

# *You think you've got problems? How posh words become ordinary*

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lānguāgē  
âcṭs and  
worldmaking

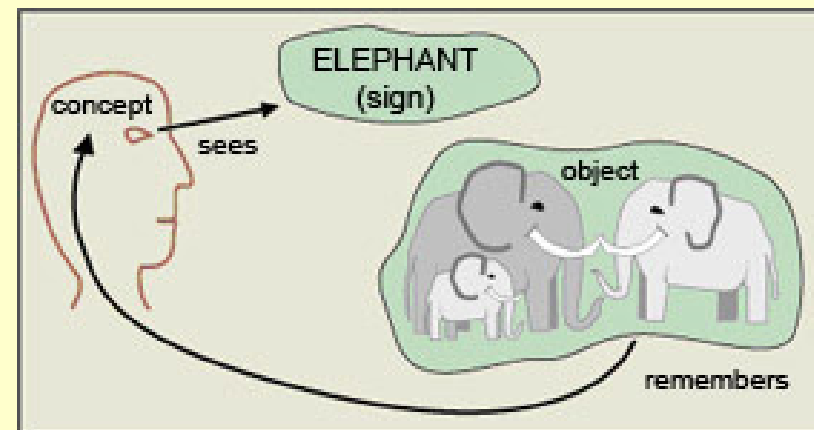
## Some old linguistic questions

Where do words come from?

How do the words we use relate to and represent the world around us?

**F**ACUNDUS DICTUS QUIA FACILE  
fari possit. Facus qui locos  
& ludos. gestus & factus commen-  
dat. a faciendo dicitur. Fruga-  
lis. a fruge nominatus. id est a  
fructu uel parsimonia. siue ut  
alii uolunt a modestia & tempe-  
rantia. Generator qui pecuni-  
am deponit apud debitorem.  
quasi fenerator. Nam fenus

Isidore of Seville (c.560-636), *Etymologiae*



## Some old linguistic questions

### Where do words come from?

In the languages of western Europe, one of the most important sources of **borrowing** is Latin (and Greek through Latin). These words are known as ‘learnèd words’ / Fr. *mots savants* / Sp. *palabras cultas* or *cultismos* / It. *parole dotte*.

The Romance languages descend from Latin, but words which were inherited directly from Latin usually underwent many changes in their pronunciation and meaning. Sometimes the same Latin word was inherited and later borrowed.

Latin	French		Spanish		Italian	
	popular	learnèd	popular	learnèd	popular	learnèd
FRĪGĪDU(S)	<i>froid</i>	<i>frigide</i>	<i>frío</i>	<i>frígido</i>	<i>freddo</i>	<i>frigido</i>

## *Some old linguistic questions*

### Where do words come from?

The extent of learned borrowing is enormous, and such words have become very common; they are also very widely shared, and so make for **convergence** among the western European languages.

Tengo una **documentación bastante útil clasificada** en una **forma bien elemental**, porque tampoco tengo **espacio**, pero quizás sea, digamos el prime, la primera semía de una **futura biblioteca de servicio**, ¿no? Ahora, aparte de esto, hago el trabajo de **secretaria** de... uno de los **agregados comerciales**. Y... bueno, todo lo que el **secretariado implica lógicamente**, tipear, tomar **dictado**, en fin, tomas pequeñas tareas **despreciadas** por los **intelectuales**.

I've got very useful **documentation classified** in a very **elementary** fashion, because I haven't got room, but maybe it's the first, the first seed, let's say, of a **future library service**, mm? Now, besides that, I work as a **secretary** to one of the **commercial** attachés. And, well, all that being a **secretary implies**, of course: typing, taking **dictation**, in short, all those little jobs which are despised by **intellectuals**.

## *Some old linguistic questions*

### Why does language change?

The extent of learned borrowing is enormous, and such words have become very common; they are also very widely shared, and so make for **convergence** among the western European languages.

The commonest learned borrowings in modern Spanish are:

108	momento
139	último
169	problema
177	existir
181	único
193	idea
220	permitir
268	situación
280	social
283	tema

## *Problem, problema, problème*

**problem** *noun* **1** a situation or matter that is difficult to understand or deal with · *a problem with the software* · *He's got a drink problem.* **2** someone or something that is difficult to deal with. **3** a puzzle or mathematical question set for solving. **4 as adj** **a** said of a child, etc: difficult to deal with, especially in being disruptive or anti-social; **b** said of a play, etc: dealing with a moral or social problem. **have a problem with something** **1** to be unable or unwilling to associate with it or to understand it · *Do you have a problem with her gayness?* **2** to be troubled by it · *has a problem with gambling.* **no problem** *colloq* **1** said in response to a request, or to thanks: it's a pleasure, no trouble, etc. **2** easily · *found our way, no problem.*

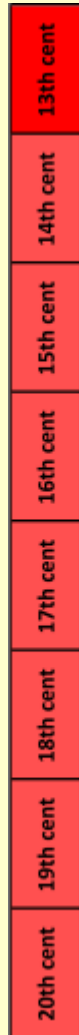
**ETYMOLOGY:** 14c: from Greek *problema* a thing put forward, from *proballein* to put forth.

## problema

Del lat. *problēma*, y este del gr. πρόβλημα *problēma*.

1. *m.* Cuestión que se trata de aclarar.
2. *m.* Proposición o dificultad de solución dudosa.
3. *m.* Conjunto de hechos o circunstancias que dificultan la consecución de algún fin.
4. *m.* Disgusto, preocupación. *U. m. en pl.* *Mi hijo solo da problemas.*
5. *m.* Planteamiento de una situación cuya respuesta desconocida debe obtenerse a través de métodos científicos.

## *Problem, problema, problème*



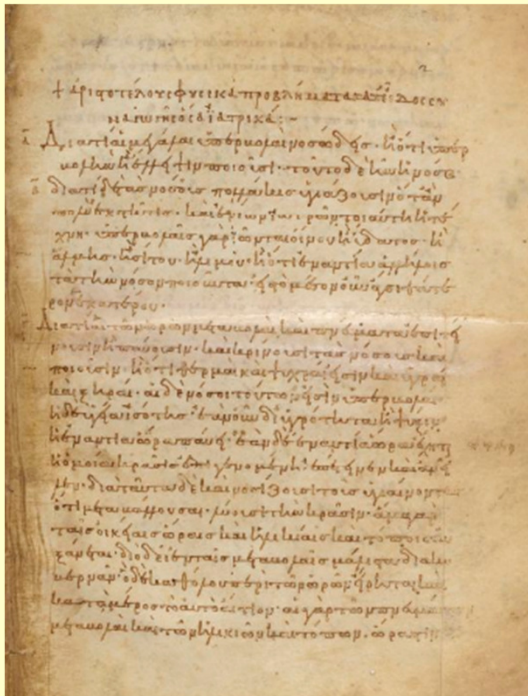
13th cent. Sicily, Italy. Bartolomeo da Messina, a translator at the court of King Manfred of Sicily (1258-1266) translates *Problemata Aristotelis* from Greek into Latin.



# Problem, problema, problème

13th cent
14th cent
15th cent
16th cent
17th cent
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19th cent
20th cent

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## *Problem, problema, problème*

difficult question

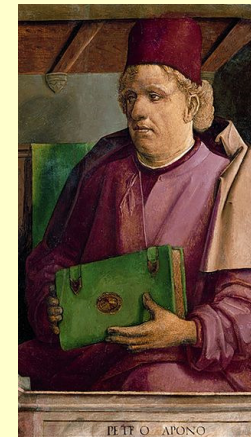
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Pietro d'Abano (c.1257-1316) writes a commentary on this in Latin. He defines *problema* as

'a difficult question containing something which is to be solved by disputation and appears to be a quagmire'

[Questio difficilis aliquod continens quod disputationes solvendum quod et voragine videtur]



# Problem, problema, problème

13th cent
14th cent
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19th cent
20th cent

1380 France. Evrart de Conty translates Bartolomeo da Messina's translation and Pietro d'Abano's commentary into French.

Chi commence li livres des **problemes** de Aristote, c'est a dire des fortes questions, translates de latin en francois

'Here begins the book of the "problems" of Aristotle, that is to say, of the substantial questions, translated from Latin into French'

difficult question



## *Problem, problema, problème*

riddle

c.1382 England. Chaucer uses *probleme* in *The Summoner's Tale*

How hadde this cherl ymaginacioun  
To shewe swich a **probleme** to the frere?



13th cent
14th cent
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## *Problem, problema, problème*

13th cent  
14th cent  
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18th cent  
19th cent  
20th cent

riddle

Late 14th cent. England. In the Wycliffite Early Version of the Vulgate (Latin) Bible, *probleme* is used as an equivalent for Latin *problema*.

Judges 14:15

blandire viro tuo et suade ei ut  
indicet tibi quid significet  
**problema**

Fage to þi man & moeue hym  
þat he schewe to þee what  
betokneþ þe **probleme**

‘Flatter your husband and persuade him to tell you what  
the riddle means’

## *Problem, problema, problème*

enigmatic expression, something difficult to understand

15th cent. Spain. Juan de Mena makes a daring rhyme between a number of *cultismos*: *poema*, *tema*, *problema* and *nema*.

Usemos de los poemas  
tomando dellos lo bueno,  
mas fuigan de nuestro seno  
las sus fabulosas temas;  
sus fiçiones y **problemas**  
desechemos como espinas,  
por aver las cosas dinas  
ronpamos todas sus nemas.

*Coplas de los pecados mortales, before 1456*



*'Let us use poems by taking good things from them; but their fantastic subjects must be banished from our bosoms; we should cast away like thorns their fictions and "problems", and break all their seals in order to possess the worthy things.'*

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## *Problem, problema, problème*

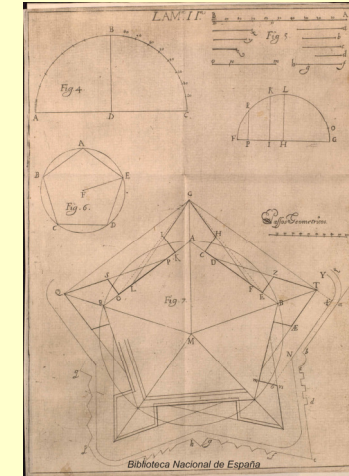
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17th cent. Spain.

y generalmente por esta práctica se medirán todas las distancias inaccesibles, que es **problema** universal, y escusa el individuar muchos casos particulares (José Zaragoza, *Fábrica y uso de varios instrumentos matemáticos*, 1675)

‘and generally by this practice all inaccessible distances will be measured, which is a general problem and makes it unnecessary to detail particular cases’

mathematical problem



## *Problem, problema, problème*



difficulty to be overcome

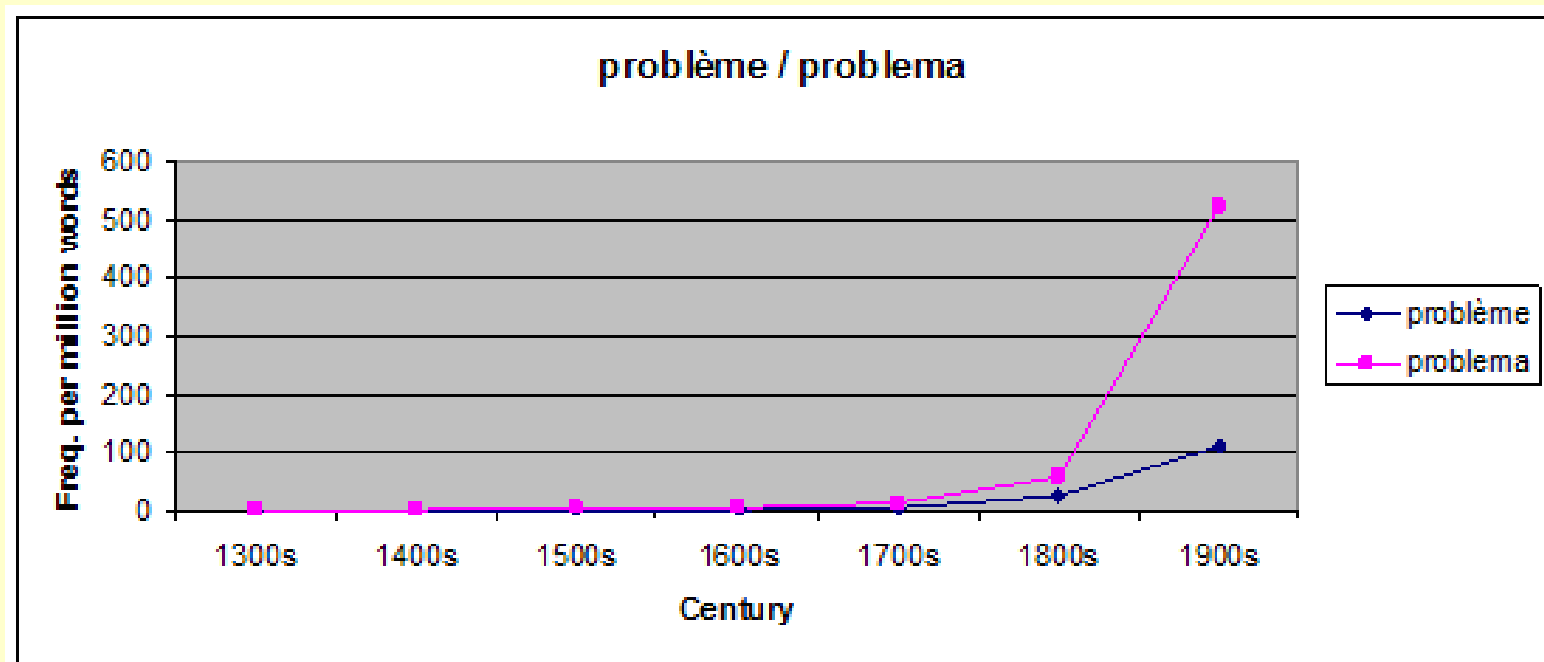
18th cent. England.

The grand political **problem** in all ages has been to invent the best combination or distribution of the supreme powers of legislation and execution (J. Otis, 1764)

- 13th cent
- 14th cent
- 15th cent
- 16th cent
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- 19th cent
- 20th cent

difficulty

19th-20th cents. Dramatic increase in frequency of Fr. *problème*, Sp. *problema*.



(Statistics based on FRANTEXT and the Corpus del español)



## *Problem, problema, problème*

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19th-20th cents. Dramatic increase in frequency of Fr. *problème*, Sp. *problema*.

*Problème* is the 188th most frequent word in modern French.

*Problema* is the 169th most frequent word in modern Spanish.

## *Problem, problema, problème*

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19th-20th cents. Dramatic increase in frequency of Fr. *problème*, Sp. *problema*.

Widening of meaning

difficult question; riddle  
enigmatic expression, something difficult to understand  
question to which an answer is required  
mathematical problem  
difficulty to be overcome  
difficulty

## *Problem, problema, problème*

13th cent  
14th cent  
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19th-20th cents. Dramatic increase in frequency of Fr. *problème*, Sp. *problema*.

Widening of meaning

Increase in collocational possibilities on the basis of English models?

*That's not your problem*

*No problem*

*She's got problems*

*The terrorist problem*

## *Problem, problema, problème*

13th cent
14th cent
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20th cent

19th-20th cents. Dramatic increase in frequency of Fr. *problème*, Sp. *problema*.

	1200s	1300s	1400s	1500s	1600s	1700s	1800s	1900s
<b>poss + <i>problema</i></b>	0	0	0	0	0	1	14	143
<b>es + poss + <i>problema</i></b>	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	17
<b><i>sin problema</i></b>	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	12
<b><i>tener + problemas</i></b>	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	334
<b><i>problema</i> + adj</b>	0	0	0	2	0	12	71	528

## *Social, sociale*



14th cent.

Luciu Sylla, consulu in la guerra **sociali** (OVI: Accurso di Cremona, Libru di Valeriu Maximu translatau in vulgar messinisi, 1321/37)  
'Lucius Silla (Sulla), consul in the Social War'

Desqueles Eutrope et Orose font mention en leur dit .V. livre et Florus en son tiers livre ou chapitre des batailles **sociales**.  
(FRANTEXT: Raoul de Presle, La Cité de Dieu de Saint Augustin, 1371-5)

'Of which Eutropius and Orosius make mention in their aforementioned Book V and Florus in his Third Book or Chapter on the Social Wars'

of the Allies

## *Social, sociale*



of the Allies

14th cent.

[...] la batalla **social**, de la qual auemos dicho, et la qual estada facta dentro Ytalia [...] (Juan Fernández de Heredia, trs. of Eutropius, *Breviarium ab urbe condita*, 1377-99)  
'the Social War, which we have spoken of, and which, having been fought in Italy [...]'

Silla þe consul wente into Campania azenst Metridas and was in Campania forto destroye al þe relief of þe bataille þat heet **sociale** (John de Trevisa, *Polychronicon Ranulphi Higden*, tr. 1387)

## *Social, sociale*

13th cent
14th cent
15th cent
16th cent
17th cent
18th cent
19th cent
20th cent

pertaining to society; sociable

14th cent.

Et kistu esti lu plui raxunivili modu di pensari, ka l'omu s'è esti naturalmenti **sociali**, amicabili et parintivili [...] (Anonimo (Niccolò Montaperti o Casucchi?), *Sposizione del Vangelo della Passione secondo Matteo*, 1373)

'And this is the most rational way of thinking, for man is indeed sociable, amicable and domestic.'

Et pour vray la vie **sociale** ou compaignable est aux enfans moult couvenable, se la compaignie est bonne. (Jean Daudin, *De la erudition ou enseignement des enfans nobles*, 1360-80)

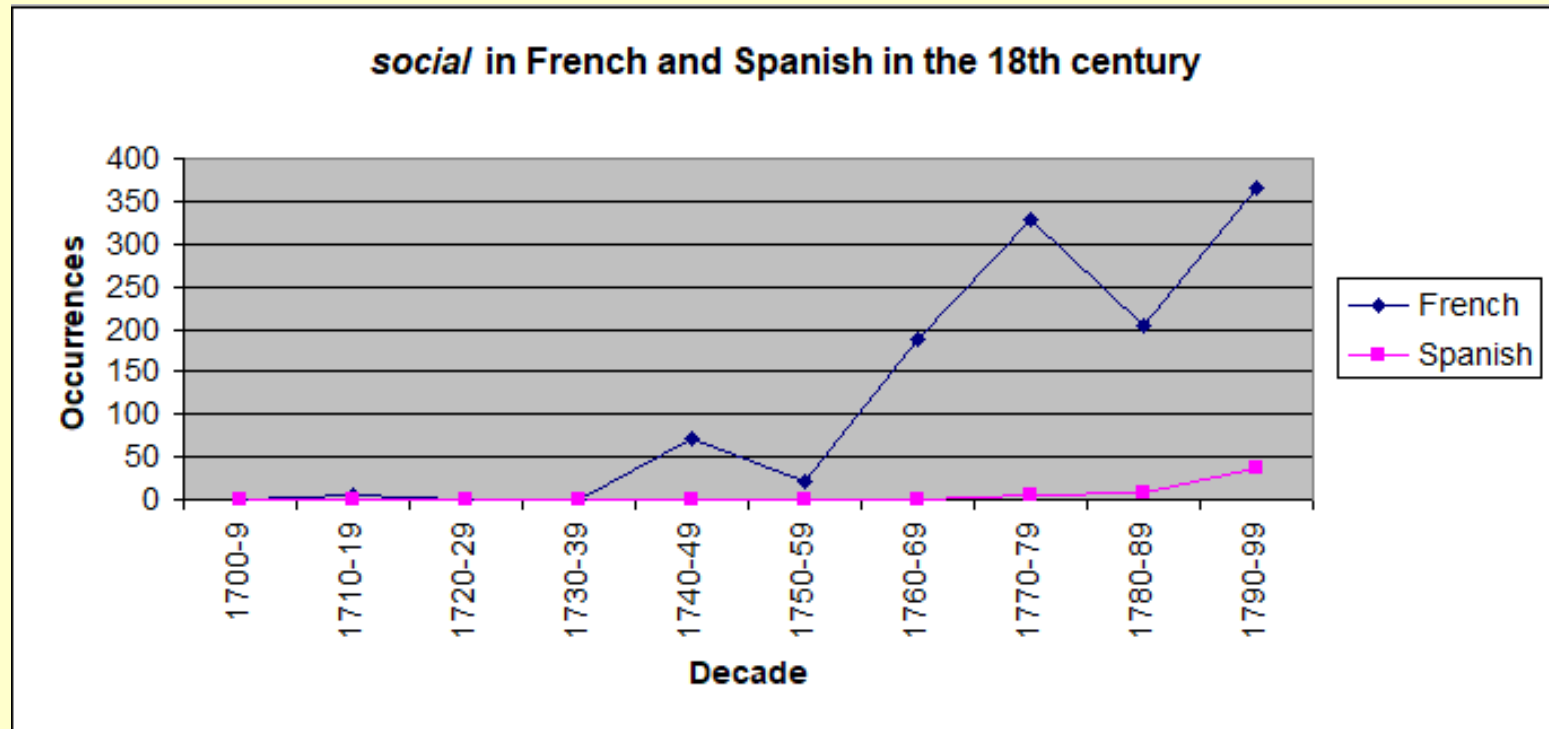
'And truly, sociable or companionable life is very good for children, if the company is good.'

## Social, sociale

pertaining to society

18th cent.

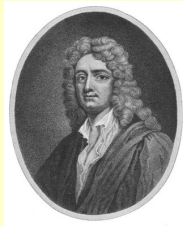
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17th cent	1750-1775
18th cent	
19th cent	1776-1799
20th cent	



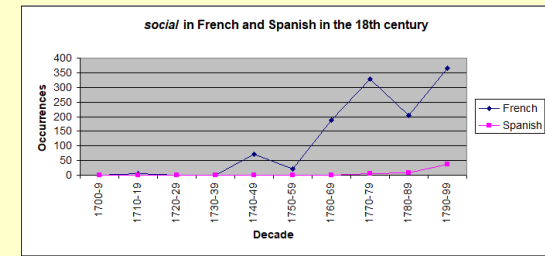
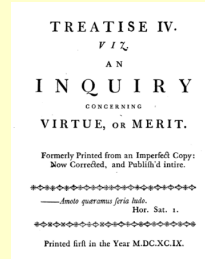


Social, sociale

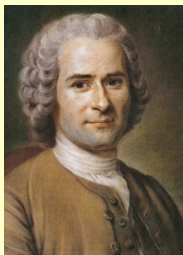
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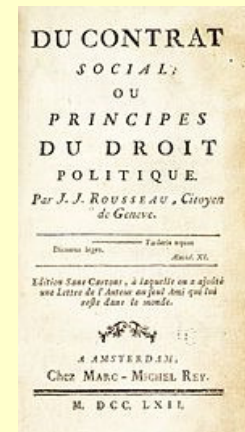
Anthony Ashley Cooper, 3rd Earl of Shaftesbury, *Inquiry Concerning Virtue*, 1699



Denis Diderot, *Essai sur le mérite et la vertu ou Principes de la philosophie morale*, 1745



Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Du contrat social*, 1761



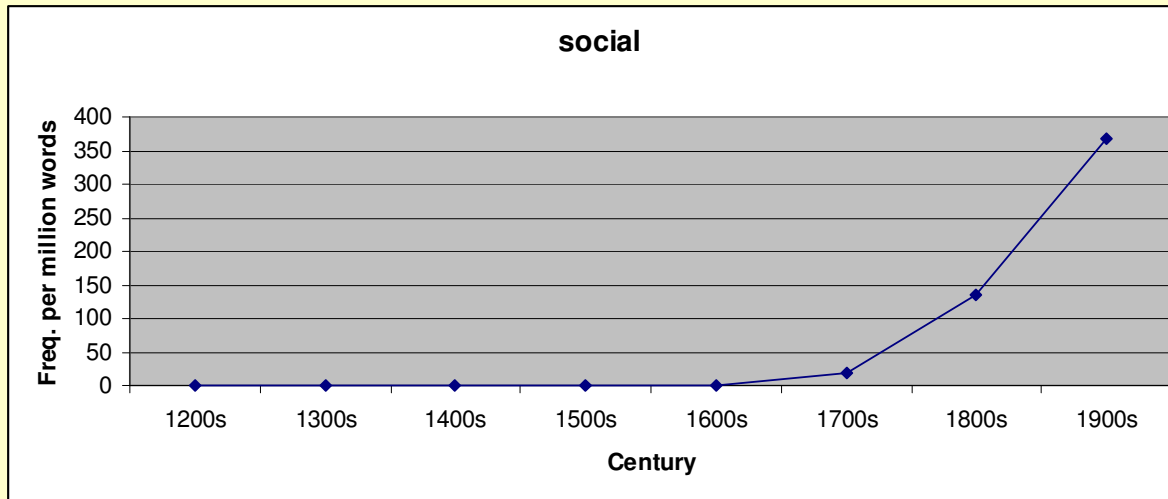
Melchior de Jovellanos, *Informe de la Sociedad Económica de Madrid*, 1794

<b>Diderot (1745)</b> <i>affection, inclination, passion, penchant, sentiment</i>	<b>Rousseau (1762)</b> <i>contrat, pacte, ordre, corps, lien, loi, système</i>	<b>Jovellanos (1794)</b> <i>orden, pacto, equidad, derecho</i>
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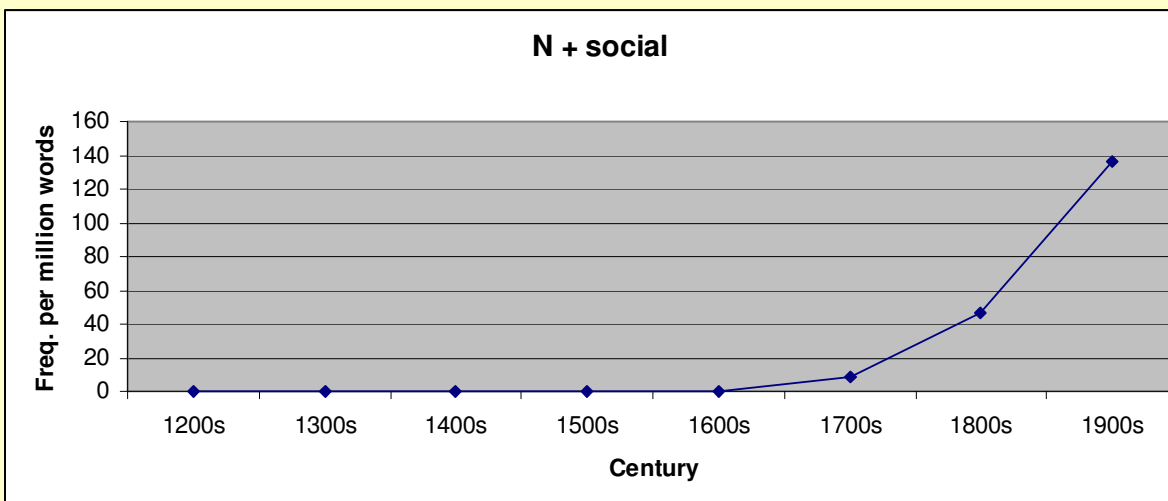
## *Social, sociale*

### The importance of N + ADJ collocation

13th cent
14th cent
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20th cent



Frequency of *social* in Spanish



Frequency of N + *social* in Spanish

## *Social, sociale*

### The importance of N + ADJ collocation

13th cent
14th cent
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Eng	Sp	Fr	It
<b>social deprivation</b>	penuria, etc., social	misère. etc., sociale	privazione sociale
<b>social exclusion</b>	exclusión social	exclusion sociale	esclusione sociale
<b>social function</b>	acto, función social	fonction sociale, rôle social	funzione sociale
<b>social fund</b>	fondo social	fonds social	fondo sociale
<b>social history</b>	historia social	histoire sociale	storia sociale
<b>social housing</b>	vivienda social	logement social	abitativa, edilizia sociale
<b>social justice</b>	justicia social	justice sociale	giustizia sociale
<b>social ladder</b>	progreso, promoción, escala social	ascension, promotion, échelle sociale	scala sociale
<b>social life</b>	vida social	vie sociale	vita sociale
<b>social media</b>	medios sociales	média social	social media, (media sociali)
<b>social medicine</b>	medicina social	médecine sociale	medicina sociale
<b>social sciences</b>	ciencias sociales	sciences sociales	scienze sociali
<b>social skills</b>	habilidades, aptitudes sociales	compétences, aptitudes sociales	competenze, abilità sociali

*Social / sociale* with a noun in English, Spanish, French and Italian (Linguee)

## Some questions

The origin of *cultismos* is not as simple as just ‘Latin’ or ‘Greek’: their presence in the languages of western Europe is due to a series of **transnational contacts**

**Does this mean they are exactly equivalent in these languages?**

Their diffusion in everyday usage is quite recent and constitutes a **change from above**

**How did that come about?**

Some have become the most **frequent words in use**, and label **very basic concepts**

**How did people manage without these words?**

## Some questions

The origin of *cultismos* is not as simple as just ‘Latin’ or ‘Greek’: their presence in the languages of western Europe is due to a series of **transnational contacts**

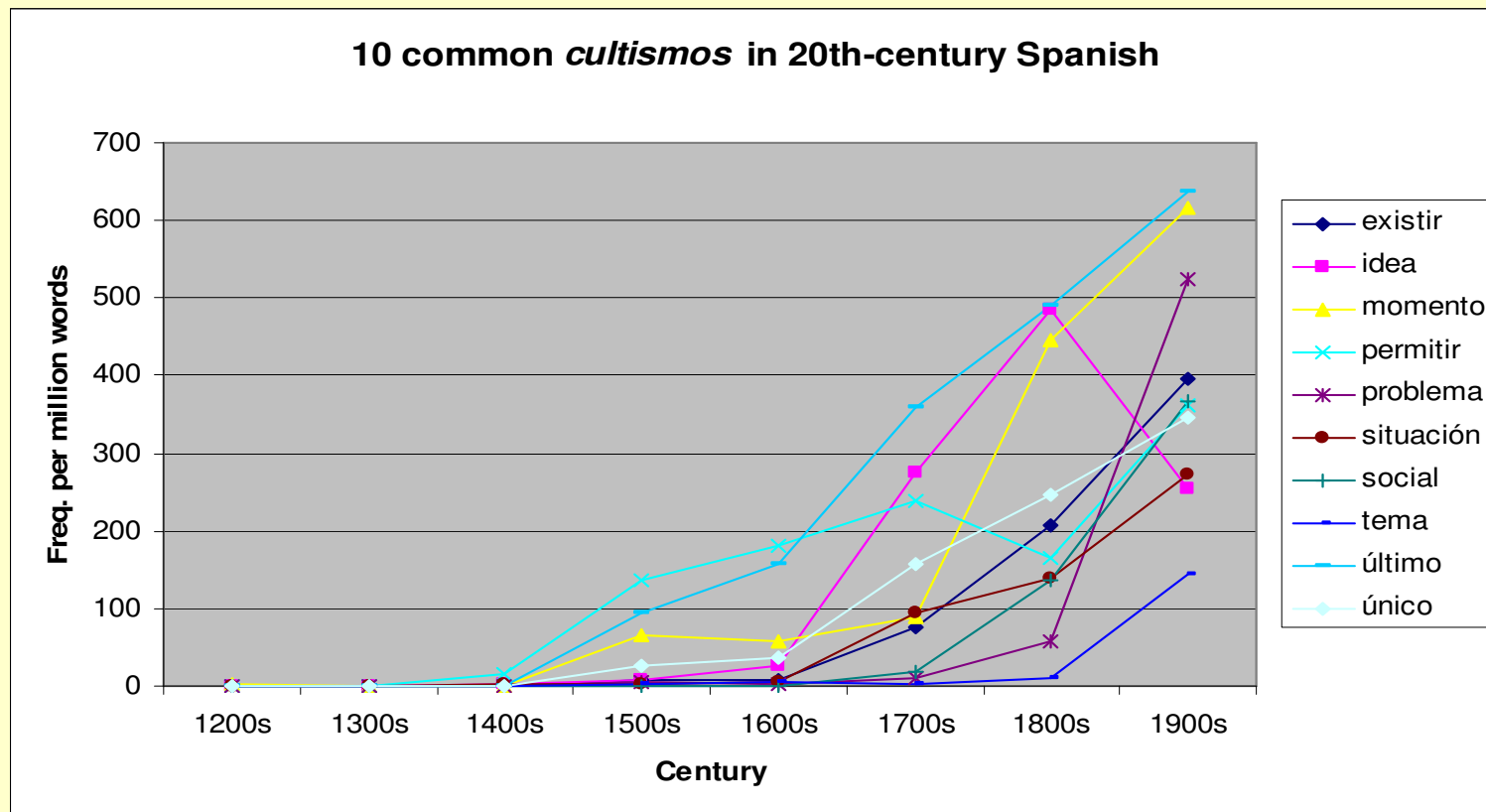
**Does this mean they are exactly equivalent in these languages?**

Spanish	French	English
mi <u>único</u> amigo	mon <u>seul</u> ami	my <u>only</u> friend
El <u>único</u> libro que no había leído	le <u>seul</u> livre que je n’avais pas lu	the <u>only</u> book I hadn’t read
un hijo <u>único</u>	un fils <u>unique</u>	an <u>only</u> child
una obra de arte <u>única</u>	une œuvre d’art <u>unique</u>	a <u>unique</u> work of art

## Some questions

Their diffusion in everyday usage is quite recent and constitutes a **change from above**

**How did that come about?**



## Some questions

Their diffusion in everyday usage is quite recent and constitutes a **change from above**

**How did that come about?**

*Mass education*

*The Industrial and Technological Revolutions*

*Mass media*

## Some questions

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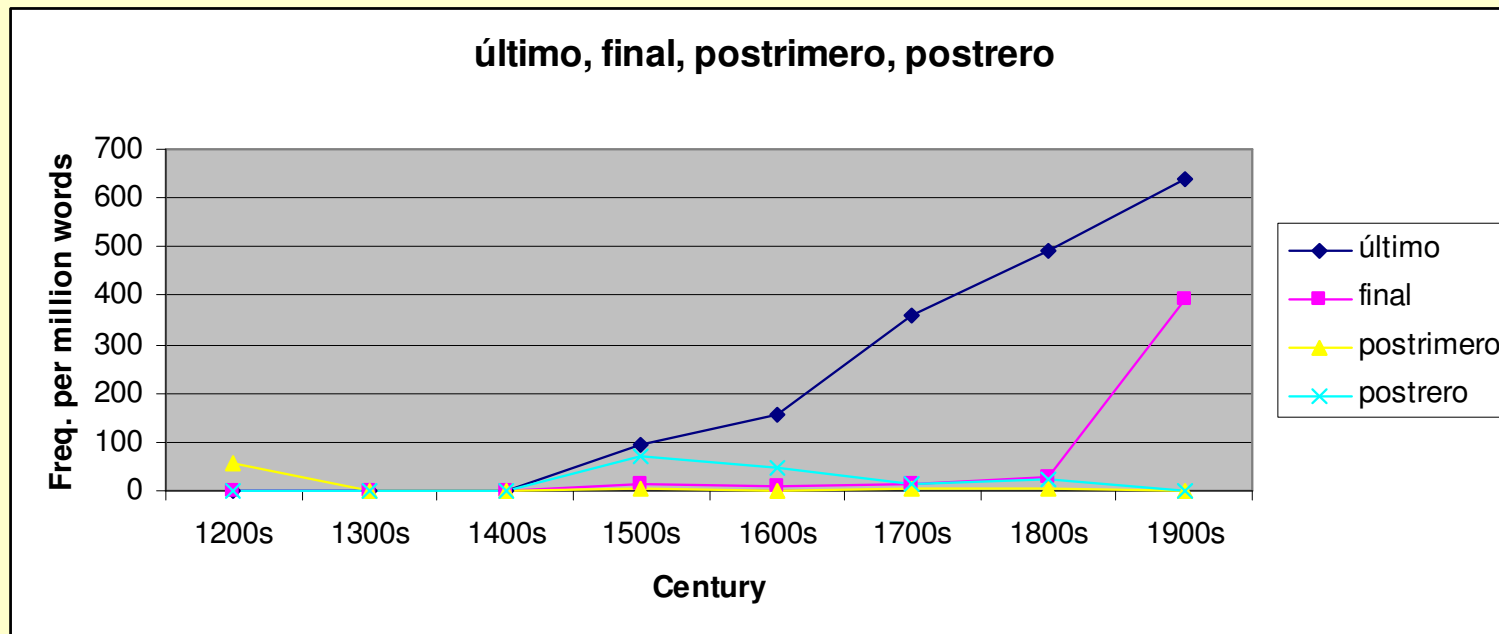




## Some questions

Some have become the most **frequent words in use**, and label **very basic concepts**

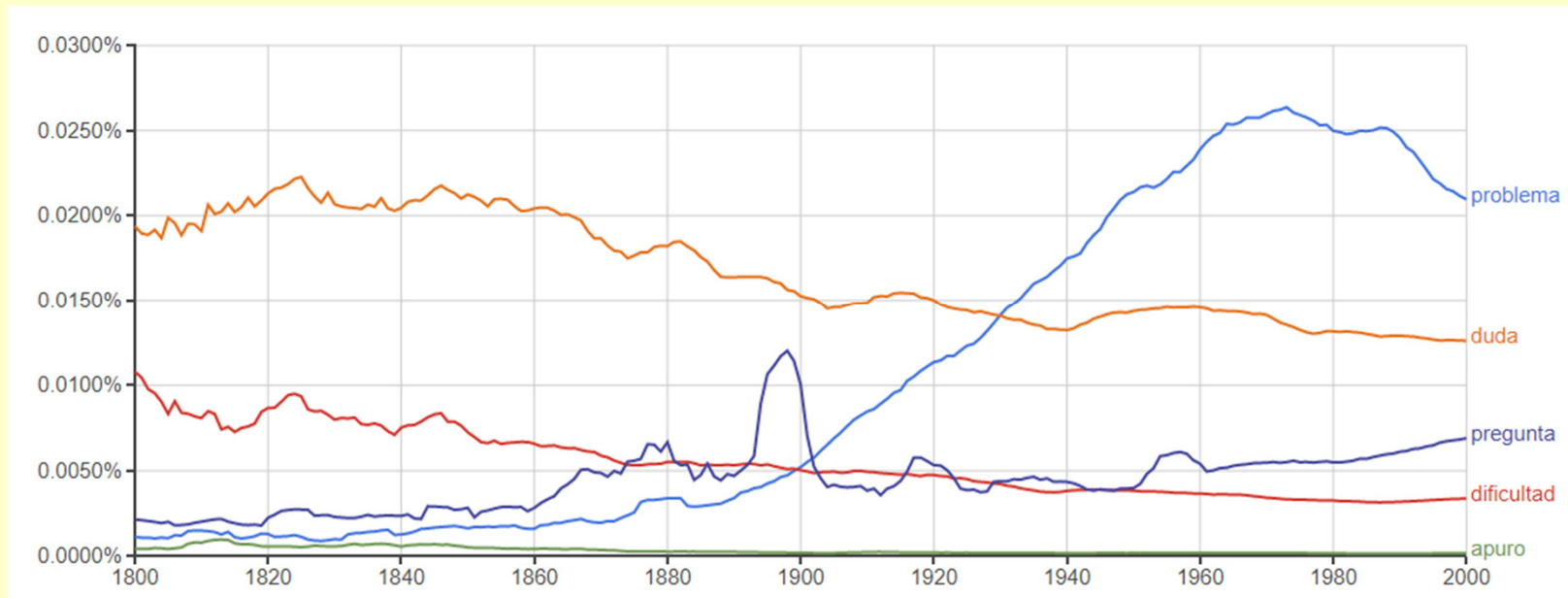
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## Some questions

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