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**RELIGIOUS VOCABULARY AND BIBLICAL ALLUSIONS IN
ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHING: CONTEMPORARY CHALLENGES,
STUDENTS’ NEEDS, AND THE PROSPECTS OF CORPUS-INFORMED
INSTRUCTION**

The integration of religious vocabulary and biblical allusions into English Language Teaching (ELT) presents a multifaceted challenge in contemporary educational contexts. While English remains deeply rooted in Judeo-Christian traditions, modern classrooms are increasingly diverse, requiring pedagogical approaches that balance cultural literacy with inclusivity. The findings from corpus analysis of the Biblical English Corpus (BEC) and the Corpus of Contemporary American English (COCA) provide a robust empirical foundation for understanding the linguistic behaviour of religious vocabulary and its relevance for language instruction. These findings not only confirm the quantitative and functional significance of religious lexis but also illuminate how corpus-informed methodologies can enhance teaching practices.

Frequency analysis demonstrates that religious vocabulary constitutes a non-negligible component of contemporary English. The identification of 2,847 lemmatised items in the BEC, with 127 items exceeding 5.0 occurrences per million words in COCA, supports the argument that such vocabulary is not marginal but functionally relevant. High-frequency items such as God, faith, church, spirit, and Jesus dominate usage, collectively accounting for a substantial proportion of religious lexical tokens. Importantly, the distribution follows Zipfian principles, in which a relatively small set of high-frequency items (e.g., the top 20, which account for over 60% of occurrences) offers a strategic entry point for pedagogical prioritisation. This suggests that targeted

instruction focusing on core vocabulary can yield significant gains in learners' comprehension and production.

Beyond raw frequency, keyword analysis reveals the distinctiveness of biblical language when compared to general English. With over 1,200 statistically significant keywords identified, including righteousness, commandment, and redemption, the data highlight a specialised lexical domain that characterises religious discourse. Notably, the analysis also uncovers stylistic features of biblical register, such as elevated use of kinship terms (father, son, brother) and metaphorical body-part expressions (heart, hand, face). The presence of archaic pronouns (thee, thou, thy)—particularly in the King James Version—raises important pedagogical questions. While these forms are obsolete in modern usage, their persistence in literary and cultural references necessitates at least passive recognition by advanced learners.

Collocational patterns further underscore the importance of teaching religious vocabulary as part of larger lexical units rather than isolated items. The identification of 387 statistically significant collocations, including high-frequency combinations such as Holy Spirit, say a prayer, and by the grace of God, supports a phraseological approach to instruction. These multi-word units often carry meanings that extend beyond the sum of their parts, particularly in idiomatic expressions of biblical origin. For instance, phrases like cast the first stone or the writing on the wall are predominantly used metaphorically in contemporary discourse. Corpus evidence indicates that over 87% of such idioms occur in non-literal contexts, reinforcing the need to prioritise figurative meaning and pragmatic usage in teaching.

Diachronic analysis across different biblical translations reveals significant lexical evolution, reflecting broader changes in the English language. The transition from archaic forms in the King James Version to more accessible language in modern translations (e.g., NIV, NRSV, ESV) illustrates processes of lexical modernisation and semantic shift. Examples such as charity evolving into love or conversation into behaviour demonstrate how meaning can shift over time, potentially leading to misunderstanding among learners encountering older texts. This highlights the

importance of historical awareness in advanced language instruction, particularly for students engaging with literary or theological materials.

Polysemy represents another critical dimension of religious vocabulary. Corpus data show that many high-frequency terms, such as spirit and baptism, exhibit extensive semantic range, functioning in both religious and secular contexts. For example, baptism may refer to a religious ritual, a metaphorical initiation (baptism of fire), or even broader conceptual transitions. Similarly, spirit operates across theological, psychological, and supernatural domains. This semantic flexibility poses challenges for learners, who must navigate multiple meanings depending on context. However, it also offers opportunities for developing deeper lexical awareness and interpretative skills. Corpus-informed instruction can play a key role here by exposing learners to authentic usage patterns and frequency distributions, enabling them to distinguish between core and extended meanings.

Considering these findings, corpus-informed instruction emerges as a particularly effective approach to teaching religious vocabulary and biblical allusions. By grounding pedagogical decisions in empirical data, teachers can prioritise high-frequency, high-utility items, introduce learners to authentic collocational patterns, and address semantic complexity systematically. Moreover, corpus tools enable the creation of data-driven learning activities, such as concordance analysis and pattern discovery, that promote learner autonomy and critical engagement with language.

In conclusion, the corpus-based analysis of religious vocabulary provides compelling evidence of its continued relevance in English-language use and, by extension, in language teaching. Despite the challenges posed by cultural diversity, semantic complexity, and historical variation, integrating this lexical domain into ELT is both justified and beneficial. By aligning instruction with corpus findings, educators can offer learners a richer, more nuanced understanding of English—one that reflects its cultural depth and communicative reality.

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DIGITAL EUROPEAN STUDIES IN HIGHER EDUCATION: HUMANISTIC DIMENSIONS OF EU ECONOMIC, SOCIAL, AND TERRITORIAL SYNERGY

In the contemporary European context, higher education is increasingly shaped by the intersection of digital transformation, social inclusion, territorial cohesion, and long-term sustainability. For this reason, Digital European Studies should be understood not as a narrowly technological field but as an interdisciplinary educational space in which digital tools are considered alongside values, citizenship, critical reflection, and the social consequences of change. UNESCO's roadmap on the future