S-C coherently complements the image-schema activated by 'journey' with the destination ('to Catholicism'); this is congruent with the titular (and—because of the rhyming pattern—somewhat jocular) scenario of coming home, which also highlights the goal over the source. Summing up, the title of each of these books, by foregrounding different elements of the scenario implicated

<sup>1</sup> The preposition 'from' on the cover and the title page of S-E is set in lowercase and a hand-written style font, while both PILGRIMAGE and ROME are set in uppercase, print-style font (see Figure 2).

by the conceptual metaphor CHANGE OF CONFESSION IS A PASSAGE, announces a different perspective of the respective narratives: S-E signals a backward-looking orientation and unspecified goal of the journey, whereas S-C is forward-looking, with an unspecified point of departure. Consequently, the two narratives become prototypes of an escape and homecoming, respectively.

This perspective has clear implications for the function that may be attributed to each book as well as for their putative readership. Behind any published account of a cross-confessional conversion is a strong ideological impulse and a definite, albeit not always explicit, evaluation of each of the faith communities involved. Even though the overall structure of these narratives (SOURCE-PATH-GOAL) may create an illusion that the authors are guiding their readers through the same process of argumentation or experience that each of them had once found compelling, there is little doubt that it is their current—and not previous—confessional affiliation that defines the spectrum of their readership. Their narratives are organized chronologically but cast in retrospective (the frequency of occurrence of the phrase ‘little did I know’ is quite striking, especially in S-C), which implicitly stresses their current confessional viewpoint. To their former faith communities the authors are often nothing less than apostates and traitors<sup>2</sup>; one may reasonably expect that in those circles their testimony will be dismissed on ideological grounds as untrustworthy. This means that such narratives are in reality addressed to members of the destination faith community.

Such a hypothesized profile of the target readership is immediately confirmed by even a casual glance at the books under analysis in terms of their paratextual framing. S-E, advertised on the front cover as ‘the true story of a Roman Catholic priest’s search for truth’, contains several appendices, including, ‘What the Church Doesn’t Want You to Know About History’ (Appendix A) and, ‘Roman Catholic False Doctrine’ (Appendix B). It also offers readers a glossary, providing explanations for terms such as breviary, cassock, confession, diocese, genuflection, Host, Mass, and sacrament. It is unlikely that Catholic readers would either need the glossary or find the appendices particularly appealing (appalling, rather, considering their titles). S-C, on the other hand, features on the back cover several short recommendations from the Archbishops of New York and Philadelphia, the president of Franciscan University of Steubenville, and from the author of *Evangelical Is Not Enough*. The publisher’s blurb praises the authors for, ‘sharing...all about their conversion to the Catholic Church and the truth and splendor of the Catholic faith’. Similarly, it is unlikely that non-Catholic readers, particularly Evangelicals, would be either selected as strategic marketing targets or attracted by recommendations such as these.

Interestingly, despite this very clear targeting of the audience, both books make numerous attempts to uphold the illusion of engaging with their former faith communities, e.g., ‘O, how I wish that I could tell all my Catholic friends that...I would cry out to them that ...’ (S-E, 94); ‘We also want to share this challenge with our non-Catholic brothers and sisters in Christ’ (S-C, 179). Considering the readership profile discussed above, however, it seems that when the authors appear to be making a case they are in fact trying

<sup>2</sup> Which they repeatedly emphasize in their narratives as evidence, on the one hand, of their own determination in following their conscience, and, on the other hand, of the disingenuousness of their opponents.

to convince those already convinced. It becomes clear that the real function of this type of pseudo-argumentative writing is to assert and foster the confessional identity of the group that supports its publication (and, possibly, to provide arguments for use in proselytizing); a successful appeal to the former faith community to reconsider their doctrinal foundations would require a very different approach. This leads us to the problem of the linguistic representation of confessional affiliation and the faith passage in particular.

### *Semantics of capitalization*

If we were to establish the confessional profile of each of the two source texts solely on the basis on their (para)linguistic properties, one of the most readily available sources of evidence would be the capitalization pattern. Sometimes there is no disagreement between S-E and S-C as regards the capitalization of expressions bearing confessional significance. Regardless of differences in doctrinal positions both texts consistently capitalize terms such as Blessed Sacrament, Eucharist, God's Word, Host, Savior, Scripture and Virgin Mary, in accordance with American spelling conventions, assumed to be shared across the S-area, as prescribed in *The Chicago Manual of Style (CMOS)*. Quite often, however, confessional sympathies and doctrinal differences transpire at the orthographic level. This is particularly evident in S-C, whose doctrinal perspective is manifested in its consistent uppercase spelling of: 'Pope' (without distinction between use for the office and as a title, contrary to CMOS 8.25); 'Rosary' (both the object and the prayer, contrary to CMOS 8.110); as well as 'Catholic Tradition' (vs. 'Protestant tradition'; 'Reformed tradition'), 'Holy Communion' (vs. 'Presbyterian communion'), and 'Catholic Faith' (vs. 'reformed Protestant faith'). The pattern becomes especially noticeable when we compare some descriptions of religious experience before and after the authors' conversion to Catholicism, as in the following example:

(1a) [before] ...I had chances to live out my faith in new ways (S-C, 10)

(1b) [after] ...wept with joy to see me come into the fullness of the Faith (S-C, 163)

The same tendency is illustrated by the capitalization of the noun, 'church' whenever referring to the Roman Catholic Church, not only when part of the formal name (contrary to CMOS 8.97):

(2a) ...Jesus Christ and the Catholic Church which he founded (S-C, xiii)

(2b) ...a book I now believe to be filled with misrepresentations and lies about the Church—entitled *Roman Catholicism* (S-C, 6)

while using lowercase spelling with reference to other denominations (and not just particular congregations):

(2c) ...his ministry in the Presbyterian church (S-C, 1)

(2d) ...a unified witness of all Christian churches (S-C, 27)

(2e) ...that the trial could end in the Episcopal church (S-C, 51)

(2f) ...I found the various Orthodox churches to be hopelessly divided among themselves (S-C, 61).

The prevalence and regularity of this pattern hardly allow us to consider the difference between 'faith' and 'Faith' or 'church' and 'Church' as merely referential. It is also definitely evaluative. From the cognitive perspective, such confessionally sensitive capitalization may be explained semantically in terms of iconicity ('more form, more meaning'). Throughout S-C, among many churches, the Church stands out—even at the level of orthographic representation.

By contrast, S-E relies on ideologically motivated capitalization to a much lesser extent and generally follows the rules set out in *The Chicago Manual of Style*. It refers consistently to the 'Catholic church' but also to the 'Adventist church', 'Lutheran church', and to 'God's true church'; it distinguishes between 'the pope' and 'Pope Gregory VII' as well as 'a mass' and 'the High Mass'. Some traces of its doctrinal emphases may be found in the regular capitalization of personal pronouns referring to God, as well as of certain nouns (e.g., 'Heaven', 'Hell'). Yet this does not seem to highlight any confessional distinctions. Importantly, it does not indicate its confessional position by paralinguistic means, which could be achieved through casting some traditionally Catholic terms in lowercase. Such a practice, indeed, could hardly be considered symmetrical to the capitalization of selected confessionally-significant terms as observed in S-C. Capitalization of a word conventionally spelt in lowercase indicates a special understanding of its meaning or its scope of reference. Deliberate de-capitalization of conventionally uppercase words, on the other hand, usually entails challenging not only their status but also the convention itself. Unconventional capitalization is usually considered defective in stylistic terms—unexpected de-capitalization more readily arouses suspicion of pushing an ideological agenda. Behind this asymmetry, there is a broadly shared psychological basis: granting an unexpected award typically requires less explanation than administering unexpected punishment.

### *Essentially contested conceptualizations*

**T**he fact that some concepts are shared across a linguistic and cultural background does not preclude ideologically based semantic or referential differentiation. Doctrinal and confessional differences, as we have seen, may be signaled by paralinguistic means, e.g., through violation of certain orthographic conventions. More often than not, however, linguistic markers of these differences are not so obvious and the use of common terms by various confessional groups creates an impression of shared conceptual background. In this section, while still focusing on the S-area, we will explore how, in spite of common terminology used to describe the faith passage, the evangelical and Catholic perspectives rely on conflicting conceptualizations, and how these are manifested linguistically.

One of such seemingly shared concepts is that of 'conversion', appearing in both narratives in various linguistic forms. While the *Merriam-Webster's Dictionary*, 18th edition, defines it broadly in the religious sense as 'an experience associated with the definite and decisive adoption of a religion', each of the two authors stresses a different element of that definition and redefines the concept in the course of the narrative, both lexically and grammatically: in particular through various configurations of transitivity. Since the transitivity model provides one means of investigating how a reader's or listener's perception of the meaning of a text is pushed in a particular dimension and how the linguistic structure of the text effectively encodes a particular 'world-view'

(Simpson 1993, 104), let us examine in detail how these seemingly subtle linguistic operations affect the understanding of conversion advocated by each one of the two narratives.

In S-E, the early occurrences of this concept profile external agency and the institutional aspect, either through the passive voice ('suppose a soul were converted to Catholicism on his deathbed' [S-E, 38]) or the transitive use, additionally highlighted by inverted commas ('...our possible attempt to 'convert' him' [S-E, 83]). However, as the description of the faith passage advances, there is a definite shift towards the intransitive use ('I was still... unconverted' [S-E, 88]), culminated in the statement: 'There was nothing sensational, dramatic, or highly emotional about my conversion' (S-E, 93). This demonstrates how S-E at first engages with the latter element of the general definition ('adoption of a religion') and moves towards the former experiential aspect in order to contrast in an evaluative manner the institutional and the personal dimension of this concept. An opposite process is to be observed in the S-C: while initially highlighting the experiential aspect ('I experienced the...power of God's grace in conversion' [S-C, 5]). It subsequently starts to indicate the destination ('my conversion to the Catholic Faith' [S-C, 127]; 'when evangelical Protestants convert to the Catholic Church' [S-C, 165]) and stress the ecclesiastical admission ('If I convert...it won't be until 1990' [S-C, 76]; 'why I do not go ahead and convert' [S-C, 111]). As a result, the redefined understanding of 'conversion' in each of the two books becomes conceptually equivalent to either an inner personal experience (S-E) or a public and official admission to an ecclesiastical body (S-C)<sup>3</sup>. It is regularly referred to in accordance with the preferred conceptualization, i.e., either as 'experiencing salvation' (S-E, 87); 'being born again' (S-E, 119); 'receiving Christ as my Lord and Savior' (S-E, 93), or as 'becoming Catholic' (S-C, 83, 89, 116, etc.); 'being received into the Church' (S-C, 162, 175); 'joining the Church' (S-C, 90, 108, 116, etc.). It is obvious that each of the authors is aware of the alternative conceptualization and attempts to 'correct' it through their narrative<sup>4</sup>.

There are many other examples of ideologically inspired differences in conceptualization in spite of apparent terminological convergence. 'Joining the Church', used profusely and emphatically in S-C as equivalent to 'converting', in S-E is conceived as a completely separate—and relatively insignificant—act of acquiring denominational affiliation ('I joined the church and was baptized by the pastor' [S-E, 88]; note the lowercase in 'church'). Likewise, 'receiving Christ', depending on the concessional affiliation, is understood either in metaphorical terms as a salvific act of commitment (S-E) or in metonymic terms as referring to the sacrament of the Eucharist (S-C). At other times the difference is predomi-

<sup>3</sup> It is noteworthy that Rafael (1987) while discussing 'conversion to Christianity' in the context of Tagalog colonial society quite unsurprisingly understands it in terms of confessional admission rather than inner spiritual experience, which corresponds to the Catholic view of the concept.

<sup>4</sup> This is particularly evident in the *Foreword* to S-C, introducing the 'story of their life and their conversion' (vii)—this sequence alone iconically indicates the ecclesiastical understanding of conversion (which happened relatively late in their life). Even though the *Foreword* then appears to apply this word in a broader sense, almost in line with the evangelical view ('The only story even more dramatic than conversion to Christ's Church is the initial conversion to Christ himself', *ibid.*), this impression is quickly dispelled: 'But these two dramas—becoming a Christian and becoming a Catholic—are two steps in the same process and in the same direction' (vii).



nantly axiological: while S-E is strongly in favor of 'biblical Christianity' as authentic and bowing before no earthly authority, S-C is just as critical of 'Bible Christians', considering them theologically misguided in their rejection of the ecclesiastical tradition. Most dramatically, perhaps, the titular Rome is either viewed as a sinister center of spiritual enslavement (S-E) or a glorious home of the family of faith (S-C).

Let us relate the above observations to the general research questions posed earlier in this paper. We have seen that key religious terms are shared across a linguistic and cultural community only in a very general sense corresponding to a typical, context-independent dictionary definition incapable of elucidating ideologically-based distinctions. Despite using common vocabulary, the respective confessional circles rely on significantly different conceptualizations. In this way, certain religious categories seem to be prototypical examples of what W. B. Gallie (1956) calls 'essentially contested concepts'<sup>5</sup>. This is how he explains the dynamics behind them:

[E]ach party recognizes the fact that its own use of it is contested by those of other parties, and that each party must have at least some appreciation of the different criteria in the light of which the other parties claim to be applying the concept in question. More simply, to use an essentially contested concept means to use it against other uses and to recognize that one's own use of it has to be maintained against these other uses. Still more simply, to use an essentially contested concept means to use it both aggressively and defensively. (Gallie 1956: 174)

This is precisely what we see happening in and between the two source texts discussed here—and the faith communities they represent—as they systematically contest certain religious concepts such as 'church' or 'conversion' through a variety of means. Cognitive linguists confirm that within linguistic and cultural communities alternative conceptualizations are 'extremely common' (Lakoff 1987, 306) and that 'people in every culture are likely to contest many of their categories' (Kövecses 2006, 60). As we raise this problem to the interlingual and intercultural plane, there emerge a number of interesting questions. To what extent do these ideologically sensitive conceptualizations reach across linguistic and cultural boundaries? What role does translation play in this contestation? How are power relations between languages, cultures, and religions manifested in translation?

## Target Texts

It is time to broaden the scope of this discussion by introducing the two target texts, *Pielgrzymka z Rzymu* (1994, no translator named), hereinafter 'T-E', and *W domu na jlepiej* (2009, translated by Mira Majdan), hereafter 'T-C'. In terms of the model proposed in Figure 1, they will be considered both along the vertical axis, i.e., with reference to

<sup>5</sup> Bourdieu makes a very similar point when he writes about the language used with reference to art: 'The majority of notions which artists and critics use to define themselves or their adversaries are indeed weapons and stakes in the struggle... These combative concepts gradually become technical categories...' (1987, 206). Kövecses (2006) discusses a number of linguistic implications of essentially contested concepts using 'art' as an example.

their respective source texts, as well as in the horizontal dimension of their shared linguistic and cultural setting. As before, we will proceed from the most noticeable features to the less transparent ones.

### *Judging a book by its cover*

**B**aker points out that ‘processes of (re)framing can draw on practically any linguistic or non-linguistic resource to set up an interpretive context for the reader... This may include exploiting paralinguistic devices such as...typography’ as well as ‘visual resources such as color, image and layout’ (Baker 2010, 120). Paying no heed to the proverbial warning, I will argue that judging a published text by its formal properties—which is often possible even without knowing the language—may be highly revealing in several respects, including its espoused translation philosophy and the desired framing of the narrative.

At this level, the two translations are indeed very different, as shown in Figure 2.



Figure 2. Front covers of analysed texts. Images reproduced by permission.

Save the language of publication, T-E seeks to imitate its source text in all imaginable aspects. The design of S-E has been meticulously replicated, from the pictures, fonts and colors on the front cover; to the right margin alignment of the three editorial blurbs (translated from the English) on the back cover; to the photographs placed throughout the book; to the page layout (including page header and footnoting). Going to such lengths to produce an iconic representation of the source text, especially before the era of electronic publishing, does reveal a lot about the publisher’s views regarding the status of the source text and the role of translation. It is hardly surprising to note that while the author of the cover photo is credited, the translator is not named. This imitative strategy is of course applied to the title, rendered literally from the English.

T-C, on the other hand, does not try to resemble its source text in visual terms. The cover has a completely different design: instead of the Vatican against sky-blue background (as in S-C), it features a dark lighthouse against the setting sun, which in combination with the title, *W domu najlepiej* (the punch line of the Polish proverb ‘wszędzie dobrze, ale w

domu najlepiej' [lit. 'it is good everywhere but best at home']), renders an image much more universal and symbolically<sup>6</sup> richer than the geographically bound 'Rome sweet home' of the English book. As a result, rather than explicitly announce a conversion story, the title reframes the narrative as one of universally relevant, proverbial homecoming. This reframing is pursued throughout: T-C reproduces none of the photographs found throughout S-C; it replaces the recommendations and endorsements on the back cover with its own editorial blurb; the subtitle only appears on the fifth page (not on the cover); it uses a different set of fonts. Needless to say, the translator is acknowledged in the center of the title page.

These observations alone give grounds to predictions regarding the linguistic properties of the two translations, correlated with their confessional profile. In the evangelical tradition, the source text and author is the ultimate authority, which is to be followed very closely. There is no recognition of differences in readership or in cultural and religious setting; the Polish reader is practically identified with the American reader. The Catholic tradition, by contrast, takes the source book as a sort of raw material to be shaped and molded—or, to use the metaphor preferred by narrative theory, reframed—as the translator and publisher see fit in order to appeal to the target readership. There is virtually no obligation to reproduce the formal features of the source text or endorse all decisions of its author.

### *Paralinguistic evidence*

The above predictions are largely confirmed by paralinguistic data. Against the background of Polish spelling conventions (Polański 2006) and in particular those governing religious terminology (Przybylska and Przychyna 2004), some patterns in both target texts may be observed, indicative of their ideological stance—though not necessarily in the confessional sphere. Interestingly, the tendencies noted above in the source texts (see 2.2) are reversed in their translations. The non-conventional and irregular capitalization pattern found throughout T-E (e.g., *Kościół Katolicki*, *kościół katolicki* ['Catholic church']; *Biblijny* ['biblical']) does not seem to indicate confessional emphases but is the result of a translator following the source text closely and, consequently, the American spelling and typographic conventions, frequently colliding with Polish ones<sup>7</sup>. T-C, on the other hand, in comparison with its source text—which made extensive use of ideologically sensitive capitalization, often contrary to general American conventions—thoroughly complies with Polish spelling principles, using the traditional uppercase for *Kościół* ('church'), whether Catholic or Presbyterian (however rare such occurrences are—see 3.3), and not capitalizing words and expressions such as *tradycja* ('Tradition' in S-C) or *pełnia wiary* ('fullness of the Faith' in S-C). In both cases, these patterns are more indicative of the perception of the role of translation (especially its overall orientation towards either the source text or the target reader) and the power rela-

<sup>6</sup> The lighthouse, because of its function in navigation, is of course a powerful and fairly universal symbol of safety (especially amongst the perils of [sea] travel), homecoming, etc.

<sup>7</sup> This includes the consistent use of opening inverted commas placed in the upper line ('), typical of English texts, even though Polish typographical principles strongly prescribe the lower line variant (,).

tions between the two cultures than of a particular confessional affiliation.

### *Contested concepts in translation*

We have demonstrated above (2.3) that in inter-confessional discourse some religious notions and terms become essentially contested concepts. In the shared linguistic and cultural context of the source texts, this contestation was achieved by paralinguistic means (e.g., capitalization, inverted commas), by gradual redefinition (sometimes leaving some grammatical traces, e.g., transitivity patterns), and by developing evaluative connotations. Let us now examine how these concepts are contested and reframed across linguistic and cultural boundaries, in and through translation.

At the heart of both faith passages described in the source texts is 'conversion'. The first problem involved in discussing the contestation of this concept by the target texts is in itself conceptual because its Polish equivalent, *nawrócenie*, is not separately accounted for in the consulted dictionaries (Dubisz 2006; Dunaj 1999; Szymczak 1978) except in the verbal form, *nawrócić*. Even though the nominal derivative *nawrócenie* does occur in Polish religious discourse and is occasionally defined in specialist publications (e.g., Chmielewski 2002), the lack of a separate nominal entry in Polish dictionaries seems to indicate a degree of conceptual—and not just terminological—incommensurability between both languages and cultures involved. As Wierzbicka convincingly argues, 'the concept of religious experience, so characteristic of the English-language literature on religion, is often treated by this literature as universal' (2010, 71) while in fact it is strongly 'Anglocentric' (2010, 72). Consequently, an experiential understanding of conversion, embraced by the evangelical perspective, is far less likely in Polish than it is in English. This is confirmed by the standard dictionary definition of the verb *nawrócić*. In addition to the primary, spatial sense drawn from the word's etymology (the unprefixated verb *wrócić* means 'to return')<sup>8</sup>, the transitive form is defined as 'to persuade somebody to change their confession' (or, more generally, 'their views') and the reflexive form as 'to change one's confession' (or 'views') (Dubisz 2006). In contrast to the definition of the religious sense of 'conversion' in English (see 2.3), the Polish word puts a definite emphasis on the confessional aspect, with no indication of any previous or accompanying spiritual experience. Such an understanding of *nawrócenie*, of course, is congruent with the conceptualization of religious 'conversion' as predominantly denominational accession, promoted by S-C. Moreover, against the etymological background it may be argued that *nawrócenie* prototypically consists of a return to what is one's true home, possibly after going astray—note the titles of both S-C and T-C!—not unlike in the parable of the Prodigal Son (Luke 15:11-32).

All this tips the conceptual scales of *nawrócenie* in favor of the Catholic view and the translator of T-C takes full advantage of it. Sometimes, when 'conversion' could possibly

<sup>8</sup> The primary meaning of *nawrócić* is divided into three sub-entries: (1) 'to turn towards a previous place; to reappear'; (2) 'to direct someone or somebody or something to a previous position'; (3) 'to refer to what has been spoken of, thought of, etc.' (Dubisz 2006).

be understood in the experiential and spiritual sense, T-C substitutes other concepts, e.g., *poznanie* ('knowing'); otherwise it not only translates 'conversion' as *nawrócenie* but also quite regularly alternates it with *zmiana wyznania* ('change of confession') and *przejęcie na katolicyzm* ('transfer to Catholicism')<sup>9</sup>. In fact, not only is 'conversion' in T-C given a clear direction and unmistakably confessional setting but also in several instances there is a remarkable shift in agency:

(3) ...they *came* into the Church (S-C, 144; emphasis added)—*zostali przyjęci* do Kościoła ('were received into the church') (T-C, 201; emphasis added)

(4) ...to *become* Catholic (S-C, 156; emphasis added)—*zostać przyjęta* do Kościoła katolickiego ('to be received to the Catholic church') (T-C, 221; emphasis added).

This change from the active to the passive voice creates a radically different construal of the scene, with the initiative and authority resting with the receiving church. Sometimes the shift is more subtle but no less suggestive:

(5)...I decided to be received into the Church (S-C, 159)—*zdecydowałam się prosić* o przyjęcie do Kościoła katolickiego ('I decided to *ask* for being received to the Catholic church') (T-C, 221; emphasis added).

In short, in its handling of the concept of 'conversion', T-C not only continues the contestation pursued by its source text but also takes it to a new level of precision—though, as we have seen, it is partially aided by the semantic profile of the word *nawrócenie* in Polish.

This means that the translator of T-E faces a more difficult task, and has to work, as it were, against the linguistic odds. Bound by the policy of closest possible adherence to the source text on all levels, he or she regularly translates all mentions of 'conversion' by *nawrócenie*, regardless of the contestation involved. This in several instances leads to forms and uses conceptually incongruent with the dictionary definition of *nawrócenie*, as in the following example:

(6) I was still... unconverted (S-E, 88)—*nadal... nie byłem nawrócony* ('still... I was not converted') (T-E, 116).

The incongruence stems from the fact that changing one's confession is a singular and volitional act while the participial expression *nie być nawrócony* ('not to be converted') profiles both a stable state and external agency required to change it. As a result of this conceptual clash, the grammatical acceptability of this phrase is debatable, which creates an impression that T-E is forcing foreign (namely, English) morphosemantic patterns onto the Polish system. This in itself, of course, may be a method of engaging in conceptual contestation by invoking the witness of an authoritative source language and its conceptualization of the experience in question.

Another important concept contested in translation is 'church'. In Polish the generic word *kościół*—just like 'church' in English—is used in various confessional circles to designate (a) the body of believers, (b) a particular church community, or (c) a church building.

<sup>9</sup> The latter expression is also offered in numerous instances throughout T-C as translation of 'to join the Catholic church' and 'to become Catholic'.

Among some Protestant groups, however, it is customary to use the word *zbór* ('congregation'), often self-referentially, in sense (b) and, by way of metonymy, (c). *Zbór*, derived from the reflexive verb *zbierać się* ('to gather'), profiles the non-hierarchical, i.e. congregational organization of many Protestant churches—which has resulted in its exclusively Protestant connotations—but precisely because of this profile it clashes with the general, abstract sense (a). This distinction is applied effortlessly in T-E which correctly alternates between *zbór* and *kościół* when translating 'church'. The translator of T-C, however, is evidently unfamiliar with details of this differentiation and uses the term *zbór* indiscriminately, enticed by its Protestant connotations, even when denominations are referred to in S-C (e.g., 'mainstream churches' is mistranslated as *wiodących zborów* ['leading congregations']). This only in part stems from ignorance; a more fundamental reason is revealed by a very sparing use of the word *kościół* in non-Catholic contexts throughout T-C. Indeed, it almost seems as if the designation *Kościół presbiteriański* ('Presbyterian church') amounted to violating the semantic range of the word.<sup>10</sup> There is little doubt that the translator is here assuming the role of an ideological gatekeeper—to borrow Martha Cheung's evocative metaphor—who 'allows certain words, terms, phrases or expressions, as it were, get through the gate and keep out others' (1998: 266). This translational strategy is practically tantamount to the use of the adjective *real* in expressions such as 'a real man,' 'real courage' or 'a real masterpiece'<sup>11</sup>; as Bourdieu points out, 'in all these examples, the word 'real' implicitly contrasts the case under consideration to all other cases in the same category, to which other speakers assign, although unduly so (that is, in a manner not 'really' justified) this same predicate' (1987: 206). Consequently, *kościół* in T-C becomes a concept contested by linguistic means—much like in S-C by paralinguistic means (see 2.2)—and therefore chiefly reserved in referential terms to only one confessional community.

At other times, conceptual contestation revealing confessional sympathies and doctrinal position may be introduced in translation where there was none in the source text. The name Mary in Polish has two variants: the archaic form *Maryja* (three syllables, stress on the middle one) and the contemporary form *Maria* (two syllables, the first one stressed). Contrary to what one might expect, the difference between them is not stylistic but referential, with the former used exclusively of the Holy Virgin and only the latter used as a proper name. This is a prime example of how religion at times finds expression in the structures of language. The Catholic doctrine insists on the linguistic recognition of the Virgin Mary's unique status; Protestants put her on a linguistically equal footing with all other Marys. Faced with this distinction, absent in English, the two translations make their doctrinal position—at least in terms of the Marian devotion—immediately clear, though at the expense of the credibility of the chronological unfolding of their narratives.

<sup>10</sup> These reservations are reflected in popular dictionary definitions which typically assume the Catholic perspective as the cultural norm. For instance, Dubisz (2006) defines the collocation *chodzić do kościoła* ('to go to church') as 'to be a [religiously] practicing person; to take part in the Holy Mass on a regular basis.'

<sup>11</sup> Austin argues that, 'we should insist always on specifying with what 'real' is being contrasted—'not what' I shall have to show it is, in order to show it is 'real': and then usually we find some specific, less fatal, word, appropriate to the particular case, to substitute for 'real' (1979, 88).

(Whilst still a Roman Catholic priest, Brewer, in the Polish translation, appears strangely irreverent toward Mary; Hahn, on the contrary, whilst still a Presbyterian minister, shows her rather unexpected reverence).

Finally, certain concepts may be contested somewhat unknowingly when one party fails to recognize what is of vital importance to the other party and effectively treads on its conceptual toes. This is apparently the case with the designation 'evangelical'. It is used profusely in S-C as a broad, non-confessional label for a fundamental branch of Protestantism. T-C with remarkable consistency translates it as *ewangelicki*, which in Polish for historical reasons is exclusively reserved for the Lutheran church (officially named *Kościół Ewangelicko-Augsburski*). The problem is further complicated by the fact that in the opinion of many fundamental Evangelicals in Poland, the Lutheran church is considered liberal and therefore not 'evangelical' at all (in their understanding of the term, of course—here's yet another instance of an essentially contested concept). Instead, the preferred adjectives used by fundamentalists in self-descriptions are *ewangeliczny* (which also recently has acquired some denominational connotations by appearing in official names of several churches and organizations) and *ewangelikalny*. By being grossly ignorant of the intricate dynamics of the Polish evangelical terminology, T-C confuses its readers by misrepresenting the affiliation of the opposing faith community and effectively—though, perhaps, inadvertently—challenges its identity.

From the perspective of narrative theory, the translational phenomena discussed in this section may be viewed as cases of framing by labeling. Using a label 'pointing to or identifying a key element or participant in the narrative', they seek to provide 'an interpretative frame that guides and constraints our response to the narrative in question' (Baker 2006, 122). In both accounts, conversion is clearly framed as progression from an inferior to a superior faith community.

## Conclusion

**H**aving discussed some specific linguistic and translational phenomena at play in the four texts as well as in their contexts, let us now assume a broader perspective of relationships and tensions between the confessional and linguistic constituencies emerging from the model proposed earlier (Figure 1). Though helpful in envisioning the general dynamics, this model may also suggest false symmetry and balance along both the horizontal and vertical axes. In reality, some balance only seems to hold across the S-area, i.e., between the evangelical and Catholic communities in the United States, with both enjoying a strong identity but neither one dominating the other. This relative confessional equilibrium is reflected in a broad semantic and referential range of certain religious concepts in English (including 'church' and 'conversion') which are not tilted towards any particular confessional option within Christianity; rather, they are prone to contestation and negotiation in similar measure by all parties. As a result, each of the source texts examined here is just as linguistically English, and just as culturally American as the other, notwithstanding their respective confessional markers.

The Polish religious context, in turn, is radically different, since the dominating posi-

tion of the Catholic Church is strongly reflected in the linguistic and cultural conventions. In this setting, the evangelical community, representing a very small minority, tends to view translation as a powerful tool of asserting and reinforcing its confessional identity. This is achieved through temporal and spatial framing which ‘involves selecting a particular text and embedding it in a temporal and spatial context that accentuates the narrative it depicts and encourages us to establish links between it and current narratives that touch our lives’ (Baker 2006, 112). Through translation, of conversion narratives in particular, the minority group is able to build an identity link with a context in which its beliefs enjoy a strong and respectable position, effectively establishing itself, as it were, as a diplomatic post of a foreign empire. Such a perception has far-reaching consequences. It leads to a highly imitative translation practice—since ‘this type of embedding requires no further intervention in the text itself’ (Baker 2006, 112)—and, consequently, to elevating the status not only of the source text and author, but also of the source language and culture at the expense of the receiving community. When the two cultures and languages collide, preference is typically given to the foreign over the domestic, as illustrated by English conceptual models as well as linguistic and paralinguistic conventions repeatedly overriding Polish ones in T-E. One such clash is particularly dramatic. T-E, following closely its source text, uncritically repeats the historically absurd phrase ‘Polish concentration camps’ (T-E, 161) for which Western media are regularly taken to task by Polish diplomatic services! This strategy of identity reinforcement through translation is very costly in cultural terms and likely to result in an even stronger alienation of the minority group, which is often perceived by a majority of the target culture as willingly succumbing to, indeed, inviting, foreign imperialism. In societies dominated by one religious option, such a use of translation creates an inevitable tension between the religious and cultural aspects of the wider national identity.

The same power dynamics are manifested in a markedly different character of the translation produced by and for a majority group. The dominant status of Catholicism in Poland and the resulting strong sense of religious and cultural identity are reflected in the authoritative and largely autonomous role of the translator (as well as editor and publisher) who does not feel the pressure to be bound by the linguistic and editorial properties of the source text. Instead, there is another kind of ideological pressure, often formalized through an official censorship process applying to Catholic publications (as is the case with T-C, bearing the imprimatur of the ecclesiastical authorities supervising the publisher), to promote a positive image of the faith community, which directly impacts the target text, either at the stage of translation or editorial adjustment. (For example, T-C rather conveniently omits the sentence, ‘And it was the Catholics who could outdrink and outswear me before I became a Christian, so I knew how much help they needed’ [S-C, 6]). The sense of the dominant position also finds expression in a rather ignorant—or arrogant, as the minority could argue—handling of certain concepts and distinctions vital for the marginalized group. In short, translating from a hegemonic position in the target culture contributes both to a further elevation of one’s status and to a further marginalisation of one’s opponents. This brings to mind the painfully realistic biblical principle: ‘For whoever has will be given more, and they will have an abundance. Whoever does not have, even what they have will be taken from them’ (Matthew 25:29, New International Version). Translation turns out to be a powerful means of executing this principle.



Even though this study only examines two translations in detail, they are representative of a larger body of publications. Here is yet another instance of asymmetry, for it is the minority group that has produced translations of a large number of conversion narratives<sup>12</sup>. In view of its comparatively small overall publishing output, the decision to select these texts for translation reveals the importance attributed by Polish Evangelicals to apologetic writings upholding their religious identity. Polish Catholic publishers, on the other hand, have translated relatively little of foreign apologetic works—and the few translations have only been published very recently<sup>13</sup>. Considering the confessional distribution in Poland, the Catholic community historically did not need translation to preserve its sense of identity or spread its teaching, having no shortage of indigenous authors and writings. By contrast, the evangelical community in Poland historically has heavily relied on translation; until lately, books offered by evangelical publishers were almost exclusively translations.

It hardly comes as a surprise that the linguistic, translational, and editorial tendencies identified above are correlated to some religious convictions held in the respective faith communities—in particular, to their doctrinal positions regarding the status of the Christian Scriptures. On the one hand, the fundamentalist evangelical insistence on the verbal inspiration of the Bible, and consequently on its inerrancy, naturally favors a very strong orientation toward the source text, a high view of the original author, and very low of the translator (often to the point of complete invisibility), as well as an imitative translation method. The Catholic recognition of the vital role of the ecclesiastical tradition in doctrinal matters and especially in interpreting the Scripture, on the other hand, correlates with a far more flexible approach to the source text and a considerably greater degree of autonomy on the part of the translator-interpreter.

Throughout this paper, I have sought to demonstrate that an exploration into the dynamics of publication and translation of conversion narratives—which are a pseudo-persuasive (auto)biographical text-type centered around conceptual contestation—requires a broad and inclusive research perspective. One must take account of linguistic, cultural, religious, historical, social, and possibly a number of other factors—as well as the intricate and often entangled relationships between them. This inevitably leads to a reassessment of some traditional distinctions (for instance, between religion and culture or between the confessional and national identity), much in line with the idea of transdisciplinarity. Consequently, this study may be thought of as offering an empirical case for a transdisciplinary approach to the study of translation.

<sup>12</sup> For example: Richard Bennett and Martin Buckingham, *Daleko od Rzymu ... blisko Boga*, 1994 (originally published as *Far From Rome Near to God*); Esther Gulshan and Thelma Sangster, *Rozdarta zasłona*, 1995 (originally published as *Torn veil*); Rabi Maharaj, *Śmierć guru*, no date (originally published as *Death of a Guru*); Stan Telchin, *Zdradzony*, 1985 (originally published as *Betrayed!*); Louis Vogel, *Moje świadectwo*, no date (originally published as *Mein Zeugnis*).

<sup>13</sup> For example: Ronald A. Knox, *Ukryty strumień*, 2005 (originally published as *The Hidden Stream*); Scott Haln, *Przyczyny wiary: Jak rozumieć i wyjaśnić i wyjaśnić i jak występować w jej obronie*, 2009 (originally published as *Reasons to Believe: How to Understand, Explain, and Defend the Catholic Faith*).

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