

Language, space and the Bible: How to *create* (things) with words

Branimir Vukosav*

bvukosav@unizd.hr

<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-9096-1467>

Arkadiusz Krasicki**

akrasicki@unizd.hr

<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-6229-5233>

Marijana Kresić Vukosav***

mkresic@unizd.hr

<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-9284-0028>

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The paper discusses human possibilities and limitations with respect to the creative function of language, by analysing linguistic, geographic and theological accounts of how human identity and the world are created in and through language. In a first step we will discuss realistic vs. constructivist approaches in epistemology, with the aim of describing the shift towards postmodernist and relativistic scientific positions, especially in research in the fields of linguistics and geography. Then, we analyse the creative functions that these disciplines attribute to language use, including speech acts and geographic names. The theological part of the paper focuses on the creative power of God, as it is described in the Holy Bible and expressed through language, with reference to the allegory of Babel. In this section, God's creation is put in contrast to human creation. The study concludes with a synthesis of all insights gained and a comparison of human vs. the divine power of creation.

Key words: *the Bible, geography, language, the power of creation, theology.*

* Branimir Vukosav, PhD, Assist. Prof., University of Zadar, Department of Geography; Address: Dr. Franje Tuđmana 24 i, HR-23000 Zadar, Croatia.

** Arkadiusz Krasicki, PhD, Assoc. Prof., University of Zadar, Department of Religious Sciences; Address: Dr. Franje Tuđmana 24 i, HR-23000 Zadar, Croatia.

*** Marijana Kresić Vukosav, PhD, Full Prof., University of Zadar, Department of Linguistics; Address: Trg Kneza Višeslava 9, HR-23000 Zadar, Croatia.

*Introduction*****

The use of language, human existence in space, divine creation of all that exists – all of these are processes that entail the creation of facts, circumstances, entities and, in the latter case, living beings. Although they might seem very similar with respect to the creating force, these processes are essentially different, depending both on the agent causing the creation, the object being created and the circumstances in which they occur. This can be illustrated by the phenomenon of human identity, which we can approach as a prerequisite for or outcome of language use, and thus investigate with the help of (applied) linguistics. A person's speech gives hints to who he/she is (or intends to be); moreover, the whole process of communication can be analysed as a process of self (and other) creation.¹ The identities of individuals and groups also have a strong geographic context – namely, people “create” the sense of self, partially with respect to their existence and functioning within their geographic surrounding, as well as the real and constructed boundaries of space they perceive. Thus, in geographic terms, identity is reflected in ascribing collective and individual meaning to space and deriving meaning from the various spatial phenomena. From the point of view of the Bible, the identity of man is that he is created in the image and likeness of God, a process that can be described as the pinnacle of creation.

The main problem with research on the phenomenon of identity² in the humanities and social sciences, and up to now a largely neglected one, is that the respective agents' possibilities and limitations are not clearly identified from an epistemological and philosophical point of view. This is the research gap which we intend to address in this paper by discussing human possibilities and limitations with respect to the creation through language. In essence, we approach this with the creative function of language from an interdisciplinary perspective by analysing how it is reflected in linguistic, geographic and theological accounts of creation.

**** Proof reading by Dave Cottingham.

¹ Cf. Marijana KRESIĆ, *Sprache, Sprechen und Identität*, München, 2006; John EDWARDS, *Language and identity*, Cambridge, 2009.

² Cf. Jean-Claude KAUFFMAN, *Die Erfindung des Ich. Eine Theorie der Identität*, Tübingen, 2005.

1. *The objectivistic vs. postmodernist approach in epistemology and other scientific disciplines*

In epistemology, a positivistic and objectivist view, which had its roots in the rationalist approach of the Enlightenment, has in the past decades encountered a push back by the so-called “postmodernism” view, a subjectivistic and constructivist paradigm which has become particularly prominent in the humanities and social sciences.

As intellectual eras, both pre-modernism (connected to medieval times) and modernism (rooted in the age of Enlightenment and its scientific, economic and technical developments) were founded on realism and on objectivism as the main approaches.³ Both are based on the assumption that the individual is making use of reason in order to gain insights into the objectively existing outside world. With pre-modernism and its link to Christianity there is a strong emphasis on the assumption that both the outside world, as well as ethical and moral principles, have their (supernatural) origin outside of the individual and that the latter are rooted in God’s natural law.

In contrast to this is the program of the postmodernist intellectual avant-garde with the most prominent philosophers Foucault, Derrida, Lyotard, Rorty and Lacan largely abandoning the notions of reason, truth, and knowledge.⁴ By disregarding the notions of truth and objective reality, this intellectual line actually negates the foundations of the scientific approach and the very ideal of seeking the truth.

At the core of the postmodernist approach is an “explicit epistemic relativism (belief in personal or culturally specific truths or facts)”⁵ and “the promotion of a version of pluralism which privileges the views of minority groups over the general consensus of scientists of liberal democratic ethics which are presented as authoritarian and dogmatic”⁶. These positions have introduced subjectivism, irrationalism and political activism into science, with an emphasis on the superiority of personal experience over empirically described facts. There are many contradictions in the postmodernist conceptions of the world and the scientific method, such as the assumption that all truths, standpoints, claims and values are subjective, except for the very claim that all perceptions and interpretations of the world are subjective.⁷ By working towards overthrowing the power relations in favour of interests of minority groups, the postmodernist approach

³ Cf. Stephen HICKS, *Explaining Postmodernism. Skepticism and Socialism from Rousseau to Foucault*, Wisconsin, 2011, 8.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 2.

⁵ Cf. Helen PLUCKROSE, *How French “Intellectuals” Ruined the West: Postmodernism and Its Impact, Explained* (27.03.2017), <https://areomagazine.com/2017/03/27/how-french-intellectuals-ruined-the-west-postmodernism-and-its-impact-explained/>, (03.06.2024).

⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷ Cf. Hicks, *Explaining Postmodernism...*, 6-13.

departs from descriptive, objective and analytical scientific research and shifts the academic endeavour in the direction of a political activism aimed at changing the social order in favour of ideologies that are to a large extent inspired by political and cultural Marxism.⁸

In geography, the postmodernist approach has made a more significant impact primarily in the branch of human geography, namely, the parts of it which are concerned with relationships of individuals and communities with space. The main focus of postmodern scholars within the discipline has been the research of individual and collective meanings ascribed to spaces and narratives about spaces. However, the problem with this approach has been that this focus on meaning as a reflection of subjective notions about space, often does so at the expense of spatial reality.⁹ Although the exploration of meaning has made significant contributions to the field and has introduced space into social theory, the shift towards postmodernism in the late 1980s and the early 1990s has nevertheless created some fundamental issues like the tendency to shift towards relativism. This line of thought introduces anti-realism to the discipline, resulting in the negation of any empirical evaluation and in making the objective truth and scientific knowledge appear subjective and relative.¹⁰

2. *Language: creating things with words*

In the following section, on the basis of insights, studies and theories from the field of linguistics, we will discuss human possibilities and limitations with respect to creating social and discursive facts, speakers' identities, influences on other speakers.

2.1. *Speech acts*

The notion of the *speech act* is used in pragmatics, the linguistic discipline which investigates the functions and use of language in communicative contexts. In addition to its descriptive or informative function, language has an even more frequently occurring performative function which is expressed through what is at first called performative acts, and later speech acts¹¹. For example, if someone says "I name this ship the *Queen Elizabeth*", and if all circumstances

⁸ *Ibid.*, 227-228.

⁹ Cf. Alexandras P. LAGOPOULOS, *Postmodernism, geography and the social semiotics of space, Environment and Planning D: Society and Space*, 11 (1993) 255-278, 255.

¹⁰ Cf. Andrew SAYER, *Postmodernist Thought in Geography: A Realist View*, *Antipode*, 25 (1993) 4, 320-344, 321.

¹¹ Cf. John Langshaw AUSTIN, *How to Do Things with Words: The William James Lectures delivered at Harvard University in 1955*, ed. by J. O. Urmson, Marina Sbisa, Oxford, 1962, 33.

and necessary conditions are met, the speaker will have performed the act of naming the ship accordingly. Another example would be the sentence "I hereby declare you husband and wife", uttered in a wedding ceremony. A speech act, therefore, can be conceived of as intentional linguistic behaviour which is in accordance with the principles and rules acquired in a certain society¹² and defined as an utterance uttered with the intention to perform a certain act with a specific purpose or effect in the world or with respect to oneself or other speakers. At the centre of speech act theory is the assumption that speech can have an effect on the extralinguistic world and change it. This aspect of a speech act is what Austin calls perlocutionary act, i.e. the consequences or effects of an utterance, such as someone being offended or baptized or persuaded to do something. The locutionary act is situated at the level of the utterance or proposition, referring to what is said, e.g. "Open the window." vs. "Could you please open the window?" In this example, two different locutionary acts are uttered, but the same illocutionary act or speech act is expressed, which is a request. The perlocutionary effect could be that the other person in fact does open the window. One of the main claims of speech act theory is that speakers perform illocutionary acts, i.e. do things with words most of the time, and only to a small extent merely describe the outside world.

In his work *Speech Acts*¹³ and other publications Searle¹⁴ further clarifies and develops the notions introduced by Austin and offers a classification which encompasses five types of speech acts, i.e. assertives. These are speech acts that bind the speaker to the truth of the expressed proposition, whereby the hearer can be informed truthfully about a state of affairs expressed by the assertive (verbs that explicitly mark assertives and can, but do not have to be used in respective utterances: *claim, say, argue, put forward*). Directives are speech acts uttered with the intention to direct the hearer to perform a certain action or change his/her behaviour, attitude or opinion (example verbs: *request, order, advise*). Commissives represent speech acts that commit the speaker to some future action (example verbs: *promise, commit to, will*). Expressives are speech acts expressing the speaker's attitudes, views or emotions, e.g. congratulations, apologies, thanksgivings or acknowledgements (example verbs: *feel, think, hold*). Finally, declarations are speech acts that change reality in accordance with the content of the declaration, e.g. baptizing, declaring someone guilty, or declaring a couple husband and wife.

To sum up, all the aforementioned categories of speech acts can be used by speakers in order to a) change certain parts of social and also spiritual reality (wedding vows, baptism, as in the case of declarations, b) to have certain effects

¹² Cf. John R. SEARLE, *Speech Acts*, Cambridge, 1969, 57.

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ Cf. John R. SEARLE, A Taxonomy of Illocutionary Acts, in: Keith GUNDERSON (ed.), *Language, Mind, and Knowledge*, vol. 7, Minneapolis, 1975, 344-369, 369; John R. SEARLE, *Expression and Meaning*, Cambridge, 1979.

on the behaviour, inner state or cognition of the hearer, as in the case of assertives and directives, or c) to commit the speaker himself to doing something or expressing his/her inner state, as in the case of commissives and expressives. All this occurs in accordance with respective sociocultural, linguistic and communicative conventions that are valid in a speech community and require certain conditions to be met; e.g. only a person with the respective authority can declare someone guilty or perform a baptism etc.

2.2. *Acts of identity*

In addition to the speech act functions listed above, with every utterance speaker realizes the function of constituting their individual and group identity through the respective locutionary, illocutionary and perlocutionary act, i.e. they make a statement concerning who they are as individuals and with respect to their social role or status, e.g. a student, a school teacher, a mother, a priest, a scientist. In the literature, this phenomenon has been brought up by Le Page and Tabouret-Keller¹⁵ with the notion *Acts of identity*, which in their study refers to the observation that a speaker performs an identity-related act with every speech act to a greater or lesser extent.

Thus, with the help of speech acts or the so-called acts of identity, speakers can change certain parts of the outer world according to social conventions, commit themselves or other speakers to some course of action or to the truthfulness of their assertions, express their current viewpoints or emotions, or mark their more permanent identities and belongings. In the linguistic discipline of discourse analysis¹⁶, human communication is also widely perceived as having a reality-constitutive function or effect. Contents discussed and displayed in media discourse, for instance, are perceived as parts of reality by their audiences or users. However, the respective assertives, the category of speech act which is the most frequent in such type of discourse, must fulfil the condition of truthfulness in order to count as a valid reality representation. The same can be said for applying to the aforementioned speech acts of identity which can be performed successfully only if they follow the respective rules of communicative convention, and also respect principles such as social and natural order.

¹⁵ Cf. Robert B. LE PAGE, Andrée TABOURET-KELLER, *Acts of identity: Creole-based approaches to language and ethnicity*, Cambridge, 1985.

¹⁶ Cf. Shi-XU, *A Cultural Approach to Discourse*, London, 2005, 13-41.

3. Geography: creating places through language use

The human experience is a profoundly spatial phenomenon and depends largely on geographic realities. The mind and all of our senses, as well as the way they access reality around us, are wired in order to perceive ourselves and others as spatial phenomena and interact with our environment. Our interaction with both living and non-living elements of space demands creating interpretations of our geographic reality through the process of ascribing direct or inherited meanings to it. In that context, it is necessary to elaborate the ways in which we interpret, imagine, categorize, and relate to space. Finally, we name our “creation” and the name used (a toponym, or a place name) does much more than just identify a place – it contains and evokes all the qualities of our relation to a specific location/area.¹⁷ In this chapter we explore the ways in which people *create places* by ascribing meanings to geographic reality and using place names.

3.1. Space and place – creating identity through meaning

In geography, the terms *space* and *place* have a fundamental role. The term “space” is a more abstract one and has been a central term within the positivist approach oriented towards spatial analysis. It is considered a “container” of physical objects and spatial events.¹⁸ There are several aspects of comprehending space, most usually in terms of it being regarded as “absolute” (qualitatively empty, passive, homogenous, immobile) or “relative” (differentiated, affecting and structuring the things it contains).¹⁹ The notion of “absolute” space was, however, rejected by some geographers in the second half of the 20th century. For instance, Lefebvre²⁰ discards it and proposes the notion of space being “produced” through social activity, giving it a historical dimension. Nevertheless, the dominant opinion implied in various recent publications recognizes space as objective (absolute) and place as a construct founded upon it, with space remaining a fundamental and central concept.

Another increasingly important concept in geography is identity. When it comes to perceiving space and place in the context of identity, two main notions must be differed: 1) identity of space/place in terms of its distinctive and unique visible features, and 2) identity of place in relation to an individual or

¹⁷ Branimir VUKOSAV, Borna FUERST-BJELIŠ, Labels of interest groups as indicators of a vernacular region: A case study in Croatia, *Tijdschrift voor Economische en Sociale Geografie*, 107 (2016) 454-467, 458.

¹⁸ Cf. Laura ŠAKAJA, *Uvod u kulturnu geografiju* [Introduction to Cultural Geography], Zagreb, 2015, 104-106.

¹⁹ Cf. Emil MAZÚR, Ján URBÁNEK, Space in geography, *GeoJournal*, 7 (1983) 139-143, 139.

²⁰ Cf. Henri LEFEBVRE, *The Production of Space*, Oxford, 1991, 7-9.

group that resides in it. Given the increasing academic interest in the concept of identity in the last several decades within the humanities and the social sciences, the interest of geographers in the latter notion has been growing as well. As mentioned above, human experience with the environment necessarily implies the formation of meaning. Thus, a *space* with an ascribed meaning becomes a *place*²¹, a new concept that transcends mere geometric and physical qualities. Essentially, the interaction of an individual or a group with a place forms a “sense of place”, a construct used to denote the relationship and the sense of belonging and attachment to a place.²² According to Relph, a Canadian geographer, the meanings that make up places can range from direct experience to geometric abstractions and depend on our intentions.²³ He identifies and categorizes the properties of place directly involved in the construction of meaning – location, time, landscape, community, personal spaces and rootedness. Groups and individuals construct images and narratives about place through both the inherited meanings as well as their own personal experiences with place, as well as with other people who inhabit it²⁴, and the resulting “sense of place” becomes a core of their spatial identities.²⁵ It is important to note that the experiences and meanings that make up the “sense of place” rely heavily on objective geographic, historical and social facts. These facts represent a foundation, an objective reality upon which all the spatial identities are built.

3.2. *Toponyms and creating “place” out of “space”*

Toponyms or place names are an indispensable part of human language, used not only to identify certain spatial phenomena but also to communicate our own relations to realities around us in cognitive, emotional, ideological and social ways²⁶. As Claval puts it, “space cannot be known, shared and memorized except by language”²⁷. Geographically and socially, thus, toponyms play a very important role of linguistic representations (symbols) that articulate geographic realities.²⁸ Besides serving as mere place identifiers, they have another important function. Namely, a word used to name a place acquires a dimension that transcends both geography and language. It becomes a carrier of mea-

²¹ Cf. Šakaja, *Uvod u kulturnu geografiju...*, 106.

²² Cf. Paul CLAVAL, *An Introduction to Regional Geography*, Oxford, 1998.

²³ Cf. Edward C. RELPH, *Place and Placelessness*, London, 1976.

²⁴ Cf. Claval, *An Introduction...*, 139.

²⁵ Cf. Thomas ROHKRÄMER, Felix Robin SCHULZ, *Space, Place and Identities, History Compass*, 7 (2009) 5, 1338-1349, 1338.

²⁶ Cf. Botolv HELLELAND, *Place Names and Identities, Oslo Studies in Language*, 4 (2012) 2, 95-116, 99.

²⁷ Claval, *An Introduction...*, 142.

²⁸ Cf. Branimir VUKOSAV, *Geographic name Zagora and its reference to areas in the Dalmatian hinterland in the selected newspaper medium, Geoadria*, 16 (2011) 2, 261-281, 262.

ning and identity of individuals and groups. In terms of collective identities, it reflects the shared memory of living together in a place through time. Group experiences generate specific narratives (historical and mythological) about a place. Furthermore, individual memories and experiences “infuse” a place name with additional individual meanings.²⁹ In a sense, a toponym becomes the key which unlocks the whole set of collective and individual narratives and identities. It becomes inextricably connected to a place as an identifier of the place’s residents (usually in form of adjectives, “Croatian”, “Bavarian”, “Parisian”, etc.).³⁰

What can we, therefore, conclude from the function of toponyms in terms of their “power” of creation? In the process of turning spaces into places they serve a crucial role as carriers of meanings. Thus, the power of words in this case is quite clear – they are the means through which we label geographic realities and create familiar places that become extended parts of our “self”.

4. Human power and weakness in creating the tower of Babel

Human activity after the sin of Adam and Eve was marked by pain, sweat, birth pains, and death (Genesis 3). It seems that from that moment on, everything a person undertakes has a limited success. In these terms, one should consider human motives for action. Does a person work for God’s glory or for his own glory? Does the satanic exhortation for man to be like God (Genesis 3) still ring in people’s ears? Has man ceased to be the image of God (Heb. *bəšelem ’ēlōhîm*) and no longer follows Him in creating with word and deed? These are some of the questions to which we want to find an answer in this part of the paper by discussing the interpretations of the construction of the tower of Babel in the book of Genesis. As a being created in God’s image but limited by the separation from God (after the fall of Adam and Eve), the human person exhibits both greatness and weakness. The allegory of the “tower of Babel” is a good example of this contrast.

²⁹ Cf. Marijana KRESIĆ VUKOSAV, Branimir VUKOSAV, Identität in Sprache und Raum, in: Janina BEHR et al. (eds.), *Schnittstellen der Germanistik. Festschrift für Hans Bickes*, Berlin, 2020, 215-232, 217; Branimir VUKOSAV, Marijana KRESIĆ VUKOSAV, Space and Language in Conceptualizing Identity, *Topoi*, 41 (2022) 3, 471-482, 473.

³⁰ Cf. Vukosav, Kresić Vukosav, *Space and Language...*, 474.

4.1. *Man as the image of God (bāṣelem 'ēlōhîm) – proof of human strength*

Since God created man in his own image, man has in him something incomprehensible, something divine. That is why man belongs to God and not to himself.³¹ God remembers (zqr) and cares for man (pqd). According to Psalm 8, “He made him a little lower than heavenly beings” (m^e 'at mē'elōhîm, Hebrew: *angel*: LXX), “crowned him with glory and honour” (*tr*). He gave him “authority over the works of His hands” (*mšl*), “put everything under his feet” (*šit*).³² This is where human greatness and dignity are revealed, and man appears as God's image (bāṣelem 'ēlōhîm). In this sense, we can understand that man is, in a way, a creator like God, but limited as a created being. Only man as a creature and image of God can grow in God's presence. The core of man as God's image is his union with God. Sin destroys the community and that is why man becomes lost. However, man never ceased to be made in God's image. Although this image was restored in Jesus Christ, man still feels weakness and degeneration in all areas of human life. Thus, man became a limited being.³³

God's command makes man strong in this respect even though it presupposes his weakness. Man remains as God's co-worker on Earth. That is why man's work is holy - with his work he continues God's work of creation and God's plan becomes man's plan as well.³⁴ And there is no contradiction until man departs from God through sin.

4.2. *The situation after Sin and its influence in relationship between God and man – proof of human weakness with the consequence of loss of identity*

The third chapter of the book of Genesis presents the truth about sin and its consequences, the truth about life's drama that affects every being. It is an image opposite to that of paradise where harmony and peace reign. Through sin, Adam and Eve became weak and imperfect since they rejected the gift of God's love. The two lose their identity, and sin develops/manifests in the perversion of the relationship between man and woman, and breaks the Creator's idea of mutual help, which is expressed concretely in relations to God and to other people. Thus, “Building a city and a tower up to the sky in Gen 11:1-9 stands

³¹ Cf. Celestin TOMIĆ, *Prapovijest spasenja* [Prehistory of salvation], Zagreb, 1977, 76-78.

³² Cf. Božo LUJIĆ, Osnovno biblijsko pitanje: što je čovjek? [The basic biblical question: what is man?], *Bogoslovska smotra*, 74 (2004) 3, 595-618, 608-609; Arkadiusz KRASICKI, Dostojanstvo čovjeka u Ps 8 [The Dignity of Man in Ps 8], *Kateheza: časopis za vjeronauk u školi, katehezu i pastoral mladih*, 31 (2009) 4, 312-321, 319.

³³ Cf. John M. FLOWER, Grijeh, *Biblijski pogledi*, 9 (2001) 1-2, 37-78, 40-43.

³⁴ Cf. Tomić, *Prapovijest spasenja...*, 80.

for an attempt to conquer heaven without God, that is, for ending diversity in the name of ideologically imposed unity.”³⁵ On the other hand, we are aware that the biblical motif of building the tower, which is associated with the pride of people after sinning against God, does not agree with the historical reality. Similar towers were built at that time (Babel - gate of heaven), so that people would be closer to God. Therefore, the historical fact says that building a tower should not be in competition with God and should not destroy the relationship of man to God.³⁶

When cooperating with God, man can do much because he is God's associate, but when he distances himself, his creativity visibly deteriorates because of the consequences of Original Sin. Adam and Eve succumbed to the temptation to become independent of God and took fate into their own hands despite a man can always choose good and reject evil.³⁷ The power of words through which man expressed himself following the example of his Creator, changed its character after the sin. Instead of blessing, man began to curse. Although he is called to do good, he chooses evil. This is evident in the eleventh chapter of the Genesis, when man builds the tower of Babel.

4.3. *The Tower of Babel*

The continuation of the events of human activity and the development of identity after the fall of Adam and Eve includes their descendants and the rest of humanity. The biblical text about the construction of the Tower of Babel helps us understand human strength and weakness that follow the fall (Genesis 11:1-9):

“The whole earth was of one language and of one speech. It happened, as they travelled east, that they found a plain in the land of Shinar; and they lived there. They said one to another, ‘Come, let’s make brick, and burn them thoroughly.’ They had brick for stone, and they used tar for mortar. They said, ‘Come, let’s build us a city, and a tower, whose top reaches to the sky, and let’s make us a name; lest we be scattered abroad on the surface of the whole earth.’ Yahweh came down to see the city and the tower, which the children of men built. Yahweh said, ‘Behold, they are one people, and they have all one language; and this is what they begin to do. Now nothing will be withheld from them, which they intend to do. Come, let’s go down, and there confuse their language, that they may not understand one another’s speech.’ So, Yahweh scattered them abroad from there on the surface of all the earth. They stopped building the

³⁵ Anto POPOVIĆ, *Od slike Božje do Božjeg sinovstva* [From the image of God to the sonship of God], Zagreb, 2008, 76.

³⁶ Cf. Božidar MRAKOVČIĆ, *Biblijska pitanja* [The Biblical questions], Zagreb, 2018, 56-57.

³⁷ Cf. PAPINSKA BIBLIJSKA KOMISIJA [Pontifical Biblical Commission], *Što je čovjek? (Ps 8,5). Putovanje kroz biblijsku antropologiju* [What is a man? (Ps 8:5). A Journey Through Biblical Anthropology], Zagreb, 2022, No. 301-302.

city. Therefore, the name of it was called Babel, because Yahweh confused the language of all the earth, there. From there, Yahweh scattered them abroad on the surface of all the earth.”³⁸

At the beginning of chapter 11, the entire human race gathers in the valley of Shinar to build a city for themselves. This is not the first time Shinar is mentioned; it is mentioned in the previous chapter where Nimrod, a descendant of Ham, founds the kingdom of Babel (i.e. Babylon). Therefore, he was probably the leader of all who gathered in Shinar, and the city they decide to build would become a part of the kingdom.³⁹

The starting point in the description of the construction of the tower is presented in verse 1 “All the earth had one language and the same words”. People spoke one language, although the text says *kal-ha’ares*, which can denote the whole country, as well all human political structures (Deuteronomy 1:5) or specific territories of the country (cf. 2 Sam 24:8).⁴⁰ The question that arises is how can it be that people or the whole country had only one language or used the same words⁴¹. It is acceptable in the biblical sense, because the entire human population descended from one father – Noah. Speaking the same language made it easier for them to build what they planned.⁴² However, we must not ignore the contrary opinions of biblical scholars who claim that there were other peoples who probably spoke other languages. They base their conclusion on chapter 10 which describes the table of nations.⁴³ How do we reconcile the claim that people spoke one language throughout the land but at the same time there were people who spoke their own languages? It is possible that the notion of “one language” refers to the common ideas and harmonious actions of all people.⁴⁴ So, the people have “one speech”, one idea that they want to embody, and additionally, they have one shared territory at their disposal. The verse “They moved from the east” functions here as a literal concept of movement, but it also signifies the departure from God. Instead of serving as a strength, the common language becomes a curse due to this departure. The very decision to stay in one safe place and to “make a name” for themselves is

³⁸ World English Bible (WEB) is a trademark of Rainbow Missions, Inc. Electronic text downloaded from <http://www.ebible.org/>. Text formatted for use with Accordance by OakTree Software, Inc. Version 1.4.

³⁹ Cf. Tim GRAY, Jef CAVINS, *Hoditi s Bogom. Putovanje kroz Bibliju* [Walking with God. A Journey through the Bible], Split, 2018, 44.

⁴⁰ Cf. Dariusz ADAMCZYK, Występek mieszkańców całej ziemi w świetle Księgi Rodzaju (11,1-9) [Transgression of the Inhabitants of all the Earth in the Light of the Book of Genesis (11:1-9)], *Poznańskie Studia Teologiczne*, 25 (2011) 57-83, 58.

⁴¹ Cf. Carlo Maria MARTINI, *Odnaleźć siebie samych* [How to find yourself], Kielce, 1999, 76.

⁴² Cf. Petar VLAŠIĆ, Kula babilonska i pometnja jezika [The Tower of Babel and confusion of tongues], *Bogoslovska smotra*, 2 (1911) 3, 236-247, 241.

⁴³ Cf. Adamczyk, *Występek mieszkańców całej...*, 58.

⁴⁴ Cf. Ante PERIŠA, Duhovi i Kula Babilonska. Jezična raznolikost i međusobno razumijevanje [Spirits and the Tower of Babel Language Diversity and Mutual Understanding], *Jezik*, 64 (2017) 3-4, 92-103, 93.

disobedience to God who, after the Flood, sent people to spread all over the world, be fruitful and multiply in order to populate the Earth (Genesis 9:1). The plan to preserve one language and to build a tower is contrary to God's plan, and relies on human reasoning. Finally, one group wants to impose its plan and ideas on others. They act as if they know everything and even insist on making bricks in their own specific way. It is an attempt to establish hegemony, and one language is not the basis of harmony anymore. God intervenes and confuses their languages, scattering them around the world.

After sin, man loses his identity. He moves away from God and times reduces his creativity. This does not mean that he completely loses his gift from God. We said that man is forever (made in) God's image, which itself became stained due to original sin. What he starts he cannot finish on his own. A new intervention of God is needed in order to create a new man, a new force is needed to create a new community. This happened after Christ's death and resurrection when the Holy Spirit came upon the disciples.⁴⁵

As we conclude our research, we should answer another very important question that arises as a guiding thought throughout our entire work (linguistic and geographical part) and that is the problem: can we call the Tower of Babel a kind of toponym as geography assumes? The term Babel in the exegetical and theological sense cannot be a toponymal *per se*. Babylon is more of a stylistic figure and an example of theological thinking about human activity after the fall of Adam and Eve. Today, after the archaeological excavations have disclosed the foundations of the ancient tower (580 BC), can it be said that it is the same one that the Book of Genesis talks about? There are many opinions based mostly on the dating of the biblical text compared to the discovered remains. By the way, not only the city of Babel but also the whole of Mesopotamia was known for similar towers.⁴⁶

Taking into account the theological and historical facts due to which the Tower of Babel was built, we can assume that it is very difficult to connect the talk about space and the creation of space on the basis of linguistic studies about language as a means of creation, and the very transition from linguistic studies to biblical-theological analysis is very problematic. However, assuming the facts and the purpose of this research, the Tower of Babel can remain a symbol of human, i.e. the opposite, after sin, of thinking about God and other people.

⁴⁵ Papinska biblijska komisija, *Što je čovjek?*, No. 341-345.

⁴⁶ Cf. Mrakovčić, *Biblijska pitanja...*, 56.

Conclusion: Human possibilities and limitations with respect to creation

In this paper, the concept of creation is explored with a special focus on the creation of human identity and the use of language. From the point of view of linguistics, geography and Bible studies, human possibilities and limits with respect to creation are explored through the notions of speech acts, naming places, and the allegory of the tower of Babel.

As described through speech act theory, speakers can change certain parts of the outer world according to social conventions, they can commit themselves or other speakers to some course of action or to the truthfulness of their assertions, they can express their current viewpoints or emotions or mark their more permanent identities and belongings with the help of speech acts or so-called acts of identity. However, human speech acts and the respective acts of identity can only be performed successfully if they are truthful and follow the respective rules of communicative and culturally conditioned convention, but also only if they follow the rules and principles of social order and natural order.

From the point of view of geography, humans can express spatial affiliation and their geographically based identity e.g. by using geographical names (toponyms) in “creating” places out of spaces. The resulting place-related identities, although subjective interpretations of space, are founded in objective reality and rely on human interaction with the actual geographical surroundings. Toponyms have an important function of evoking meanings and narratives attached to spaces. In this way they contribute to creating:

- 1) the identity of place in terms of distinctive visible features that make a location unique and distinguish it from another one,
- 2) and the identity of an individual or group that resides in a place, in relation to it.

As the biblical analysis of the story of the construction of the Tower of Babel has revealed, only divine power is unlimited with respect to its creative capacity on all levels (physical, material, spiritual etc. reality). For humans, creating outside the scope of God’s will and plan becomes impossible, leads to chaos and loss of identity. Man was created for love because he is God’s creation (Genesis 1:26-27; 2:4). Still, after Original Sin, he wanders the world. What the story of the tower of Babel highlights is the “common language” of those who gathered in Shinar. What united people was language (common goal, idea) and obedience to God. People created aspects of social reality within their community, but with disregard to God’s plan. God’s will always include a blessing, but ignoring

God's plan excludes man from that blessing. Man can create only within the framework of God's plan.

The analysis presented in this paper reveals how the creating power of God and man are substantially different in nature: whereas the first one is the foundation of creation and, as such, unlimited and omnipotent, the latter is God's gift to man. Human creative force and its success largely depend on his obedience and loyalty to his Creator. The main logical and epistemological problem with relativism, constructivism and postmodernism essentially stems from the attempt to ascribe divine omnipotence to the world, especially to man. Certain movements in the humanities and social sciences fail in their basic definition or understanding of man as a limited being and neglect the objective reality. In doing so, they mistakenly interpret man's subjective views and standpoints as realities.

Branimir Vukosav* – Arkadiusz Krasicki** – Marijana Kresić Vukosav***

Jezik, prostor i Biblija: Kako stvarati (stvari) riječima

Sažetak

U radu se razmatraju ljudske mogućnosti i ograničenja s obzirom na stvaralačku funkciju jezika, i to na temelju analize lingvističkih, geografskih i teoloških prikaza načina na koji ljudski identitet i svijet nastaju pomoću jezika. U prvom se koraku raspravlja o realističnim nasuprot konstruktivističkim pristupima u epistemologiji, radi opisivanja pomaka od tradicionalnih prema postmodernističkim i relativističkim znanstvenim pozicijama, posebno u lingvistici i geografiji. Zatim analiziramo stvaralačke funkcije koje te discipline pripisuju uporabi jezika, uključujući govorne činove u jeziku i geografska imena. Teološki dio rada usredotočen je na Božju stvaralačku moć, kako je opisana u Bibliji i izražena jezikom, na temelju analize babelske alegorije. U ovome se dijelu Božje stvaranje stavlja u suprotnost ljudskom stvaranju. Rad završava sintezom svih spoznaja dobivenih ovim istraživanjem i usporedbom ljudske i Božje nadnaravne i neograničene snage stvaranja.

Ključne riječi: Biblija, geografija, jezik, moć stvaranja, teologija.

* Doc. dr. sc. Branimir Vukosav, Sveučilište u Zadru, Odjel za geografiju; Dr. Franje Tuđmana 24 i, HR-23000 Zadar; e-mail: bvukosav@unizd.hr.

** Izv. prof. dr. sc. Arkadiusz Krasicki, Sveučilište u Zadru, Teološko-katehetski odjel; Dr. Franje Tuđmana 24 i, HR-23000 Zadar; e-mail: akrasicki@unizd.hr.

*** Prof. dr. sc. Marijana Kresić Vukosav, Sveučilište u Zadru, Odjel za lingvistiku; Trg Kneza Višeslava 9, HR-23000 Zadar; e-mail: mkresic@unizd.hr.