

ABSTRACT

As English has become a world language, there are more and more people using it as a first, second or foreign language. Parallel to this is the growing interest in the use of literature in the language classroom. As part of this literature, The Bible is not only considered as a great work but is also one of the most influential and widely read books. Indeed The Bible has played an influential role in the development of the English language, in particular the 'King James Bible'. Although The Bible is considered first and foremost as a religious text, it has also been read as a work of literature and as many scholars have pointed out the greatest book in the English language.

This study proposes to look at extracts from of The Bible in English separated by over 400 years to compare the changes in the language that have occurred over that period. It was decided to take an in depth approach to the analysis of two typical genres found in The Bible. In order to do this, a Systemic Functional Grammar (SFG) approach was taken. It was felt that this would allow a three dimensional examination to be undertaken in terms of the ideas expressed, how these ideas were presented to the audience and how the texts were put together. The genres of 'recount' and 'persuasion' were selected as these involve quite different grammatical requirements.

What the findings indicate is that between 'The King James Bible' and 'The New English Bible', very little change has occurred in terms of grammatical structure in spite of the four centuries of evolution that the English language has undergone. This lack of change may account for the lasting popularity and freshness of a translation of The Bible which dates back to 1611. Such popularity and freshness is one of the hallmarks of great literature and consequently a suitable example of the English Language for learners around the world.

