

Chapter 8

Translating the untranslatable: Hebrew idioms in Maltese translations of the Bible

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The present paper aims to examine selected Biblical Hebrew idioms and their equivalents used in three translations of the Bible into Maltese: *Il-Bibbja* translated by P.P. Saydon, *Il-Bibbja* published by Għaqda Biblika Maltija and *Il-Bibbja Mqaddsa* published by Trinitarian Bible Society. Some Biblical idioms are foreign to modern languages' ways of expression. Nevertheless, the widely used translations preserved many remote Hebrew idioms in multilingual versions of the Bible. Both Hebrew and Maltese are Semitic languages. They share basic vocabulary, some ways of expressions, even some idioms, especially those which connect the Biblical tradition with the Maltese Christian cultural background. For that reason many idioms have been translated into Maltese literally. Still many of those phrases cannot be understood without a comment. In some cases the translation of Għaqda Biblika Maltija provides the dynamic renderings of such idioms when the other two don't, e.g. 1 Sam 24:4 וַיֵּבֶא שָׁאוּל לְהִסָּךְ אֶת־רַגְלָיו *way-yāḇō šā'ûl lə-hāsēk 'et-raḡlāw*, lit. 'and Saul went in to cover his feet', i.e. 'to relieve himself', is rendered respectively as *u daħal Sawl jgħatti riġlejh* (lit.) and *u Sawl daħal fih biex jaqdi l-bżonnijiet tiegħu* (dyn.). Other idioms remain rendered literally in all the translations, e.g. וְאַתָּה לֹא תִגְלֶה וְעֵרֹת אֲחֹת אִמִּי וְעֵרֹת אֲחֹת אָבִיךָ *wə-'erwat 'āḥôt 'immākā wə-'āḥôt 'āḇikā lō taḡallē*, lit. 'and you shall not uncover the nakedness of your mother's sister, nor of your father's sister', i.e. 'you will have no sexual relations...', is rendered as *La tikxifx l-għera ta' oħt ommok jew oħt missierek*, or even following the Hebrew syntax as *Lanqas l-għera ta' oħt ommok jew ta' oħt missierek ma għandek tikxef*. Many such solutions resemble the classical Van Dyke's Arabic way of translation of the Bible.

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1 Introduction

Although translations of the Bible into Maltese were undertaken already in the first half of the 19th century, these were usually parts of the New Testament, translated from the Vulgata (*Il-Bibbja* 1995: 1957: 2, 4; Cachia 1994: 106-108; Sciberras 2018: 54-56).

Only in the 20th century did the Maltese have the entire Bible (i.e. the Old and New Testament) translated, including two Catholic translations from the original languages: Hebrew, Aramaic

and Greek, and one Protestant translation from English. Catholic translations also include the deuterocanonical books, omitted in the Protestant translation.

In 1959, Maltese Roman Catholic priest and linguist Pietru Pawl Saydon published a translation of the Bible in Maltese from Hebrew and Greek (Il-Bibbja 1995: vii; Cachia 1994: 271).

However, Saydon produced a translation that did not reflect the biblical text in spoken Maltese: “Maltese scholars who have critically analysed Saydon’s text have concluded that he had produced a translation for the scholar’s desk, where one would have dictionaries and grammars at hand in order to correctly understand Saydon’s translation” (Sciberras 2018: 51). “With respect to vocabulary he did not think it twice to call back to life obsolete words or to give their original Semitic meaning to living words; e.g. *ġebel*, ‘mountain’, not ‘stone’; *leħħ*, ‘to insist’, not ‘to flash’, *għelm* is used in the sense of ‘knowledge, science’, besides its ordinary meaning of ‘sign’. (...) the construct case takes the place of the colloquial *ta’* construction” (Sant 1961: 13). Therefore, the rest of the translation of these liturgical texts used the more colloquial Maltese. Saydon himself preferred to use pure Maltese vocabulary (*Malti safi*): “I have invariably avoided all foreign words for which there is a purely Maltese-Semitic equivalent” (Abela 2002: 7).

The completed work resulted in a mixture of the two forms of Maltese diction (Sciberras 2018: 50-51). Saydon’s choice of vocabulary of Semitic origin and its systematic avoidance of words of Romance origin and differences in word order between the Saydon Bible (VSO) and the modern Maltese language (SVO) may explain why Saydon’s text did not ultimately become the basis for liturgical readings. Saydon alone, after translation of the five books of the Pentateuch published in 1931 a short dictionary containing 222 difficult words that can be found in them (Sciberras 2018: 58). That may explain why Maltese readers perceived the Saydon Bible rather difficult to understand even if vocabulary issues have been explained beforehand (Abela 2002: 7, 125-127). However, Saydon’s edition of the Bible was republished in three volumes (1976, 1982, 1990) and then in a single-volume version in 1995 with introductions and new notes for each book (Il-Bibbja 1995: vii).

In 1980, Karmnu Żammit published a single-volume Protestant translation of the Bible according to the English Authorized Version (Il-Bibbja Mqaddsa 2006; Cachia 1994: 271).

In 1984, the first edition of the Maltese Bible Society Bible, a one-volume work appeared, to become one of the most popular translations into Maltese (Il-Bibbja 2013: xi; Schembri 2003: 19). It was a fresh translation of the entire Bible from the original languages into spoken Maltese; those Biblical texts are now widely used in the Catholic liturgy in Maltese (Sciberras 2018: 59). So far, five editions of this Bible have been published (1984, 1996, 2004, 2011 and 2020).

As with the translation of the Bible into other languages, in the case of translation into Maltese the dominant methodology was formal-equivalence translation. The translators tried to convey the meaning of each word in Maltese, sometimes maintaining the original syntax and sentence structure (Abela 1996: 25; Sciberras 2018: 57-59). This is especially visible in Saydon’s translation (Abela 2002: *passim*). Because this means that the recipient must deal with sometimes incomprehensible idioms, some Biblical scholars and/or translators recommend to use a dynamic-equivalence or functional-equivalence translation as well, or even to convert ancient weights or measures, currency values, the time of the day, etc. (Holy Bible 2004: 9, 12-14). That translation focuses on translating the message of the original-language text. Usually, the purely dynamic-equivalence translation may create a fear of deviating from the message of

the original, on the other hand, formal-equivalence translation may turn out to be completely incomprehensible to the average recipient (Holy Bible 2004: A11).

However, we must remember that the tradition of formal-equivalence translation in the countries that adopted Latin culture and Christianity in the Western Latin rite was consolidated by referring to subsequent versions of the Vulgate and their revisions (e.g. the Clementine Vulgate of 1592). The influence of the Vulgate was visible in both Catholic translations of the Bible and their Protestant counterparts. Therefore, sometimes even incomprehensible idioms have been preserved as standard phrases used for centuries in translations into native languages via Latin.

2 Hebrew Idioms in Maltese Translations of the Bible

For research purposes, I have selected 35 Hebrew biblical idioms in 30 quotations. I provided them with a translation, explanation and/or commentary. The numbers in parentheses refer to sentences or phrases in the Hebrew Bible and their translations discussed below. The examples in the table are arranged according to the order of the Hebrew alphabet.

Table 1: Discussed examples of Hebrew idioms and euphemisms

No.	Hebrew	Transcription	Explanation and Commentary
(13)	אֲכַפְּרָה פָּנָיו בַּמִּנְחָה	<i>'ăḵpārâ pānāw bam-minḥâ</i>	'Let me cover over his face by the present', so that he does not see the offence, i.e. pacify him (Brown et al. 1951: 497)
(13)	אֶרְאֶה פָּנָיו	<i>'ar'e pānāw</i>	'I will see his face'; to see one's face, i.e. to appear before one, in one's presence (Brown et al. 1951: 816)
(10)	אֶשָּׂא בְשָׁרִי בְשִׁנִּי	<i>'eśsâ bəšārî bə-šinnāy</i>	'I take my flesh in my teeth', i.e. I risk my life (Brown et al. 1951: 1042)
(27)	בְּיָד רָמָה	<i>bə-yāḏ rāmā</i>	'with an high (raised) hand', i.e. boldly, defiantly; figuratively of hand as of symbol of might (Brown et al. 1951: 389, 926)
(8)	בְּנִיתִי לוֹ בֵּית נֶאֱמָן	<i>bānîṭî lô bayîṭ ne'ēmān</i>	'I built him a sure house', 'I will build him...', to build a house = perpetuate and establish a family (Brown et al. 1951: 109, 124)
(3)	בָּשָׂר	<i>bəśar</i>	'flesh, i.e. male organ of generation (euphemism) = penis' (Brown et al. 1951: 142)
(21)	הֲאִנִּי אֱלֹהִים אֲנִכִּי	<i>hă-ṭaḥaṭ 'ēlōhîm 'ānōkî</i>	'am I instead of God?', in transferred sense: in place of, instead of (Brown et al. 1951: 1065)
(11)	וַיַּחֲזֶק אֶת־יָדוֹ בְּאֱלֹהִים	<i>wa-yəḥazzēq 'et yāḏô bēlōhîm</i>	'and strengthened his hand in God'; to strengthen the hand of anyone = to sustain, encourage (Brown et al. 1951: 304)

No.	Hebrew	Transcription	Explanation and Commentary
(24)	וַיַּכְבֵּד אֶת-לִבּוֹ	<i>way-yakbēd 'et libbô</i>	'he hardened his heart', i.e. he became stubborn, unresponsive (Brown et al. 1951: 457-458, 525)
(20)	וַיִּשָּׂא רַגְלָיו	<i>way-yiśśā raġlāw</i>	'he lifted up his feet'; to lift = to set out, in order to hold, carry away (Brown et al. 1951: 670, 920)
(29)	וַיִּשְׁלֶךְ אֶת-נַפְשׁוֹ מִנֶּגֶד	<i>way-yašlēk 'et naṣṣô minneġed</i>	'and he flung away his life in front (or straight away)', i.e. hazarded it (Brown et al. 1951: 617)
(9)	וַיִּתְהַלֵּךְ חֲנוּךְ אֶת-הָאֱלֹהִים	<i>way-yithallēk ḥănôk 'et hā-'ēlōhîm</i>	'Enoch walked with God' (denoting intimacy, fellowship), i.e. he lived in close fellowship with God (Brown et al. 1951: 394)
(5)	יָדַע אֶת-חַוָּה אִשְׁתּוֹ	<i>yāda 'et-ḥawwâ 'istô</i>	'he knew his wife, Eve', i.e. he knew her carnally = he has sexual relations with her (Brown et al. 1951: 394)
(6)	יֹדֵעַ יְהוָה יְמֵי תַּמִּימִם	<i>yôde'a YHWH yāmê tāmîmim</i>	'The Lord knows the days of the innocents' = he takes notice of them, regards them. i.e. he takes care of them (Brown et al. 1951: 394)
(25)	יִפְרֹשׂ אֶת-כַּפָּיו	<i>yiprôs 'et kappāw</i>	'he will spread out his hands' in prayer, as a sign of longing to receive (Brown et al. 1951: 496, 831)
(13)	יִשָּׂא פָנַי	<i>yiśśā pānāy</i>	'he will lift up my face', i.e. he will be gracious to me (Brown et al. 1951: 670)
(17)	יִשָּׂא פָרְעָה אֶת-רֹאשִׁךָ	<i>yiśśā pār'ô 'et-rōšekā</i>	'Pharaoh will lift up your head', i.e. he will restore you to honor (Brown et al. 1951: 670)
(22)	יָשִׁית יָדוֹ עַל-עֵינֶיךָ	<i>yāšît yādô 'al 'ēneykā</i>	'he shall put his hand upon your eyes' (Brown et al. 1951: 1011), i.e. he will be present at your death, he will take care of your burial
(14)	לֹא יִגְלֶה כְּנָף אָבִיו	<i>lō yaġalle kənap 'ābîw</i>	'he will not uncover his father's skirt', i.e. extremity of garment, its corner or loose flowing end (Brown et al. 1951: 163, 489)
(2)	לְהַסֵּךְ אֶת-רַגְלָיו	<i>la-hāsēk 'et-raġlāw</i>	'to cover his feet', euphemism for evacuating the bowels, i.e. defecate (Brown et al. 1951: 697)
(27)	לְעֵינַי	<i>la-'ênê</i>	'on sight of', i.e. in the presence of, in full view of (Brown et al. 1951: 745)
(18)	לִפְנֵי יְהוָה	<i>li-pānê YHWH</i>	'before the Lord/ in the presence of him', i.e. in the sight (estimation) of the Lord = in the world (Brown et al. 1951: 816-817)

No.	Hebrew	Transcription	Explanation and Commentary
(30)	מה לי ולך	<i>ma lî wā-lāk</i>	In the formula of repudiation, or emphatic denial: ‘what is there (common) to me and to you?’, i.e. what have I to do with you? (Brown et al. 1951: 496)
(7)	מצחק את רבקה אשתו	<i>maṣahēq ’et ribqā ’ištō</i>	‘toying with Rebekah, his wife’ (of conjugal caresses) = caressing her (Brown et al. 1951: 850).
(10)	נפשי אשים בכפי	<i>naṣṣî ’āšîm ba-kappî</i>	‘I have taken my life in my hand’, i.e. I hazarded it (Brown et al. 1951: 496)
(19)	נקיון כף	<i>niqyōn kaṭ</i>	‘cleanness of palm’, figuratively for purity of act, freedom from guilt, innocence (Brown et al. 1951: 496, 667)
(26)	נשאתי את ידי	<i>nāṣātî ’et yādî</i>	‘I raised my hand’ in oath (Brown et al. 1951: 389, 670)
(15)	ערוות אחות אמן לא תגלה	<i>erwat ’āhôt ’ammā lō tēgallē</i>	‘You shall not uncover the nakedness of your mother’s sister’, chiefly euphemism for cohabitation, i.e. sexual relations (Brown et al. 1951: 163, 788-789)
(23)	ערל שפתים	<i>’āral šəpātāyim</i>	‘uncircumcised of lips’ figuratively of incapacity to speak; unskilled in speech (Brown et al. 1951: 790, 973)
(12)	ערלה אזנם	<i>’ārēlā ’oznām</i>	‘their ear is uncircumcised’, figuratively of incapacity to hear/listen, i.e. to be unreceptive (Brown et al. 1951: 24, 790)
(28)	ערף יפנו לפני	<i>ōreṭ yipnû li-ṭānē</i>	‘they turned back (back of neck) before (someone)’, fleeing from the foe (Brown et al. 1951: 791)
(4)	פני ילכו	<i>pānay yēlēkû</i>	‘my face = my presence will go’ – to go personally (Brown et al. 1951: 229-230, 815-816)
(21)	פרי בטן	<i>ṭarî beṭen</i>	‘the fruit of the womb’, i.e. offspring (Brown et al. 1951: 106)
(1)	רמה קרני ביהוה	<i>rāmâ qarnî ba-YHWH</i>	‘my horn is lifted up in the Lord = the Lord has made me strong’ – to be/become strong and powerful, denoting increase of might, dignity (Brown et al. 1951: 901-902, 926-927)
(16)	שער הרגלים	<i>ša’ar hā-raġlāyim</i>	‘the hair of the legs’, i.e. of genitals (Brown et al. 1951: 972); “the hair of the feet”, moreover, is a euphemism for the shaving of genital hair, all the more to contribute to humiliation (Brueggmann 1998: 73)
(19)	תם לבב	<i>tām labāb</i>	‘completeness of heart’, i.e. integrity of mind (Brown et al. 1951: 1070)

texts fully vocalized (I only omitted the accents) and transcribed them. I used the Authorized (King James) Version (henceforth: The Holy Bible 1953) as the closest English translation (a). In cases of deviations from the original, I marked it in the comment. Since idioms usually require more explanation, I used the mostly dynamic New Living Translation (b). I also used the Arabic translation of the Bible (the so-called Van Dyck version), in my own transcription, based on the ZDMG tradition, as a comparative material (c). I compared them with their versions in the three Maltese Bible translations mentioned above: the Saydon version (d), the Trinitarian Bible Society version (e) and the Għaqda Biblika Maltija version (f). The translations of the Latin, Maltese and Arabic texts are my own and I am solely responsible for possible errors.

(1) 1 Samuel 2:1

רָמָאֵה קַרְנִי בַיהוָה *rāmâ qarnî ba-YHWH* (Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia 1997: 445)

- a) *mine horn is exalted in the LORD* (The Holy Bible 1953: 321)
- b) *The LORD has made me strong* (Holy Bible 2004: 212)
- c) *ʔirtafaʕa qarnî bir-rabbi* (Al-Kitāb al-muqaddas 1982: 427) ‘My horn rose in the Lord’
- d) *jirtefa’ qarni b’Alla tiegħi* (Il-Bibbja 1995: 225) ‘my horn is lifted up with my God’
- e) *qarni rtafa’ bil-Mulej* (Il-Bibbja Mqaddsa 2006: 204) ‘my horn was lifted up by the Lord’
- f) *irtefgħet rasi fil-Mulej* (Il-Bibbja 2013: 304) ‘my head was raised in the Lord’ [*Irtefgħet rasi: literalment: il-qarn tiegħi, simbolu ta’ qawwa u saħħa* ‘My head was raised: literally: my horn, a symbol of power and strength’]

The Maltese translations use VIII form of the root $\sqrt{\text{RFG}h}$, usually rendered by passive voice forms ‘to be lifted, to be raised’ (Aquilina 1990: 1199), Arabic VIII form has active meaning; d) and e) follow the original literally, only f) replaced rather ambiguous *qarni* ‘my horn’ with *rasi* ‘my head’. The use of the word *Mulej* is closer to the tradition of rendering Hebrew YHWH by Lord.

(2) 1 Samuel 24:4

וַיָּבֹא שָׂאוּל לְהַסֵּד אֶת־רִגְלָיו *way-yābō šā’ul la-hāsēk ’et-raḡlāw* (Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia 1997: 490)

- a) *and Saul went in to cover his feet* (The Holy Bible 1953: 350)
- b) *Saul went into the cave to relieve himself* (Holy Bible 2004: 229 [English traditional number of the verse: 24:3])
- c) *fa-daħala šāwulu li-kay yuḡaṭṭiya riḡlay-hi* (Al-Kitāb al-muqaddas 1982: 468) ‘So Saul went in to cover his feet’
- d) *u daħal Sawl jgħatti riḡlejh* (Il-Bibbja 1995: 245) ‘and Saul came in covering his legs’
- e) *u Sawl daħal iḡhatti riḡlejh* (Il-Bibbja Mqaddsa 2006: 223 [24:3]) ‘and Saul came in covering his legs’
- f) *u Sawl daħal fih biex jaqdi l-bżonnijiet tiegħu* (Il-Bibbja 2013: 331) ‘and Saul entered into it to attend to his needs’

The Hebrew idiom has been preserved in both the Arabic and two Maltese translations d) and e). In both editions (Il-Bibbja 1995 and Il-Bibbja Mqaddsa 2006) there is no explanation of that idiom. Version f) conveys the meaning of the idiom somewhat descriptively but rather clearly.

(3) Ezekiel 23:20

אֲשֶׁר בְּשָׂר־חֲמֹרִים בְּשָׂרָם וְזִרְמַת סוּסִים זִרְמָתָם *’āšer baśsar ḥāmôrîm baśārām wə-zirmaṭ sūsîm zir-māṭām* (Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia 1997: 936)

- a) *whose flesh is as the flesh of asses, and whose issue is like the issue of horses* (The Holy

Bible 1953: 888)

- b) *(lovers) with genitals as large as a donkey's and emission like those of a horse* (Holy Bible 2004: 643)
- c) *'al-laḏīna laḥmu-hum ka-laḥmi l-ḥamīri wa-maniyyu-hum ka-maniyyi l-ḥayli* (Al-Kitāb al-muqaddas 1982: 1212) 'Their flesh is like the flesh of donkeys and their semen is like the semen of horses'
- d) *li laḥamhom laḥam il-ḥmir, u sabbhom sabb il-fḥal* (Il-Bibbja 1995: 993) 'whose flesh is the flesh of asses, and whose pouring is the pouring of stallions'
- e) *li laḥamhom hu bḥal laḥam il-ḥmir, u li sabbhom hu bḥal sabb iż-żwiemel* (Il-Bibbja Mqaddsa 2006: 581) 'whose flesh is like the flesh of asses, and whose pouring is like the pouring of horses'
- f) *li laḥamhom laḥam il-ḥmir, u tixridhom tixrid iż-żwiemel* (Il-Bibbja 2013: 960) 'whose flesh is the flesh of asses, and their spilling is the spilling of horses'

The Hebrew expressions have been rendered in both the Arabic and the Maltese translations d), e) and f) literally, without any comment, so they remain obscure, cf. Aquilina (1987: 720, 1990: 1565). The literal translation of this verse has a long tradition. The Vulgate renders it as follows: *quorum carnes sunt ut carnes asinorum / et sicut fluxus equorum fluxus eorum* (Biblia Sacra Vulgata 2007: 1298) 'whose flesh is like the flesh of asses, and their discharge is like the discharge of horses'.

(4) Exodus 33:14

לִּי אֶפְרָיִם וְנֹחַמִּי לֵךְ *pānay yēlēkū wa-hāniḥōtī lāk* (Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia 1997: 143)

- a) *My presence shall go with thee, and I will give thee rest* (The Holy Bible 1953: 108)
- b) *I will personally go with you, Moses, and I will give you rest—everything will be fine for you* (Holy Bible 2004: 71)
- c) *waḡh-ī yasīru fa-ʔuriḥu-ka* (Al-Kitāb al-muqaddas 1982: 143) 'My face will go, and I will give you rest'
- d) *Niġi jien innifsi u nserrḥek* (Il-Bibbja 1995: 75) 'I myself will come and comfort you'
- e) *Wiċċi jiġi miegḡhek, u nserrḥek* (Il-Bibbja Mqaddsa 2006: 66) 'My face will come with you, and I will comfort you'
- f) *Il preżenza tiegħi tiġi miegḡhek, u nserrahlek rasek* [*Il preżenza tiegħi tiġi miegḡhek: letteralment: wiċċi. Alla se jgħin lil Mosè direttament mhux permezz ta' ḥliqa oħra.*] (Il-Bibbja 2013: 98) 'My presence will come with you, and I will reassure you. [My presence comes with you: literally: my face. God will help Moses directly not through another creation.]'

The most readable, dynamic translation is d). e) follows the original faithfully and literally; f) also, adding in my opinion unnecessary *rasek* 'your head', cf. Arabic c). The comment on f) is also based on a literal translation.

(5) Genesis 4:1

וַאֲדָם יָדַע אֶת חַוְּוָה אִשְׁתּוֹ *wə-hā-'ādām yāda' 'et-ḥawwā 'ištō* (Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia 1997: 6)

- a) *And Adam knew Eve his wife* (The Holy Bible 1953: 8)
- b) *Now Adam has sexual relations with his wife, Eve* (Holy Bible 2004: 5)
- c) *wa-ʔarafa ʔādamu ḥawwāʔa mraʔata-hu* (Al-Kitāb al-muqaddas 1982: 7) 'And Adam knew Eve his wife'
- d) *Għaraf ir-raġel 'il martu Eva* (Il-Bibbja 1995: 7) 'the man knew his wife Eve'

- e) *U Adam għaraf lil martu Eva* (Il-Bibbja Mqaddsa 2006: 3) ‘And Adam knew his wife Eve’
- f) *U Adam għaraf lil martu Eva* (Il-Bibbja 2013: 5) ‘And Adam knew his wife Eve’

The Hebrew word *yāda* ‘he knew’ have been rendered in both the Arabic and the Maltese translations d), e) and f) literally, without any comment, and therefore remains misleading, both in Arabic and especially in Maltese: *għaraf* ‘to recognize, to identify; to know how to do or to say something well’ (Aquilina 1990: 974).

(6) Psalm 37:18

יְדַע יְהוָה יְמֵי תְּמִימִם *yôdē‘a YHWH yāmê tāmîmim* (Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia 1997: 1119)

- a) *The LORD knoweth the days of the upright* (The Holy Bible 1953: 633)
- b) *Day by day the LORD takes care of the innocent* (Holy Bible 2004: 430)
- c) *ʔar-rabbu ʕārifun ʔayyāma l-kamalati* (Al-Kitāb al-muqaddas 1982: 857) ‘The Lord knows the days of the blameless’
- d) *Fi ħsieb il-Mulej jiem in-nies sewwa* (Il-Bibbja 1995: 546) ‘In the care of the Lord [are] the days of the righteous men’
- e) *Il-Mulej jaf il-jiem tat-tajbin* (Il-Bibbja Mqaddsa 2006: 408) ‘The Lord knows the days of the good [plur.]’
- f) *Fi ħsieb il-Mulej il-ħajja tat-tajbin* (Il-Bibbja 2013: 626) ‘in the care of the Lord [is] the life of the good [plur.]’

The Maltese version of e) is the most literal. f) comes closest to dynamically conveying the meaning of an idiom. d), Saydon’s translation, is midway between literal and dynamic.

(7) Genesis 26:8

וַיַּרְא יִצְחָק מַצְחֵק אֶת רֵבֶקָה אִשְׁתּוֹ *way-yarā wə-hinnē yiṣḥāq maṣaḥēq ‘ēt ribqā ‘ištô* (Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia 1997: 39)

- a) *and saw, and, behold, Isaac was sporting with Rebekah his wife* (The Holy Bible 1953: 32)
- b) *and saw Isaac caressing Rebekah* (Holy Bible 2004: 21)
- c) *wa-naʕara wa-ʔidā ʔiṣḥāqu yulāʕibu riʕqata mraʔata-hu* (Al-Kitāb al-muqaddas 1982: 40) ‘He looked and saw Isaac playing with Rebekah, his wife’
- d) *u ra ‘l İzakk iżiegħel b’Rebekka martu* (Il-Bibbja 1995: 23) ‘and saw Isaac caressing Rebekah, his wife’
- e) *u ra ‘l İzakk iżiegħel b’Rebekka martu* (Il-Bibbja Mqaddsa 2006: 18) ‘and saw Isaac caressing Rebekah, his wife’
- f) *u ra lil İzakk iżiegħel b’martu Rebekka* (Il-Bibbja 2013: 27-28) ‘and saw Isaac caressing Rebekah, his wife’

The Maltese translations rather clearly convey the meaning of the idiom.

(8) 1 Samuel 2:35

וְבִנִּיתִי לוֹ בַּיִת נָאֶמְן *‘û-bānîti lô bayit ne’ēmān* (Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia 1997: 448)

- a) *and I will build him a sure house* (The Holy Bible 1953: 322) – In the original Hebrew we are dealing with an untranslatable play on words, based on the root *ṣāḥaq* ‘to laugh’ – *yiṣḥāq* ‘he laughs (also: Isaac, proper name)’, and participial *maṣaḥēq* ‘sporting, playing, toying with’ (Brown et al. 1951: 850)
- b) *I will establish his family* (Holy Bible 2004: 213)
- c) *wa-ʔabnī la-hu baytan ʔamīnan* (Al-Kitāb al-muqaddas 1982: 429) ‘And I will build him a safe house’
- d) *u nibnilu dar dejjiema* (Il-Bibbja 1995: 226) ‘and I will build him a lasting house’

- e) *u nibnilu dar dejjiema* (Il-Bibbja Mqaddsa 2006: 205) ‘and I will build him a lasting house’
- f) *u nibnilu dar li tibqa’ għal dejjem* (Il-Bibbja 2013: 306) ‘and I will build him a house that will last forever’

All Maltese versions - d), e), and f) - as well as the Arabic version c) and the Authorized Version a) render the phrase literally. This verse, devoid of any explanation in all versions, remains unclear to the average reader. Cf. the Vulgate: *et aedificabo ei domum fidelem* (Biblia Sacra Vulgata 2007: 1298) ‘and I will build him a faithful house’.

(9) Genesis 5:22

וַיִּתְהַלֵּךְ חֲנוֹךְ אֶת־הָאֱלֹהִים אַחֲרַי הוּלִידוּ אֶת־מֶתוּשֶׁלַח שְׁלֹשׁ מֵאוֹת שָׁנָה way-yithallēk ḥănōk ‘et hā-’ēlōhîm ‘aḥārê hōlîdô ‘et matūšelah šālōš me’ôt šānâ (Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia 1997: 8)

- a) *And Enoch walked with God after he begat Methuselah three hundred years* (The Holy Bible 1953: 10)
- b) *After the birth of Mathuselah, Enoch lived in close fellowship with God for another 300 years* (Holy Bible 2004: 6)
- c) *wa-sāra ṭaḥnūḥu maṣa llāhi baṣda mā walada matūšālaḥa ṭalāṭa miṭati sanatin* (Al-Kitāb al-muqaddas 1982: 10) ‘Enoch walked with God after he begot Methuselah for three hundred years’
- d) *Mexa Henok ma’ Alla u għax, wara li wiled ‘il Metusalah, tliet mitt sena* (Il-Bibbja 1995: 8) ‘Enoch walked with God and lived, after he begot Methuselah, three hundred years’
- e) *U Henok wara li wiled lil Metuselah, mexa ma’ Alla għal tliet mitt sena* (Il-Bibbja Mqaddsa 2006: 4) ‘And Enoch after he begot Methuselah, walked with God for three hundred years’
- f) *U Henok kien jimxi ma’ Alla. U wara li wiled lil Matusala għex tliet mitt sena oħra* (Il-Bibbja 2013: 5) ‘And Enoch walked with God. And after he begot Methuselah he lived another three hundred years’

All Maltese versions - d), e), and f) - as well as the Arabic version c) and the Authorized Version a) render the phrase literally. Therefore, the meaning of the idiom, devoid of explanation in all versions, remains unclear. Cf. the Vulgate: *et ambulavit Enoch cum Deo postquam genuit Mathusalam trecentis annis* (Biblia Sacra Vulgata 2007: 10) ‘and Enoch walked with God three hundred years after he begat Methuselah’.

(10) Job 13:14

אֶשָּׂא בְשָׁרִי בִשְׁנֵי וְנַפְשִׁי אֲשִׁים בְּכַפִּי | עַל־מָה ‘al mā ‘eśśā ḥaśārî ḥa-šinnāy wə-naṣṣî ‘āśîm bə-kappî (Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia 1997: 1240)

- a) *Wherefore do I take my flesh in my teeth, and put my life in mine hand?* (The Holy Bible 1953: 594) – Hebrew: put my soul... (= myself)
- b) *Yes, I will take my life in my hands and say what I really think* (Holy Bible 2004: 397)
- c) *li-mādā ṭaḥdu laḥm-ī bi-ṭasnān-ī wa-ṭaḍaṣu naṣf-ī fī kaff-ī* (Al-Kitāb al-muqaddas 1982: 805) ‘Why do I take my flesh with my teeth and put my soul in my hands’
- d) *Ha ngib jien laħmi bejn snieni, u ħajti nqiegħed f’qiegħ idi* (Il-Bibbja 1995: 495) ‘Let me put my flesh between my teeth, and put my life in the palm of my hand’
- e) *Għaliex għandi nieħu laħmi fi snieni, u nqiegħed ħajti f’idi?* (Il-Bibbja Mqaddsa 2006: 381) ‘Why should I take my flesh in my teeth, and put my life in my hand?’
- f) *Ha nieħdu jiena laħmi bejn snieni, u ħajti nqegħedha f’idejja* [Ħajti nqegħedha f’idejja: Ġob jissogra jmur fil-qorti quddiem Alla, għax żgur mill-innoċenza tiegħu] (Il-Bibbja 2013: 572) ‘Let me take my flesh between my teeth, and put my life in my hands. [My life is

in my hands: Job vows to go to court before God, because he is sure of his innocence]’

All Maltese versions - d), e), and f) - as well as the Arabic version c) and the Authorized Version a) render the phrase literally. Only f) adds an explanation in the comment. Cf. the translation of the Vulgate: *quare lacero carnes meas dentibus meis et animam meam porto in manibus meis* (Biblia Sacra Vulgata 2007: 742) ‘wherefore I tear (!) my flesh with my teeth, and bear my soul in my hands’.

(11) 1 Samuel 23:16

וַיַּחֲזֶק אֶת-יָדוֹ בְּאֵלֹהִים *wa-yəḥazzēq ’et yādô bēlōhîm* (Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia 1997: 489)

- a) *and strengthened his hand in God* (The Holy Bible 1953: 349)
- b) *and encouraged him to stay strong in his faith in God* (Holy Bible 2004: 229)
- c) *wa-šaddada yada-hu bi-llāhi* (Al-Kitāb al-muqaddas 1982: 467) ‘He strengthened his hand by God’
- d) *u qawwielu qalbu f’Alla* (Il-Bibbja 1995: 244) ‘and strengthened his heart in God’
- e) *u qawwielu l-fiduċja tiegħu f’Alla* (Il-Bibbja Mqaddsa 2006: 222) ‘and strengthened his trust in God’
- f) *u qawwielu qalbu f’Alla* (Il-Bibbja 2013: 330) ‘and strengthened his heart in God’

The Maltese versions d) and f) are the most literal. e) comes closest to dynamically conveying the meaning of the idiom.

(12) Jeremiah 6:10

הִנֵּה עֲרֵלָה אֲזַנָּם וְלֹא יִכְלּוּ לְהִקְשִׁיב *hinne ’ärēlâ ’oznām wə-lō yûkālû lə-haqšîb* (Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia 1997: 793)

- a) *Behold, their ear is uncircumcised, and they cannot hearken* (The Holy Bible 1953: 796)
- b) *Their ears are closed, and they cannot hear* (Holy Bible 2004: 576)
- c) *hā ’inna ’uduna-hum ġalfā’u fa-lā yaqdirūna ’an yašgaw* (Al-Kitāb al-muqaddas 1982: 1083) ‘Behold, their ears are uncircumcised, and they are not able to listen’
- d) *Ara, mhix maħtuna widnithom, u ma jistgħux jifhmu* (Il-Bibbja 1995: 899) ‘Behold, their ears are uncircumcised, and they cannot understand’
- e) *Ara, widnejhom mhumieħ ċirkonċizi, u ma jistgħux jisimghu* (Il-Bibbja Mqaddsa 2006: 520) ‘Behold, their ears are not circumcised, and they cannot hear’
- f) *Bla ħtin widnejhom, u ma jistgħux jisimghu* (Il-Bibbja 2013: 855) ‘Their ears are uncut, and they cannot hear’

All Maltese versions - d), e), and f) - as well as the Arabic version c) and the Authorized Version a) render the phrase literally. Therefore, the meaning of the idiom, devoid of explanation in all versions, remains unclear. Cf. The Vulgate: *ecce incircumcisae aures eorum et audire non possunt* (Biblia Sacra Vulgata 2007: 742) ‘behold, their ears are uncircumcised, and they cannot hear’.

(13) Genesis 32:21

וְאַכְפַּרְהָ פָּנָיו בַּמִּנְחָה הַזֹּאת לְפָנַי וְאַחֲרָיִי כֵן אֶרְאֶה פָּנָיו אִילֵּי יִשָּׂא פָנָי *’ăkṣarâ pānāw bam-minḥâ ha-hōleket la-pānāy wə-’aḥārê kēn ’ar’e pānāw ’ûlāy yîśšā pānāy* (Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia 1997: 52)

- a) *I will appease him with the present that goeth before me, and afterward I will see his face; peradventure he will accept of me* (The Holy Bible 1953: 43 [32:20])
- b) *I will try to appease him by sending gifts ahead of me. When I see him in person, perhaps he will be friendly to me* (Holy Bible 2004: 27)

- c) *ʔastaʕtifu waġha-hu bil-hadiyyati s-sāʔirati ʔamāmī wa-baʕda dālīka ʔanzuru waġha-hu ʔasā ʔan yarfaʕa waġh-ī* (Al-Kitāb al-muqaddas 1982: 54 [32:20]) 'I seek his face with the gift that is walking before me, and then I look at his face, hoping that he will lift up my face'
- d) *Intaffilu qilltu bil-ġhatja li sejra quddiemi, u wara dan inkun nista' nara wiċċu; għandu mnejn jilqagħni tajjeb* (Il-Bibbja 1995: 30) 'I will mitigate his ferocity with the donation that is going before me, and after that I will be able to see his face; he may receive me well'
- e) *Inberrdu bil-ġhotja li sejra quddiemi; imbagħad nara wiċċu; għandu mnejn jilqagħni tajjeb* (Il-Bibbja Mqaddsa 2006: 24 [32:20]) 'I will soften him by the gift that is going before me; then I see his face; he may receive me well'
- f) *Inrattablu wiċċu bir-rigal li sejjer qabli; halli mbagħad wara dan nara 'l wiċċu, għandu mnejn jerfagħli 'l wiċċi* (Il-Bibbja 2013: 36) 'I will soften his face with the gift that is going before me; let then after this I see his face, he may lift my face'

The Maltese versions of d) and e) comes closest to dynamically conveying the meaning of the Hebrew verse. f) is almost slavishly literal and difficult to understand, cf. literal Arabic c). Besides, there is no comment to that verse in this edition of the Bible. Interestingly, the Vulgate version is a dynamic translation: *placebo illum muneribus quae praecedunt et postea videbo forsitan propitiabitur mihi* (Biblia Sacra Vulgata 2007: 48) 'I will please him with the gifts that will be sent in advance, and then I will see if I will be treated kindly'.

(14) Deuteronomy 23:1

לֹא יִיקַח אִישׁ אֶת-אִשְׁתּוֹ אָבִיו וְלֹא יְגַלֶּה כְּנָף אָבִיו *lō yiqqah 'iš 'et 'ēšet 'ābîw wə-lō yaḡalle kənaḡ 'ābîw* (Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia 1997: 326)

- a) *A man shall not take his father's wife, nor discover his father's skirt* (The Holy Bible 1953: 238 [22:30])
- b) *A man must not marry his father's former wife, for this would violate his father* (Holy Bible 2004: 156 [22:30])
- c) *lā yattaḥiḍ raġlun imraʔata ʔabī-hi wa-lā yakšif dayla ʔabī-hi* (Al-Kitāb al-muqaddas 1982: 315 [22:30]) 'a man shall not take his father's wife, nor uncover his father's skirt'
- d) *Hadd ma jiżżewwēg ma' mart missieru, u lanqas jikxef tarf friex missieru* (Il-Bibbja 1995: 163) 'No one marries his father's wife, nor uncovers the edge of his father's bed'
- e) *Hadd m'għandu jieħu mart missieru, u lanqas jikxef tarf friex missieru* (Il-Bibbja Mqaddsa 2006: 151 [22:30]) 'No one shall take his father's wife, nor uncover the edge of his father's bed'
- f) *Hadd ma jista' jiżżewwēg il-mara ta' missieru, lanqas jikxef tarf friex missieru [Il-mara ta' missieru: dan kien jista' jiġri għax ir-raġel kien jista' jkollu aktar minn mara waħda.]* (Il-Bibbja 2013: 221) 'No one can marry his father's wife, not even uncover the edge of his father's bed. [His father's wife: this could happen because the man could have more than one wife.]'

All Maltese versions - d), e), and f) - as well as the Arabic version c) and the Authorized Version a) render the phrase literally. The verse is built on the principle of syntactic parallelism: it repeats the prohibition in different words, cf. dynamic translation b); the comment to f) does not refer to the text itself.

(15) Leviticus 20:19

וְעִרְוַת אִשְׁתּוֹ אִמָּהּ וְעִרְוַת אִשְׁתּוֹ אָבִיהָ לֹא תַגַּלְלֶה *wə-erwat 'āḥôt 'imməkā wə-āḥôt 'ābikā lō taḡallē* (Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia 1997: 193)

- a) *And thou shalt not uncover the nakedness of thy mother's sister, nor of thy father's sister* (The Holy Bible 1953: 145)
- b) *Do not have sexual relations with your aunt, whether your mother's sister or your father's sister* (Holy Bible 2004: 96)
- c) *Ħawrata l-ħuħti l-ħummi-ka l-aw l-ħuħti l-abī-ka lā takšif* (Al-Kitāb al-muqaddas 1982: 191) 'You shall not uncover the nakedness of your mother's sister or your father's sister'
- d) *Laŋqas l-għera ta' oħt ommok jew ta' oħt missierek ma għandek tikxef* (Il-Bibbja 1995: 100) 'You should not even uncover the nakedness of your mother's sister, or your father's sister'
- e) *Laŋqas il-għera ta' oħt ommok, jew ta' oħt missierek, ma għandek tikxef* (Il-Bibbja Mqaddsa 2006: 91) 'You should not even uncover the nakedness of your mother's sister, or your father's sister'
- f) *La tikxif l-għera ta' oħt ommok jew oħt missierek* (Il-Bibbja 2013: 132) 'Do not uncover the nakedness of your mother's sister or your father's sister'

All Maltese versions - d), e), and f) - as well as the Arabic version c) and the Authorized Version a) render the phrase literally. Therefore, the meaning of the idiom, devoid of explanation in all versions, remains unclear. The next verse sheds some light on the true meaning of the idiom.

(16) Isaiah 7:20

בְּיוֹם הַהוּא יִגְלַח אֶדְנִי בְּתַעַר הַשְּׂכִירָה בְּעַבְרֵי נָהָר בְּמִלֵּךְ אֲשׁוּר אֶת־הָרֹאשׁ וְשֵׁעַר הָרַגְלַיִם וְגַם אֶת־הַזָּקָן תִּסְפֶּה
bayyôm ha-hû yağallah 'ādōnāy bə-ta'ar haś-śakîrā bə-'ēbrē nāhār bə-melek 'aššûr 'et hā-rōš
wə-ša'ar hā-rağlāyim wə-ğam 'et haz-zāqān tispe (Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia 1997: 686)

- a) *In the same day shall the LORD shave with a razor that is hired, namely, by them beyond the river, by the king of Assyria, the head, and the hair of the feet: and it shall also consume the beard* (The Holy Bible 1953: 737)
- b) *In that day the Lord will hire a "razor" from beyond the Euphrates River—the king of Assyria—and use it all to shave off everything: your land, your crops, and your people [Hebrew shave off the head, the hair of the legs, and the beard.]* (Holy Bible 2004: 522)
- c) *fī dālīka l-yawmi yaħliq s-sayyidu bi-mūsā mustağğaratīn fī ṣabri n-nahr bi-maliki 'aššūra r-raṣa wa-šaṣra r-riğlayni wa-tanziṣu l-liḥyata 'aydan* (Al-Kitāb al-muqaddas 1982: 1000) 'On that day, the master will shave the head and the hair of the legs with a razor hired from across the river by the king of Assyria, and the beard will also be removed'
- d) *Dak in-nhar iqaxxar is-Sid b'mus mikri min-naħa l-oħra tax-Xmara ir-ras u x-xagħar tar-riğlejn, u jğizż ukoll il-leħja* (Il-Bibbja 1995: 837) [sic!] 'On that day the Master shaves his head and legs with a razor hired from the other side of the River, and also shaves his beard'
- e) *Dak in-nhar Sidi jqaxxar b'mus tal-leħja, mikri min-naħa l-oħra tax-xmara, (jğifieri, bis-sultan ta' l-Assirja) ir-ras u x-xagħar tar-riğlejn; u jğizż ukoll il-leħja* (Il-Bibbja Mqaddsa 2006: 481) 'On that day my Lord shaves with a razor, hired from the other side of the river, (that is, by the king of Assyria) the head and the hair of the legs; and he also shaves the beard'
- f) *Dakinhar iqaxxar Sidi b'mus mikri min-naħa l-oħra tax-xmara, bis-sultan tal-Assirja, il-qorriegħa tar-ras u x-xagħar tar-riğlejn, u jğizż il-leħja wkoll* (Il-Bibbja 2013: 775) 'On that day he will shave the scalp and the hair of his legs with a razor hired from the other side of the river, with the king of Assyria, and he will also shave his beard'

All Maltese versions - d), e), and f) - as well as the Arabic version c) and the Authorized Version

a) render the phrase literally. The deeper meaning of the phrase *śa‘ar hā-raġlāyim* ‘the hair of the legs’ emphasizing complete humiliation remains hidden.

(17) Genesis 40:13

שְׁלֹשֶׁת יָמִים יִשָּׂא פָרְעֹה אֶת־רֹאשׁוֹ | בְּעוֹד bə-‘ôd šalōšet yāmīm yiśśā par‘ō ‘et-rōšekā (Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia 1997: 65)

- a) *Yet within three days shall Pharaoh lift up thine head* (The Holy Bible 1953: 52)
- b) *Within three days Pharaoh will lift you up* (Holy Bible 2004: 522)
- c) *fī talātati ʔayyāmin ʔaydan yarfaʕu firʕawnu raʕsa-ka* (Al-Kitāb al-muqaddas 1982: 67) ‘In three days again, Pharaoh will exalt your head’
- d) *Tlett ijjem oħra jerfagħlek Fargħun rasek* (Il-Bibbja 1995: 36) ‘Three more days Pharaoh will lift your head’
- e) *Izda fi tlitt ijjem oħra, Fargħun jerfagħlek rasek* (Il-Bibbja Mqaddsa 2006: 481) ‘But in three more days, Pharaoh will lift your head’
- f) *Tlitt ijjem oħra, il-Fargħun jerfagħlek ġieħek* (Il-Bibbja 2013: 45) ‘Three more days, the Pharaoh will restore your reputation’.

The two Maltese translations d) and e) render the phrase literally. Version f) conveys the meaning of the idiom somewhat descriptively but rather clearly.

(18) Genesis 10:9

הָיָה גִבּוֹר־צֶיד לְפָנָי יְהוָה hû hāyâ ġibbōr ṣayid li-ṗānê YHWH (Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia 1997: 14)

- a) *He was a mighty hunter before the LORD* (The Holy Bible 1953: 14)
- b) *Since he was the greatest hunter in the world* (Holy Bible 2004: 9)
- c) *kāna ġabbāra ṣaydin ʔamāma r-rabbi* (Al-Kitāb al-muqaddas 1982: 16) ‘He was a mighty hunter before the Lord’
- d) *Hu kien kaċċatur kbir f’għajnejn il-Mulej* (Il-Bibbja 1995: 11) ‘He was a great hunter in the eyes of the Lord’
- e) *Hu kien kaċċatur kbir quddiem il-Mulej* (Il-Bibbja Mqaddsa 2006: 6) ‘He was a great hunter before the Lord’
- f) *Kien kaċċatur qalbieni f’għajnejn il-Mulej* (Il-Bibbja 2013: 11) ‘He was a brave hunter in the eyes of the Lord’

All Maltese versions - d), e), and f) - as well as the Arabic version c) and the Authorized Version a) render the phrase almost literally. Nevertheless, d) and e) replace the vague *li-ṗānê* ‘before’ (Maltese *quddiem*) with another idiom valorizing the hunter’s situation.

(19) Genesis 20:5

בְּתָם־לִבִּי וּבְנִיּוֹן כַּפִּי עָשִׂיתִי זֹאת bə-tām ləbābî ‘û-bəniqyōn kappî ‘āsītî zōt (Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia 1997: 28)

- a) *in the integrity of my heart and innocency of my hands have I done this* (The Holy Bible 1953: 24)
- b) *I acted in complete innocence! My hands are clean* (Holy Bible 2004: 9)
- c) *bi-salāmati qalb-ī wa-naqāwati yaday-ya faʕaltu hādā* (Al-Kitāb al-muqaddas 1982: 29-30) ‘In the integrity of my heart and the purity of my hands I have done this’
- d) *B’qalb safja u idejn bla ħtija għamilt dan* (Il-Bibbja 1995: 18) ‘With a pure heart and blameless hands I did this’

- e) *Fis-safa ta' qalbi, u fl-indafa ta' idejja, għamilt dan* (Il-Bibbja Mqaddsa 2006: 13) 'In the purity of my heart, and in the cleanliness of my hands, I did this'
- f) *B'qalb saffa u b'idejn indaf għamilt dan* (Il-Bibbja 2013: 20) 'With a pure heart and clean hands I did this'

The Maltese versions e) and f) render the phrase literally. d) is closer to the original meaning of the idioms.

(20) Genesis 29:1

וַיִּשָּׂא יַעֲקֹב רַגְלָיו וַיֵּלֶךְ אֶרְצָה בְנֵי־קְדֵם way-yiśśā ya'āqōb raġlāw wāy-yēlek 'arṣā bānē qedem (Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia 1997: 44)

- a) *Then Jacob went on his journey, and came into the land of the people of the east* (The Holy Bible 1953: 36) – Hebrew: 'and Jacob lifted up his feet'
- b) *Then Jacob hurried on, finally arriving in the land of the east* (Holy Bible 2004: 29)
- c) *tumma rafaṣa yaṣqūbu riġlay-hi wa-dahaba ʔilā ʔarḍi banī l-mašriqi* (Al-Kitāb al-muqaddas 1982: 45) 'then Jacob lifted up his feet and went to the land of the people of the east'
- d) *Imbagħad qala' Ġakobb riġlejha u telaq lejn art in-nies tal-Lvant* (Il-Bibbja 1995: 26) 'Then Jacob strained (?) his legs and left for the land of the people of the East'
- e) *Imbagħad Ġakobb baqa' jimxi u wasal f'art in-nies tal-Lvant* (Il-Bibbja Mqaddsa 2006: 20) 'Then Jacob kept walking and arrived in the land of the people of the east'
- f) *Imbagħad Ġakobb iċċaqtaq u telaq lejn art in-nies tal-Lvant* (Il-Bibbja 2013: 31) 'Then Jacob moved and left for the land of the people of the East'

The Maltese versions of e) and f) convey the meaning of the Hebrew verse well. I had a problem with translating Saydon's version, d). He uses the verb *qala'*, which has either a meaning that does not fit the translation of the Hebrew idiom: 'to earn, to gain, to obtain; to cause, to give raise to, or expresses negative actions: to pluck, to pull off, to strain (Aquilina 1990: 1108-1109).

(21) Genesis 30:2

הֲתַחַת אֱלֹהִים אֲנֹכִי אֲשֶׁר־מָנַע מִמֶּךָּ פְּרִי־בֶטֶן hā-taḥat 'ēlōhīm 'ānōkī 'āšer māna' mimmeḳ pəri bāten (Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia 1997: 46)

- a) *Am I in God's stead, who hath withheld from thee the fruit of the womb?* (The Holy Bible 1953: 38)
- b) *Am I God? (...) He's the one who has kept you from having children!* (Holy Bible 2004: 24)
- c) *ʔa-laʔall-ī makāna llāhi l-laḍī manaṣa ʔan-ki tamrata l-baṭni* (Al-Kitāb al-muqaddas 1982: 47) 'Am I in the place of God who withheld from you the fruit of the womb?'
- d) *Huwa jien flok Alla li ċaħadlek frott il-ġuf?* (Il-Bibbja 1995: 27) 'Is it me instead of God who denied you the fruit of the womb?'
- e) *Jaqaqaw jien flok Alla, li żammlek frott ġufek?* (Il-Bibbja Mqaddsa 2006: 21) 'Am I instead of God, who kept the fruit of your womb?'
- f) *Jaqaqaw jien flok Alla, li ċaħħdek minn frott il-ġuf?* (Il-Bibbja 2013: 31) 'Am I instead of God, who deprived you of the fruit of the womb?'

All Maltese versions - d), e), and f) - as well as the Arabic version c) and the Authorized Version a) render the phrase almost literally. However, the theological dissemination of the idiom 'the fruit of your womb' in the Christian tradition makes the meaning of the verse understandable. Cf. the version of the Vulgate: *num pro Deo ego sum qui privavit te fructu ventris tui* (Biblia Sacra Vulgata 2007: 43) 'Am I for God who deprived you of the fruit of your womb?'

(22) Genesis 46:4

וַיֹּסֶף יָשִׁית יָדוֹ עַל-עֵינָיו *wa-yōsēp yāšīt yādō ‘al ‘ēneykā* (Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia 1997: 76)

- a) *and Joseph shall put his hand upon thine eyes* (The Holy Bible 1953: 60)
- b) *But you will die in Egypt with Joseph attending to you* (Holy Bible 2004: 46)
- c) *wa-yadaṣu yūsufu yada-hu šalā saynay-ka* (Al-Kitāb al-muqaddas 1982: 78) ‘And Joseph will put his hand on your eyes’
- d) *u Ġużepp b’idu jagħlaqlek għajnejk* (Il-Bibbja 1995: 41) ‘and Joseph will close your eyes with his hand’
- e) *u Ġużepp b’idu jagħlaqlek għajnejk* (Il-Bibbja Mqaddsa 2006: 36) ‘and Joseph will close your eyes with his hand’
- f) *u id Ġużeppi għad tagħlaqlek għajnejk* (Il-Bibbja 2013: 52) ‘and Joseph’s hand will close your eyes’

Maltese versions d) and e) clearly convey the meaning of the verse by replacing the phrase *yāšīt yādō ‘al ‘ēneykā* ‘he will put his hand on your eyes’ with the version *b’idu jagħlaqlek għajnejk* ‘he will close your eyes with his hand’, understandable in our cultural tradition. In version f) the translator made a kind of *pars pro toto*: it is Joseph’s hand that will close Jacob’s eyes. This translation is not only distant from the original, but also a bit artificial.

(23) Exodus 6:12

וְאֲנִי עֶרְלָה *wa-’ānī ‘āral šəpātāyim*

- a) *who am of uncircumcised lips*
- b) *I am such a clumsy speaker!* (Holy Bible 2004: 48)
- c) *wa-ʔanā ʔaḡlafu š-šafatayni* (Al-Kitāb al-muqaddas 1982: 95) ‘and I am of uncircumcised lips’
- d) *jien li m’iniex maħtun f’xufftejja* (Il-Bibbja 1995: 51) ‘I who am not circumcised in my lips’
- e) *li m’għandix ċirkonċiżjoni f’xofftejja* (Il-Bibbja Mqaddsa 2006: 44) ‘that I am not circumcised in my lips’ [literally: that I don’t have circumcision in my lips]
- f) *jien li ma għandix xufftejja maħtuna* (Il-Bibbja 2013: 65) ‘I who don’t have my lips circumcised’

All Maltese versions - d), e), and f) - as well as the Arabic version c) and the Authorized Version a) render the phrase literally. Therefore, the meaning of the idiom, devoid of explanation in all versions, remains unclear. Cf. The Vulgate: *praesertim cum sim incircumciscus labiis* (Biblia Sacra Vulgata 2007: 82) ‘especially since I am uncircumcised in lips’.

(24) Exodus 8:28

וַיִּכְבֹּד פַּרְעֹה אֶת-לְבוֹ גַּם בַּפֶּעַם הַזֹּאת *way-yakbēd par’ō ‘et libbô gam bap-pa’am haz-zōt* (Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia 1997: 99)

- a) *And Pharaoh hardened his heart at this time also* (The Holy Bible 1953: 76 - 8:32!)
- b) *But Pharaoh again became stubborn* (Holy Bible 2004: 50 - 8:32!)
- c) *wa-lākin ʔaḡlaza firṣawnu qalba-hu hādihi l-marrata ʔaydan* (Al-Kitāb al-muqaddas 1982: 99 [8:32]) ‘But Pharaoh hardened his heart this time also’
- d) *U webbes Fargħun qalbu did-darba wkoll* (Il-Bibbja 1995: 53) ‘And Pharaoh hardened his heart once more’
- e) *U Fargħun webbes qalbu din id-darba wkoll* (Il-Bibbja Mqaddsa 2006: 46 - 8:32!) ‘And Pharaoh hardened his heart this time too’

- f) *Izda qalb il-Fargħun reġgħet twebbset din id-darba wkoll* (Il-Bibbja 2013: 68) ‘But the Pharaoh’s heart hardened again this time too’

Maltese versions d) and e) render the phrase literally. Nevertheless, the meaning of the idiom is understandable. In version f) the translator made again a kind of *pars pro toto*: it is Pharaoh’s heart that hardened. In this case, we can assume the Vulgate tradition, because the text in the Latin version reads as follows: *et ingravatum est cor Pharaonis ita ut ne hac quidem vice dimitteret populum* (Biblia Sacra Vulgata 2007: 43 – 8:32!) ‘and Pharaoh’s heart was so burdened that he would not let the people go even this time’.

(25) Exodus 9:29

אֶפְרֹס אֶת-כַּפֵּי אֵל יְהוָה *’eprōs ’et kappay ’el YHWH* (Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia 1997: 101)

- a) *I will spread abroad my hands unto the LORD* (The Holy Bible 1953: 77)
- b) *I will lift my hands and pray to the LORD* (Holy Bible 2004: 50)
- c) *ʔabsuṭu yaday-ya ʔilā r-rabbi* (Al-Kitāb al-muqaddas 1982: 101) ‘I will stretch out my hands to the Lord’
- d) *niftaħ idejja lejn il-Mulej* (Il-Bibbja 1995: 54) ‘I open my hands to the Lord’
- e) *niftaħ idejja lejn il-Mulej* (Il-Bibbja Mqaddsa 2006: 47) ‘I open my hands to the Lord’
- f) *ngholli idejja lejn il-Mulej* (Il-Bibbja 2013: 69) ‘I raise my hands to the Lord’

The two Maltese translations d) and e) render the phrase literally. Version f) conveys the meaning of the idiom rather clearly by replacing phrase *niftaħ idejja lejn il-Mulej* ‘I open my hands to the Lord’ with *ngholli idejja lejn il-Mulej* ‘I raise my hands to the Lord’. The reference to the prayer situation is clearly legible.

(26) Numbers 14:30

נִשְׁאַתִּי אֶת-יָדִי *nāsātī ’et yādī* (Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia 1997: 238)

- a) *I swear* (The Holy Bible 1953: 178) - Hebrew: ‘I raised my hand’
- b) *I swore* (Holy Bible 2004: 117)
- c) *rafaṣtu yad-ī* (Al-Kitāb al-muqaddas 1982: 235) ‘I raised my hand’
- d) *jien, b’idi merfugħa, ħlift* (Il-Bibbja 1995: 122) ‘I, with my hand raised, swore’
- e) *jien, b’idi merfugħa, ħlift* (Il-Bibbja Mqaddsa 2006: 112) ‘I, with my hand raised, swore’
- f) *jien erfajt idi u ħlift* (Il-Bibbja 2013: 164) ‘I raised my hand and swore’

The Maltese translations rather clearly convey the meaning of the idiom by adding a verb *ħlift* ‘I swore’, specifying the meaning of the sentence.

(27) Numbers 33:3

יָצְאוּ בְנֵי-יִשְׂרָאֵל בְּיָד רָמָה לְעֵינֵי כָל-מִצְרַיִם *yāṣū’û bānē yisrā’el bā-yād rāmā lā-’ênē kol miṣrāyim* (Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia 1997: 276)

- a) *the children of Israel went out with an high hand in the sight of all the Egyptians* (The Holy Bible 1953: 205)
- b) *The people of Israel left defiantly, in full view of the Egyptians* (Holy Bible 2004: 1134)
- c) *ħaraġa banū ʔisrāʔīla bi-yadin rafiṣatin ʔamāma ʔaṣyuni ġamīʔi l-miṣriyyīna* (Al-Kitāb al-muqaddas 1982: 270) ‘The children of Israel went out with a high hand in front of all the Egyptians’
- d) *ħarġu wlied Israel b’id merfugħa taħt ġħajnejn l-Eġizzjani kollha* (Il-Bibbja 1995: 140) ‘the children of Israel came out with a raised hand under the eyes of all the Egyptians’
- e) *ulied Izrael ħarġu b’id merfugħa taħt ġħajnejn l-Eġizzjani kollha* (Il-Bibbja Mqaddsa 2006: 140)

129) ‘the children of Israel went out with a raised hand under the eyes of all the Egyptians’

- f) *ulied Izrael ħargu b’rashom merfugħa quddiem għajnejn l-Eġizzjani* (Il-Bibbja 2013: 188) ‘the children of Israel went out with their heads lifted before the eyes of the Egyptians’

The two Maltese translations d) and e) render the phrase literally. Version f) conveys the meaning of the idiom rather clearly by replacing somewhat ambiguous phrase *b’id merfugħa* ‘with a raised hand’ with a situationally clear phrase *b’rashom merfugħa* ‘with their heads lifted’.

(28) Joshua 7:12

אֶרְפָּה יָפְנוּ עֲרָףָם לִפְנֵי יְיָ *ōrep yiḥnū li-ḥanē ’ōyḇêhem* (Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia 1997: 364)

- a) *turned their backs before their enemies* (The Holy Bible 1953: 261)
- b) *the Israelites are running from their enemies in defeat* (Holy Bible 2004: 172)
- c) *yudīrūna qafā-hum lamāma laḥdāʾi-him* (Al-Kitāb al-muqaddas 1982: 347) ‘They turned their backs before their enemies’
- d) *ma jistgħux ulied Israel jieqfu quddiem l-egħdewwa tagħhom* (Il-Bibbja 1995: 181) ‘the children of Israel cannot stand before their enemies’ (brak!)
- e) *iżda dawru daharhom quddiem l-egħdewwa tagħhom* (Il-Bibbja Mqaddsa 2006: 166) ‘but they turned their backs before their enemies’
- f) *imma kellhom idawwru daharhom quddiemhom* (Il-Bibbja 2013: 245) ‘but they had to turn their backs before them’

The Maltese versions e) and f) convey the meaning of the Hebrew verse literally and require an explanation or contextual interpretation. Version d) explains the situation clearly, but omits the translation of the phrase we are interested in.

(29) Judges 9:17

וַיַּשְׁלֵךְ אֶת-נַפְשׁוֹ מִנְּגֶד way-yašlēk ‘et napšō minneġed (Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia 1997: 417)

- a) *and adventured his life far* (The Holy Bible 1953: 297) – also possible Hebrew meaning: ‘and he threw himself against it’
- b) *and risked his life* (Holy Bible 2004: 196)
- c) *wa-ḥātara bi-nafsi-hi* (Al-Kitāb al-muqaddas 1982: 396) ‘And he risked himself’
- d) *ma beżax għal ħajtu* (Il-Bibbja 1995: 207) ‘he did not fear for his life’
- e) *ma bażax għal ħajtu* (Il-Bibbja Mqaddsa 2006: 189) ‘he did not fear for his life’
- f) *u tarraf ħajtu* (Il-Bibbja 2013: 279) ‘and he risked his life’

The Maltese versions e) and f) convey the contrary meaning, more distant than the original Hebrew phrase, by using the negation. Version f) renders the idiom properly.

(30) Judges 11:12

מָה לִּי וָלָךְ *ma lī wā-lāk* (Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia 1997: 422)

- a) *What hast thou to do with me* (The Holy Bible 1953: 301) – Hebrew: What is to me and you
- b) *Why ... [Why have you come out to fight against my land?]* (Holy Bible 2004: 198)
- c) *mā l-ī wa-la-ka* (Al-Kitāb al-muqaddas 1982: 400) ‘What do I have to do with you’
- d) *X’ghandek inti miegħi* (Il-Bibbja 1995: 209) ‘What do you have to do with me?’
- e) *X’hemm bejnietna* (Il-Bibbja Mqaddsa 2006: 191) ‘What is between us’
- f) *X’hemm bejni u bejneq* (Il-Bibbja 2013: 282) ‘What’s between me and you’

This typical Semitic phrase is usually translated literally. It is also found in the Gospel of John 2:4: *τί ἐμοὶ καὶ σοί, γύναι*; (Holmes 2010: 191) ‘What about me and you, woman?’; in Latin version: *quid mihi et tibi est mulier* (Biblia Sacra Vulgata 2007: 1660) ‘What is to me and you, woman?’. All Maltese versions - d), e), and f) - render the phrase almost literally.

3 Conclusion

In this article, I have gathered 35 Hebrew idioms and biblical phrases and analyzed the way they are translated in three modern editions of the Bible: Il-Bibbja translated by P.P. Saydon, Il-Bibbja published by Għaqda Biblika Maltija and Il-Bibbja Mqaddsa published by Trinitarian Bible Society. These idioms are found in 30 quotations from various books of the Hebrew Bible. As with the translation of the Bible into other languages, in the case of translation into Maltese the dominant methodology was formal-equivalence translation. The translators rendered the Hebrew idioms literally even though most of these phrases are currently incomprehensible to many average readers. However, this is influenced by the centuries-old tradition of Christian transmission in the Western tradition supported by the Latin translation of the Bible, i.e. the Vulgate. Out of 30 examples, 14 quotations came close to the dynamic translation method: (2f), (6f), (7def), (11e), (13de), (17f), (19d), (20ef), (22de), (25f), (26def), (27f), (28d?), (29f). 9 quotations related to only one of the three Maltese translations: (2f), (6f), (17f), (19d), (25f), (27f), (28d?), (29f). In the remaining 16 quotations, the dominant methodology was formal-equivalence translation.

It’s worth noting that Saydon’s translation and the one published by Għaqda Biblika Maltija “reflect the two chief characteristics that distinguish a translation of merit, namely, its accuracy and faithfulness to the original, and its merits as a literary work of art” (Sciberras 2018: 62). Nevertheless, Hebrew idioms, translated literally, as the above examples show, usually require additional linguistic commentary, which is absent from these translations. This also applies to Żammit’s translation from English, which is completely devoid of any references.

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