

Encyclopedia of English Language Bible Versions

Bradford B. Taliaferro. *Encyclopedia of English Language Bible Versions*. Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2013. 543 pp. \$75.00. Paper. ISBN: 9780786471218.

Some may not be familiar with McFarland Publishing (<http://www.mcfarlandbooks.com/>), a publisher located in a tiny town in the mountains of North Carolina. They have turned out a good number of titles on a wide variety of subjects, many of them reference works aimed at libraries (as a baseball enthusiast, they first caught my attention with the many histories and biographies of the game which they publish). Most of their titles are not inexpensive, but they do tend to be consistently of a higher quality in terms of binding, graphic design, and editing. One of the subject areas in which they regularly publish is religion (not just Christianity).

This title is similar to another McFarland title published in 2009, *English Language Bible Translators* by William Paul (ISBN: 9780786442430). Paul's work is obviously more limited in scope but does a much more thorough job with that narrower focus than Taliaferro's book (*EELBV*). If you plan to buy one, I would encourage buying both. Other monographs have certainly dealt with the history of the Bible in English translation. Without attempting any lengthy list, one thinks of F.F. Bruce's *History of the Bible in English*, which went through several editions, or more recently Bruce Metzger's *The Bible in Translation: Ancient and English Versions*, covering translations through the year 2000. Also helpful is David Dewey's *A User's Guide to Bible translations*, which gives a fairly comprehensive overview of English translations and the history behind them (through the year 2005). Any of these or other similar titles will give more of a prose history of various translations.

I am not aware however of any recent reference book which covers the ground as specifically as Taliaferro's new volume. He cites as one of his main sources the *Catalogue of English Bible Translations: A Classified Bibliography of Versions and Editions* by William J. Chamberlin (Greenwood Press, 1991). If you don't own Chamberlin's work, I'm not sure I'd rush out to get it, since it starts around \$230.00 online for a used copy and is quickly becoming dated given the many recent translations in the last two decades. The audience for the *EELBV* is not stated, but it is obviously not meant for a casual reader or occasional Bible scholar. The work is far too detailed to be of practical use to anyone other than those who are students of Bible translation or for libraries. Yet the information will prove useful in reference collections for scholars of English language Bible translation.

The *EELBV* is in a sense two books in one. The first 260 pages cover over 1,400 English language Bible versions, both print and online (by which I assume he means online "only" versions). To arrive at that number, Taliaferro counts not only translations of the entire Bible, but partial translations, such as just a New Testament or the gospels, as well as *variants* of translations. Some of these are intentional variants while others are accidental (e.g., printing errors not caught). So the number 1,400 is a bit misleading. Still, one cannot argue with the comprehensive scope of his research. It is hard to imagine that he missed any translations. This section is introduced by a brief but useful glossary of relevant terminology such as "dynamic equivalence," "polyglot," and "transliteration" — terms casual Bible students may not know.

Taliaferro utilizes a numbering system for each entry, which makes the cross references and indexes much more helpful and easy to use. He chose to start his numbering at #7000 in order to avoid confusion with earlier reference sources which also use numbering systems. That seems like overkill, but it doesn't harm the usefulness of the system. He also states that he skips some numbers purposely to allow for future additions to his listings; be ready to buy the second edition at some point.

What will the reader find in a typical entry? First, there is a basic description of the version listed, such as when it was completed, previous English versions it may have been based upon, Greek and/or Hebrew versions it used as its source, and later changes made to the version. Some sample verses are usually provided (very helpful), as is a brief bibliography (sometimes only one entry). In some entries, a listing of the translation team is provided, sometimes in exhaustive detail. At the end of each entry is a list of the "catalog numbers," which gives a further breakdown of Taliaferro's numbering system for the various parts or revisions of that version (of marginal value). If a version of the Bible is later revised or updated (which may not mean any major revisions), then the updated version gets a separate entry — but not always. For example, the New American Standard Bible (1971), which went through what would be considered by many to be a significant revision in 1995, receives only one entry (#8100).

In some entries (presumably of more well known versions, but it is not clear), the *EELBV* also includes charts in which some verses are chosen by Taliaferro to illustrate slight changes to the version as it went through various revisions over time. To return to the NASB, a chart is included which tracks ten revision points — nine for the initial version and one for the 1995 major revision. It is unclear how he chose the verses in each chart. In this one, he uses Amos 3:2 as an example. It originally stated "You only have me..." In 1975 it was changed to read "You only have I chosen..." which is the wording retained in 1995. This verse makes sense as an example, as it is not only fairly different linguistically but could be taken to show a slight theological difference as well. But then another verse he includes in this chart is Mark 8:20, which originally used the word "basketfuls"; in 1972 this was changed to "baskets full." Not earth shattering stuff here. Frankly, as one skims through these comparison charts, the examples tend much more to the latter insignificant type than the former more substantive example. It would have been better had he shown us the ones that actually matter.

The second section of the *EELBV* is information about Translators, Revisers, and Editors. Each entry provides some or all of the following: date of birth/death (if known), gender (helpful given the ambiguity of some names), ecclesiological and/or theological affiliation (very useful), academic or other credentials, and then of course which Bible version(s) they worked in any way with cross-reference to the previous section. Occasional added cross-references point to related people or Bibles. None of these entries is more than a paragraph long, but they provide sufficient information to identify the people. Interestingly, the entries in the section on the Bible versions themselves do not usually mention those who were primary editors/contributors, so users would probably be directed to this second section from the preliminary information in a Bible itself where such people are normally listed.

How does this section compare to Paul's *English Language Bible Translators*? One example: the entry for Eugene Peterson, the author of the paraphrase, *The Message*, gets about a paragraph length entry in the *EELBV*; in Paul's book, Peterson merits an entry about one page in length which covers much the same ground as the *EELBV*, but with more detail. Paul's work seems to be more selective, while the *EELBV* tends to include even minor contributors to versions. It would be ideal to have both on the shelf, the *EELBV* for breadth and Paul for depth.

The *EELBV* has multiple appendices. The first four list the variants for the (1) Tyndale New Testament, (2) Geneva Bible, (3) Douay/Rheims-Challoner Bible, and (4) the Authorised Version. Apparently these are listed

here given the larger number of variants, but unfortunately there does not seem to be any note in the main entries for these versions pointing users to the appendixes. The next appendix is for “confusing Bible names” (names of translations). This is followed by one for “unfinished Bible versions” (but apparently still in process or potentially so) and then another for “abandoned Bible versions” (partially done but no plans to complete). It then follows with “notable Bible portions” (such as the Internet LOLCatBible — you decide how notable that is) and “dialect and slang Bible portions” (the Bible in Cockney and the Cameroon Pidgin Bible).

The final appendix contains “version cross reference tables.” This cross references the *EELBV* with five other catalogs of English Bible versions. While I assume the other works are arranged alphabetically (not all are at my disposal), this final appendix could prove useful to the more serious scholar of Bible versions trying to compare the various reference sources. Lastly, a brief general bibliography and an extensive index are provided.

This work, for some of its odd choices of detail included, is definitely worth including in the reference section of any library, undergrad or graduate, with any sort of Biblical studies program. It is hard to argue with the comprehensive scope of it. The writing is clear and easy to understand, and it is arranged for ease of use.

See also:

- International Society of Bible Collectors (ISBC) <http://www.biblecollectors.org/>
- Bible Reader’s Museum (author’s website) <http://www.biblereadersmuseum.com/>

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