Evaluative Functions of Biblical Phraseological Units

Diana Stefanova[1]

A R T I C L E   I N F O

A B S T R A C T

This paper examines appraisal instantiations realised through Biblical phraseological units in the Biblical text itself. It reports on some of the findings of a larger study on Biblical phraseological units in English in which appraisal analysis is applied. The database comprises 378 phraseological units extracted from several dictionaries. First, the textual function of the phraseological units is determined. Next, for the ones with evaluative function, the type of evaluation is defined. The function of the studied phraseological units as expressive resources from the semantic regions of emotion, ethics and aesthetics is analysed. Using the comprehensive taxonomy of appraisal lexical resources provided by the appraisal model evaluative inscriptions and tokens of invoked evaluation found in the Biblical text were assigned to the sub-categories of social sanction and social esteem and were further divided into the categories of propriety and veracity and normality, capacity and tenacity respectively. Information concerning the frequency distribution of appraisal instantiations in the Biblical text is presented. Finally, comparisons with the findings of two other studies are drawn. It is argued that in the collectivity to individual continuum Biblical phraseological units have a high potential of performing an evaluative function.

1. INTRODUCTION

Biblical phraseological units play an active role in contemporary discourse in English and create an "intertextual mosaic" (to use Julia Kristeva's expression

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[1] "Angel Kanchev" University of Ruse – Ruse (Bulgaria), Department of Foreign Languages

Corresponding Author:
Diana Stefanova, "Angel Kanchev" University of Ruse – 8 Studentska Str,, 7017 Ruse, Bulgaria
E-mail:dstefanova@uni-ruse.bg

(1980)) while being passed from generation to generation. Studying their function as lexical resources for judging bahaviour and appreciating the value of things is part of the larger issue of examining how speakers take up the challenge of solving the ever-changing communicative tasks they face with the available conventionally agreed linguistic resources – a central topic in contemporary anthropologically-centered linguistic studies. The study presented in this paper is part of a larger investigation on Biblical proverbs and phraseological units in English in which a combination of two analytical tools is applied, appraisal model and culturematic analysis, which come from systemic functional linguistics and linguo-cultural analysis respectively.

The aim of the present study is to examine the evaluative function of Biblical phraseological units in the text of the Bible and to explain the type of evaluation they instantiate. The design of the study involves collecting phraseological units of Biblical origin from dictionaries and examining them in the context of their use in the Biblical text applying discourse analysis techniques based on the appraisal model developed within the framework of systemic functional linguistics. To achieve homogeneity of the sample a working definition of a phraseological unit was adopted. Emiliya Nedkova's definition was chosen for this study because of its strong reliance on the achievements of the Russian school in phraseology:

> *A phraseological unit is an established unit of the lexicon in a speech community which is characterized by relative fixedness and comprises more than just one word. It usually has the structure of a phrase and sometimes of a sentence. As a part of formulaic language, a phraseological unit has a unified meaning which is the result of a semantic transformation of the meaning of its components. Phraseological units have nominative, characterizing and expressive functions.*

<div align="right">(Nedkova 2011: 10, own translation)</div>

Several dictionaries (DITO 1992, ERPD 1984, BDFP 2012, NDCL 2002) were chosen as source material for collecting the sample of Biblical phraseological units for the purposes of the study. Approximately 420 phraseological units were extracted from the chosen dictionaries. Then the candidates for inclusion in the database for the study were checked using the yardstick of the working definition and after discarding the items that do not comply with the criteria formulated in the working definition, 378 items were

retained. Next, the evaluative function of the chosen phraseological units was examined in the context of the Biblical text itself. To this end two translations of the Biblical text into English were used, The New International Version and The King James Version.

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Systemic functional linguistics which enables the researcher to explore the relation of language structure to language function and to the meaning potential available to speakers of a language provides a suitable framework for the present study (for an up-to-date exposition see (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014). Appraisal theory developed by the Sydney School (in the works of Iedema *et. al.* 1994, Coffin 1997 , Eggins and Slade 1997, Martin 2000, 2003, Macken-Horarik 2003, and Martin and Rose 2007) in the tradition of systemic functional linguistics was chosen as the main analytic tool because of its special treatment of the way speakers use linguistic resources and mechanisms to share emotions, tastes and normative assessments. The overview of the appraisal model that follows is based on James Martin and Peter White's monograph *The Language of Evaluation* (2005).

Appraisal analysis extends the traditional treatment of systemic functional linguistics of the interpersonal mode of meaning. It revolves round the three axes of attitude, engagement and graduation. Attitude refers to feelings and emotional reactions, judgements of human behavior and assessments of the aesthetic value of objects. Engagement is concerned with how speakers or writers position themselves with respect to the attitudes expressed. And graduation shows how strong or weak a feeling is or whether a thing is at the core or in the periphery of its category (Martin and White 2005: 34-38). As seen in Figure 1, the three basic categories stand out and it can be seen that the focal category of attitude embraces three further subcategories: affect, judgement and appreciation. According to the appraisal model, judgement is a subsystem of language involved in construing attitudes to people and their behaviour. It is divided into social esteem and social sanction. Martin and White (2005) give the following explanation of the distinction between social sanction and social esteem:

> *Judgements of esteem have to do with 'normality' (how unusual someone is), 'capacity' (how capable they are) and 'tenacity' (how resolute they are);*

judgements of sanction have to do with 'veracity' (how truthful someone is) and 'propriety' (how ethical someone is).

(Martin and White 2005: 52)

Social esteem is related to the way people's characters are measured in social networks such as family, friends, colleagues, etc. while social sanction is related to the way people's behavior is judged against civic or religious norms by the larger community.
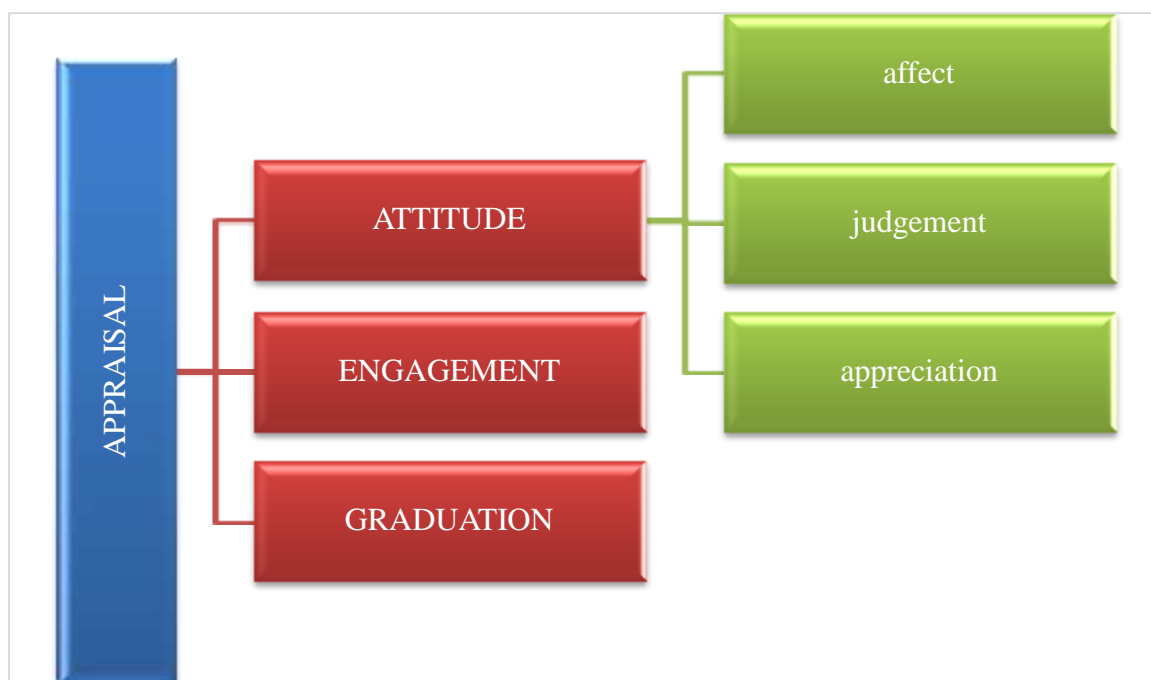

Figure 1. The place of attitude in the appraisal model

(adapted from Martin and White, 2005: 38)

Affect and appreciation are also divided into further subcategories as are the other two main categories of engagement and graduation, but these subdivisions will not be discussed here.

3. EMPIRICAL RESULTS

The first step in the analysis of the collected empirical data was determining the text function of the chosen phraseological units in the Biblical text. It was observed that the phraseological units examined in the present study perform two of the five text functions outlined by Rosamund Moon: informational, evaluative, situational, modalising and organisational (Moon

1998: 217). The analysis showed that 316 out of the 378 phraseological units perform an evaluative function in the Biblical text. They account for 82% of the total number of the studied units. The share of the phraseological units with informational function was smaller – only 18%. No phraseological units performing situational, modalising or organisational functions were found because the phraseological units capable of performing such functions were excluded from the study as they do no satisfy the conditions stipulated in the adopted working definition which is in the tradition of the "narrow" phraseological conception. After determining the textual function of the phraseological units the ones with evaluative function were analysed applying the techniques of appraisal analysis. This stage of the analysis showed the type of attitude expressed by the examined phraseological units. Table 1 shows the format of the table created in the study to summarise the results of the coding and the analysis.

Phraseological unit	Syntactic function	Textual function	ATTITUDE			Type of intertextual connection
			Affect	*Judgement*	*Appreciation*	
in Abraham's bosom *(Luke 16:22)*	adjunct	evaluative		propriety +		citation
[22]One day the beggar died and was carried by the angels to Abraham's side. And the rich man also died and was buried. [23]In Hades, where he was in torment, he looked up and saw Abraham from afar, with Lazarus by his side. *KJV* And it came to pass, that the beggar died, and was carried by the angels into Abraham's bosom: the rich man also died, and was buried.						

Table 1. Examples of notation and analysis

The results show that the greatest number of phraseological units realise judgement – 251 which is two thirds of the total number of the examined phraseological units. Only one in ten phraseological units realises appreciation and the number of phraseological units that realise affect is half that of appreciation as shown in Table 2.

Realisations	Distribution					
	present		absent		sum	
	n	*%*	*n*	*%*	*n*	*%*
Affect	20	5	367	95	387	100
Judgement	251	65	136	35	387	100
Appreciation	45	11	342	89	387	100

Table 2. Frequency distribution of the main subcategories of attitude

At the next level of analysis when the phraseological units under consideration were classified according to the subordinated categories of judgment – social sanction and social esteem, it turned out that the greatest number of phraseological units were used as linguistic resources of expressing social sanction – 186 or 59 % of the phraseological units with an evaluative function. Three times less are the phraseological units that realise social esteem – 65 and they account for 20% of the evaluative units.

The following subtle level of differentiation the phraseological units associated with moral and ethical norms or the category of propriety in the terminology of Martin and White (2005) stand out. This category accounts for 52% of the evaluative phraseological units. It is noteworthy that positive and negative valuations are almost evenly distributed with a slight prevalence of negative ratings. Second comes the category of capacity accounting for 14% of the studied evaluative units. The rest of the categories – veracity and tenacity – are less represented by 7% and 5% respectively. The lowest rate is observed with the category of normality – 1.5%. The detailed breakdown of the frequency distribution of the subordinated categories within category of attitude is presented in Table 3.

Subcategories of attitude	present		absent		sum	
	n	*%*	*n*	*%*	*n*	*%*
Social sanction	**186**	59	130	41	316	100
Propriety	***164***	52	152	48	316	100
Positive propriety	78	24	238	76	316	100
Negative propriety	86	27	230	73	316	100
Veracity	***22***	7	294	93	316	100
Positive veracity	7	2	309	98	316	100
Negative veracity	15	5	301	95	316	100
Social esteem	**65**	20	251	80	316	100
Normality	***5***	1.5	311	98.5	316	100
Positive normality	1	0.3	315	315	316	100
Negative normality	4	1.2	312	98.8	316	100
Capacity	***45***	14	271	86	316	100
Positive capacity	19	6	297	94	316	100
Negative capacity	26	8	290	92	316	100
Tenacity	***15***	5	301	95	316	100
Positive tenacity	11	3	305	97	316	100
Negative tenacity	4	1.2	312	98.8	316	100

Distribution spans the present/absent/sum header columns above.

Table 3. Breakdown of the frequency distribution of the subcategories of social sanction and social esteem

4. CONCLUSION

The tendency observed in this study concerning the prevalence of the evaluative function of Biblical phraseological units in the Biblical text itself (82%) matches a tendency attested in the Oxford Hector Pilot Corpus which comprises spoken and written data with a great proportion of journalism by Rosamund Moon. She reports that "89% of the FEIs [fixed expressions and idioms that she investigated] with a metaphoric or simile content have some evaluative function" (Moon 1998: 225). The same tendency is observed in a

database of Biblical proverbs collected for the larger investigation mentioned in the introduction. Petrova and Stefanova report that in 84% of the proverbs in the database of their study "evaluative inscriptions and tokens of invoked evaluation index acts of evaluation" (Petrova and Stefanova 2017: 18). The high occurrence of the evaluative function of the studied phraseological units in the Biblical text points to the nature of their potential of expressing a meaning which is part of the repository of meanings in the culture creatively exploited by various sub-groupings and individuals.

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Author Biography

DIANA STEFANOVA teaches English at the Department of Foreign Languages in Ruse University, Bulgaria. She is writing a PhD thesis on Biblical proverbs and idioms.