Semantic Evolution in the Psalms: A Diachronic Analysis of Linguistic Transformations

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Abstract
This study examines the semantic evolution of selected passages from the Psalms in the Bible's King James Version (KJV), focusing on their implications for biblical interpretation and theological understanding. Employing a qualitative, diachronic linguistic research design, purposive sampling was used to select passages featuring terms that exemplify semantic changes such as broadening, narrowing, amelioration, pejoration, metaphorical change, and metonymic change. Key Hebrew terms and their English translations were analyzed using tools like the Interlinear Bible and Strong's Hebrew Dictionary to trace their historical evolution and contemporary meanings. The findings highlight significant semantic shifts in terms such as "fruit," "compass," "blessed," "fool," "shepherd," and "heart," reflecting the dynamic interplay of cultural, historical, and linguistic factors. These shifts both enrich and challenge the interpretation of the Psalms as terms gain broader metaphorical significance or lose their original theological depth. The study underscores the importance of historical linguistic awareness for accurate interpretation, providing recommendations for integrating these insights into theological scholarship and modern biblical engagement. Limitations include a focus on the KJV, suggesting further research on other translations and the application of computational linguistic tools. This research contributes to the fields of biblical studies and historical linguistics by bridging the gap between ancient texts and contemporary readers, reaffirming the enduring spiritual significance of the Psalms.

Keywords: Semantics, Semantic Change, Psalms, Diachronic Linguistics, Biblical Interpretation.

Introduction

The Psalms, a collection of ancient Hebrew poetic texts, have long served as a cornerstone of spiritual reflection and worship across diverse cultures and religious traditions. Among various translations, the King James Version (KJV), completed in 1611, stands out for its literary elegance and profound theological influence on the English-speaking world. However, the linguistic evolution of the English language over centuries has resulted in significant semantic changes, complicating contemporary interpretations of the Psalms. This study examines these semantic changes and their implications for understanding the Psalms in the KJV. Semantic change refers to the evolution of word meanings over time, often manifesting in forms such as broadening, narrowing, amelioration, pejoration, metaphorical change, and metonymic change. For instance, words like "scrip" and "compass" have experienced significant shifts in meaning since the publication of the KJV, reflecting a narrowing of their contemporary usage compared to their original contexts (Gillhammer, 2020). Understanding these shifts is essential for accurate interpretation, as they can alter the

theological and cultural implications of the texts. The KJV's poetic language, while celebrated for its beauty, often obscures the original meanings of Hebrew words, necessitating analysis to preserve the Psalms' theological richness (Firth, 2023).

The linguistic evolution of the Psalms is influenced by socio-cultural, historical, and technological factors. As language evolves, the meanings of words can shift dramatically, often in subtle yet impactful ways. For example, the term "scrip" in the KJV originally referred to a small bag or wallet but has become more specialized in contemporary usage, often referring to a written document or script (Keefer, 2022). Such narrowing can lead to misunderstandings, as modern readers may not grasp the full implications of the original Hebrew terms. A thorough examination of these semantic changes is thus crucial to bridging the gap between ancient and modern interpretations of the Psalms. The Psalms are particularly rich in metaphorical and symbolic language, making them ideal for studying semantic change. The transformation of Hebrew terms into their English equivalents in the KJV offers an opportunity to explore how linguistic shifts affect theological understanding. For example, the Hebrew word hesed, often translated as "lovingkindness" in the KJV, conveys connotations of loyalty and covenant faithfulness that are not fully captured by contemporary interpretations. By tracing the evolution of such terms, this study aims to uncover the deeper theological messages embedded in the Psalms and their resonance with modern readers.

The evolution of language presents a significant challenge to interpreting the Psalms in the KJV. Semantic shifts in key terms, such as "fruit," "compass," and "blessed," obscure their original meanings and theological implications. These changes can distort the understanding of the Psalms' spiritual messages, making it harder for modern readers to connect with the text's depth and richness. Addressing these issues requires a diachronic linguistic analysis to bridge the gap between ancient and contemporary meanings. This study addresses the need for heightened historical linguistic awareness in biblical interpretation. Examining the semantic evolution of key terms highlights the Psalms' theological richness and its adaptability to contemporary cultural and linguistic contexts. This research contributes to both biblical studies and historical linguistics by illuminating the dynamic relationship between language, faith, and meaning.

The primary aim of this study is to explore the semantic changes in the Psalms (KJV) and their impact on biblical interpretation and theological understanding. The objectives are to: (1) Identify words in the Psalms that have undergone semantic change. (2) Compare the original Hebrew meanings of these words with their English equivalents in the KJV and contemporary interpretations. (3) Analyze the implications of these semantic changes for biblical interpretation. (4) Provide recommendations for incorporating historical linguistic insights into biblical studies. By addressing these objectives, the study seeks to bridge the gap between ancient texts and modern readers, offering fresh perspectives on the Psalms' spiritual and literary significance. The enduring influence of the KJV on English literature and theology necessitates a reevaluation of its texts in light of linguistic evolution. By analyzing the semantic changes in the Psalms, this study provides valuable insights for scholars, theologians, and readers, ensuring the Psalms' relevance and richness remain accessible to contemporary audiences. This research aligns with ongoing efforts in biblical studies to preserve the integrity of theological messages while adapting them for modern interpretation. It serves as a reminder that understanding historical linguistic transformations is critical for maintaining the depth and relevance of sacred texts in a changing world.

Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

Semantic change, or the evolution of word meanings over time, has garnered extensive scholarly attention across fields such as linguistics, cognitive science, computer science, and religious studies. By investigating the mechanisms and patterns underlying semantic evolution, researchers have enhanced our understanding of the cognitive, cultural, and linguistic factors shaping word meanings in both secular and sacred texts. The primary mechanisms of semantic change include broadening, narrowing, amelioration, pejoration, metaphorical change, and metonymic change. Campbell (2021) highlights these as natural linguistic processes influenced by cultural and technological factors. For instance, the semantic broadening of terms like "fruit" and the narrowing of terms such as "scrip" demonstrate the dynamic interplay between language and societal context (Punt, 2023). These processes are integral to understanding the historical development of language, particularly in literary and religious texts.

Advances in computational linguistics have significantly impacted the study of semantic change. Diachronic word embeddings, which model semantic evolution across time, are one such tool. Hamilton, Leskovec, & Jurafsky (2016) demonstrated the utility of diachronic embeddings in uncovering statistical laws of semantic change. Similarly, Kutuzov et al. (2018) employed the Pointwise Relative Temporal (PRT) and Absolute Pointwise Difference (APD) methods, integrated with the ELMo language model, to quantify semantic changes in English over five decades. These computational methods have shown that semantic change rates vary across words and are influenced by factors such as word frequency and polysemy. Gruppi, Adali, & Chen (2020) developed a model ensemble for detecting lexical semantic change, while Perrone et al. (2019) employed Bayesian models to analyze semantic evolution in ancient Greek texts. These approaches

have broadened the scope of diachronic research by providing innovative methodologies for tracking changes in lexical semantics.

The cognitive and linguistic factors that constrain semantic change are pivotal to understanding its evolution. Li & Siew (2020, 2022) argue that semantic evolution is primarily driven by how people use and learn language, emphasizing that higher rates of semantic change can be cognitively taxing. Updating word meanings, particularly for frequently used terms, poses challenges for language users, illustrating the interplay between cognitive capacity and linguistic shifts. Religious texts, such as the Bible, offer a rich corpus for examining semantic evolution due to their historical depth and cultural significance. A prior study emphasizes the importance of diachronic linguistics in analyzing translations like the King James Version (KJV), which contains terms whose meanings have shifted over centuries. Such changes can obscure the original intent of the text, necessitating linguistic awareness among readers and scholars (Aliyeva, 2024). The Psalms, with their symbolic and poetic language, provide a fertile ground for studying semantic shifts. For example, the Hebrew term *leb*, translated as "heart," originally encompassed intellect and will, but its meaning has become more emotion-centric over time, reflecting cultural shifts in understanding human experience (Du, 2022). Kutuzov et al. (2018) suggest that computational tools like diachronic word embeddings hold promise for uncovering semantic evolution in biblical texts, although such methodologies remain underutilized in biblical studies. Cross-linguistic studies have explored semantic shifts in diverse cultural and social contexts. Al-Athwary (2022) examined the semantic change of Arabic loanwords in Turkish, finding that semantic narrowing is not always the dominant form of change in linguistic borrowing. Okoth, Stephen, & Isaac (2019) investigated semantic shifts in Kenyan prison argot, highlighting how social factors drive linguistic evolution. Semantic change often interacts with other linguistic phenomena, such as grammaticalization and pragmatic shifts. Francis & Yuasa (2008) proposed a multi-modular approach to grammaticalization, while prior literature explored semantic reanalysis as a mechanism of language change. Beeching (2005) examined how politeness-induced changes led to the pragmaticization of the French adverb *quand même*, illustrating the role of social usage in semantic evolution.

Empirical research has explored the dynamic nature of word meaning acquisition and evolution. Estes et al. (2007) identified the critical role of word segmentation in mapping words to meanings, suggesting that segmentation is a foundational step in vocabulary learning. Distributional semantics, as discussed by prior studies, effectively models word meanings based on linguistic context, highlighting its potential for capturing semantic behavior. Studies on event-related potentials (ERPs), such as the N400 component, have further illuminated the cognitive processes involved in semantic integration (Fang & Perfetti, 2017; Perfetti, Wlotko, & Hart, 2005). Research on generalizing word meanings during sleep (Friedrich et al., 2015) and the activation of morphemic meanings in processing opaque words (Tsang & Chen, 2014) underscores the context-dependent and dynamic nature of semantic representations. The study of semantic change reveals a multifaceted process shaped by cognitive, linguistic, social, and technological factors. Advances in computational methods, such as diachronic word embeddings and Bayesian models, have provided innovative tools for tracking and analyzing semantic evolution, enabling researchers to uncover nuanced patterns of meaning change across different contexts. Empirical and theoretical studies have enriched our understanding of the mechanisms driving semantic change, particularly in literary and religious texts like the Bible and Psalms, where semantic shifts profoundly influence interpretation.

Despite significant advancements, research gaps remain. One major limitation is the underutilization of computational methods in the study of religious texts and other historical corpora. While computational approaches have been effectively applied to secular texts and specific languages, their potential in biblical and theological studies remains largely untapped. Additionally, there is a lack of cross-disciplinary research integrating linguistic, cognitive, and sociocultural perspectives to provide a more holistic understanding of semantic evolution. Another gap is the limited exploration of how semantic change impacts modern readers' comprehension and interpretation of ancient texts, particularly in educational and theological contexts. Further research could focus on how shifts in word meanings affect the transmission of cultural and spiritual values over time. Addressing these gaps will not only advance the field of diachronic linguistics but also deepen our understanding of the complex interplay between language, culture, and cognition.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical foundation of this study is rooted in diachronic linguistics, which examines how word meanings evolve over time. Drawing on Campbell's (2021) classification of semantic change, the research identifies six primary types: (1) Semantic Broadening, involves expansion of a word's meaning to encompass more general or diverse concepts. (2) Semantic Narrowing, which is contraction of a word's meaning to a more specific or limited sense. (3) Amelioration, which means acquisition of more positive connotations. (4) Pejoration, which means acquisition of more negative connotations. (5) Metaphorical Change, which is adoption of figurative meanings based on metaphorical associations. (6) Metonymic Change, which is a shift in meaning through association with related concepts (Adeel, Akram, & Koam, 2019). This framework was applied to the analysis of selected passages in the Psalms, enabling a systematic examination of how linguistic

transformations affect their interpretation. Tools such as the Interlinear Bible and Strong's Hebrew Dictionary provided the basis for comparing original Hebrew terms with their contemporary English equivalents. Integrating linguistic and theological perspectives ensured a holistic approach, illuminating the complex interplay between language evolution and biblical interpretation (Du, 2020). The literature on semantic changes in biblical texts, particularly the Psalms, reveals a rich tapestry of linguistic evolution influenced by cultural, historical, and technological factors. The application of diachronic linguistics provides a robust framework for understanding these changes, offering insights into how they affect the interpretation of sacred texts. By addressing existing research gaps and employing innovative methodologies, this study contributes significantly to the fields of historical linguistics and biblical studies.

Methodology

Research Design

This study adopts a qualitative, diachronic linguistic approach to investigate the semantic changes in selected passages from the Psalms in the King James Version (KJV) of the Bible. Diachronic linguistics, which examines how language evolves over time, is employed to trace shifts in the meanings of key terms within the Psalms. The research focuses on the textual analysis of Hebrew words and their translations, using resources such as the Interlinear Bible and Strong's Hebrew Dictionary. The study seeks to understand how changes such as semantic broadening, narrowing, amelioration, pejoration, metaphorical change, and metonymic change influence biblical interpretation and theological understanding.

Sampling

Purposive sampling was used to select passages from the Psalms that feature terms demonstrating notable semantic changes. Words like "fruit," "compass," "scrip," "blessed," "joy," and "fool" were chosen based on their theological and linguistic significance. These terms play pivotal roles in conveying key messages within the Psalms and have undergone various types of semantic evolution. The sampling method ensures a representative selection of terms that illustrate the dynamic interaction between language and context, allowing for a comprehensive analysis of semantic change.

Data Collection

The data collection process involved several stages to ensure a robust analysis of the selected terms. The original Hebrew words were identified using the Interlinear Bible, providing insights into their meanings and contextual usage in the Psalms. These Hebrew terms were compared with their English translations in the KJV to evaluate how their meanings were rendered in the 17th-century text. Strong's Hebrew Dictionary was utilized to explore the lexical meanings and theological nuances of the Hebrew words. Additionally, contemporary English dictionaries and linguistic studies were consulted to identify the modern interpretations of these terms. This multi-step process allowed for a detailed diachronic comparison of word meanings across different time periods.

Data Analysis

The analysis followed a structured approach to trace the semantic changes of each selected term. The original meanings of the Hebrew words, as documented in the Interlinear Bible and Strong's Hebrew Dictionary, were compared with their KJV translations and contemporary meanings. These changes were categorized into six types—broadening, narrowing, amelioration, pejoration, metaphorical change, and metonymic change—based on Campbell's (2021) framework of semantic evolution. By applying this classification, the study systematically examined how linguistic transformations influence the interpretation of the Psalms. The findings are presented in tabular format to clearly delineate the progression of meanings from their original usage to their contemporary context.

Results

The analysis of selected passages from the Psalms in the King James Version (KJV) uncovers substantial semantic changes that have occurred over time, shedding light on the dynamic evolution of language and its impact on the interpretation of sacred texts. These changes are categorized into six primary types: semantic broadening, narrowing, amelioration, pejoration, metaphorical change, and metonymic change. Each category reflects the nuanced shifts that key Hebrew terms have undergone as they were translated into English for the KJV and further transformed in meaning through their use in modern English. These linguistic shifts are not merely technical but are deeply intertwined with cultural, historical, and theological contexts that have influenced both the translation process and subsequent interpretations. The selected passages were carefully chosen for their theological and linguistic importance, focusing on terms that exhibit significant semantic shifts. These terms, such as "fruit," "compass," "blessed," "fool," "shepherd," and "heart," serve as exemplars of how language evolves in response to changing cultural perceptions and theological emphases. For instance,

some terms demonstrate broadening or narrowing, where their meanings expand to encompass broader ideas or contract to focus on specific aspects, reflecting shifts in societal priorities or theological understandings. Other terms show amelioration or pejoration, evolving to carry more positive or negative connotations that resonate with changing moral or ethical frameworks. Additionally, metaphorical and metonymic changes illustrate how figurative language adapts over time, maintaining relevance while often acquiring new layers of meaning.

This linguistic evolution highlights the complex interplay between language and theology. The original Hebrew terms, rich in cultural and religious significance, were translated into English with careful consideration of their theological implications. However, as English itself evolved, the meanings of these terms shifted further, influenced by changing cultural norms, intellectual movements, and advancements in biblical scholarship. Such shifts can enrich the interpretive possibilities of the Psalms, but they can also obscure original meanings, necessitating a deeper awareness of the historical and linguistic context in which these texts were written and translated. These changes were categorized into six semantic types: semantic broadening, semantic narrowing, amelioration, pejoration, metaphorical change, and metonymic change.

Semantic Broadening

In Psalm 1:3 (KJV), the term "fruit" (Hebrew: פרי, *peri*) demonstrates semantic broadening. Initially, *peri* referred broadly to any produce from trees, encompassing grains, nuts, and various agricultural products. In modern English, "fruit" is more narrowly associated with sweet, fleshy plant products, though broader interpretations persist in technical or metaphorical contexts, such as agriculture and symbolic language (See Table 1).

Table 1: *Semantic Broadening in the Term "Fruit".*

Word	Original Hebrew Meaning	Meaning in KJV (1611)	Contemporary Meaning	Type of Change
Fruit	Any produce from a tree	Agricultural produce	Sweet, fleshy plant products; broader in technical contexts	Broadening

This broadening enriches the metaphorical implications of Psalm 1:3, allowing the term to symbolize not only material prosperity but also a wide range of spiritual blessings and divine provisions.

Semantic Narrowing

In Psalm 32:7 (KJV), the term "compass" (Hebrew: סבב, *sabab*) originally meant "to surround or encompass." Over time, its meaning in English has narrowed to refer predominantly to a navigational instrument, which reduces its metaphorical and theological richness. Table 2 exemplifies the semantic narrowing of the term' compass'.

Table 2: *Semantic Narrowing in the Term "Compass".*

Word	Original Hebrew Meaning	Meaning in KJV (1611)	Contemporary Meaning	Type of Change
Compass	To surround or encompass	To encircle or surround	Navigational instrument	Narrowing

This semantic narrowing diminishes the term's original connotations of divine protection and omnipresence.

Amelioration

In Psalm 1:1 (KJV), the term "blessed" (Hebrew: אשר, *esher*) has undergone amelioration. Originally signifying a general sense of happiness or well-being, the term now conveys the deeper spiritual meaning of divine favor or grace. Table 3 gives an example of amelioration.

Table 3: *Amelioration in the Term "Blessed".*

Word	Original Hebrew Meaning	Meaning in KJV (1611)	Contemporary Meaning	Type of Change
Blessed	Happiness or well-being	State of joy and righteousness	Divine favor or grace	Amelioration

The amelioration of "blessed" enriches its theological resonance, emphasizing a close relationship between individuals and God.

Pejoration

In Psalm 14:1 (KJV), the term "fool" (Hebrew: נבל, *nabal*) originally referred to someone lacking moral or

spiritual insight. Over time, the term has acquired a more derogatory meaning, describing someone who is irrational, thoughtless, or lacking judgment. Table 4 gives an example of pejoration.

Table 4: *Pejoration in the Term "Fool".*

Word	Original Hebrew Meaning	Meaning in KJV (1611)	Contemporary Meaning	Type of Change
Fool	Lacking moral insight	Senseless or ignorant	Irrational or thoughtless	Pejoration

This shift amplifies the moral weight of the term, emphasizing the gravity of denying God's existence and wisdom.

Metaphorical Change

In Psalm 23:1 (KJV), the term "shepherd" (Hebrew: רעה, *ra'ah*) has shifted from its literal meaning of tending sheep to a metaphorical representation of guidance, care, and protection. Table 5 exemplifies this metaphorical change.

Table 5: *Metaphorical Change in the Term "Shepherd".*

Word	Original Hebrew Meaning	Meaning in KJV (1611)	Contemporary Meaning	Type of Change
Shepherd	One who tends sheep	Caregiver and guide	Protector, guide, nurturer	Metaphorical Change

This metaphorical change deepens the theological portrayal of God as a compassionate caregiver.

Metonymic Change

In Psalm 51:10 (KJV), the term "heart" (Hebrew: לב, *leb*) originally referred to the inner person, including the mind and will. In contemporary usage, "heart" primarily symbolizes emotions and character. Table 6 gives an example of metonymic change.

Table 6: *Metonymic Change in the Term "Heart".*

Word	Original Hebrew Meaning	Meaning in KJV (1611)	Contemporary Meaning	Type of Change
Heart	Inner person, mind, or will	The seat of emotions and will	Emotions, character, and personality	Metonymic Change

The metonymic shift reflects cultural changes in understanding human identity and the inner self. This analysis provides a structured framework for understanding how language evolution influences the perception and engagement with biblical texts. Each type of semantic change offers unique insights into the dynamic nature of language and its profound impact on theology and spirituality. These findings underscore the importance of recognizing and addressing semantic changes to fully appreciate the Psalms' theological depth, cultural resonance, and continued relevance in contemporary discourse.

Discussion

The Psalms, with their poetic depth and theological significance, provide a fertile ground for exploring semantic evolution. The linguistic shifts observed in the Psalms reflect broader cultural, historical, and theological dynamics that shape both ancient and contemporary interpretations. This section explores six primary types of semantic change—broadening, narrowing, amelioration, pejoration, metaphorical change, and metonymic change—highlighting their impact on the understanding and relevance of these sacred texts.

Semantic Broadening: Enriching Metaphors of Abundance

The concept of semantic broadening is well-illustrated in Psalm 1:3, where the term "fruit" undergoes an evolution from its original agricultural connotation to a broader metaphorical representation of blessings and prosperity (Ferraresi et al., 2018). Initially referring to physical fruit borne by a tree, the term has expanded to symbolize the cumulative outcomes of a righteous life under God's favor. This shift enriches the metaphor, connecting physical sustenance with spiritual flourishing. The broader interpretation of "fruit" invites readers to consider the interconnectedness of divine provision in both material and spiritual contexts. For instance, the metaphor emphasizes that a life rooted in God's teachings yields not just sustenance but also personal growth, emotional well-being, and communal harmony. Furthermore, the semantic broadening aligns with contemporary theological discourses on stewardship and sustainability. By framing "fruit" as a symbol of blessings that extend to the environment and community, the passage resonates with modern concerns about ecological responsibility and sustainable living. Such interpretations expand the relevance of the Psalms in addressing present-day challenges, encouraging a holistic view of divine blessings that encompasses physical health, spiritual maturity, and environmental care. The enriched metaphor thus bridges ancient theological

perspectives and modern ecological and ethical considerations, ensuring the continued relevance of the text.

Semantic Narrowing: Challenges in Preserving Imagery

In contrast to broadening, semantic narrowing can restrict the scope of a term, potentially reducing its metaphorical richness. In Psalm 32:7, the term "compass," derived from the Hebrew *sabab*, originally conveyed the imagery of God's encompassing protection—a profound theological concept central to the Psalms (Chukhanov & Kairbekov, 2024). Over time, however, the modern association of "compass" with navigation tools has narrowed the term's connotation, potentially diluting its theological depth. The original Hebrew term *sabab* encompassed a sense of being surrounded or encircled by divine care and protection, akin to the embrace of a fortress shielding its inhabitants. This imagery reinforced the assurance of God's omnipresence and active guardianship. In modern interpretations, the narrower association with a directional tool risk reducing the term to a utilitarian concept, losing the emotive and spiritual resonance of God's protective embrace. To preserve the richness of this metaphor, it is imperative for readers and interpreters to consider the historical linguistic context. Understanding the original breadth of *sabab* restores the profound theological meaning of divine guardianship, enabling a deeper spiritual connection with the text. This awareness underscores the importance of historical and linguistic scholarship in contemporary biblical interpretation, ensuring that the richness of the Psalms is not diminished by modern linguistic shifts.

Amelioration: Spiritual Depth and Divine Favor

The semantic amelioration of the term "blessed" in Psalm 1:1 reflects a significant theological shift, emphasizing divine grace and spiritual alignment with God (Peterson, 2012). In its historical usage, "blessed" conveyed a sense of happiness or fortune bestowed upon individuals who lived in accordance with divine laws. Over time, its meaning has evolved to embody a deeper spiritual alignment and favor from God. This shift enriches the ethical and moral dimensions of the Psalms, transforming "blessedness" from a mere state of contentment to a profound spiritual experience. The modern understanding encourages readers to view happiness not as an isolated emotional state but as an outcome of living in harmony with divine principles. For instance, "blessed" in the context of Psalm 1:1 signifies the fulfillment that comes from meditating on and delighting in God's law. This evolution aligns with contemporary theological perspectives that emphasize grace, ethical living, and spiritual growth. The amelioration of "blessed" enhances its moral and philosophical implications, offering readers a framework for understanding the interconnectedness of divine favor, ethical conduct, and personal well-being.

Pejoration: Amplifying Moral Admonitions

The term "fool" in Psalm 14:1 exemplifies semantic pejoration, intensifying its admonitory tone over time (Lu, Abdullah, & Ang, 2023). Historically, "fool" may have referred to a person lacking wisdom or discernment. In its modern usage, however, the term has acquired a stronger connotation of irrationality and spiritual denial, amplifying the ethical and theological seriousness of the Psalmist's message. This pejoration aligns with cultural attitudes that associate foolishness with moral irresponsibility and a rejection of divine wisdom. The evolution of "fool" reinforces the Psalmist's call to accountability, emphasizing the grave consequences of disregarding God's guidance. For contemporary readers, the intensified tone of the term highlights the ethical and spiritual gravity of rejecting divine wisdom, making the admonition more impactful. By examining the pejoration of "fool," readers gain insight into the evolving moral and cultural values that shape the interpretation of the Psalms. The stronger condemnation associated with the term underscores the importance of wisdom and ethical conduct in maintaining a life aligned with divine principles.

Metaphorical Change: The Shepherd as a Universal Symbol

The metaphorical evolution of "shepherd" in Psalm 23:1 demonstrates its enduring theological significance and universal appeal (Liang et al., 2017). Initially, the term "shepherd" depicted God as a caretaker of His people, guiding them through life's challenges. Over time, this metaphor has expanded to encompass broader concepts of leadership, care, and provision. In modern contexts, the shepherd metaphor resonates with contemporary ideas of compassionate leadership and nurturing relationships. By portraying God as a shepherd, Psalm 23:1 emphasizes themes of protection, guidance, and provision, offering reassurance to readers across cultural and historical contexts. This enduring metaphor bridges ancient and contemporary understandings of divine-human relationships, highlighting God's unwavering care and guidance. The shepherd's role, as depicted in the Psalm, also aligns with modern discourses on servant leadership and the ethical responsibilities of those in positions of authority. By drawing on the rich imagery of the shepherd, the Psalm continues to inspire reflections on care, stewardship, and community in both religious and secular contexts.

Metonymic Change: Shifting Views of Human Identity

The metonymic change in the term "heart" in Psalm 51:10 reflects cultural shifts in understanding human identity and the psyche (Jiang, 2018). Historically, the Hebrew term for "heart" encompassed the entire inner self, including intellect, will, and emotions. Over time, its meaning has become more narrowly associated with

emotions, reflecting cultural changes in the perception of the human psyche. This semantic shift enriches theological interpretations of Psalm 51:10, emphasizing the holistic nature of spiritual renewal. The plea for a "clean heart" underscores the interconnectedness of emotions, will, and intellect in seeking purity before God. For contemporary readers, this change highlights the importance of addressing the entirety of one's inner being in the pursuit of spiritual growth and alignment with divine will. By exploring the metonymic evolution of "heart," readers gain a deeper understanding of how cultural and linguistic shifts shape theological concepts. This awareness fosters a more nuanced engagement with the Psalms, encouraging reflections on the holistic nature of human identity and spiritual transformation.

Conclusion, Recommendations, and Implications

This study has revealed the intricate semantic evolution of key terms in the Psalms of the King James Version (KJV), showcasing the dynamic interaction of linguistic, cultural, and theological transformations over time. By analyzing terms such as "fruit," "compass," "blessed," "fool," "shepherd," and "heart," the research highlights how these shifts both enrich and challenge modern interpretations of sacred texts. Through a diachronic linguistic lens, the study emphasizes the importance of historical linguistic awareness in preserving the theological and spiritual depth of the Psalms while making them accessible to contemporary readers. The findings affirm the enduring relevance of the Psalms and demonstrate how understanding semantic changes can bridge ancient texts with modern interpretations, fostering deeper engagement and comprehension.

Despite its valuable contributions, the study is not without limitations. It focuses exclusively on the KJV, a single English translation, which restricts the comparative scope of the research. Future studies should include multiple English translations, such as the New International Version (NIV) or the English Standard Version (ESV), as well as non-English translations, to examine how semantic changes vary across linguistic and cultural contexts. Additionally, while the qualitative approach used here provides detailed insights, it limits the generalizability of the findings. Employing advanced computational tools, such as diachronic word embeddings or Bayesian models, could offer more granular and quantitative insights into semantic evolution. Furthermore, the study analyzed a select set of terms, leaving room for broader lexical studies to capture the full semantic spectrum of the Psalms. Future research should consider several areas of expansion. Comparative translation analysis can illuminate how different linguistic and cultural traditions shape the semantic evolution of biblical texts. The application of computational linguistics could provide a deeper understanding of the rates and patterns of semantic change. Interdisciplinary approaches, integrating insights from cognitive science, theology, and cultural studies, could offer a more holistic perspective on the interaction between language, culture, and spirituality. Moreover, exploring how these semantic shifts influence contemporary theological discourse, and educational practices would deepen the understanding of their impact on modern readers and communities.

This study contributes significantly to both diachronic linguistics and biblical studies. For diachronic linguistics, it demonstrates the value of applying linguistic frameworks to ancient texts, showcasing how historical linguistic analysis can uncover the evolution of language in response to cultural and religious factors. For biblical studies, the research equips theologians, educators, and readers with a framework to engage more deeply and accurately with the Psalms, emphasizing the necessity of linguistic awareness in interpreting ancient texts. This has practical implications for religious education, encouraging the development of curricula and teaching materials that integrate historical linguistic insights to foster a nuanced understanding of scripture. The findings also inform the preparation of sermons, study guides, and commentaries, enriching spiritual engagement with the Psalms. By bridging the gap between historical linguistic analysis and theological interpretation, this study reinforces the importance of interdisciplinary research in uncovering the enduring significance of sacred texts. It invites ongoing dialogue among linguists, theologians, and educators to ensure that the Psalms continue to inspire and inform across generations and contexts. Through its focus on semantic evolution, this research not only preserves the theological richness of the Psalms but also ensures their continued relevance in a rapidly changing world.

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