

# LARES\_PROJECT UNA EUROPA (SEED FUNDING 2019)

## *LEXICON OF RELIGIOUS ACCULTURATION IN ANTIQUITY*

### PRESENTATION

*Religion manifests itself through interaction and communication.  
It is thus a relevant factor in the system of civilization.*

(Walter Burkert, *Creation of the Sacred*, 1996, p. 6)

### THE PROJECT

*«Until recently, the interaction between language and religion as topics relevant to bilingualism or multilingualism has been relatively little explored, although there is an extensive body of research on religious language. [...] Past research has also identified the linguistic consequences of the spread of various religions, particularly with respect to choice of ritual language and orthographic systems. The language use patterns and practices historically characteristic of different religious traditions [...]. Other recent research has examined the linguistic consequences of linkages between regionally prominent languages and dialects and religious practice in diverse international locations. [...] recent political events, interest in conversion efforts of religions other than Christianity, and growing recognition of the academic legitimacy of the field of language and religion predict a likely increase in applied linguistic research in this area.»*

(Bernard SPOLSKY, *Religion as a site of language contact*, «Annual Review of Applied Linguistics» 23, 2003, pp. 81-94)

Paraphrasing the title of a 2003 article by Bernard Spolsky, religion could be understood as a place of linguistic contact and, it should be added, a privileged field of investigation in this area. Till not long ago, the interaction between language and religion, both conceived in their relevance to bilingualism and multilingualism, has been not enough explored. This is even more surprising, when we consider that there is an ample corpus of studies on the religious language, especially with respects to the process of translation of sacred texts in different languages and to what the diffusion of various religions entails linguistically. Therefore, with the assessment of the models and practices of

language use historically peculiar to different religious traditions as point of departure, we are interested above all in understanding the linguistic implications of the activities and policies of exchange – may they be determined by processes of colonization, conquest, expansion, trade, alliance – that are always sources of dissemination and contact in the ancient Mediterranean. In addition, we take into account the persistency of some themes and concepts, albeit in their substantial historical re-functionalization and diachronic re-semanticization, the latter caused by the use and re-use of a pre-established, and sometimes inalienable, linguistic heritage. As Spolsky observes, the recent political events, the interest for the efforts in conversion made by religions different from the Christian one and the ever-growing legitimization of the role of language and religion in academic environments let us imagine a likely increase in linguistic research applied to this field.

The primary effort of this project is to reconsider religious language in its cultural rooting, by exploring the relative nature of the semantic devices and of the signs systems in relation to the manifestations of religious contact and contamination. Through a multidisciplinary approach that draws on history, linguistics, anthropology, philosophy, psychology and literature, this project aims to analyze the linguistic transformations and variations related to inculturation and acculturation phenomena occurring in ancient and late-antique religious environments and reflecting the structure of the relations unveiled by the linguistic turn, in the attempt to respond to the world stimuli and to produce world views. Lastly, the debate over linguistic variation and religious acculturation touches upon an issue that, ultimately, pertains to the construction of the western individual and collective identities: the coexistence and conflict inherent to cultures and between cultures focused on the exchange processes and the policies at the origin of the mutations of the religious mentality and experience in the ancient Mediterranean.

## THE MODEL

The primary aim of the *Lexikon* is to design a conceptual and socio-cultural map *in fieri*, mobile and *fluid* both on the synchronic and diachronic level, open to ever new “combinations”. The *Lexicon of Religious Acculturation in Antiquity* is thus conceived as a work-in-progress : inside the map, the heuristic paths and the hermeneutic perspectives will be signalled by digital markers (*i.e.*, tag clouds, pop-up), tightly linked to the two main components, namely religion and language.

In our virtual map, we have designed these markers of the (“fact”, “field”, “object”) ‘religious’ – meant as historical product and human phenomenon – according to three **main fields**, respectively sub-divided into three **realms of relevance**. In this perspective, ‘field’ (sub. ‘conceptual’) means any consistent organization of the experience (specific object of knowledge) or, according to Gunter Radden and Rene Dirven (*Cognitive English Grammar*, Amsterdam 2007), the general area of belonging of a category in a specific circumstance, whereas ‘realm’ (sub. ‘constitutive’) means the area, system or restricted space of action, belonging, extension (acted, experienced, conceptualized, enjoyed, shared).

## CONCEPTUAL FIELDS and CONSTITUTIVE REALMS

Departing from the idea of religion as highly effective ‘system of symbolic communication’, the identified fields and realms are all meant as spaces of knowledge *in fieri*, i.e. dependent on an ‘internal’ analysis responding to logics of processual definition and re-definition.

### FIELD 1: Communication

- REALM of the practice (rite)
- REALM of the belief (myth)
- REALM of the fiction (symbol)

### FIELD 2: Representation

- REALM of the sign (semiotics)
- REALM of the meaning (semantics)
- REALM of the speech (rhetoric)

### FIELD 3: Fruition

- REALM of the systems
- REALM of the instruments
- REALM of the structures

## THE LEMMAS

The single lemmas will be clickable and will lead to textual descriptions. It will be possible for the reader, however, to move between fields and realms of correlated interest by clicking directly on the lemmas. Every single lemma, marked by a color referring it to the realm of primary reference, is made up by:

- a *text* providing the definition of the lemma and: 1. the main semantic values; 2. the semiotic implications, if these exist; 3. the diachronic development, viz. the historical directions of linguistic and conceptual elaboration and re-elaboration along with the associated processes of reception and re-negotiation of the symbolic capital;
- a synthetic list of the *lexicon* developed in the historical tradition of the studies;
- a series of *links* directing to resources on the web (normally, the websites of reference of the research centers that re-direct to other resources);
- a concise reference bibliography.

By clicking on a single lemma, it is possible to access a short bio-bibliography of the author and a printable version, in PDF format.

## CREDITS

The *Lexicon of Religious Acculturation in Antiquity* is the long-term aim of the project **LARES: Language and Religion. Lexical Change and Variation in Ancient Religious Enculturation/ Acculturation phenomena**.

The project – funded through *seed funding* of the **network UNA-Europa** – is jointly promoted by: Alma Mater Studiorum – Università di Bologna, Helsingin Yliopisto, Uniwersytet Jagielloński w Krakowie, Universidad Complutense de Madrid, in the attempt to promote a tighter collaboration among the universities involved in the studies field of “Language and Religion”. The most salient results of this collaboration are two international events that will take place from May 2021 to July 2022 and that will pave the way for a structural collaboration to follow.

1) The first event consists of an explorative workshop, that will take place in the Università di Bologna in May 2021: *Interdisciplinary Paths of the Historical-religious Research in the Ancient World: Themes, Concepts, Perspectives*. The explorative workshop will be organized – with preliminary virtual meetings with the group coordinators – as open conversations (possibly as word-café sessions) about some keywords and concepts that help define intercultural and interdisciplinary differences through multifold perspectives. The participants will be encouraged to start joint explorations of research paths and to lay down the bases for a common project centered around a Lexicon of Religious Acculturation in Antiquity.

2) The results of these joint explorations and of further research undertaken by the participants will be shared in an ensuing event that will take place at the University of Krakow in springtime 2022 preliminarily entitled: *Lexical Change and Variation in Ancient Religious Enculturation/ Acculturation Phenomena*. It will be structured as a research foresight lab, whose results will be confronted and discussed with specialists from other fields, in order to elaborate a publication plan with the contributions of experts from different, but mutually connected, disciplines. The research theme dealt with in the research labs “Language and Religion” is a promising one with regards to a deeper interdisciplinary collaboration, for it is associated with different disciplinary fields linked to each other, from cognitive studies to linguistics to memory and cultural-traceability studies; moreover, it opens up new paths for linking the contemporary global challenges to the historically profound and geographically broad connections characterizing the many different cultural worlds.