



# 'Semantic extension' and semantic change: were translators of the Old Latin Bible L1 speakers of Greek?

## 1.1. THE OLD LATIN BIBLE

- The earliest Latin translations of biblical texts are known collectively as Old Latin Bible (OLB), or *Vetus Latina*.
- There is scholarly consensus that the OLB was translated from Ancient Greek versions of the Bible (Houghton 2023).
- However, unlike Jerome's *Vulgate*, the OLB cannot be traced back to a single translator, or even place and time of origin – the identity of its translators remains so far unknown (*ibid.*).
- The native language of the OLB translators is a matter of debate, with earlier scholarship in favour of Greek and more recent scholarship in favour of Latin.

## 1.2. SEMANTIC EXTENSION

- Latin translations of the Bible, as well as other Christian Latin writings, contain many contact-induced features, e.g.
  - angelus* 'angel' ← ἄγγελος (borrowing)
  - glōrificō* 'glorify' ← δοξάζω (loan translation)
- One such feature is sometimes referred to as 'semantic extension' (SE) (e.g. Burton 2000:120, 2011:489-90).
- Burton refers to Weinreich (1953:48):
  - "[...] the extension of the use of an indigenous word of the influenced language in conformity with a foreign model."
- Weinreich's example:
  - Yakut *tahym* 'water level' → 'level' on the basis of Russian *úroven* 'level'
- SE is also known as 'semantic loan', 'loan-shift', 'semantic calque', etc.
- Can SE tell us something about the L1 of the OLB translators?**
- Is SE limited to biblical translations, or are there cases of SE spreading beyond biblical texts, thus counting as semantic change?**

## 2. SELECT DATA AND PARALLELS

<i>virtūs</i> ← δύναμις		<i>grātia</i> ← χάρις		<i>inting(u)ō</i> ← βάπτω, βαπτίζω	
Usual meaning	OLB extension	Usual meaning	OLB extension	Usual meaning	OLB extension
'manliness, strength, courage'	'mighty act, miracle'	'favour (found with or shown to others), charm'	'divine favour, divine goodwill, divine gift'	'to dip in'	'to baptize'
Ex: Matthew 11:20 <i>tunc coepit improperare civitatibus, in quibus factae sunt plurimae virtutes eius</i> 'Then he began to reproach the towns in which most of his <u>miracles</u> were performed' OLB extension → semantic change? YES		Ex: Luke 1:28 <i>et ingressus angelus evangelizavit eam et dixit illi: ave grātia plena [...]</i> 'The angel, having come in, blessed her, and said: greetings, (you who are) full of <u>divine favour</u> ' OLB extension → semantic change? YES		Very rarely found: the borrowing <i>baptizō</i> is overwhelmingly prominent  Ex: Matthew 28:19 (patristic quote) <i>[...] intingentes eos in nomine patris [...]</i> ' <u>baptizing</u> them in the name of the father' OLB extension → semantic change? NO	
<i>commūnicō</i> ← κοινωνέω		<i>commūnis</i> ← κοινός		<i>pānis</i> ← ἄρτος	
Usual meaning	OLB extension	Usual meaning	OLB extension	Usual meaning	OLB extension
'share, discuss' (transitive)	'share in, participate' (intransitive)	'common, shared'	'dirty, impure'	'bread, loaf'	'food, sustenance, spiritual nourishment'
Ex: 1 Timothy 5:22 (Sabatier v3 1743:876) <i>manus cito nemini imposueris, neque <u>commun</u>caveris peccatis alienis</i> 'You will not lay hands quickly on anyone, nor <u>share in</u> the sins of others' OLB extension → semantic change? YES (see further below)		Ex: Mark 7:2 <i>cum viderent quosdam ex discipulis eius <u>communis</u> manibus, id est non lotis, manducare panem, vituperaverunt</i> 'When they saw some of his disciples eating bread with <u>dirty</u> , that is, with unwashed hands, they found fault' OLB extension → semantic change? NO		NB: very occasionally used as 'food' before OLB, but high increase in frequency after OLB Ex: Genesis 3:19 (Sabatier v1 1743:20) <i>in sudore faciei tuae edes <u>panem</u> tuum</i> 'by the sweat of your brow you will eat your <u>food</u> ' OLB extension → semantic change? YES	

**More SE prompted by Christianity in Latin (outside of biblical translations):**  
*commūnicō* 'to share in (intr.)' → 'to take part in the Holy communion' [change in several Romance languages] (Modern Gk. κοινωνώ has this meaning, but it is difficult to tell whether the developments are independent)

### SE in Christian scriptures in other languages:

Ancient Greek ← Hebrew (Silva 1975)

θάλασσα 'sea' → 'lake'

[no change]

ἄρτος 'bread' → 'food'

[no change]

ἄγγελος 'messenger' → 'herald of God, angel'

[change, Koine Gk.–]

Old English ← Latin (Štrmelj 2020:5,7, Hock 1991:399)

*haelend* 'one who heals' → 'Jesus'

[change, OE–1275]

*eastron* 'pagan feast of Eastre' → 'Passover'

[change, OE–, though now only in the collocation *Jewish Easter*]

*heofon* 'sky, abode of the gods' → 'Christian heaven'

[change, OE–]

*hel* 'abode of the dead' → 'Christian hell'

[change, OE–]

## 3.1. Q1: TRANSLATORS' L1

- SE is discussed mainly in relation to the recipient language, with little focus on means of transmission.
- In studies on crosslinguistic influence and bilingualism, similar phenomena have been described as 'semantic transfer' and 'conceptual transfer' (e.g. Jarvis and Pavlenko 2008:120-2).
- Ex: English learner of Russian using *chashka* to mean 'a paper cup' (*ibid.*)

	'cup'	'glass'	'paper cup'
Eng. <i>cup</i>	✓	✗	✓
Eng. <i>glass</i>	✗	✓	✗
Rus. <i>chashka</i>	✓	✗	✗
Rus. <i>stakan</i>	✗	✓	✓

- ...however, if the learner has advanced control of the L2, the L2 can influence the L1 (*ibid.* 79-81).
- Examples have been recorded for bilingual Latin-Greek speakers as well, e.g. (Adams 2003:261-8)  
*casus* 'fall' → 'grammatical case' (in L1, ← πτώσις)  
*ζωή* 'life' → term of endearment (in L2, ← (*mea*) *vita*)
- SE unfortunately cannot help us establish the OLB translators' L1.**

## 3.2. Q2: SEMANTIC CHANGE

- While the OLB extended meanings spreading outside of biblical translations are sometimes limited to religious contexts, they are also found across many centuries, thus qualifying as cases of semantic change.
- The OLB translations, likely in conjunction with early patristic writings, probably played a significant role in promoting the semantic extension of certain lexical items.
- It seems the OLB extended meanings which failed to spread beyond the translation were rarely used within the OLB itself. This limited usage may have resulted in a lower overall frequency of use of the extended meanings, thereby hindering their broader dissemination.

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