τὸ δικαίωμα ἐμπροσθεν ἐν τῷ Ἰσραήλ (Ruth 4:7): An analysis of the Greek rendering of the Hebrew legal aspects in Ruth 4:7 for characterising the Greek translator’s translation technique

Being a literal and relatively precise translation of the Hebrew text, the Septuagint (LXX) of the book of Ruth attests divergences or variants in relation to the Masoretic text (MT) in the details of the text. These variants, if not inconsistent or linked to a different Hebrew Vorlage, could be explained as a translator’s choice to promote clarity, add a particular nuance or introduce innovation at the narrative level of the text. This is, for instance, the case in the legal process that runs through the fourth chapter of the book. Amongst all of the legal aspects illustrated in Ruth 4, this contribution presents a case study, focusing on the interjection in Ruth 4:7 that explains the legal custom. After analysing the equivalence between the Hebrew text and its Greek rendering, this article offers several new insights aimed to produce a more nuanced characterisation of the translation technique of the Greek translator of the LXX-Ruth and a clearer understanding of the nuances, innovations and specificities of the LXX-Ruth.

Contribution: This article contributes to the ‘Focus and Scope’ of HTS Teologiese Studies/Theological Studies because it deals with both the textual history of the Bible – more precisely, with its process of translation from Hebrew into Greek – and the exegesis of the LXX. Indeed, it highlights new insights into the translation technique of the Greek translator of the LXX-Ruth and on the nuances, innovations and specificities of the LXX-Ruth.

Keywords: Septuagint; LXX; Ruth; legal aspects; Ruth 4:7; translation technique.

Introduction

Being a literal and relatively precise translation of the Hebrew text (Knobloch 2007:239; Thackeray 1909:13; Quast 2006:125), the Septuagint (LXX) of the book of Ruth attests divergences or variants in relation to the Masoretic text (MT) in the details of the text (Bons 2011:701). These variants, if not inconsistent or linked to a different Hebrew Vorlage, could be explained as a translator’s choice to promote clarity, add a particular nuance or introduce innovation at the narrative level of the text.

This is, for instance, the case in the legal process that runs through the fourth chapter of the book. Amongst all of the legal aspects illustrated in Ruth 4, this contribution will present a case study and it will limit the analysis to the interjection in Ruth 4:7 that explains the legal custom. Therefore, this study will first present this verse as it is attested in the MT and LXX. Consequently, the equivalence between the Hebrew text and its Greek rendering will be examined and evaluated. By doing so, this contribution aims: (1) to offer a more nuanced characterisation of the translation technique of the Greek translator of the LXX-Ruth, by taking into account not only the categories of ‘literalness’ and ‘freedom’, but also the ‘faithfulness’ and eventually the ‘creativity’ of the translator (Ausloos & Lemmelijn 2014:54–55) and (2) to gain a clearer understanding of the nuances, innovations and specificities of the LXX-Ruth.

The interjection in Ruth 4:7: Explaining the legal custom

At the gate of Baithleem, in front of the elders of the city, Boos invites Hidden One (‘274 379 in the MT and κρύφιε in the LXX) to acquire the field from the hand of Noemin and from Ruth.

Note: Special Collection: Septuagint and Textual Studies, sub-edited by Johann Cook (Stellenbosch University).
He will also need to acquire Ruth herself in order to raise up the name of the deceased on his inheritance (4:7). Hidden One replies by declining Boos' suggestion because he would ruin his inheritance (4:6). In 4:7, the narrative is interrupted to describe the legal custom in Israel in former times. The text of 4:7 is shown in Box 1.2

The legal custom in former times in Israel

By examining the equivalence between the MT and LXX, we immediately notice a first textual variant: whereas the MT only attests ἐπὶ τὴν ἀγχιστείαν καὶ ἐπὶ τὸ ἀντάλλαγμα, the LXX. This reveals that there was no agreement on this sentence. For the Greek terms, the author uses: the δικαίωμα (DELG), Liddell–Scott–Jones (LSJ), δίκη (Hubbard 1988:247; Sasson 1989:141; Schipper 2016:168), the μισθός, μισθωτήσθαι (LEH), Dictionnaire Étymologique de la Langue Grecque historique (HGL), the τὸ δικαίωμα, from the root of δίκη, indicating both ‘rule, custom’ and ‘justice’, means ‘ordinance, decree’ and also ‘custom’ and ‘rightful due’. According to certain authors focusing on the Hebrew Bible (HB), the noun δικαίωμα would be Semitisms, based upon the meaning of the Hebrew שיפוט. However, several studies have indicated that the meaning ‘custom, rule’ of δικαίωμα can no longer be considered a Semitism. Rather, it should be understood as the result of the development of the Greek language, with δικαίωμα initially indicating the ‘supporting document’ in a legal process, which assumed, as here in the LXX–Ruth, the meaning of a(n) ‘ordinance/law’ (Cadell 1995:207–221; Montevecchi 1996:71–80; Tov 1999:112).

Having established the semantic value of the textual variant in the LXX, the question arises whether or not the Greek translator had a different Vorlage, and, if so, how he rendered it. Amongst the scholars focusing on the Hebrew Bible (HB), only Joüon (1986:85) considers the text of the LXX as the ‘most original’. Indeed, by referring to the LXX-Ruth and to Jeremiah 32:7–8, where the acquisition of a camp is related to ‘right of redemption’, he suggests that, in Ruth 4:7, the masculine noun שיפוט is lacking and that, therefore, would have been the ‘primitive reading’ (Joüon 1986:85). Contrary to this hypothesis, Campbell (1975:147), Hubbard (1988:247), Sasson (1989:141), Bush (1996:233), Schipper (2016:168) and De Waard (2004) stress the feminine gender of the pronoun and consider the reading of the MT the original one while that of the LXX a paraphrase of the (proto)-MT. When examining what LXX-scholars have written, Bons (2011:708, 2014:231) and Ziegert (2008:243–244) consider τὸ δικαίωμα as an addition of the LXX for the purpose of clarifying the sentence. Among the LXX-scholars, Assan-Dhôte and Moatti-Fine (2009:106) also seem to consider it an addition. After indicating that this noun does not have an equivalence in the MT, they argue that the choice of this term reflects the desire of the translator to award a juridical value to the ancient practice described in this verse. Quast (2006:125), instead, does not include this plus among the additions of the LXX-Ruth.

When we examine the critical edition of the HB, we notice that De Waard (2004) does not refer to Hebrew witnesses through an equivalent for τὸ δικαίωμα. He indicates, however, that Vulgata, Targum and Peshitta agree with the reading of the LXX.

By turning the attention on the critical edition of the LXX, we notice that no textual variants are attested for the reading τὸ δικαίωμα. This reveals that there was no hesitation in the Greek transmission to adopt this syntagm, even among the hexaplaric witnesses, which attempt to offer a more faithful rendering of the Hebrew text. We can, therefore, consider that the presence of a noun indicating a(n) ‘ordinance/custom/rule’ is geographically broadly attested, but only in the versions. Therefore, it is difficult to discern whether or not the LXX-translator had a different Vorlage and, consequently, I would suggest leaving this question open. With regard to the aim of this contribution concerning a more nuanced characterisation of the translation technique of the LXX-translator of Ruth, it is clear that, if the LXX-translator makes use of a Hebrew Vorlage, attesting a Hebrew equivalent for τὸ δικαίωμα, the reading of the LXX reveals a literal and faithful translator. If, instead, the LXX-translator does not have a Vorlage diverging from the Hebrew text attested in the MT, then the attestation of τὸ δικαίωμα exhibits a free translator who resorts to creativity in order to render his text as clear as possible for his target audience. In this case, on the basis of what has been said concerning the meaning of the noun and following Assan-Dhôte and Moatti-Fine’s hypothesis, the Greek translator would underline the juridical value of the act described in the second hemistich of this verse.

By proceeding through the description of the verse, the temporal adverb εἶμι ἐν τῷ Ἰσραήλ and the local syntagm ἐν τῷ Ἰσραήλ in MT and εἰς τὴν ἀγχιστείαν καὶ εἰς τὸ ἀντάλλαγμα in the LXX.3

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2. The Hebrew text follows the Biblia Hebraica quinta (BHQ) (De Waard 2004), while the Greek text follows the critical edition of the Göttingen Unternehmen (Quast 2006).
3. According to manuscript 108, Symmachus’ reading is: παρὰ περιουσίας καὶ συναλλαγῆς, which means ‘about (instead of “on”) the inheritance (according to LS), attested only here) and the interchange’.

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Page 2 of 6
The lexeme ἀντάλλαγμα is derived from the root ἀνταλλάγω and indicates ‘(the right to/price of) redemption’. Constructed with the suffix of the first personal singular, this noun is also attested in 4:6, when Hidden One asks Boos to ‘redeem his redemption’. In this regard, the lexica and commentaries register nuances in the meaning (Hubbard 1988:248–249; Joüon 1986:84–85); whereas in 4:6, ἀντάλλαγμα indicates the ‘right of redemption’, in 4:7, it refers to the ‘act of redemption’ (of the field). The LXX-translator renders ἀντάλλαγμα by the noun ἄγχιστευσις in both instances, therefore, without distinguishing between the two nuances of meaning. This noun renders the Hebrew equivalent faithfully only from a grammatical point of view.6 Semantically, in fact, the Greek noun, derived from the root ἄγχιστεύω (‘exchange, recompense’). The LXX-translator renders it by ἀντάλλαγμα. This noun is composed of the adjective ἀντάλλας (an)other with a guttural suffix, employed to convey the idea of exchange; the suffix -ας, indicating the result of the action; and the adverb and prefix ἀν-, developing a distributive value (cf. Assan-Dhôte & Moatti-Fine 2009:106–107; Heilman 1963:§302). This means, according to the lexis, ‘that which is given or taken in exchange’. Therefore, on the basis of these meanings, the use of ἀντάλλαγμα as an equivalent for ἄγχιστευσις can be considered a literal, faithful and unique rendering.6

The second topic of the legal custom, ἐκκύκλωμα, means ‘exchange, exchanging, recompense’. The LXX-translator renders it by ἀντάλλαγμα. This noun is composed of the adjective ἀλλός (an)other with a guttural suffix, employed to convey the idea of exchange; the suffix -ός, indicating the result of the action; and the adverb and prefix ἀν-, developing a distributive value (cf. Assan-Dhôte & Moatti-Fine 2009:106–107; Heilman 1963:§302). This means, according to the lexis, ‘that which is given or taken in exchange’. Therefore, on the basis of these meanings, the use of ἀντάλλαγμα as an equivalent for ἐκκύκλωμα can be considered a literal, faithful and unique rendering.

The aim of the legal process is expressed by the following final proposition: ἡ γεννημένη ἢπι in MT and τοῦ στήσαν πᾶν λόγον in the LXX. Here, the infinitive πι’el from εἶπεν (said), constructed with the preposition γ and meaning ‘to fulfill, to confirm, to establish, to impose’,7 is rendered by the genitive article τοῦ and the infinitive aorist active σημάτω (from σήμανον), meaning ‘to set up, to establish’. The direct object τῆς ἐκκύκλωσεν τοῦ, meaning not only ‘every speech/saying/word’ but also ‘every matter/affair’, is rendered by the adjectival πᾶς (at the accusative singular, meaning ‘every’) and the noun λόγος, meaning ‘computation, relation, exploitation, debate, continuous statement, verbal expression, utterance, saying, subject-matter, expression’ (DELC: ad loc). Now, in the MT-Ruth, τῆς is also attested twice in 3:18, when Noemin invites Ruth to sit until the τῆς [‘matter’ and also ‘word’] turns out’ because Boos will not rest until the moment when the τῆς has been accomplished (verb γεννημένη). In both cases in 3:18, the Hebrew noun is rendered in the LXX by πῆμα, meaning, in the occurrences outside the LXX, ‘spoken word, saying’. As for its meaning in the LXX, scholars have underlined that πῆμα expresses the same duality as τῆς, by referring to both the word and the object of this word, while λόγος seems to be more suitable in reference to the law (Dogniez & Harl 1992:41–43). On the basis of the given discussion, it appears that whereas the MT attests a lexical link between the words of Noemin and the legal action described in 4:7 through the usage of the noun τῆς, the LXX-translator does not maintain this lexical link. In this case, he nuances the meaning of his text: in 3:18, he uses πῆμα, which indicates primarily the ‘matter’ (and lastly ‘words’8 and which assumes the nuance of the meaning of the Hebrew Vorlage. In 4:7, instead, the translator renders τῆς by λόγος, designating the ‘spoken word, the statement’ and stressing the juridical context, which appears in these verses.

By considering the whole rendering of the final proposition, it can be asserted that it reveals a literal and faithful translator who, by making specific lexical choices, adapts the meaning of his text to the context and stresses the juridical value of the custom described.

The description of the custom

What follows is a description of the custom in Israel: the first sentence refers to the action of a man in removing his sandal ([נַפְשָׂת הַנַּפְשָׂת], while the second refers to the action of giving it to a neighbour ([נַפְשָׂת נָפְשָׂת]). In both sentences in the MT, it is impossible to discern which is the man among those involved in the legal action (Boos, Hidden One, the elders or the whole city) who accomplishes the action of removing his sandal and giving it to a neighbour (Hubbard 1988:250; Sasson 1989:142–143; Zakovitch 1999:161). In Greek, the

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4. It should be observed, for example, that the participle qal from the same root (נַפְשָׂת), indicating the ‘redeemer’, has three different equivalents in the LXX: six times דִּבְרֵי (3:9, 12; bis; 4:3, 6, 14); once דִּבְרֵי אָדַם (4:1) and twice the substantivized participle from the verb דִּבַּר (2:20; 4:7). From a grammatical standpoint, only the substantivized participle from the verb דִּבַּר renders the Hebrew participle faithfully and literally and refers to a generic relative, when Noemin introduces to Ruth the existence of one of the kinsmen (2:20). This form also appears in the verse, object of this analysis (4:7) but it does not have an equivalent in MT. The two nouns (דִּבְרֵי וּדִבַּרְתִים) on the other hand, refer to a specific person: either Boos, Hidden One or Obev (4:14). In comparison to the participle, the substantive accentuated the identity and role of the person, more than the actions that he accomplishes or will potentially accomplish. Moreover, Assan-Dhôte and Moatti-Fine (2009:43) argued that the participle is used with a direct complement; without any complement, it is a noun to be employed. Concerning the two nouns (דִּבְרֵי וּדִבַּרְתִים), we observe that they can be considered as synonyms. However, the occurrence of דִּבַּרְתִים in 4:1 – containing four syllables, compared with the three-syllabled דִּבַּר – has several phonological and attested only here – may be a stylistic expedient to emphasise the character when he first appears. Dorival (2020:143) underlines also that ‘The דִּבַּרְתִים is more frequent than the דִּבְרֵי’.

5. From a semantic point of view, the root of the verb לְבַדְרַע would have been a better equivalent for the root ‘קָחָה’. (Cf. Dorival 2015:238).

6. The expression הַנַּפְשָׂת – ἀντάλλαγμα is, in fact, attested only here (Cf. Assan-Dhôte & Moatti-Fine 2009:106). Elsewhere, the noun הַנַּפְשָׂת tends to be rendered as ἄγχιστευσις (in Leviticus 27:10, 13 in reference to the ‘substitute’ animal and in Job 28:17 in reference to the ‘exchange of a gold vessel’). In Job 15:31, instead, the Hebrew noun is rendered in relation to the verb הבָּדַר and has, as an equivalent, a conjugated form of דָּבַר דָּבִיר, which indicates ‘something tough, unchangeable’ as its equivalent.

7. Several authors consider this verb an Aramaism and some point out that this verb is typical of late Hebrew (See Joüon 1986:65; Sasson 1989:142; Zakovitch 1999:160). Campbell (1975:147) and Hubbard (1988:249) considered the verb an Aramaism, but argued that it is not necessarily related to late Hebrew.


10. In the verses preceding 3:18, Ruth says to Noemin what Boos did (verb σοφεύω, in 3:16), then what he gave (verb βιβλιοσάλω) to her and finally what he said (verb εἰπον) to her concerning her return to her mother-in-law.
text reads: καὶ ἐπέλυε τὸ ὑπόδημα αὐτοῦ καὶ ἐδίδον τῷ πλησίον τῷ ἀγχιστεύοντι τὴν ἀγχιστείαν αὐτοῦ.

It emerges that the conjunction καὶ is not attested in the MT. In the Hebrew text, only the Masoretic accentuation (the qaipe qaton on the last syllable of τῇ) links the final preposition to what proceeds in the verse, because the following sentence is not introduced by any conjunction. It seems, therefore, that the LXX-translator adds the conjunction to his text in order to clarify the construction of the sentences and, by so doing, confirms the structure of the verse, which is later made explicit by the Masoretic accentuation. The imperfect medium indicative third person singular ἐπέλυε (from ὑπέλυε, meaning ‘to loosen beneath or below’) is the equivalent of the qatal qal ḫâFP and renders faithfully, but not literally (which would be an aorist), the iterative value of the Hebrew verb.

The subject of the verb is ὁ ἀνήρ, the equivalent of the Hebrew זֶמֶן. Here, the article, expressed in Greek, has no equivalent in the Hebrew text and plays its role in determining the noun to which it is linked. The article refers, indeed, to the person, who will be specified subsequently. In this way, whereas in the MT, it is impossible to understand clearly who accomplishes a certain act, the article seems to clarify the people and their role in the legal actions. As for the direct object that follows (τὸ ὑπόδημα αὐτοῦ), it represents a literal and faithful rendering of הָנָעֲלֶהוּ.

The second action of the legal custom (καὶ ἐδίδον τῷ πλησίον τῷ ἀγχιστεύοντι τὴν ἀγχιστείαν αὐτοῦ) partially represents a faithful rendering of the (proto-)MT: here, the conjunction καὶ and verb ἐδίδον (third person singular of the imperfect from δίδωμι, meaning ‘to give’) are adequate equivalents for וְנָתַן. The following dative τῷ πλησίον τῷ ἀγχιστεύοντι τὴν ἀγχιστείαν αὐτοῦ, the rendering of יִשְׁרָאֵל, deserves a more elaborate description and analysis.

The adverb πλησίον ['near'] is preceded by the article and therefore, assuming a nominal value (‘the one who is near’ and therefore ‘the neighbour’), is the expected equivalent of the noun יִשְׁרָאֵל. The following syntagm, that is, τῷ ἀγχιστεύοντι τὴν ἀγχιστείαν αὐτοῦ, lacks an equivalent in the MT. Here, in the present participle singular dative from ἀγχιστεύω, in apposition to πλησίον, meaning ‘who is the next of kin’ and, in this case, where the noun is followed by the object ἀγχιστεία, ‘who exercises the rights and responsibilities of a kinsman’.

In the LXX, therefore, the nearby one who receives the sandal is the next of kin (τῷ ἀγχιστεύοντι) who now exercises the responsibility/right of his role (τῆς ἀγχιστείας αὐτοῦ). Here, the translator seems to introduce these textual variants to clarify the dynamic of the exchange and to solve the incertitude related to the identification of the characters, as attested in the MT. Although the specification of the direct complement, τῆς ἀγχιστείας αὐτοῦ, may appear redundant, it clarifies the new dynamic of the exchange: ὁ ἀγχιστεύων does not refer to Hidden One, as is always the case in Ruth 4, but rather to Boos, who is assuming the role of a kinsman and is now exercising his rights and responsibilities (τῆς ἀγχιστείας αὐτοῦ), as demanded in 4:6.

The identification of the characters involved in the legal custom is now clear: ὁ ἀνήρ, who takes off his sandal and gives it to his neighbour, is Hidden One; the neighbour, who is also the next of kin (τῷ ἀγχιστεύοντι) and who is assuming and exercising his rights (τῆς ἀγχιστείας αὐτοῦ) is, instead, Boos.

The description of the legal custom, therefore, reveals a translator who can be considered neither literal nor faithful, by considering the incertitude concerning the role of the characters in the MT and, therefore, the difficulty of discerning whether or not the meaning given by the Greek translator is the meaning of the MT. In this case, he clearly makes an exegetical choice and, by resorting to creativity, attributes the actions to one or other of the characters involved in the legal action.

**The final statement**

Finally, the last sentence of this verse represents a statement, linked in the MT to the beginning of the verse through the repetition of וּן [proceeded by the conjunction] and of the complement of place בְּיִשְׂרָאֵל. Between these two syntagms, the וּהֵעֵרְל, connected to the root of וּן (cf. 4:9, 11) and determined by the article (וּהֵעֵרְל), refers to ‘attestation, testimony’. The Greek equivalent (και τοῖσι ίνι μαρτύρων ἐν Ἰσραήλ) maintains the link to the beginning of the verse through the repetition of the pronoun τοῖσι and the complement of place, ἐν Ἰσραήλ. Between them, the imperfect of the verb εἰμὶ in the third person singular (ἰμ) makes the nominal sentence of the MT explicit, while the noun μάρτυρων, in agreement with MT, refers to the ‘testimony, proof’ of the legal custom.

**Conclusion**

By analysing the Hebrew text of Ruth 4:7 and its Greek rendering in the LXX, this article aimed to offer a more nuanced characterisation of the translation technique of the Greek translator of the LXX-Ruth and establish a clearer understanding of the text. The description of the legal custom, therefore, reveals a translator who can be considered neither literal nor faithful, by considering the incertitude concerning the role of the characters in the MT and, therefore, the difficulty of discerning whether or not the meaning given by the Greek translator is the meaning of the MT. In this case, he clearly makes an exegetical choice and, by resorting to creativity, attributes the actions to one or other of the characters involved in the legal action.

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11. Indeed, there is no evidence to suggest a different Hebrew Vorlage. Several manuscripts, witnesses of the recensional work (18 R 161-162 C 5 160 391), do not attest the conjunction.

12. No evidence seems to suggest a different Vorlage. Notice, however, that 376’s (a good witness of the hexaplaric recension, see Quast 2006:25) and R 161-162 C 5 160 391 (a recension that offers a mixed text, see Quast 2006:72) do not attest the article.

13. Concerning τῆς ἁγγαρείας, BHQ does not attest to any textual variants here. Concerning the Greek text, it seems that only A does not attest τῆς ἁγγαρείας. Concerning τῆς ἁγγαρείας αὐτοῦ, we should first examine whether or not the LXX-translator had a different Hebrew Vorlage. However, under the current state of research, there is no evidence to suggest this. When we turn our attention to the critical edition of the LXX, we notice that only manuscript 407 does not attest the accusative.

14. The participle is attested in the plural form in 2:20.

15. We should also note that the personal pronoun of the third person singular, αὐτοῦ, has an equivalent in the MT, with the suffix personal pronoun of the third person singular (τοῦ). However, in the MT, the suffix is linked to the neighbour and refers to τῷ, in the LXX, it is linked to τῆς ἁγγαρείας and refers to τῶν ἀγχιστευόντων.
understanding of the nuances, innovations and specificities of the LXX-Ruth.

When we turn our attention to the second aim of this article (the nuances, innovations and specificities of the LXX-Ruth), it emerges that this text offers a clearer identification of the characters involved in the legal action (ὁ ἀνήρ, τὸ ἀγχιστεύοντι τὴν ἀγχιστείαν αὐτοῦ). The juridical value of the custom described here is also stressed by: (1) the plus of τὸ δίκαιωμα; (2) the lexical choices of λόγος; and (3) the reference to the neighbour, who is the one who assumes and exercises his rights and responsibilities (τὸ ἀγχιστεύοντι τὴν ἀγχιστείαν αὐτοῦ). The text of the LXX becomes therefore more intelligible for a Greek-speaking, Jewish target audience, who were probably unfamiliar with Jewish law. However, whereas the legal custom in the MT concerns the ‘redemption’ (of a field and a widow), in the LXX, it refers to the dynamics of ‘close kinship’.

Although this article has provided new insights into the translation technique of the LXX-translator of Ruth, the results of this analysis, based only on the interjection in Ruth 4:7, do not offer a complete picture of the translation technique of the LXX-Ruth and the nuances and specificities of this text. It should be underlined that this is not the aim of this article. This contribution would rather pave the way and open up a new path for a deeper, more detailed investigation into the LXX-Ruth. Analysing and evaluating the other legal aspects in Ruth 4 and situating them in the whole depiction of this text. It should be underlined that this is not the aim of this article. This contribution would rather pave the way and open up a new path for a deeper, more detailed investigation into the LXX-Ruth. Analysing and evaluating the other legal aspects in Ruth 4 and situating them in the whole depiction of this text.

Data availability

Data sharing is not applicable to this article as no new data were created or analysed in this study.

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The views and opinions expressed in this article are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the official policy or position of any affiliated agency of the author.

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