

ETYMOLOGICAL AND LEXICAL ANALYSIS OF “COURAGE”

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Abstract: This article investigates the etymological development and lexical characteristics of the English word courage. The study aims to trace its historical origins, semantic changes, and lexical relationships within the English language. Using historical dictionaries and semantic analysis, the research reveals that courage originated from the Latin *cor* meaning “heart,” later evolving through Old French and Middle English to its present-day meaning of “mental or moral strength to face danger or fear.” The article concludes that courage reflects not only a linguistic evolution but also a transformation of cultural and moral values from physical bravery to spiritual and ethical strength.

Keywords: Courage, etymology, lexicon, semantic field, moral values, linguistic evolution, transformation, spiritual, ethical, bravery.

INTRODUCTION

Language preserves the cultural, historical, and emotional experience of humanity. Words associated with moral and spiritual values, such as courage, play an essential role in understanding how societies conceptualize human virtues. The study of courage from an etymological and lexical perspective allows researchers to trace the evolution of moral concepts and their linguistic expression. In modern English, courage signifies mental and moral strength that enables individuals to confront danger, fear, or difficulty. However, the meaning of the term has undergone significant change throughout history. From its Latin origin *cor* (“heart”), the word gradually expanded its sense from a physical to a moral and spiritual dimension. This research aims to explore how courage developed etymologically and what lexical relationships define its position in the English language.

MATERIALS

This study employs qualitative linguistic methods with an emphasis on etymological and lexical-semantic analysis. Etymological analysis was used to trace the historical development of courage through Latin, Old French, and Middle English sources, based on data from the Oxford English Dictionary (OED) and Online Etymology Dictionary. Lexical analysis identified synonyms, antonyms, derivatives, and collocations related to courage, focusing on its semantic relationships within the English lexicon. Comparative analysis was briefly applied to illustrate differences between historical and modern meanings. The material analyzed includes English dictionaries, historical linguistic references, and examples from classical literature to observe semantic usage.

RESEARCH AND METHODS

The word courage has its root in the Latin noun *cor*, which literally means “heart.” In ancient Roman and medieval thought, the heart symbolized not only a physical organ but also the center of emotions, will, and moral character. From Latin *cor*, the word passed into Old French as *corage* (12th century), meaning “heart, spirit, or temperament.” In this stage, the term referred to

both emotional disposition and bravery. In Middle English (13th–14th centuries), the form *courage* or *corage* entered the language through French influence. Early English usage denoted “the heart as the seat of feelings” and later “bravery in battle or adversity.” By the 15th century, courage had acquired its modern meaning—“mental or moral strength to face danger, fear, or pain.” This semantic shift from physical to moral courage reflects broader cultural changes emphasizing inner spiritual strength over mere physical valor.

RESULTS

The results demonstrate that courage has experienced both semantic broadening and moral elevation over time. In its earliest usage, it referred to the literal heart—the source of emotions and vitality. Gradually, this meaning evolved to represent moral and spiritual bravery, illustrating how language mirrors human psychological and ethical development.

DISCUSSION

The metaphor of the “heart” as the center of strength is universal across cultures. In English, the expressions *heart of a lion* and *take heart* preserve this symbolic connection. This metaphorical continuity shows that courage embodies not just an emotional state but a spiritual force rooted in cultural perception. The word’s close relationship with terms like *bravery* and *valor* emphasizes its moral dimension, while its antonyms (*cowardice*, *fear*) mark the boundaries of human character traits. Linguistically, courage belongs to the semantic field of moral and spiritual values, alongside *honor*, *faith*, and *hope*.

CONCLUSION

The etymological and lexical analysis of courage reveals a deep connection between language, morality, and culture. From its Latin origin *cor* meaning “heart,” the word evolved into a symbol of inner moral strength and spiritual resilience. Its lexical relationships demonstrate that courage occupies a central position among virtues expressing human bravery and determination. Thus, the linguistic journey of courage reflects not only semantic evolution but also humanity’s enduring belief in the power of the heart as the source of true strength.

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