

PROLEGOMENA TO THE DEVELOPMENT OF AN INVENTORY OF SYNSEM FEATURES FOR THE OLD ENGLISH VERD

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1. INTRODUCTION

In the Functional-Lexematic Model (F-LM), words are organized into classes which predict, to a great extent, their syntactic and semantic properties. Moreover, these regularities of the lexicon can be mapped out by means of syntactic-semantic (synsem) parameters, which operate throughout the lexicon in the various areas of meaning and constitute a determining factor in the actual process of constructing an underlying clause structure (Faber and Mairal 1998).

Synsem features can be divided into three main types, according to their scope of application:

- 1 Lexically-realized grammatical parameters, which determine what complementation patterns a certain verb can accept.
- 2 Lexically-realized optional parameters, which explain why certain arguments, though semantically present, are not syntactically activated in the actual linguistic expression.
- 3 Lexically-realized contextual parameters, which are not syntactically projected, but serve as clues for contextual settings (Faber and Mairal 1998: 38).

In this paper I will try to apply these principles to the analysis of the Old English² verb. My first aim will be to determine some of the different ways the lexically-realized grammatical parameter of *causation* (Díaz Vera forthcoming) finds a systematic correspondence in the syntax of the OE verb, acting as a filter that accepts certain syntactic complementation patterns while blocking others.³ Moreover, references to both optional and contextual

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parameters will be made throughout the paper, but only as far as these interact with the causative parameter.

Obviously, the usual caveats about the nature of the data apply: can the absence of a hypothetically possible meaning or constructions for a given predicate in the whole corpus of OE written texts be taken as a genuine reflection of the semantics/syntax of the verb, or should it be considered accidental? In spite of the obvious limitations of historical inquiry, I nevertheless think that the progressive application of the most recent developments in lexical studies to the analysis and description of the syntactic and semantic relations of the OE verb should greatly contribute to our understanding of this historical variant of the English language.

2. LEXICALLY-REALIZED GRAMMATICAL PARAMETERS: CAUSATION IN OE

Lexically-realized grammatical parameters have a direct effect on a predicate's complementation structure. As Faber and Mairal (1998: 39) put it, when we experience an event "we perceive when it begins and/ or ends, how long it lasts, if it is recurrent, what effect it has on us, and if it truly corresponds to the world or a state of the world", and all these parameters find a direct reflection in the meaning and in the syntax of the verb. What I shall argue here is that, when applied to OE, these grammatical parameters of causation are still transparent on both the morphological and the phonological levels.

Verbs express events or states of being. There is no doubt that a causative situation is semantically relevant to the verb, as it affects the event or state of being directly. The causation parameter can be signalled in NE by bound morphemes (e.g. darken "to make dark") or, more frequently, expressed by lexically independent forms (e.g. die and its causative kill "to cause to die"). Moreover, many NE verbs can be used both as non-causatives and causatives (e.g. sink, shine, shame; Faber and Mairal 1998: 53-57). On the syntagmatic axis, these causative predicates have a transitive use (SVO: They sank the ship), whereas the verbs in the non-causative subdomain are one-place predicates which do not (SV: The ship sank).

Unlike NE, the causative pattern was clearly established in the phonological and morphological structure of the different Gmc dialects, where different prefixes and suffixes were systematically used to distinguish between causative and non-causative meanings of the same verb. A first example of the origin and development of causative predicates by derivation from non-causative verbs can be found in the group of OE verbs expresing MOVEMENT IN LIQUID, where the different Gmc dialects systematically

added the formative $*/j\alpha/^4$ to one of the roots of the corresponding non-causative predicates (Nedyalkov and Silnitsky 1978), which explains why none of these verbs has a back root vowel in OE in the present system (see *Table 2*).

Gmc VERBAL INFINITIVE	OE non- causative (c=ablaut series)	suffixation (verbal root + */-jα-/)	OE causative	NE (non causative/ causative)
* du:β-α-n	dúfan (c7)	INF*du:β-+jαn	dýfan	dive 1/dive2
*siηkw-α-n	sincan (c3)	PRET1*sαηkw-+jαn	sencan	sink1/sink2
*deup-jα-n	díopan (c3)	PRET1 *dαup- + jαn	dýppan	-/dip

Table 1: OE verbs of MOVEMENT IN LIQUID: the development of the causative subdimension.

The complete effects of this process can be seen from the following distribution of the causative and non-causative subdimensions of OE verbs of MOVEMENT IN LIQUID (*Table 3*):

MOVEN	MENT IN LIQUID (NON-CAUSATI	MOVEMENT IN LIQUID (CAUSATIVE)	
dúfan	to GO into the water	dýfan	to cause somebody/something to GO into the water
sincan	to GO slowly downwards below the surface of the water	sencan	to cause somebody/something to GO slowly downwards below the surface of the water
díepan	to GO deep into a liquid for a short time	dýppanl	to cause somebody/something to GO deep into liquid for a short time
!		dýppan2	to cause someone/smething to GO deeply into liquid for a short time (in baptism)

Table 2: OE verbs of MOVEMENT IN LIQUID: distribution of the causative and non-causative subdimensions.

From a morphological point of view, these causative predicates show all the features that characterize OE heavy root Class I weak verbs (Lass 1994: 166-167), such as the use of the inflexional endings /-d-/ (preterite) and /-ed/ (past participle). Some examples of the four predicates included in the causative subdimension of MOVEMENT IN LIQUID are:⁵

[1] DÝFAN: Mec feonda sum feore besnyßfede, woruldstrenga binom, wætte sßfan, **dyfde** on wætre, dyde eft fonan, sette on sunnan, fær ic swiße beleas herum fam fe ic hæfde (OX/3_XX_XX_RIDDL, 193)

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- [2] SENCAN: Ac ondrædað one þe þa sawle mæg and eac þone lichaman on helle **besencan** (O3_IR_RELT_LWSTAN1,80)
- [3] DÝPPAN1: Dryge hine ŏonne on sunnan and dyppe hine oβre syβan (O3_IR_RELT_LWSTAN2,172)
- [4] DÝPPAN2: Ic eowic depu vel **dyppe** in wættre in hreunisse seβe βonne æfter me cymeð (O3_XX_NEWT_RUSHW, 37)

In the causative subdomain, an agent causes someone or something to go downwards into a liquid; it follows that all these verbs have a transitive use (corresponding in Gmc to SOV, as can still be seen in examples [1], [2] and [4]; Lehmann 1972: 242-244), whereas the verbs in the non-causative subdomain are one-place predicates which do not (SV). See for example:

- [5] DÚFAN: Ic...deaf under yŏe ([§]OX/3_XX_XX_RIDDL, 73)
- [6] SINCAN: Geseah fa fone wind swione frohtade & fa ingon sincan cegde cwefende "Hæl mec drihten" (O3_XX_NEWT_RUSHW, 125)
- [7] DÍOPAN: per waxeð wunde & deopeð into pe soule ([§]M1_IR_RELT_ANCR, 288)

A very different type of derivation is found in the domain of LIGHT, which shows the following semantic distribution in OE:

LIGHT (NON-CAUSATIVE)		LIGHT (CAUSATIVE)		
scínan	to give off LIGHT/ to be BRIGHT	gescínan	to cause something to give off LIGHT/to be BRIGHT	
bierhtan	to SHINE bright	gebierhtan	to cause something to SHINE bright	
beorhtian	to become BRIGHT	Gebeorhtnian	to cause something to become BRIGHT	

LIGHT (NO	N-CAUSATIVE)	LIGHT (CAUSATIVE)
glówan	to SHINE with a sudden, bright light	
twinclian	to SHINE with rapidly intermittent light	
scymrian	to SHINE with a tremulous or flickering light	
<i>Lihtan</i> to	begin to SHINE	4
glisian	to SHINE with a brilliant but broken and tremulous light	
glittenian	To SHINE brihtly (metal)	

Table 3: OE verbs of LIGHT: distribution of the causative and non-causative subdimensions.

As in modern languages such as English or Spanish (Faber and Pérez 1993: 120-122), the OE domain of LIGHT is characterized by the existence of a large number of non-causative predicates, in clear contrast to the causative subdomain, with only three verbs: gescínan, gebierhtan and gebeorhtnian. Some examples of these causative predicates are:

- [8] GESCÍNAN: Swa eac se mona, swa miclum he lyht swa sio sunne hine gescinő (O2_XX_PHILO_BOETHAL, 86)
- [9] GEBIERHTAN: Swa swa ealle steorran weorðað onlihte & gebirhte of þære sunnan, sume þeah beorhtor, sume unbeorhtor (O2_XX_PHILO_BOETHAL, 86)
- [10] GEBEORHTNIAN: God geberhtnade hine on hine seolfne ([§]O3_XX-NEWT_LIND, 32)

As can be seen here, the mechanism of derivation used for the formation of these causative predicates consists in the use of the Gmc nominal and verbal prefix $*/g\alpha$ -/ (OE ge-), the etymological equivalent to Latin con-, with the primary sense of "assocation" (e.g. OE gebrófor "brethren"). The OE verbal prefix ge- is frequently used as a simple marker of the past participle;

moreover, non-participial verbs may appear in either form, sometimes with no apparent semantic difference (e.g. OE (ge)campian "fight"; Lass 1994: 204). When there is a clear sense, it is usually perfective or resultative: this is the case of verbs of LIGHT, which can be interpreted as "a light vehicle (e.g. a jewel, a piece of metal) gives off LIGHT as a result of contact with the beam emitted from a light source (e.g. the sun, a fire, a lamp)", or more simply "a light source causes a light vehicle to SHINE".

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Obviously, the semantic roles of agent and goal are highly restricted by the limited number of possible light sources and vehicles found in the physical world. However, this basic schema is frequently extended "so as to allow its shape to be filled by entities that are not strictly physical or spatial in the prototypical senses" (Faber and Pérez 1993: 131) producing a large number of metaphorical extensions of the basic meaning, where the syntactic differences between the causative (SVO) and the non-causative (SV) subdomains are obviously maintained.

I will finally analyse some of the verbs that formed the causative subdimensions of the OE domains of EXISTENCE, COGNITION and FEELING. The three lexical domains analysed here are:

DOMAIN	OE CAT	USATIVE SUBDOMAIN
EXISTENCE	gelimpan	to CAUSE something to come to EXISTENCE in someone's perception
COGNITION	<i>fyncan</i>	to CAUSE someone to THINK about someone or something in a particular way
FEELING	hréowan	to CAUSE someone to FEEL sorry (as a result of something that has happened)

Table 4: Prototypical OE causative predicates from three different subdimensions of the lexical domains of EXISTENCE, COGNITION and FEELING.

From a lexical point of view, these predicates are the result of three different types of derivation. As in the case of verbs of LIGHT, where a natural force acts as cause, OE *gelimpan* has been formed by adding the prefix *ge*- to the non-causative verbal root *limpan* "belong to, pertain" (prototypically used with non-human participants), with the resulting primary meaning of "to cause someone to start to HAVE something in his perception". Moreover, from a semantic point of view, the cause of the perception is seen here as natural, which allows a further connection between the causative subdimensions of EXISTENCE and LIGHT.

- [11] Sum sare angeald æfenræste, swa him ful oft **gelamp**, siþðan goldsele Grendel warode, unriht æfnde, oþþæt ende becwom, swylt æfter synnum (OX/3_XX_XX_BEOW, 39)
- [12] Ful earhlice laga & scandlice nydgyld purh Godes yrre us syn gemæne, understande se pe cunne, & fela ungelimpa **gelimpð** pysse epode oft & gelome (O3_IR_HOM_WULF20, 271)

OE βyncan is one of the results of an intricate process of derivation, similar to the one described for verbs of MOVEMENT, through which the zero-grade of the IE nominal root */tong-/ "feel" (Gmc */βuŋk-/; Pokorny 1959-1969: 1.1088)9 develops into the causative predicate Gmc */βuŋkjαn/ (PRET1 */βuŋxta/), with the original meaning "to cause someone to KNOW a quality of something". 10

- [13] Philippuse **geßuhte** æfter ßæm ßæt he an land ne mehte ßæm folce mid gifan gecweman ße him an simbel wæron mid winnende (O2_NN_HIST_OROS, 116)
- [14] Do swa fe **fynce**, fyrngidda frod, gif ðu frugnen sie on wera corðre (OX/3_XX_XX_ELENE, 81)

Finally, the OE strong verb *hréowan* can be treated as a lexical causative (Nedyalkov and Silnitsky 1978: 10), the general idea of causation being implicit in the original meaning "to cause someone to FEEL sorry". Causation is morphologically marked in its derivate *hréowsian*, a weak verb that, unlike *hréowan*, admits exclusively personal constructions (see example [16]):

- [15] Đæs ðe him **hreowan** ðyrfe, swa swa hie swiður wenað ðæt him genog sie on hira lifes clænnesse (O2_IR_RELT_CP, 411)
- [16] Hi ðeah ne betað ne ne **hreowsiað**, ðæt hi ne wenen, ðeah hi hira synna forlæten (O2_IR_RELT_CP, 423)

The three OE predicates under scrutiny are characterized by the co-occurrence of the following prototypical syntactic pattern of complementation, where a non-nominative human participant in the role of affected is strictly necessary in topic position:

1. OVAdj/ObCl

(a) O=prototyp. a person (affected; Dat/Acc)

(b) Adj=prototyp. +concrete: an unpleasant situation or feeling (Phen; Gen)

ObCl=prototyp. -concrete: objective action or event (Cause; Object Clause)

This complementation structure, which encodes the concrete way speakers experience the event, presents a number of secondary derivations in OE, most of which have the presence of a topicalized human affected in the dative or in the accusative case in common (but see OE *hréowsian* above). Moreover, personal constructions with nominative experiencers are not accepted by these causative predicates, the change from impersonal to personal implying (where possible) a radical change in the predicate's meaning. Causation acts thus as a filter that blocks not only the appearance of nominative human participant as subjects of these predicates, but also their embedding in a matrix clause with verbs expressing a wish, a command, etc., an imperative, and modification by certain adverbials expressing such things as desire, intention or volition.

3. LEXICALLY-REALIZED OPTIONAL PARAMETERS: CASE MARKING AND OPTIONALITY

Lexically-realized optional parameters explain why certain arguments, though semantically present, are not syntactically activated in the actual linguistic expression (Faber and Mairal 1998: 58). For example, OE causatives of EXISTENCE, FEELING and POSSESSION assigned case to their arguments only *optionally*, so that case marking is activated by the predicate only under certain circumstances (Fischer and van der Leek 1983: 357, Penhallurick 1975, Seefranz-Montag 1984).

One of the syntactic patterns used with these OE predicates was characterized by the presence of a cause in nominative and an experiencer in dative (VSO: Elmer's "type I", (1981: 70); Fischer and van der Leek's "cause subject" (1983: 357)) which, in spite of its grammatical role, is topicalized.¹¹

[17] Ealle pas ungesælða us **gelumpon** purh unrædes (O3/4_NN_HIST_CHRONE, 141)

[18] Sua eac Dauit, õe folneah on eallum õingum Gode licode (O2_IR_RELT_CP, 35)

This pattern occurs whenever a verb assigns dative case to the experiencer and the cause remains unmarked. Cole (1986) says that the dative case can function as a mark of "secondary agent", i.e. someone who is responsible for furnishing the energy to initiate the process it undergoes. This explains, among other things, why a predicate like OE *lician*, which requires a prototypically inanimate participant in the role of cause, universally conforms this pattern¹² (Allen 1986: 404), or why OE *scamian* or *lystan*, where the notion of causation is strongly associated with the second participant, are not recorded in this form (Elmer 1981: 69).

This being so, the OVS pattern implies that the *feeling*, the *possession*, or the act of *coming to existence* resulted from some personality trait of the experiencer, rather than from a quality or action of the cause; moreover, this can be re-formulated in terms of *moving* and *touching*: physical contact between the two participants is not strictly necessary for the actual events expressed through the OVS pattern, and this fact is encoded in the neutral relation that the verb establishes with the second participant, which is not marked by any of the local cases that existed in OE.

4. LEXICALLY-REALIZED CONTEXTUAL PARAMETERS: MANNER, POWER RELATIONS AND LOCATION

Lexically-realized contextual parameters are not syntactically projected, but serve as clues for contextual setting (Faber and Mairal 1998: 58). The OE verbs *cweman*, which prototypically implies the existence of a human argument as cause, ¹³ tells more about the agent than about the cause:

[19] Manige tiliað Gode to **cwemanne** to pon georne ðæt hi wilniað hiora agnum willum manigfeald earfoðu to prowianne (O2_XX_PHILO_BOETHAL, 133)

[20] Ic õe lustum lace **cweme**, and naman pinne niode swylce geara andette, foroon ic hine goodne wat (O2/3 XX XX MPS, 4)

As can be seen in these two examples, the OE verb *cweman* implies that the agent exerts himself to make a good impression on someone else. The occurrence of non-human causes is generally blocked by the semantic parameter of manner codified in this verb, which implies that the pleasure resulted directly from a quality or from an action consciously carried out by the agent. For this reason, a non-human argument in this position could be

accepted only marginally, depending on the extent to which it could be attributed to human consciousness.

Things being so, the construction *seo boc cwemeß me (corresponding to NE "the book pleases me") might be regarded as unacceptable in OE. The same type of explanation applies to other OE predicates expressing repentance and shame, such as hreowan and sceamian. These two verbs imply further a negative axiological evaluation built in to their second argument, as can be seen in:

[21] Forðæmðe hie ne magon ealneg ealla on ane tid emnsare **hreowan**, ac hwilum an, hwilum oðru cymð sarlice to gemynde (O2_IR_RELT_CP, 413)

[22] Sceamian heora foroi, and syn gedrefede ealle mine fynd; and gan hy on earsling, and sceamien heora swioe hrædlice (O2/3_XX_OLDT_PPS, 10)

As can be seen in [22], sceamian was often used as a reflexive verb (Elmer 1981: 69). This implies that the two arguments (experiencer and cause) correspond to the same human entity, so that a sentence like ?ic sceamige β es mannes should be seen as, at least, an odd instance of this predicate. This restriction does not apply to hreowan and its derivates, as in [23]:

[23] Hwæt fa se mæssepreost fæs mannes ofhreow, and scof on halig wæter of fam halgan treowe (O3_NN_BIL_AELIVES 26, III, 142)

In this example we can clearly see how the power relation between the two arguments, priest and parishioner, and the context where this action can take place are encoded within the meaning of the predicate: thus, whereas the subject corresponds to the entity with a higher degree of moral authority, the place where the action takes place is a church. By inverting power relations we may get such unprototypical examples as ?se mann ofhreow fixes mæssepreostes, a type of construction that clearly violates the parameter of moral authority that is inherent to the OE verb ofhreowan.

5. CONCLUDING REMARKS

In this article, I have tried to apply some of the principles of the semantic-syntactic model developed by Faber and Mairal (1998) to the analysis of the OE verb. By introducing the three types of synsem parameters described here into the definition of a verbal meaning, we can see how the semantics of this verb acts as a filter of its syntactic projections. In this way, the definition of the whole set of synsem parameters that are inherent in an OE predicate or a whole lexical subdomain would contribute to a complete characterization of its meaning, exclusively based on the semantics it encodes.

In order to exemplify this, I will propose here the following definition of

the OE predicates hreowan1 and hreowan2:

hreowan1: OVAdj [to CAUSE someone to FEEL sorrow]
e.g. Mec hreoweß fas mengu de hie vel fordon freo dagas is
(O3_XX_NEWT_RUSHW, 131)

- 1) +CAUS (transitive)
- 2) Argument A: +case-marking (acc/dat) Argument B: ±Hum
- 3) manner: unvolitional (focus on the cause)

hreowan2: SVAdj [to FEEL sorrow for someone]

e.g. forðæm & hie ne magon ealneg ealla on ane tid emnsare hreowan, ac hwilum an, hwilum oðru cymð sarlice to gemynde (O2_IR_RELT_CP, 413)

- 1) -CAUS (intransitive)
- 2) Argument A: optional case-marking Argument B: +Hum
- manner: volitional (focus on the subject)
 power relation: moral authority (argument
- A)
 1 ocation: prototypically religious context
 [church]

NOTES

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²The following abbreviations will be henceforward used: IE = Indo-European; L = Latin; Gmc = Germanic; OE = Old English; ME = Middle English; NE = New English.

- ³ Others examples of lexically-realized grammatical parameters analyzed by Faber and Mairal (1998) include achievement, cessation, conation, negativity and factivity. Obviously, this inventory of features is by no means exhaustive.
- ⁴ The same suffix is found in most Gmc languages to form agents from nouns, e.g. OE *hierde* shepherd" <Gmc*/herdj α z/, from */herd α / "herd"), *déma* "judge" (<Gmc */do:m-j α -z/, from */do:moz/ "law"); cf. Lowe 1972: 214-215. There existed thus a very clear semantic parallelism between both effects of the Gmc formative (noun > agent noun; verb > causative verb).
- ⁵ Most of the examples presented in this part of the research have been extracted from the *Helsinki Corpus of English Texts* (Kytö 1996: 43-60). Examples extracted from the *Oxford English Dictionary* (OED) are marked with [§]. A full list of abbreviated titles is included at the end of this paper.
- ⁶ The OED gives the following example of OE diopan used transitively: We cwædon be δam blaserum, δxet man dypte δone $a\beta$ be $\beta ryfealdum$ ([§] O3_IR_RELT_LWSTAN6). Obviously, the form dypte corresponds to the weak preterite of $d\acute{y}ppe$, not of $d\acute{o}pan$, which functions as a strong verb in OE (preterite $d\acute{e}op$).
- ⁷ This uneven balance between both subdomains can be related to the fact that light is prototypically emitted from a natural source (such as the sun, a fire or the stars) in a completely natural way (Faber and Mairal 1998: 54). Only when the beam of light emitted by these primary light agents encounters a medium (i.e. a vehicle to reflect light, such as a metal or a jewel), the general idea of causation can be made possible.
- ⁸ The same can said about its hyponyms gebyrian, geweorfan, gebyrian, gerisan and gedafenian, all of them corresponding to the meaning "happen" or "be fitting".

- Note the phonological correspondence of this root with IE */tang-/, nasalized form of */tag-/ "touch" (Latin tangere "touch"; Pokorny 1959-1969: 1054). Following Sweetser's Mind-as-Body Metaphor (1990: 27-37), we could tentatively claim that these OE verbs of cognition constitute a metaphorical extension of the original predicate of sense-perception, so that: [1] TO TOUCH (IE */tang-/: non-causative; physical) > [2] TO BE TOUCHED (OE me βyncβ: causative; mental) > [3] TO TOUCH (NE I think: non-causative; mental).
- ¹⁰ The originally causative OE *\text{fencan}* "think" and the intensive OE \text{fancian} "thank" are other denominal verbs derived from this IE root.
- ¹¹ Another subtype of OVS, where S corresponds to a subordinate sentence (objective certain fact; see Elmer 1983: 21-30), can be found in OE. This pattern is especially productive with verbs of COGNITION (such as *fyncan*) and of COMING INTO EXISTENCE (*geweorfan*, *gelimpan*).
- ¹²The few examples of the OE verb *lician* appearing either with a nominative experiencer or with a non-nominative cause are found in slavish translations from Latin.
- ¹³ According to Allen (1986: 404), only 8% of the clauses with the verb cweman found in Ælfric's homilies have human objects as cause.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATED TITLES AND EDITIONS

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