The Genitive in the Earliest English Anthropic and Somatic Phraseology

Sergey Mukhin & Daria Efremova

MGIMO UNIVERSITY
Prospect Vernadskogo 76, Moscow, 119454, Russia

Abstract. This article investigates the role of the genitive case in the earliest anthropic and somatic (i.e. human-related and body-related) phraseology of Old English through the cultural linguistics analysis of the Vespasian Psalter (8th–9th centuries), the oldest surviving glossed biblical text in Old English. The study aims to uncover how Latin-derived genitive structures in N+Ngen constructions were adapted into Anglo-Saxon conceptual frameworks, serving as mechanisms for cultural conceptualization. It hypothesizes that anthropic and somatic genitives played a dominant role in early English phraseology, reflecting an anthropocentric worldview and facilitating intersemiotic transposition: the transfer of cultural concepts into linguistic symbols. Methodologically, the study combines historical linguistics, comparative linguistics, and cultural linguistics approaches to examine more than 150 N+Ngen collocations from the Vespasian Psalter. By juxtaposing Latin etymons with Old English calques, the analysis identifies seven semiotic domains and categorizes genitive functions. Quantitative and qualitative study reveals that anthropic/somatic genitives constitute a majority of phraseological units, with genitive components often outweighing nominal heads in semantic salience, particularly in metaphors bridging concrete body terms to abstract concepts. Key findings demonstrate that literal calquing from Latin preserved original semiotic mappings while allowing Old English to innovate via culturally resonant pleonastic constructions. These remained non-idiomatic, whereas abstract-concrete pairings became idiomatic. The article argues for a certain revision of phraseologization theories to incorporate the genitive-as-operator principle, where oblique cases actively shaped conceptual blending in early Germanic languages. The study bridges medieval philology and modern cognitive linguistics, offering empirical insights into how grammatical structures encoded cultural meanings. Future research directions include comparative analysis with continental Germanic psalters and cognitive modeling of "dead"-language semantics. This work underscores the Vespasian Psalter's value as a linguistic artifact, revealing the interplay between Latin influence and Old English creativity at the dawn of written tradition.

Keywords: Old English genitive, phraseologization, Vespasian Psalter, culture, conceptual metaphor, anthropocentrism, somatics

Генитив в ранней антропной и соматической фразеологии английского языка

С.В. Мухин, Д.А. Ефремова

Московский государственный институт международных отношений (университет) МИД России
119454, Россия, Москва, пр. Вернадского, 76

Аннотация. Статья посвящена исследованию роли родительного падежа в ранней антропной и соматической (то есть связанной с человеком и человеческим телом) фразеологии древнеанглийского языка. Анализ проводится в рамках лингвокультурологического изучения Веспасиановой псалтыри VIII–IX веков – древнейшего из сохранившихся англоязычных библейских текстов с глоссами. Цель исследования – выявить, как заимствованные из латыни структуры с родительным падежом в конструкциях типа N+N^{gen} адаптировались в концептуальных рамках англосаксонской традиции, выступая механизмами культурной концептуализации. Предполагается, что антропные и соматические генитивные формы доминировали в ранней английской фразеологии, отражая антропоцентрическую картину мира и способствуя межсемиотической транспозиции – переносу культурных концептов в символы языка. Методологически исследование сочетает историко-филологический анализ, сравнительно-историческое языкознание и лингвокультурологический подход для изучения более 150 коллокаций типа N+N^{gen} из Веспасиановой псалтыри. Сопоставление латинских этимонов и древнеанглийских калькированных словосочетаний позволяет выделить семь семиотических доменов и классифицировать функции родительного падежа. Количественные и качественные методы показывают, что антропные и соматические генитивные формы составляют большинство фразеологических единиц, при этом компоненты в родительном падеже зачастую превосходят ключевой субстантивный компонент по семантической значимости, особенно в метафорах, соединяющих конкретные корпореальные термины с абстрактными понятиями. Основные результаты демонстрируют, что пословное заимствование из латыни сохраняло исходные семиотические соответствия, одновременно предоставляя древнеанглийскому языку возможность инноваций через культурно резонансные плеонастические конструкции. Последние оставались нелексикализованными, тогда как пары «абстрактный – конкретный» становились фразеологизированными. В статье предлагается определённое уточнение существующих теорий фразеологизации с учётом принципа «генитив как оператор», согласно которому косвенные падежи активно обеспечивали концептуальное смешение в древнегерманских языках. Исследование выполнено на стыке традиционной филологии и современной когнитивной лингвистики и предоставляет эмпирические данные о том, как грамматические структуры кодировали культурные значения. Перспективы дальнейших исследований включают сравнительный анализ с континентальными древнегерманскими псалтирями и когнитивное моделирование семантики «мёртвых» языков. Работа подчёркивает ценность Веспасиановой псалтыри как памятника письменности, раскрывая взаимодействие латинского влияния и древнеанглийской креативности на заре письменной традиции.

Ключевые слова: древнеанглийский генитив, фразеологизация, Веспасианова псалтирь, лингвокультура, концептуальная метафора, антропоцентризм, соматика

1. Introduction

Within the framework of Veronika Teliya's linguocultural school, theoretical issues of phraseology and phraseography have been thoroughly explored across various languages, revealing the mechanisms of phraseologization and portraying set expressions in terms of cultural linguistics [3, p. 14]. However, researchers have primarily focused on the current state of phraseological systems, while diachronic and historical aspects have largely remained overlooked. This is particularly true of English phraseology. In several dissertational studies of the 1970s [5], [8], [13], historical English phraseological material was analyzed mainly from structural and stylistic perspectives. In this context, a cultural linguistics perspective on the earliest available samples of English phraseology is arguably of interest. The theoretical significance of such research lies in empirically verifying the efficacy of intersemiotic transposition mechanisms in the Old English linguistic community at the dawn of its written history, when sacred texts secured the linguistic and cultural transfer [17].

This study aims to systematically analyze the role of the genitive case in the earliest anthropic (human-related) and somatic (body-related) phraseology of Old English, with a focus on the Vespasian Psalter (8th–9th centuries). The research seeks to uncover how Latin-derived genitive structures in N+N^{gen} constructions were adapted into Anglo-Saxon conceptual frameworks, serving as mechanisms for cultural conceptualization and intersemiotic transposition.

The main goal of the research suggests addressing a number of specific tasks:

1) functional analysis of the genitive: identifying and categorizing the semantic-syntactic functions of the genitive case in Old English N+N^{gen} collocations and comparison of Latin etymons with Old English calques to trace how literal translation preserved Latin morpho-syntax while enabling Anglo-Saxon innovations;

2) identifying the domains of semiotic dominance: demonstrating that anthropic and somatic genitives dominate early English phraseology and reflect an embodied worldview; this task also implies exploring how these genitive components often outweigh nominal heads in semantic salience, particularly in metaphors linking concrete body terms to abstract concepts [10];

3) studying cultural conceptualization: mapping the semiotic domains that underpin phraseological units, revealing how Old English encoded cultural values through grammatical structures; semiotic mapping, as understood here, involves identifying semiotic domains that served as primary sources for creating conceptual models and, ultimately, phraseological units; and

4) investigating phraseologization mechanisms: testing the hypothesis that pleonastic constructions remained non-idiomatic, while abstract-concrete pairings became phraseologized.

2. Material and methodology

A total of 16 [16] partially or completely glossed psalter manuscripts have survived to the present day out of an original total of up to 50 psalters [14], which constitutes the largest topical group of Anglo-Saxon manuscripts. The linguistic material for this study was selected from manuscript MS Cotton Vespasian A I edited by Henry Sweet [19]. The manuscript in Latin was assumingly produced in Lichfield, Staffordshire, in the first half of the 8th century. In the second quarter of the 9th century, interlinear glosses in Old English with distinct Mercian features were added by the scribe, whose conventional name in medieval studies is the Royal Bible Master Scribe [2]. The scribe's handwriting is also recognizable in other written artifacts of the era, which are associated with St. Augustine's Abbey in Canterbury or produced there [7].

Thus, the Vespasian Psalter is renowned to be the earliest collection of psalms in Anglo-Saxon England; moreover, it is the first sample of a biblical text translation in the history of English. As such, it has been and remains a subject of interest for generations of linguists [9], [15]. The linguistic evidence found in its glosses constitutes the oldest available stratum of English, albeit borrowed, phraseology.

The focus of the present research is on 150 contexts with the N + N^{gen} word combinations running across the entire Psalter. From the viewpoint of phraseology, the vast majority of them are idiomatic.

In pursuing the goals of the research, a number of methods are employed: historical linguistics, comparative method, phraseological analysis, cultural linguistics and cognitive methods.

3. Results

Genitive components in N+N^{gen} structures

The use of genitive forms in the Old English gloss is the replication of the Latin morpho-syntactic patterns, as the Vespasian Psalter translators rigorously adhered to the principle of literality in rendering the Vulgate's original text [20]. Therefore, all the Old English collocations considered in the present research are phraseological calques by nature, and it stands to reason to provide their Latin etymons alongside.

The translators of Anglo-Saxon scriptoria clearly opted for prioritizing structural fidelity over idiomatic fluency. On the one hand, it makes the earliest idioms in the history of English look almost completely forfeited of any ethnic individuality, but, on the other hand, such translational strategies were conducive to the preservation of the original form, never interrupting the bimillenial written and phraseological tradition. From King David's Hebrew through Koine Greek and Latin, the biblical morpho-syntax was carefully relayed. After all, it is this meticulous word-for-word interlinear rendition approach that has always enabled the Bible readers to enjoy the truly ancient idioms. To a great extent, they have become the basis of the modern international phraseology.

The genitive case has a lot of analogous features in Latin and in Old English and is broadly recognized for its functional diversity [12]. In the context of the phraseological word combinations analyzed in the present article, the multiple functions of genitive both in Latin and Old English texts can be reduced to the following list[1]:

possessive, e.g.: *hreod writ hreðlice writendes < calamus scribæ velociter scribentis* (*pen of a hurried scribe,* i.e. a tongue 44:2);

objective, e.g.: *doeman widwena < judex viduarum* (*judge of widows,* i.e. God, who protects the weak and vulnerable 67:6);

collective, e.g.: *ȝeðæht haliȝra < consilium sanctorum* (*assembly of the saints,* i.e. divine assembly of angelic or saintly beings who surround and support God's throne 88:8); *ȝesomnunȝ mæhtiȝra < synagoga potentium* (*assembly of the mighty,* i.e. either earthly rulers or spiritual forces witnessing divine favor 85:14);

parental, e.g.: *bearn witȝena < (children of exiles,* i.e. the descendants of the expelled prophets 126:4);

associative, e.g.: *dælniomend alra ondredendra < particeps sum ego omnium timentium* (*partaker of all who fear,* i.e. one of the God-fearing people 118:63).

The genitive components of substantive collocations play a crucial role in securing phraseological meaning. Syntax-wise the units under consideration are attributive complexes. An attributive phrase is generally understood to be a coalescence of a certain quality and its possessor. If a quality is expressed by an adjective or any other adjectival attribute, its role is clearly subordinate, with the substantive component acting as the semantic summit of the expression and the cornerstone of its phraseological image. For instance, in the idiom *Good Samaritan* (Luke 10:30–35) denoting a kind-hearted and generous person, which is among the most popular biblical idioms[2], the focal part is the noun, which names the main character of the story told by Jesus Christ. The whole aggregate of associations and references that

---

[1] The Old English and Latin word combinations are henceforth provided by way of examples in the nominative singular form. The authentic case and number form in the text of the Vespasian Psalter may differ. The numeration of psalms and verses follows that of the Vespasian Psalter. The meanings of Old English lexemes and phrases are semanticized through definitions in the Bosworth–Toller Anglo-Saxon Dictionary [4].

[2] In the Corpus of Contemporary American English (COCA) alone there are more than 800 instances of use [6, p. 94].

the parabolic idiom entails revolves around the personality of the helpful passerby. The word *Samaritan* alone could presently be sufficient to articulate the sense of the idiom. The adjectival component *good* is perceived as a mere formal complement to the already explicit idea.

With attributes represented by genitive nouns the situation is dramatically different, which does not fail to add some phraseological individuality to Old English as opposed to its descendants. The conceptual basis of such expressions and semantic load carried by the genitive components make the latter perform on par or even with pre-eminence over their nominal counterparts. The following context of the Vespasian Psalter in table 1 below is effective by way of exemplification:

Table 1

A context from psalm 140:7

Latin original	Old English gloss	New English version[3]
*sic ut **crassitudo terræ** erupta est super terram*	*swe swe **fætnes eorðan** wes tosliten ofer eorðan*	*when **the thickness of the earth** is broken up upon the ground*

Here the nominal component *fætnes (thickness)* is by no means explicit in conveying the meaning of the entire attributive phrase. To build the metaphor the abstraction of *fætnes* relies on the genitive noun *eorðan (of the ground, earth's)*, associated with the natural code of culture. Drawing upon this prolific semiotic field, there appears a set phrase underpinned by a vivid visual image of a seismic fault ripping apart the earth's profundity. Thus, the genitive component proves to be of higher importance in the ultimate formation of the idiom.

Indeed, a lot depends on the particular combination of semiotic fields to which the concepts represented by the constituent parts of collocations belong. If the nominal component is an abstraction, like the one above, or a name of an artifact, with the genitive noun being an anthropic or zoonymic name ("somebody's something" type), the prime significance of the genitive component is undeniable. The result of the said combination is, as a rule, an idiom, e.g.:

hond mæhtʒes < manus potentis (*the mightier's hand,* i.e. God's omnipotence and sovereignty 126:4);

ʒerd synfulra < virga peccatorum (*rod of sinners,* i.e. scepter of a corrupt authority, oppression 124:3);

ʒedæhte rehtwisra < concilium justorum (*the council of the just,* i.e. community of the righteous 110:1), etc.

However, when the genitive component is an inanimate name, it often gives rise to a pleonastic meaning of the resulting phrase. Such semantic excess is not an infrequent occasion in the psalms and in other biblical books:

fuʒlas heofenes < volucres cæli (*birds of the air* 8:9);

wolcnu lyfte < nubes æris (*clouds of the air* 17:12);

colu fyres < carbones ignis (*burning coals,* lit.: coals of fire 139:11).

As is obvious, the genitive components here are correlated with the natural culture code. In this particular case, omission of the genitive components would not deprive the context of its original sense. The overall meanings of collocations are no different from those of the nominal parts, and admittedly, these phrases are not idiomatic. Still, they are recurrent in biblical texts and feature fixed combinability of components. The fact that two words act together to build up a stylistic device, which pleonasm is, is contributive to conceding a phraseological status to the phrase they form.

Perhaps, the most interesting type in regard to phraseological imagery is the combination of a nominal component correlating with any of culture codes and a genitive abstract component which draws upon spiritual or emotional semiotics. Often enough bringing abstraction and matter face to face in a very narrow context provides fresh metaphors and produces vibrant images, e.g.:

unsceðfulniss honda < innocentium manuum (*cleanness of hands,* i.e. innocence of intentions 17:21);

burn willan < torrens voluntatis (*torrent of pleasure,* i.e. blessing 35:9);

---

[3] The New English versions of the contextual examples are taken from the Douai-Rheims Bible [18].

seað ermða < lacus miseriæ (*pit of misery*, i.e. suffering 39:3);

ʒer(d) rices < virga regni (the straight rod, i.e. just, upright rule 44:7);

scyld ʒuiuðu < delicta juventutis (sins of youth, i.e. past failures and mistakes recalled with repentance 24:7), etc.

Semiotic fields mapping

Proceeding from semantic properties and correlation with certain culture codes, genitive components can be categorized as follows:

1)   **anthroponyms**, e.g.:

herʒas ðiada < simulacra gentium (idols of the nations 113:12);

feder stepcilda < pater orphanorum (father of orphans, i.e. God 67:6);

boec lifʒendra < liber viventium (book of the living, i.e. a divine register of those who belong to God's covenant community 68:29), etc.

2)   **somatisms**, e.g.:

werc finʒra < opera digitorum (work of fingers, i.e. creative power and artistry of God 8:4);

seon eʒan < pupilla oculi (apple of the eye, i.e. something precious, cherished 16:8);

hlaf teare < panis lacrimarum (bread of tears, i.e. daily suffering 79:6), etc.

3)   **zoonyms**, e.g.:

middel hwelpa leona < medium catulorum leonum (den of young lions, i.e. imminent danger 57:5);

dæl foxa < pars vulpium (prey for foxes, i.e. humiliating death 62:11);

ʒelicniss calfur < similitudo vituli (likeness of a calf, i.e. a false substitute for divinity, an idol 105:20), etc.

4)   **zoomorphic terms**, e.g.:

scua fiðra < umbra alarum (shadow of wings, i.e. divine protection 16:8);

stepas elpanbænes < gradus eburnei (stairs of ivory, i.e. high status, grandeur 44:9);

wriʒels fiðra < velamentum alarum (cover of wings, i.e. divine protection 62:8), etc.

5)   **names of artifacts, inanimate objects or substances,** e.g.:

stefn beman < vox tubæ (voice of the trumpet, i.e. divine presence, power, and celebration 46:6);

mere wetres < stagnum aquæ (pool of water, i.e. life, refreshment, and God's provision amid barrenness 106:35);

dæl calices < pars calicis (portion of the cup, i.e. destiny, allotment 10:7), etc.

6)   **names of natural phenomena**, e.g.:

ofen fyres < clibanus ignis (oven of fire, i.e. divine judgment, wrath, and purification 20:10);

onsien windes < facies venti (face of the wind, i.e. overwhelming power 34:5);

heorte sæs < cor maris (heart of the sea, i.e. the ocean's depth 45:3), etc.

7)   **names of abstract concepts**, e.g.:

trymeniss meʒnes < firmamentum virtutis (bulwark of strength, i.e. God's unshakable strength and protection 150:1);

hlaf sares < panis doloris (bread of sorrow, i.e. toil, futility, and sorrow 126:2);

meʒen hælu < virtus salutis (strength of salvation, i.e. God's strength and power to save 139:8), etc.

Anthropic and anthropomorphic (somatic) phraseology, with the number of contexts amounting to 30 for either type, numerically deserves a central placement among the entirety of the collocations of the N+N^{gen} structural type. In terms of cultural linguistics it means that the anthropic and anthropomorphic semiotic domains are of paramount importance in providing the basis for the intersemiotic transposition understood as transfer of conceptual content from signs belonging to different semiotic domains of culture into the symbolic system of natural language, a process through which phraseological units emerge [22, p. 141]. In the following parts of the present article the main attention will be paid to the word combinations with anthropic and somatic components.

Collocations with anthropic genitive components

In the psalms, there have been identified a total of 34 contexts featuring substantive collocations with anthropic genitive components. Here "anthropic" is defined broadly to include terms for "God", periphrastic divine names, and various human referents. Below is a full list of genitive nouns, substantivized adjectives, and participles found in anthropic substantive phrases with the genitive (24 units total):

modur (mother), lifʒende (a living one), dryhten (Lord), folc (people), mon (man), cild (child), stepcild (orphan), widuwe (widow), doehter (daughter), hean (Most High), mæhtiʒ (the Mighty), hestan (the Highest), huntiend (hunter), Abraham, Jacob, rehtwis (a righteous one), haliʒ (holy, a saint), menen (handmaid), synful (sinner), ondredend (fearful), oferhyʒdiʒ (proud), Dauid (David), witeʒa (prophet), ðiad (heathen).

The totality of lexical anthroponyms which verbalize the concepts pertaining to the anthroponymic semiotic field falls into certain groups with reference to the semantic properties:

1)   kinship terms, e.g.: *of wombe **modur** < de ventre **matris*** (*from mother's womb,* i.e. from birth, from the very beginning 21:11);

2)   direct (*ʒod, dryhten*) and periphrastic divine names, e.g.: *bearn **ðes hean** < filii **Excelsi*** (*sons of **the Most High**,* i.e. people, humans 81:5);

3)   proper names of Old Testament main characters, e.g.: ***Abraham, Jacob;***

4)   attributive terms nominating people in regard to their qualities, occupations, or beliefs, e.g.: *rapas **synfulra** < funes **peccatorum*** (*cords of **the wicked**,* i.e. cunning contrived by sinners 118:61).

From the phraseological perspective, some of these word combinations are syntactic complexes unrelated to phraseology as their component words retain literal meanings, e.g.:

aldermen folces < principes populi (*princes of the people,* i.e. rulers 46:9);

bearn Jacob < filii Jacob (*sons of Jacob* 104:6).

Others are idiomatic expressions based on metaphor or metonymy, e.g.:

earðan lifʒendra < terra viventium (*land of the living,* i.e. this world 26:13);

feder stepcilda < pater orphanorum (*father of orphans,* i.e. God protecting the vulnerable 67:6);

sunu menenes < filius ancillæ (*son of a handmaid,* i.e. a mortal man born of a woman 115:16).

blissiendra alra ur eardunʒ < lætantium omnium nostrum habitatio (*dwelling place of all who rejoice,* i.e. God's presence as the source of joy and refuge 86:7).

Collocations with somatic genitive components

Phraseologically bound collocations with somatic genitive components are obviously as numerous as anthropic ones. A sub-classification based on anatomical semantics includes:

1.   **External body parts**, e.g.: *werc finʒra < opera digitorum* (*work of fingers,* i.e. smb's product 8:4);

unrehtwisnis helspuran < iniquitas calcanei (*iniquity of the heel,* i.e. hidden or subtle sin, particularly the sin of pride, deceit, or betrayal 48:6);

uphefenis honda < elevatio manuum (*lifting up of hands*, i.e. prayer as an act of spiritual offering 140:2);

leht eʒena < lumen oculorum (*light of the eyes,* i.e. spiritual insight 37:11).

2.   **Internal organs.** The lexical range of somatic genitive components of substantive word combinations is rather narrow. The list of 10 nouns below is exhaustive:

finʒer (finger), eaʒe (eye), hond (hand), muð (mouth), heorte (heart), weoler (lip), ondwlita (face), helspure (heel), heafud (head), tear (tear).

Incidence of each word in the text can vary: among the most frequently used ones are *heorte, muð,* and *ondwlita*. At the same time, they show broader combinability, e.g.:

unsceðfulniss heortan < innocentia cordis (*innocence of heart,* i.e. spiritual purity 100:2);

boen heortan < petitio cordis (*request of heart,* i.e. profound desire 36:4);

ʒeswencednisse heortan < tribulationes cordis (*troubles of heart,* i.e. deep emotional or spiritual suffering 24:17), etc.

"Heart" performs a symbolic function of representing the center of emotions, thoughts, and spiritual life, a conceptualization rooted in Old English's anthropocentric worldview [11].

Other somatisms may occur but once, which rules out any option of their combinability: *finʒer, helspure.*

Metaphorical context

Metaphorical substantive idioms with genitive components often appear within broader metaphorical contexts, as demonstrated by the verses 92:13–14 in table 2 below.

Table 2

A context from psalm 92:13–14

Latin original	Old English gloss	New English version
*Justus ut palma florebit et sicut cedrus Libani multiplicabitur. Plantati in **domo Domini** in **atriis domus Dei** nostri florebunt.*	*Se rehtwisa swe swe palma bloweð & swe swe cederbeam noma bið ʒemoniʒfaldad. Ʒeplantade in **huse dryhtnes** in **ceafurtunum huses** ʒodes ures blowað.*	*The righteous flourish like the palm tree and grow like a cedar in Lebanon. Planted in **the house of the Lord**, they flourish in the **courts of our God**.*

This context features two substantive phrases of the N+N^gen type: *hus dryhtnes < domus Domini* (*house of the Lord,* i.e. God's presence and protection) and *ceafurtun huses ʒodes < atrium domus Dei* (*the court of God's house,* i.e. sacred space for worship). The overall context is highly metaphoric: devout believers are compared to cedars and palms. The cedar in the Bible is endowed with symbolic significance and features positive connotations: it is a majestic, long-lived tree often associated with strength, stability, and nobility. The palm tree is a symbol of victory, resilience, and fruitfulness. The imagery of the palm tree and cedar underscores the spiritual growth and fecundity of the righteous, who are nourished by their relationship with God. There is implication that those who are rooted in God's presence will be rewarded with blossoming and prosperity.

One more context provided below in table 3 features a combination of a metaphor resting on the anthropic and somatic culture codes.

Table 3

A context from psalm 8:2

Latin original	Old English gloss	New English version
*Ex **ore infantium et lactantium** perfecisti laudem*	*Of **muðe cilda & milcdeondra** ðu ʒefremedes lof*	*Out of **the mouth of babes and sucklings** thou hast perfected praise.*

This verse is part of a hymn of creation, where the psalmist reflects on the majesty of God as seen in the heavens and in the innocent praise of children. The structure includes two genitive phrases with anthropomorphic implications: *cilda < infantium (of infants)* and *milcdeondra < lactantium (of sucklings)*. Together, they form a poetic parallelism typical of Hebrew poetry, preserved in Latin and reflected in the Old English gloss.

Both words have a strong symbolic charge, as the concept of *children or babes* emphasizes youth and innocence, and *sucklings* – those still nursing – symbolize purity and dependence. These are not just literal babies but a representation of innocence and humility that can proclaim divine truth more powerfully than the learned or powerful. In Christianity, this phrase becomes a metaphor for divine wisdom revealed to the humble rather than the wise. The parallel structure reinforces the unity of meaning: even the smallest and weakest members of society can offer perfect praise to God. It also serves as criticism of pride and self-reliance: those who consider themselves wise may miss what the innocent perceive clearly.

The next example represented by verses 3–4 of psalm 126 provides an even more extended metaphor in table 4.

Table 4

A context from psalm 126:3–4

Latin original	Old English gloss	New English version
*Ecce **hereditas Domini** filii mercis **fructus ventris**. Sicut saggitæ in **manu potentis** ita et **filii excussorum**.*	*Sehðe **erfewordnis dryhtnes** bearn meorde **westem wombe**. Swe swe strelas in **honda mæhtȝes** swe & **bearn witȝena**.*	*Behold the **inheritance of the Lord** are children: the reward, the **fruit of the womb**. As arrows in the **hand of the mighty**, so the **children of them that have been shaken**.*

The context of the verses provided in table 4 offers four attributive phrases with genitive components, three of them being anthropic and one somatic. Anthroponyms *dryhten (Lord), mæhtiȝ (mighty), witȝen (a shaken one)* verbalize the concepts associated with anthropic semiotics, while *womb (womb)* is clearly anthropomorphic.

erfewordnis dryhtnes < hereditas Domini (*inheritance of the Lord,* i.e. children): this expression symbolizes children as a divine gift and blessing from God. The term *erfewordnis (heritage, inheritance)* emphasizes that children are not merely a human achievement but a sacred trust given by God. The collocation conveys the biblical view that children are a reward and a source of joy, legacy, and continuity for their parents, with God being the distributor of such gifts.

westem wombe < fructus ventris (*fruit of the womb,* i.e. a child): the phraseological meaning of this word combination is very much like that of the previous one. It symbolizes children as a blessing and reward from God. The term *westm (fruit)*, associated with the natural code of culture, emphasizes the outcome of marriage and family life, while the somatism *womb (womb)* highlights the physical and emotional connection between parents and their children. The entire phrase reflects the biblical view that children are a divine gift and a source of fulfillment.

hond mæhtȝes < manus potentis (*hand of the mighty,* i.e. strength and power): the phrase refers to the hand of a warrior or mighty man, symbolizing strength, skill, and readiness for battle. It is part of a broader metaphor comparing children to arrows in the hand of a warrior. Just as a warrior uses arrows to defend, provide, and achieve victory, children are a source of strength, protection, and legacy for their parents. The imagery emphasizes that children are a blessing and a resource, equipping their parents to face challenges and adversaries.

bearn witȝena < filii excussorum (*children of expatriates,* i.e. support and resource when in trouble): the phrase literally means "children of those who are shaken off" or "children of the banished". The term *witeȝa (prophet)* in its biblical interpretation is understood to denote a person in exile and suggests a context of displacement or hardship. The word combination likely refers to children born to parents who have experienced struggle, displacement, or adversity, yet these children become a source of strength and hope for their families.

The passage under analysis uses parallelism, a hallmark of Hebrew poetry, which is preserved in the Latin translation and further on in the Old English gloss. The metaphors are vivid and culturally resonant, reflecting the ancient Israelite worldview, where children were seen as a divine blessing and a sign of God's favor [1]. Old English never fails to preserve the original string of metaphors in its entirety.

Metonymy – the substitution of one term for another with which it is closely associated – is generally considered less frequent than metaphor in biblical discourse, but no less significant. It often serves to condense meaning, emphasize relational concepts, and highlight human experience within divine interaction, as is exemplified by the context in table 5.

Table 5

A context from psalm 137:1

Latin original	Old English gloss	New English version
*Confitebor tibi Domine **in toto corde** meo quoniam exaudisti omnia **verba oris** mei*	*ic ondettu ðe dryhten **in alre heortan** minre forðon ðu ȝeherdes all **word muðes** mines*	*I will praise thee, O Lord, **with my whole heart**: for thou hast heard the **words of my mouth***

In this verse, drawn from a psalm of personal devotion, two key metonymies are present: *in alre heortan < in toto corde (with my whole heart)* and *word muðes < verba oris mei (words of mouth)*. These expressions rely on corporeal metonymy, where physical organs symbolize abstract emotional and spiritual states.

The "heart" stands for the seat of emotion, intention, and devotion. In the Hebrew, Latin and Anglo-Saxon traditions, the heart is not merely a physical organ but the center of thought, feeling, and moral action. The phrase signals total sincerity and inner commitment in worship, a theme central to many psalms. This usage exemplifies "part-for-whole" metonymy, where the heart represents the entire self in a state of devoted supplication.

The "mouth" symbolizes speech, and by extension, communication with God. The phrase emphasizes that what was spoken was not just sound, but intentional utterance, possibly even prayerful confession. In both Latin and Old English, the mouth is the source of truth or falsehood, aligning with biblical themes. This is an example of "container-for-content" metonymy, where the physical organ becomes a stand-in for the speech it produces, thus validating the cognitive law according to which people attribute the basic role to body parts to cognize things from the near to the far, from entity to non-entity, from the simple to the complex, and from the concrete to the abstract [21].

4. Discussion

The study has demonstrated that the genitive case in Old English anthropic and somatic phraseology served as a crucial mechanism for conceptual transfer, facilitating the encoding of culturally significant meanings through N+Ngen structures. The analysis of the Vespasian Psalter reveals the following key findings:

1.   The research has shown semiotic dominance of anthropic/somatic genitive components within phraseologized word combinations. Genitive phrases with human and body-part referents constitute a substantial part of the core of early English phraseology, accounting for the majority of attested collocations. Their prevalence confirms the centrality of embodiment in Old English conceptualization. The genitive components consistently outweigh their nominal counterparts in semantic weight when: 1) representing abstract concepts through concrete anthropic/somatic terms; 2) functioning as culture-specific symbols, or 3) participating in biblical parallelism.

2.   The study empirically validates that literal calquing from Latin preserved original semiotic mappings. Metaphoric density correlates with genitive salience: pleonastic constructions remained non-idiomatic, while abstract-concrete pairings became phraseologized. The findings necessitate a revision of phraseologization models to account for: 1) the genitive-as-operator principle in early Germanic languages, where oblique cases actively shaped conceptual blending, and 2) the anthropocentric bias in Old English semiotics, prioritizing human/body referents over natural or artifact-based metaphors.

Further research directions may comprise: a comparative analysis with continental Germanic psalter glosses to isolate Anglo-Saxon specificities; a corpus-based study of genitive phraseology in secular texts to assess sacred/profane divides; and cognitive modeling of how grammatical cases scaffold conceptual integration in "dead" languages.

The present research offers essential empirical proof for reconstructing the cognitive-linguistic interface of early medieval England, bridging the gap between traditional philology and modern conceptual semantics. The demonstrated stability of genitive-based phraseological patterns underscores their role as a grammatical gateway for cultural conceptualization.

References

1.   Alter, R. *The Art of Biblical Poetry.* Basic Books. 1985. 296 p.
2.   Ball, C.J.E. The Language of the Vespasian Psalter Gloss: Two Caveats. *The Review of English Studies,* 1970, vol. XXI, no. 84. P. 462–465.

3. *Bol'shoi Frazeologicheskii Slovar' Russkogo Iazyka. Znachenie. Upotreblenie. Kul'turologicheskii Kommentarii [Large Russian Phraseological Dictionary. Meaning. Use. Cultural Commentary]* (V. Teliya ed.). 6th edition. Moscow, AST-PRESS SHKOLA, 2024. 784 p.
4. Bosworth–Toller Anglo-Saxon Dictionary online. 2019, bosworthtoller.com (accessed 12 May 2025).
5. D"iakova, N. *Ustoichivye Slovesnye Kompleksy Drevneangliiskoi Original'noi Prozy* [Fixed Word Complexes of Old English Original Prose]. PhD Thesis Abstract. Leningrad, 1977. 23 p.
6. Fedulenkova, T. Grammaticheskie funktsii odnogo bibleiskogo frazeologizma [Grammatical functions of one biblical idiom]. *Vestnik Severnogo (Arkticheskogo) Federal'nogo Universiteta. Ser.: Gumanitarnye i Sotsial'nye Nauki,* 2024, vol. 24, no. 6. P. 92–99. DOI: 10.37482/2687-1505-V393.
7. Freeman, J. *Through many hands: the Vespasian Psalter,* blogs.bl.uk/digitisedmanuscripts/2018/11/through-many-hands-the-vespasian-psalter.html (accessed 13 May 2025).
8. Karpova, I. *Stanovlenie i Razvitie Angliiskikh Frazeologicheskikh Edinits s XIV po XX v.* [Emergence and Development of English Idioms from the 14th to the 20th c.]. PhD Thesis. Moscow, 1979. 237 p.
9. Kuhn, S.M. *The Vespasian Psalter: A Study of Its Language and Provenance.* University of Michigan Press, 1965. 327 p.
10. Lakoff, G., & Johnson, M. *Metaphors We Live By.* University of Chicago Press. 1980. 242 p.
11. Langacker, R.W. *Cognitive Grammar: A Basic Introduction.* Oxford University Press, 2008. 562 p.
12. Mitchell, B. *Old English Syntax.* Oxford University Press, 1986. 884 p.
13. Nachischione, A. *Okkazional'noe Stilisticheskoe Ispol'zovanie Frazeologicheskikh Edinits: (na Materiale Proizvedenii Dzh. Chosera)* [Occasional Stylistic Use of Idioms (by Reference to G. Chaucer's Works)]. PhD thesis abstract. Moscow, 1976. 21 p.
14. *Old English Glossed Psalters. Psalms 1–50* (Ph. Pulsano ed.). Toronto, 2001. 739 p.
15. O'Neill, P.P. *Old English Psalms.* Harvard University Press, 2016. 752 p.
16. Porck, Th. '*You are truly the same*': *The Varied Nature of Old English Glossed Psalters.* 2022, thijsporck.com/2022/10/01/you-are-truly-the-same-the-varied-nature-of-old-english-glossed-psalters/ (accessed 24 July 2025).
17. Proskurina, A. *Kommunikatsiia i Peredacha kak Formy Lingvokul'turnogo Transfera (na Materiale Drevneangliiskikh Pamiatnikov VII–XI vv. i Tekstov Biblii)* [Communication and Transmittance as Forms of Linguistic and Cultural Transfer (by Reference to 7th–11th c. Old English Manuscripts and Texts of the Bible)]. PhD Thesis Abstract. Novosibirsk, 2015. 20 p.
18. *The Holy Bible. Douay Rheims Version with Deuterocanon.* The Lord Henfield Edition. 2024. 1880 p.
19. *The Oldest English Texts* (H. Sweet ed.). London: N. Trübner & Co, 1885. 668 p.
20. Vulgate. The Holy Bible in Latin Language with Douai-Rheims English Translation, vulgate.org (accessed 24 May 2025).
21. Zhang, M. A Cognitive Research on Hand Metaphors in English. *Open Access Library Journal,* 2021, vol. 8, no. 5. P. 1–10. DOI: 10.4236/oalib.1107436.
22. Zykova, I. Lingvokreativnost' s pozitsii lingvokul'turologii: teoriia, metod, analiz [Linguistic creativity from the perspective of cultural linguistics: theory, method, and analysis]. *Iazyk, Soznanie, Kommunikatsiia: Sbornik Nauchnykh Statei, Posviashhennykh Pamiati V. N. Teliia* [Language, Consciousness and Communication: A Collection of Research Papers in Memory of Veronika Teliia]. Vol. 53. Moscow: MAKS Press, 2016. P. 136–151.

Список литературы

1. Alter R. The Art of Biblical Poetry. Basic Books. 1985. 296 p.
2. Ball C.J.E. The Language of the Vespasian Psalter Gloss: Two Caveats // The Review of English Studies, 1970, vol. XXI, no. 84. P. 462–465.
3. Большой фразеологический словарь русского языка. Значение. Употребление. Культурологический комментарий / отв. ред. В. Н. Телия. 6-е изд. М.: АСТ-ПРЕСС ШКОЛА, 2024. 784 с.
4. Bosworth–Toller Anglo-Saxon Dictionary online. 2019. URL: https://bosworthtoller.com/ (дата обращения: 12.05.2025).
5. Дьякова Н.А. Устойчивые словесные комплексы древнеанглийской оригинальной прозы: автореф. ... дисс. канд. филол. н. Ленинград, 1977. 23 с.
6. Федуленкова Т.Н. Грамматические функции одного библейского фразеологизма // Вестник Северного (Арктического) федерального университета. Серия «Гуманитарные и социальные науки», 2024, т. 24, №6. С. 92–99. DOI: 10.37482/2687-1505-V393.
7. Freeman J. Through many hands: the Vespasian Psalter. URL: https://blogs.bl.uk/digitisedmanuscripts/2018/11/through-many-hands-the-vespasian-psalter.html (дата обращения: 13.05.2025).
8. Карпова И.П. Становление и развитие английских фразеологических единиц с XIV по XX в.: дисс. ... канд. филол. н. М., 1979. 237 с.
9. Kuhn S.M. The Vespasian Psalter: A Study of Its Language and Provenance. University of Michigan Press, 1965. 327 p.
10. Lakoff G. Metaphors We Live By / G. Lakoff, M. Johnson. University of Chicago Press. 1980. 242 p.
11. Langacker R.W. Cognitive Grammar: A Basic Introduction. Oxford University Press, 2008. 562 p.
12. Mitchell B. Old English Syntax. Oxford University Press. 1986. 884 p.
13. Начисчионе А.С. Окказиональное стилистическое использование фразеологических единиц (на материале произведений Дж. Чосера): автореф. дис. ... канд. филол. н. М., 1976. 21 с.
14. Old English Glossed Psalters. Psalms 1–50 / Ph. Pulsano ed. Toronto, 2001. 739 p.
15. O'Neill P.P. Old English Psalms. Harvard University Press, 2016. 752 p.
16. Porck Th. 'You are truly the same': The Varied Nature of Old English Glossed Psalters. 2022. URL: https://thijsporck.com/2022/10/01/you-are-truly-the-same-the-varied-nature-of-old-english-glossed-psalters/ (дата обращения: 24.07.2025).

17. Проскурина А.В. Коммуникация и передача как формы лингвокультурного трансфера (на материале древнеанглийских памятников VII–XI вв. и текстов Библии): автореф. дисс. ... канд. филол. н. Новосибирск, 2015. 20 с.
18. The Holy Bible. Douay Rheims Version with Deuterocanon. The Lord Henfield Edition. 2024. 1880 p.
19. The Oldest English Texts / H. Sweet ed. London: N. Trübner & Co, 1885. 668 p.
20. Vulgate. The Holy Bible in Latin Language with Douai-Rheims English Translation. URL: https://vulgate.org/ (дата обращения: 24.05.2025).
21. Zhang M. A Cognitive Research on Hand Metaphors in English // Open Access Library Journal, 2021, vol. 8, no. 5. P. 1–10. DOI: 10.4236/oalib.1107436.
22. Зыкова И.В. Лингвокреативность с позиции лингвокультурологии: теория, метод, анализ // Язык, сознание, коммуникация: сборник научных статей, посвящённых памяти В. Н. Телия. Вып. 53. М.: МАКС Пресс, 2016. С. 136–151.

About the authors:

Sergey Mukhin, PhD, is Assistant Professor at Department of English No. 1, MGIMO University (Moscow, Russia). Spheres of research and professional interest: linguistic contacts in phraseology, Germanic studies, history of English. E-mail: s.muhin@inno.mgimo.ru. ORCID: 0000-0001-7891-8725.

Daria Efremova, PhD, is Lecturer at Department of English No. 1, MGIMO University (Moscow, Russia). Spheres of research and professional interest: text stylistics, biographic genre, history of English. E-mail: efremovadarya@yandex.ru. ORCID: 0000-0001-7133-1905.

Сведения об авторах:

Мухин Сергей Владимирович – кандидат филологических наук, доцент, доцент кафедры английского языка № 1 МГИМО (Россия, Москва). Сфера научных и профессиональных интересов: языковые контакты в области фразеологии, германистика, история английского языка. E-mail: s.muhin@inno.mgimo.ru. ORCID: 0000-0001-7891-8725.

Ефремова Дарья Андреевна – кандидат филологических наук, старший преподаватель кафедры английского языка № 1 МГИМО (Россия, Москва). Сфера научных и профессиональных интересов: стилистика текста, биографический жанр, история английского языка. E-mail: efremovadarya@yandex.ru. ORCID: 0000-0001-7133-1905.

* * *