

The analysis demonstrates that meaning in modern media discourse emerges not from isolated linguistic elements but from the coordinated functioning of multiple modes. Further research may focus on corpus-based multimodal analysis, comparative studies across media platforms, and the pedagogical implications of multimodal literacy in foreign language education.

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FROM PHYSICAL RADIANCE TO MORAL PURITY: THE DIACHRONIC EVOLUTION OF THE ‘LIGHT’ AXIOLOGICAL FRAME (FROM PIE TO OLD ENGLISH)

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Abstract

From Physical Radiance To Moral Purity: The Diachronic Evolution Of The ‘Light’ Axiological Frame (From PIE To Old English)

This study explores the evolutionary trajectory of the axiological frame ‘Light’ from its Proto-Indo-European (PIE) roots to its conceptualization in Old English homiletic prose. Using a diachronic approach, the research traces the semantic shift of the PIE root *leuk-, which originally denoted physical brightness and celestial phenomena, as it transitioned into the Germanic heroic and subsequently, Christian ethical systems. The analysis reveals a two-stage recalibration of the frame. In the heroic period, light was primarily associated with martial prestige, social status, and the luster of physical wealth (glittering of gold and weaponry). However, with the onset of Christianization, specifically in the works of Ælfric of Eynsham, the frame underwent a profound metaphorical mapping. The physical attribute of ‘brightness’ was reoriented toward the vertical axis of virtue, representing spiritual purity and

divine wisdom. By examining these axiological gradients, the study demonstrates, how the linguistic scaling of light served as a didactic tool to prioritize intangible spiritual values over the ephemeral physical world.

Keywords: axiological frame, diachrony, Proto-Indo-European, Old English, Ælfric, semantic shift, light

This paper explores the axiological potential of the concept LIGHT across a significant diachronic span, tracing its evolution from Proto-Indo-European (PIE) foundations to the late Old English period (10th century). The impetus for this study arises from a notable scholarly lacuna regarding the systematic mapping of light as a value-bearing category. Although the lexeme ‘light’ is absent from the traditional Swadesh list, it functions as a latent conceptual substrate – looming behind primary entries such as sun, moon, and day. As such, light acts as trans-cultural primitive; it is not limited to Indo-European lineages but it is present across all human cultures as a fundamental constituent of the physical world. Consequently light indirectly shapes the existence of these tentatively universal concepts (Mallory & Adams, 1997, p.83), exerting a fundamental influence on the world-modelling systems of diverse cultures. The foundational importance of the light lexeme is further substantiated by its high lexical density and the proliferation of its cognate derivatives. A survey of etymological entries reveals a vast and resilient network derived from this conceptual core. This abundance suggests that the light-frame is a powerful semantic layer relating not only to physical illumination – where day is derived from the root for ‘shine’ (ibid, 1997, p. 87), and moon (the progenitor of month) reflects the measurement of time through light (ibid, p. 385) – but also to broader categories of existence. Indeed, the etymology of star, and the collective Indo-European terms for the ‘shining of the sun’ (ibid, p. 513) prove that ancestral worldviews were literally lived by light. Beyond the physical, this core expands to cognitive clarity, visual perception, transparency, and ease. The volume of these etymological reflexes confirms that light serves as a primary cognitive anchor, persisting through millennia of language divergence as a stable vehicle for axiological meaning. The etymological trajectory of the Ukrainian lexemes освіта (education) and просвіта (enlightenment), originates from a cluster of metaphoric knots tied to light, brightness, and illumination. This conceptual mapping is culturally solidified in the Ukrainian proverbial tradition, most notably in the expression: учення – світ, невченння – тьма (learning is light, ignorance is darkness). This parallels the development of the English words enlighten, enlightenment, which are linguistically rooted in ‘light’. Such cross-linguistic convergence confirms a shared cognitive framework where knowledge is inherently associated with luminosity, while ignorance is relegated to the domain darkness. This reinforces the status of light as a universal axiological marker for intellectual and spiritual advancement.

The Old English Synthesis: Beorht and Leoht. In the Old English period, the axiological potential of light was crystallized through two primary lexemes: beorht (bright) and leoht (light). While beorht largely maintained its ancestral Germanic ties to physical luster – characterizing the ‘shining’ armour of heroes (on bearm nacan beorhte frætwæ [a cargo of weapons shining war-gear] (Beowulf, line 214), and the splendid halls of the nobility or appearing in complimentary epithets (Beorht-Dena

[bright Danes]) – it was recalibrated within 10th century religious discourse. Specifically, in Ælfric's homiletic prose *beorht* was adapted to describe the 'radiance' of the soul and the brightness of the celestial kingdom.

Simultaneously, the lexeme '*leoht*' provided a unique semantic bridge. Carrying the dual PIE heritage of both 'illumination' and 'lack of weight' (the absence of a burden), *leoht* became a central tool for moral recalibration. It must be noted that the connection between the divine and light is traced in pagan Germanic culture as well, as evidenced in *Beowulf*: *Leoht eastan com, beorht beacen Godes brimu swaðredon, | þæt ic sænæssass* [light came from the east | bright signal of God; the waves subsided | so that I (could see) the headlands] (*Beowulf*, line 569).

Ælfric utilized this linguistic polysemy to present the Christian path as both radiant and easy to bear, directly echoing the biblical promise: 'My yoke is easy and my burden is light' (Matthew, 11:28-30). This convergence allowed for a transition from heavy materiality of heroic weaponry to the 'light' (luminous / weightless) essence of the spirit. Thus, the Old English period represents the pivotal moment where the sensory perception of light was fully institutionalized as an intellectual and moral imperative.

In summary, the evolutionary trajectory of the 'light' axiological frame reveals a profound shift from a sensory-physical primitive to a sophisticated moral instrument. While its absence from the traditional Swadesh list suggests a conceptual 'transparency', the etymological persistence and high lexical density of 'light'-based derivatives across Indo-European languages – from the PIE root **leuk-* to the modern Ukrainian *ocbita* and English *enlightenment* – confirms its status as a primary cognitive anchor.

In the transition from the Germanic heroic code to the Christian homiletic tradition of the 10th century, authors like Ælfric did not merely adopt vocabulary; they recalibrated existing linguistic structures. By leveraging the polysemy of *leoht* (as both radiance and weightlessness) and the prestige of *beorht*, Ælfric successfully transposed the ancestral value of 'physical shining' onto the 'spiritual clarity' of the soul. This study thus demonstrates that the axis of virtue in Old English culture was built upon a diachronically stable, millennia-old foundation of light, proving that our modern concepts of education and moral truth remain fundamentally rooted in the ancient sensory experience of illumination. Ultimately, it is **light** we live by.

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