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**COURSE PAPER**

**The Prefixes in Old English**

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## INTRODUCTION

This course paper is devoted to the analysis of Old English prefix morphemes and their semantic variability. While many papers have been written in the past on the subject of individual prefixes or their grammatical properties, the primary aim of this research is to examine all prefixes from a semantic point of view.

The **innovation** of this study lies in its analytical approach, creating an exhaustive list of prefixes and individually highlighting the differences in their semantic meaning and connotations that come with their use. The primary focus of the study is to examine the prefixes that existed in Old English, identify their etymological origin from a synchronic point of view, explain their denotative and connotative meaning, and perform further analysis of select individual morphemes to further elaborate on the process.

The **topicality** of this research is predicated by the continuous evolution of English as a language and as an area of study. By studying and uncovering patterns in English word-formation in its older stages, we can better understand and predict its further evolution in the present day.

The **object** of this research is the Old English native and borrowed prefix morphemes and words derived from them.

The **subject** of this research is the semantics, etymology and productivity of the Old English prefix morphemes.

The **aim** of the research is to investigate the semantic properties of Old English prefix morphemes, compare and contrast their productive capability and polysemy in use. In order to achieve this aim, the following tasks of research will be performed:

- studying relevant scholastic works and papers;
- defining the notion of “prefix”, “native” and “borrowed” morphemes, and other related terminology;
- investigating known prefix morphemes using relevant online dictionaries;
- constructing a table featuring the known prefix morphemes according to the outlined criteria;

- analysing the investigation results by relevant criteria of origin, classification and meaning, arrangement of these results into tables;
- highlighting outliers among the analysed prefixes according to their special semantic or combinatory properties;
- describing the etymology, semantic and combinatory properties of select prefixes that best represent specific criteria.

The **theoretical value** of this research is the opportunity to use the collected data to conduct further research of the investigated prefixes and their continued analysis according to different criteria. The analysis offered in this study can serve as an example for similar avenues of research into other Germanic and, potentially, Indo-European languages that share a similar morphology.

The **practical value** of this research is that its conclusions can be applied in further analysis of Old English texts and lexemes as well as their translation. In addition, the constructed list of prefixes may further serve in the sphere of lexicography as a basis for improving the structure of existing digital dictionaries by consolidating alternative spellings into singular entries. Finally, the collected data may serve well in the field of anthropological linguistics through continued examination of the biases and connotations embedded into the Old English morphemes.

The theoretical basis for this paper is A. Baugh & T. Cable's "A History of the English Language", R. Hogg "An Introduction to Old English", I. Plag "Word-formation in English", R. Torre "Affix Combination in Old English Noun Formation", J. de la Cruz "Old English Pure Prefixes: Structure and Function", A. Campbell "Old English Grammar", A. Carstairs-McCarthy "An Introduction to English Morphology: Words and Their Structure", and the Bosworth-Toller Anglo-Saxon Dictionary.

The paper consists of two chapters, their respective conclusions, general conclusions to the paper itself, résumé, bibliography, a list of illustrative materials, and the appendix.

The **Introduction** provides a short summary of the research aims, object, subject, the choice of topic and methods of investigating it, as well as the theoretical and practical value thereof.

**Chapter 1 “Theoretical basis for analysing the Old English prefixes”** is focused on providing theoretical information necessary for performing a thorough analysis of the subject matter. It is here that the notion of prefix is established and differentiated from similar grammatical constructions, and a basic classification of prefixes and their meaning is provided.

**Chapter 2 “Semantic properties of the prefixes”** deals with classification of prefixes according to the outlined criteria. The first part of the chapter deals with the general results of the research, with select prefixes being used as examples to illustrate the analytical process. The second part then outlines a small number of outlier prefixes whose unique semantic or grammatical properties have made regular analysis impossible, and provides further insight on these properties using additional sourcing.

**General conclusions** summarize the data gathered from the research and restate the most important results of the conducted investigation.

**Appendix** provides a full table of collected information on the Old English prefixes aside from those which were elaborated upon in Chapter 2.

## CHAPTER 1. THEORETICAL BASIS FOR ANALYZING THE OLD ENGLISH PREFIXES

### 1.1. The notion of prefix. Differentiation between the derived and the compound word. Primary and secondary prefixes.

In order to perform any kind of analysis of Old English prefix morphemes, a list of such morphemes needs to be constructed. While other researchers (Novo Urraca, 2016, p.641; Baugh & Cable, 2002, p.60) have created similar lists, they are usually non-exhaustive due to the fact that a complete, comprehensive list of all prefix morphemes in Old English simply falls out of the scope of most works.

For the purposes of this study, a new list was created using the online version of Bosworth & Toller's "An Anglo-Saxon Dictionary" (2019), which also served as the primary resource for identifying the meaning of the prefixes in question. However, owing to the fact that the dictionary in question is a digitized copy of existing written dictionaries which came in multiple editions, its filtering capabilities have unfortunately been found lacking, and so the list was constructed by manually sorting through the tagged morphemes in alphabetic order and individually picking them out in accordance with pre-set criteria, which are the subject of this chapter.

In order to construct a list of prefixes, the first thing that needs to be established is what qualifies as a "prefix". The most basic definition provided by Carstairs-McCarthy (2002) is a non-root morpheme that precedes the root. While this definition is generally sufficient in the majority of cases, it does not adequately account for fringe cases where the line between prefixation and compounding becomes blurred. This is a particularly sensitive issue for Old English, where affixation and compounding are by far the most prevalent word-formation methods (Hogg, 2002, pp.105-107), and so establishing a distinction becomes imperative.

In this study, the main criterion for distinguishing between prefixes and compounds is the **boundedness** of the morpheme in question. As per Carstairs-McCarthy (2002), "only root morphemes can be free, so affixes are necessarily bound", meaning that they can only occur when attached to another morpheme, as opposed to

free morphemes which occur independently. Once again, this definition becomes insufficient when covering cases such as *betuxsittan* “to bring in”, where the prefix *betux-* is also a preposition, and therefore a free morpheme. In such cases, Plag (2002, p.90-92) suggests further examining the bound morpheme in question to determine whether its meaning is the same as its free equivalent.

For example, let us take *oferrádan*, a word that combines the morphemes *rádan* “read” and *ofer-* “over”. If we were to assume *ofer-* to be an adverb or preposition, and thus a free morpheme, the translation of the resulting compound would be equivalent to “read over” (with “over” meaning “physically above”), rendering the lexeme nonsensical. Bosworth-Toller, however, offers us variants of translation ranging from “read through” (equivalent to Modern English “to read over”, “to read something quickly”) to even “contemplate”. Thanks to this deviation, we can firmly say that the morpheme *ofer-* in this case is a prefix that is a homograph of the free morpheme “ofer” from which it is derived (Plag, 2002, p.91).

The above example also leads us to the relevant subject of **primary** and **secondary** prefixes. On the basis of their boundedness, prefixes can be classified into either primary or secondary. Primary prefixes are distinct on the basis that they do not have a free morpheme equivalent and occur exclusively in a bound state, for example the prefix *un-* in Old English. Meanwhile, the prefix *ofer-*, which was examined above, would be a secondary prefix, seeing as how an identical morpheme can independently occur both as a preposition and as an adverb (Novo Uracca, 2016, pp.640-641).

To illustrate why all of these criteria are important, we will turn to examples of morphemes listed by Bosworth-Toller as prefixes that are neither primary prefixes nor secondary prefixes of prepositional or adverbial origin:

- *ald-/eald-* is derived from the adjective “eald” (old, ancient). It is encountered in the example words *ealdhád* “old age” (lit. “oldhood”), *ealdfeónd* “old enemy, archfiend, devil” (lit. “old fiend”), *ealdfæder* “grandfather, ancestor” (lit. “old father”), in which it not only carries the literal meaning of age but also of figurative seniority. As such, it is a secondary prefix of adjectival/adverbial origin.



- *eormen-/irmen-* is derived from the adjective “eormen” (universal, enormous). It is encountered in the example words *eormencyn* “human race” (lit. “whole-kind”), *eormengrund* “entire earth”, *eormenstrýnd* “great generation”, and *irmenþeóde* “people of the world”, in which it carries the meaning of universality, but also connotations of large scale, wholeness, and generalisation. Furthermore, the adjective itself is rarely attested as a free morpheme and as such, it will be treated as a secondary prefix of adjectival origin.
- *þeód-* is derived from the noun “þeód” (a nation, a people). It is encountered in the example words *þeódbealu* “great ill”, *þeódbúend* “mankind” (lit. “nation-dweller”), *þeódegesa* “mighty terror”, in which it carries the meaning of massive scale, power, or intensity – enough to sway whole nations. As such, it is a secondary prefix of nominal origin.

With all of the above conditions laid out, we now have a working definition of a prefix as a morpheme of primary or secondary boundedness that precedes the root of a word and modifies its meaning.

## 1.2. Classification of meaning communicated by the prefixes

When examining the meaning communicated by a prefix, we must first establish what meaning a prefix can communicate to begin with. Unlike suffixes, prefixes generally are generally not transpositional – that is, the meaning they communicate is primarily semantic and does not strongly contribute to the grammatical meaning of the word they attach to, nor does the derived word reliably change its lexical category as it would in case of suffixation (Novo Uracca, 2016, p. 640). This soft rule of prefixation mainly contributing to semantic meaning rather than grammatical is best proven by its biggest exception, that being the prefix *ge-*. Hogg (2002) describes this morpheme as “empty of all semantic meaning, [...] close to being an inflectional marker rather than a prefix” (p.105). Indeed, while it can communicate some semantic meaning when paired with nominal words, by far the most common use of *ge-* is as a grammatical marker of

perfectivity or completion, a use which remains consistent even in modern day (for example, in the German language).

For the purposes of this study, the semantic meaning of prefixes will generally be broken down into two parts: **denotative** and **connotative**. In case of prefixes, the denotative meaning can be frequently obfuscated in a phenomenon known as semantic opacity (Plag, 2002, p.20). Semantic opacity is best understood as the inability to infer the meaning of a derived word simply from its components, seeing as how the semantic product of prefixation is oftentimes greater than the sum of its parts.

Thankfully, as was illustrated earlier in the chapter, prefixes of secondary boundedness do not greatly differ in meaning from the morphemes they descend from. As such, the denotative meaning of most prefixes is going to be prepositional or adverbial, indicating location, time, direction, manner or intensity. Indeed, many of these prefixes have become so grammaticalized that in Modern English they have become altogether detached, forming phrasal verbs such as “come in” (from *incuman*), “send forth” (from *forþsendan*), and so on (Torre, 2011, p.260).

Finally, another important component to prefix meaning is **connotation**. Broadly, connotation can be classified into one of four types: evaluative, emotive, figurative, and functional – though it is worth noting immediately that the boundaries between these categories are blurry and far from absolute, as most words display multiple types of connotative meaning at the same time, if at all. Furthermore, connotative meaning is generally strongly linked with cultural and social context of a given conversation, and thus any attempts to impose a modern classification on connotative meaning communicated by Old English prefixes will be dubious. At best, a general trend towards positive, negative, or neutral connotations can be inferred from the usage patterns of the prefixes in question, given that connotation relies on subjective perception to decipher (Norgaard et al, 2010, p.80). As such, the study will not attempt to provide exact connotations of each given word based on its prefix, and instead will provide a summary of any observed nuances in usage of given prefixes alongside their denotative meaning.

## Conclusions to Chapter 1

Having analysed relevant theoretical sources on the prefix in Old English and Modern English morphology, the following conclusions have been drawn:

1. For the purposes of this study, the **prefix** can be defined as a morpheme of primary or secondary boundedness that precedes the root of a word and modifies its meaning.
2. A prefix of **primary boundedness** is a bound morpheme without any homographic equivalents that can occur as free morphemes without relying on another root. A prefix of **secondary boundedness** is a bound morpheme which exists as a homograph to an existing free morpheme that can occur independently with similar meaning.
3. The line between a **compound** and a **derived** word with a secondary prefix of nominal or adjectival origin is drawn on the basis of their meaning. If the meaning of the noun or adjective is preserved in its entirety after attaching to another root, then the resulting word is considered a compound and the morpheme is not classified as a prefix. If the meaning of the morpheme in its bound form differs from its meaning in free form, whether in denotation or connotation, the morpheme is considered a secondary prefix.
4. The grammatical meaning of a prefix is generally non-present compared to its semantic meaning, which will be given priority in the analysis. Semantic meaning will be analysed from the point of view of **denotative** meaning and **connotative** meaning, with the latter being provided in the form of summarized notes on the usage of a given prefix based on observations of its respective derived words.

These criteria and conditions were applied throughout the information-gathering phase of the study, during which information about Old English prefixes was consolidated in the form of a table. Further elaboration on the analysis performed is provided in Chapter 2, where select prefixes are used to illustrate the process in greater detail.

## CHAPTER 2. SEMANTIC ANALYSIS OF THE PREFIXES

### 2.1 General prefix analysis results

Due to the nature of the study, it would be impractical to provide the information collected throughout the process of research in its raw form. Instead, this chapter shall serve as a summarized overview of the collected data, with the full table available in the appendix.

Following the outlined criteria, the study has identified a total of **90 prefix morphemes** using the Bosworth-Toller Anglo-Saxon Dictionary (both online and print editions), with A Concise Anglo-Saxon Dictionary by J. R. Clark Hall being used as a cross-reference. Of these prefixes, the overwhelming majority were identified as native, being either native Anglo-Saxon or derived from common Germanic stock, and only a small fraction turned out to be borrowed (Figure 1).

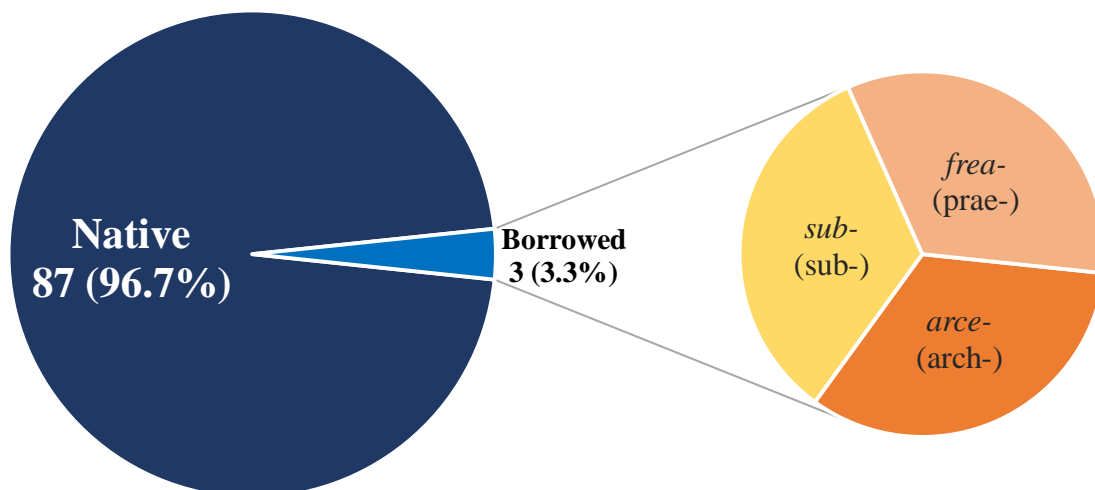


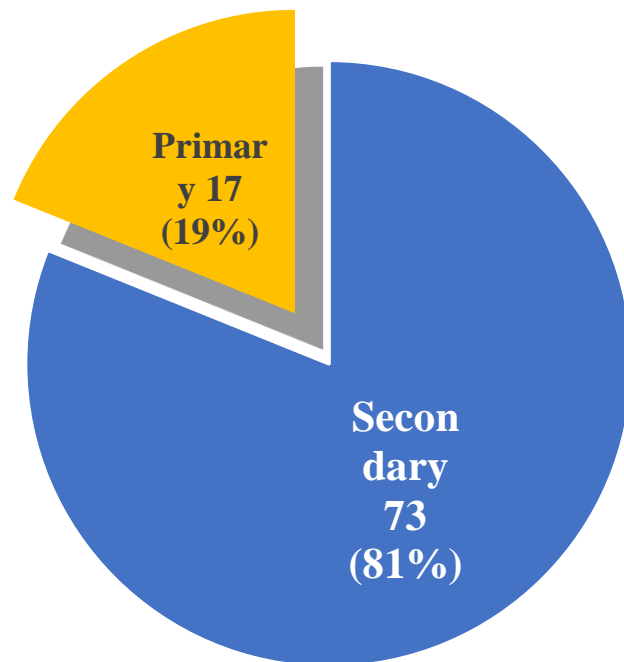
Figure 1. Old English Prefixes by Etymology

The borrowed prefixes in question are: *arce-/ærce-* (from Latin “arch-”, leading, prime, highest authority), *sub-* (from Latin “sub-”, below, under), and *frǣ-/frea-* (from Latin “prae-”, before, in front, in charge, very high degree). Besides the language of origin, all three prefixes share a common feature – their extremely narrow field of usage. With the notable exception of *frǣ-/frea-*, which combined freely with native Old English adjectives (though even then, its usage as an intensive prefix was usually superseded by native alternatives), these prefixes only occur in very specific contexts and lack lexical equivalents in Old English vocabulary. Both *arce-/ærce-* and *sub-* are

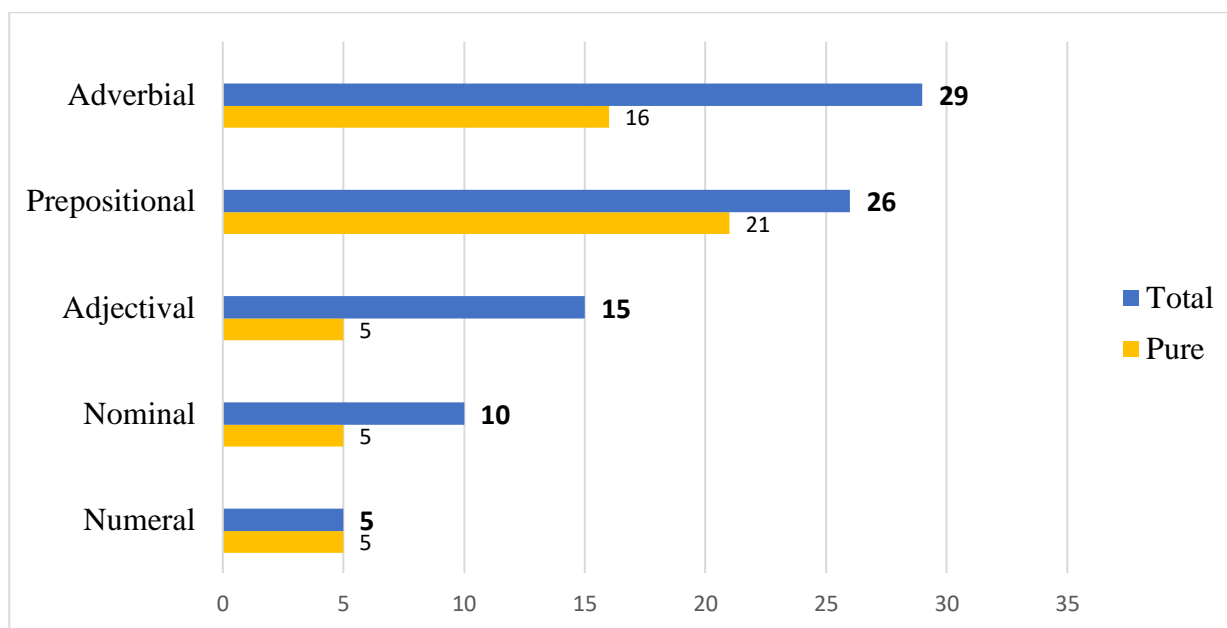
only attested in specific terms referring to Church hierarchy: *arcebisceop* “archbishop”, *arcedíacon* “archdeacon”, *arcestól* “archepiscopal seat”, and *subdiácon* “subdeacon”.

When examining the gathered prefixes from the point of view of their boundedness, we similarly see an uneven split (Figure 2). Including the three borrowed prefixes already covered above, a total of 17 prefixes can be identified as primary: *un-/an-* (negative), *cyne-* (kingly, royal), *i-/ie-* (selfsame), *mis-* (mis-, wrong, flawed), *regn-/regen-* (mighty, possessing authority or power), *sām-* (some, partial), *som-/sam-* (same as), *sel-/seld-* (rare, seldom-seen), *sin-/syn-* (perpetual, eternal), *steop-/step-* (step-, adopted), *weden-* (mad, insane), *med-/met-* (middle, mediocre), and the anomalous prefix *ge-*. With the notable exception of the last two, primary prefixes are generally monosemantic and lack deeper meaning beyond that which can be seen at a glance. Looking at the exceptions, the prefix *med-/met-*, which communicates the locative meaning of “middle”, also possesses the evaluative meaning of “mediocre, flawed, imperfect”. The nuances of the anomalous prefix *ge-* shall be covered separately.

By contrast, prefixes of secondary boundedness are generally much more numerous both in quantity and their meaning. A total of 73 secondary prefixes have been identified Bosworth-Toller, which can be further subdivided according to the part of speech from which their morpheme originally derives (Figure 3).



**Figure 2.**  
**Old English Prefixes by Boundedness**



**Figure 3. Secondary Prefixes**

For the purposes of the above table, “pure” and “total” are designations referring to the part of speech from which the prefix morpheme is derived. The value “pure” refers to prefixes derived from a morpheme that belongs to a single part of speech: for example, let us take the prefix *fore-* which has an equivalent free morpheme “fore”. “fore” is a preposition, and only ever occurs as a preposition – as such, *fore-* is a pure prepositional prefix. By contrast, let us take the prefix *ful-/full-*, derived from the word “ful”. According to the Bosworth-Toller dictionary, “ful” can occur both as an adjective and as an adverb, meaning that the prefix *ful-* is a secondary prefix of adjectival-adverbial origin. Thus, the above table lists two separate values – one counting the sum of prefixes derived from that lexical category (Total), and the other counting the amount of prefixes derived *solely* from that category (Pure).

The reason for this classification is that secondary prefixes derived from specific parts of speech share certain semantic properties depending on the part of speech they derive from. We shall now examine each of these categories in descending order by their quantity.

**Adverbial** prefixes comprise the majority (39.7%) of secondary prefixes, and are generally characterized by the fact that they possess minimal semantic opacity. On balance, their denotative meaning rarely differs from their unbound equivalent, they also generally inherit both the literal and figurative meaning of their respective free

morpheme. Examples of secondary adverbial prefixes are *purh-* (through, thorough), such as in *purhgān* “to go through, pierce, penetrate” and *purhláð* “thoroughly hateful, odious, despicable”, and *onweg-/aweg-* (away), such as in *onwegfæreld* “departure, going-away” and *onwegácirran* “to turn away, to apostatise”.

Their close second in quantity (35.6%) are **prepositional** prefixes. By contrast, these prefixes are quite prone to polysemy and semantic opacity, owing to the high combinatory ability of the part of speech from which they originate. An example of this can be seen with the prefix *wip-/wiper-* (generally denoting opposition), which is encountered in words such as *wipcweþan* “to reply”, *wiperrih* “compensation”, *wiperlécán* “to take away, to deprive”, *wipbregdan* “to hold back” and *wipercrest* “Antichrist”. Another example can be seen in *ofer-* (over), which in addition to the locative meaning (such as in *oferbæc* “upper back”) also possesses an intensifying function (such as in *ofersíman* “oppress”, and in *ofersprác* “excessive talk”), though still not quite as valent as it is in Modern English (Tomic & Novacovic, 2015).

The next two categories, the **adjectival** (20.5%) and **nominal** (13.7%) prefixes, are grouped together on the basis of their semantic similarity, as they both possess the highest amount of connotative meaning out of the other secondary prefixes. This can be most easily seen in the prefix *wude/wudu-*, derived from the noun “wudu”, which explicitly denotes objects and actions related to wood or forests (*wuduherpaþ* “path through the woods”), but implicitly carries the meaning of wilderness or being wild/untamed (*wudugát* “wild goat”; *wudumær* “echo”) or even of magical nature (*wuduwása* “satyr/faun”). Similarly, the adjectival-adverbial prefix *hinder-*, which derives from the word “hinder” (behind, after), often carries connotations of scheming or trickery (*hinderhóc* “stratagem, trap”; *hindergeap* “crafty, deceitful”).

Finally, there are the **numeral** prefixes, comprising a mere 6% of secondary prefixes. They are represented entirely by the prefixes *ān-* (one), *twi-/tweo-/twig-* (two, twice), *pri-/pre-/prie-/prim-/pry-* (three, thrice), *fiþer-/feðer-/fyðer-* (four, fourfold) and *hund-*, a special prefix that carries no direct meaning but is used in formation of numerals between 70 (*hundseofontig*) and 120. These prefixes carry no connotations and denote only quantitative meaning, which is otherwise only present in the adjectival

suffixes *manig-*, *micel-*, *fea-*, and *fela-*, though the last prefix is generally only seen in older or poetic contexts, having been largely replaced by *manig-* outside of them (Bech, 2024, pp.138-139).

## 2.2 Outlier prefixes

Outlier prefixes are primary or secondary prefixes that do not fall in the usual pattern of analysis due to their anomalous semantic and combinatory properties. These prefixes have been identified during their study due to their unusually wide array of potential meanings, high combinatory ability and partial interchangeability, and the ability to act as generic intensifiers which other prefixes do not generally possess. The prefixes considered outliers in this study are: *ā-*, *an-*, *be-*, *for-*, and *ge-*. Let us consider each of them one by one.

The prefix *ā-/a-* is a secondary prefix derived from the adverb “ā” which, according to the Bosworth-Toller dictionary, communicated a meaning similar to the word “ever”, whether in reference to actual eternity or as an intensifier (“Never have I ever...”). By contrast, the prefix *ā-* discards the “ever” part of the adverb, opting instead to communicate almost solely intensive meaning in most cases, such as in the words *abiddan* “to abide/tolerate” (from *biddan* “wait”), *afysan* “to freeze” (from *fysan* “to be cold”), or *asundrian* “to separate/tear asunder” (Hogg, 2002, p.106). In other cases, as per Etymonline, the prefix is identified as coming from the Proto-Germanic ancestor prefix *ar-* which, in addition to intensive meaning, also communicated separation or direction, e.g. *alédan* “lead away/rescue”. Adding to the confusion is the possibility that *a-* in those cases is instead a reduced version of the prefix *ǣ-*, which is attested both as a separate prefix meaning “without/-less” (*ǣfelle* “peeled, skinless”; *ǣtynge* “speechless, tongue-tied”) and as simply an alternate spelling of *ā-* (Clark Hall, 1916, p.4).

While on the topic of alternate spellings, the prefix *an-* proved to be especially challenging in this regard. While the stressed version *ān-* consistently denoted quantitative meaning of “one, singular” as mentioned in the numeral section of this chapter, the unstressed version *an-* could contextually represent a plethora of prefixes,



including the abovementioned prefix *a-* (such as in *anbidian* “to abide”). Others include:

- *on-* which is roughly equivalent to “on, upon”, eg. *anginnan/onginnan* “to begin, to start on”, *anbugan/onbugan* “to bow down”;
- *on-/ond-/and-/ander-* which communicates opposition or reciprocation, e.g. *andcweþan/ancweþan/oncweþan* “to answer, to echo, to protest”, *angildan/ongildan* “to repay” (Srivastava, 2020);
- *in-/inn-* which communicates the locative “in, inward, inside, into”, e.g. *ancuman/incuman* “to arrive, to come in”, *ansendan/insendan* “to send in, to send forth”;
- *un-/on-* which indicates reversal of meaning (identical to modern un-), e.g. *unbindan/anbindan/onbindan* “to untie” (Arista, 2024, p.8).

Moving forward, *be-/bi-* (from the adverb *be/bi* “by”) is another prefix on which Hogg comments, where depending on the situation it can have a perfective or intensifying effect, e.g. *belucan* “to lock up” (from *lucan* “lock”), *beniman* “take away” (from *niman* “take”), while in others it communicates a locative meaning similar to the modern preposition “by”, such as in *bigangan* “go around, walk by” (from *gangan* “walk, go”), *beridan* “surround” (from *ridan* “ride”), or *bineoþan* “beneath, under” (lit. “by the neath/nether part”). Additionally, if employed in a specific grammatical construction, the prefix could communicate the meaning of “away” in a figurative sense, becoming a marker of deception or betrayal: *beleogan* “to deceive by lying”, *bedydrian* “to delude, to mislead”, or *beswic* “treachery, snare” (Petré, 2006, pp.5-9).

Continuing the list is the prefix *for-*, derived from the preposition “for”. Much like *be-* or *an-*, the meaning of this prefix is often realised contextually, as its most ubiquitous meaning is simply emphatic (e.g. *forbrecan* “to break into pieces”; *foroft* “very often”) or perfective (*forsweorfan* “to wipe out, to erase”), but can also communicate prohibition (*forbiddan* “to forbid”; *forberan* “to forebear, refrain”), hostile or malicious intent (*forlædan* “to lead astray, to seduce”; *forcuman* “to overcome, to overtake, to defeat”; *forsprecan* “to badmouth, to speak ill, to speak against”), or general destruction (*forniman* “to plunder, to ransack”; *formeltan* “to consume, to

digest, to liquify”). In addition to these, *for-* sometimes occurs with verbs to reverse their meaning, such as in *forswerian* “to forswear, to betray an oath” or *forgitan* “to forget, to neglect”, showing that its connotations tend strongly towards the negative (Ogura, 2024, pp.1, 68-69),

Last but not least is the prefix *ge-/gi-*, which warrants studies of its own to pinpoint the complete extent of its usage, as it is by far the most type-frequent prefix in Old English (Novo Uracca, 2016, p.644). For the sake of analysis, the usage of *ge-* can be broadly split into two avenues: as a prefix proper, and as a grammatical marker. The latter use is quite easy to illustrate, as practically every existing verb in Old English forms its past participle with the help of *ge-* and a class-appropriate suffix. In such cases, *ge-* does not modify the lexical meaning of the word in question, instead only imparting the grammatical meaning of perfectivity and completion. This kind of usage also demonstrates the unique capability *ge-* possesses to change the lexical category of the affected word – in this context, from a verb into a participial adjective.

Much more complicated is its nature when utilized as a prefix proper. When combined with strong verbs outside of its grammatical function of creating participles, *ge-* is largely seen as interchangeable with some other outlier prefixes (*a-*, *be-*, *on-*) on the basis that their derived words do not appear to functionally differ in meaning aside from minor discrepancies in expressivity. Indeed, *ge-* itself is compared to the prefix *a-* on the basis of their interchangeability and ability to form effectively pointless paradigms where the prefixed version (*aleogan/geleogan* “to lie”) and the non-prefixed version (*leogan* “to lie”) show no significant difference in meaning whatsoever (Arista, 2012, pp.7-8).

Finally, of note is the role *ge-* plays when combined with nouns and adjectives rather than verbs. As attested by the Concise Anglo-Saxon Dictionary, the original meaning of *ge-* is considered to be “together”, communicating association or collectiveness (Clark Hall, 1916, p.129). This is demonstrated also by Arista (2012), where noun-combinations such as *bān* “bone” vs *gebān* “bones” and *wæpen* “weapon” vs *gewæpne* “arms, armaments” show a clear throughline where *ge-* transforms a singular noun into a collective. However, it is noted in the same paragraph that *ge-* can

also perform a transpositional function, with the most common transformation pattern being noun-adjective, e.g. *fola* “foal” > *gefol* “with foal, pregnant” or *mōd* “mind” > *gemōd* “like-minded” (p.2); Novo Uracca (2016) similarly comments that a pattern of prefix *ge-* and suffix *-ed* being a common way of forming noun-base adjectives, much in the same way that Modern English utilizes the prefix *be-* (see: bewitched, beheaded), demonstrating a grammatical application of *ge-* even when its semantic meaning is preserved (p.644).

## Conclusions to Chapter 2

Having analysed the data gathered throughout the research phase using criteria outlined in Chapter 1, the following conclusions can be drawn:

1. Borrowed prefixes comprise the absolute minority of prefixes in the Old English lexicon, and possess the least amount of variety in both their use and their semantic meaning.
2. Most prefixes in Old English are of secondary boundedness (81%), being derived from (in descending order) adverbs, prepositions, adjectives, nouns, and numerals. By comparison, primary prefixes comprise 19% of the Old English prefix stock, with ~1/4th of them being borrowed.
3. Primary prefixes and numeral-derived secondary prefixes largely trend towards being monosemantic and devoid of connotational meaning. Nominal and adjectival prefixes are monosemantic but tend to have strong connotations. Prepositional and adverbial morphemes both tend towards having a high degree of polysemy and semantic opacity owing to the properties of the parts of speech they originate from.
4. The primary prefix *ge-* and the secondary prefixes *a-*, *an-*, *be-*, and *for-* were counted as outliers, as all of them share the features of ambiguous meaning, high combinatory properties, relative interchangeability, and ability to act as a generic intensifier.
5. Prefixes *a-* and *ge-* have largely lost their semantic meaning, more often functioning as generic intensifiers or grammatical markers rather than true

prefixes. By contrast, *be-* and *for-* still demonstrate a clear semantic link to their prepositions of origin, while the uniqueness of *an-* largely stems from it being a homograph for a number of different prefixes owing to phonetic simplification.

With this, we have established the major patterns amongst the Old English prefixes and the practical part of the paper is concluded.

## GENERAL CONCLUSIONS

This study was devoted to the analysis of **Old English prefix** morphemes and their semantic variability, a goal which was achieved by means of compiling a list of prefixes using publicly available online dictionaries and performing individual analysis of each morpheme according to specific chosen criteria. Said criteria were outlined after careful analysis of pertinent theoretical sources, over the course of which a working definition of the prefix and its various properties were established. The raw data from the analysis was compiled into a table available in the appendix of this paper, while the paper itself offers a summarized overview of the key discoveries.

Over the course of the study, the following goals were set and achieved:

- a brief study and overview of relevant scholastic works and published research has been completed;
- functional definition of “prefix”, the means of categorising the prefix, and relevant features of the prefix have been established;
- multiple online dictionaries were consulted in order to compile a working list of Old English prefixes for further analysis;
- the resulting list was analysed and grouped according to their **etymology, boundedness, grammatical meaning, denotational** and **connotational** meaning;
- the results of the analysis were illustrated with the help of diagrams, with a number of prefixes selected as examples for further elaboration on the analytical process;
- a number of **outlier prefixes** were picked out according to their unique properties, and a separate analysis of these prefixes was performed with the help of additional sources.

Having performed the above tasks, we can confidently conclude that the semantics of the Old English prefix is a topic that requires further research. The limited scope of this study did not allow us to further delve into the nuances of individual prefixes and their usage as more focused studies have done in the past, but the analysis

conducted as part of this paper has both theoretical and practical value in the field of linguistics.

It has been established that the overwhelming majority of Old English prefixes are of **native origin** (96%), and that all **borrowed prefixes** observed in the language display a minimal degree of semantic variability.

Afterwards, the prefixes were split according to their boundedness. Prefixes of **primary boundedness** – those which only occur as prefixes – were found to be the minority (19%), with a general trend towards monosemy. **Secondary prefixes** – those which also occur as free morphemes – were organised by part of speech and further examined, establishing patterns of correlation between their denotational meaning, connotational meaning, and semantic opacity.

**Outlier prefixes** were identified among those of primary and secondary boundedness alike, with the main properties being mutual interchangeability, ambiguous denotative meaning and ability to use them as generic intensifiers.

The findings of this study prove that the Old English prefix is indeed a core part of the Old English morphology and a critical word-forming tool that offers a wide array of possible combinations that enrich the Old English word stock. The analysis of these morphemes offers us a look into ancient cultural and social views, provides rich etymological insights, and invites further research to examine the roots of the modern lingua franca and its development.

## РЕЗЮМЕ

Дослідження на тему «Префіксальні морфеми давньоанглійської мови» присвячене аналізу давньоанглійських префіксів з точки зору їх семантики. У ході дослідження було складено список префіксів з використанням онлайн-словника, після чого морфеми було індивідуально розглянуто за необхідними критеріями.

Перший розділ **“Theoretical basis for analysing the Old English prefixes”** зосереджений на збиранні та комплектації необхідної теоретичної бази для виконання подальшого аналізу. У даному розділі встановлюється робоче визначення поняття «префікс», виокремлюються критерії, за якими префіксація відрізняється від складених слів, і формулюється класифікація, за якою префікси згруповано у наступному розділі.

Другий розділ **“Semantic properties of the prefixes”** зосереджений на власне аналізі зібраних даних за умовами, поданими у попередньому розділі. Зіставлено список з 90 префіксів, виявлених у ході дослідження, після чого результат дослідження подається у двох частинах. Перша частина є викладенням загальних результатів аналізу, де кількісні відомості доповнюються окремими прикладами, що власне ілюструють процес аналізу. У другій частині виокремлюється невелика кількість префіксів, котрі не підпадають під загальну схему аналізу через унікальні особливості їх семантики та комбінаторики, і вони аналізуються окремо з використанням додаткових теоретичних джерел.

**Ключові слова:** префікс, давньоанглійська мова, конотативне значення, первинна зв'язаність, вторинна зв'язаність, семантичний аналіз.

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## APPENDIX

Prefix	Primary/ Secondary	Denotative Meaning	Connotative e meaning	Notes on usage
<i>ā/ǣ</i>	Secondary, adverb	-	-	Generally intensive
<i>ǣ</i>	Secondary (techn. noun, no relation)	Lacking, without, -less	-	Also attested as an alternate form of “a-”
ǣd/ed/ ǣt/ep	Secondary, prep	Again, anew	-	Repeated action that has happened before
ǣfter	Secondary, adv	After, later, behind, for the sake of	-	
ǣg	Secondary, adv	Again, ever, always	-	Universal, constant
ǣg/eg/eh	Secondary, noun	Water or sea	-	
all/ǣl/ eal/eall	Secondary, adjective	All, universal	-	
ǣr	Secondary, prep	Ere, ancient, long before	-	Mostly poetic in usage
af/of/ ǣf/ef	Secondary, prep	Off, away from	Negative	Can indicate a decline in quality, morality; with verbs - excess and intensity
agen	Secondary, adv	Again, once more, also	-	
ān	Secondary, num/adv	One	-	
<i>an/on</i>	Secondary, prep	On, upon	-	Can also occur as a generic intensifier
<i>an/un</i>	<b>Primary</b>	Negation, antonymous meaning	-	
<i>an/in/inn</i>	Secondary, prep	Inside, inward, internal	-	
<i>on/ond/ and/ ander</i>	Secondary, prep	Against, opposing, in return	-	“Ander” implies reciprocation rather than opposition
arce/ ǣrce (arch-, <b>Latin</b> )	<b>Primary, borrowed</b>	Arch-	-	Highest in status, importance, or authority
at/æt	Secondary, prep	At, near, away, toward	-	
ald/eald	Secondary, adj/adv	Old, ancient	-	Senior in both age

				and status
<i>be/bi</i>	Secondary, prep	By, around, nearby	-	Can also occur as a generic intensifier
between/ betwin	Secondary, prep	Between, near to both	-	
betweox/ betwux/ betwixt	Secondary, prep	Between, among, inter-	-	Used as equivalent to “inter-” as in “intermission”
cyne	<b>Primary, noun-derived</b>	Royal, kingly	Positive	
dune/dun	Secondary, prep	Down, downward	-	
efn/efen/ emn/em/ om/am	Secondary, adj	Equal, together	Positive	
eft	Secondary, adv	Again, often, repeated, back again	-	
el/ele	Secondary, adj	Foreign	Negative	Strange, other, uncanny
eormen	Secondary, adj	Enormous, massive	-	Universal, general, a sense of wholeness
fea	Secondary, adj/adv	Little, lacking	Negative	Usually referencing material goods, poor, destitute
fela	Secondary, adj/pron	Many, much	-	Very rare, mostly superceded by “manig”
fīper/ fyðer	Secondary, num	Four	-	
<i>for</i>	Secondary, prep	For	Negative	Often implies hostile intent, disagreement or destruction; can also occur as a generic intensifier
foran	Secondary, adv	Front, beginning, early part	-	Can be both locative and temporal
fore	Secondary, prep	Before (in all senses), first, supreme	-	Survives to this day in “foreman”
forþ	Secondary, prep/adv	Forth, onward, forward, toward	-	

frá/frea (prae-, <b>Latin</b> )	<b>Primary, borrowed</b>	Very, extremely, to a high degree	Positive	Intensifying prefix roughly equivalent to Latin “prae-”
fram/fra/ from	Secondary, prep	From, away from, out of	-	
ful/full	Secondary, adj/adv	Very, completely, entirely	-	Can be used with actions to indicate completeness
<b>ge/gi</b>	<b>Primary</b>	-	-	Mostly grammatical function, but can be used as a grouping prefix
gean/gegn /geagn	Secondary, adv	Against, over against, opposite of	-	Equivalent to ge-and with “ge” as an intensifier
geond/ gend	Secondary, adv	Throughout, beyond	Positive	Indicates extent, excess, or duration
heafod	Secondary, noun/adj	Leader, head, main, capital	-	
healf	Secondary, noun/adj	Half	-	
heapo/ heaðu	<b>Primary</b>	War	-	Technically a bound root, usually occurs in Icelandic place- names
hēr	Secondary, adv	Here, in here, in this location	-	
hinder	Secondary, adj/adv	Behind, beneath	Negative	Figuratively: wicked, untrue, morally beneath, reprehensive
hund	Secondary, num	-	-	Used only for numerals between 70 and 120
i/ie	<b>Primary</b>	That same (reflective)	-	
manig	Secondary, adj/pron	Many, multiple	-	Can also denote degree, e.g. <i>manigteaw</i> “dextrous”
med/met	<b>Primary</b>	Middle	Negative	Mediocre, middling, imperfect
micel	Secondary, adj	Great, large, many	Positive or negative	
mid	Secondary, prep	Middle, in the	-	

		middle of, mid-part		
middan	Secondary, noun or prep (unclear)	Between, in the middle of	-	
mis	<b>Primary</b>	Mis-, wrong, flawed, failed, bad	Negative	
n/ne	Secondary, adv/conj	Negation	-	
nan/na/no	Secondary, adv/pron	None, absence, lack	-	
neah	Secondary, adv	Near, nigh, close	Positive	Can also mean metaphorical closeness, relations
nīper	Secondary, adv	Nether, beneath, below	-	Unlike its origin, does not seem to connote inferiority
ofer	Secondary, prep	Over	-	Usually intensive (override, overdo) but can be locative (to set above)
ongean	Secondary, prep	Facing towards, opposite of, repetition	-	Implies something being done later: coming back, storing something for retrieval, opposing an attack
onweg/ aweg	Secondary, adv	Away, removal	Negative	Can be literal or metaphorical, such as turning to heretical belief
or/ur	Secondary, adv	Lack, without	Negative	
op/ot	Secondary, prep/conj	Forth, away, to, or intensive meaning	-	u- version only occurs with nominal words
regn/ regen	<b>Primary</b>	Mighty, very, with right of authority	Positive	
sām	<b>Primary</b>	Some, partial, half	-	
sam/som	<b>Primary</b>	Same, selfsame	-	
samod	Secondary, adverb	Together	-	
scín	Secondary, noun	Magical	Negative	Associated with evil

				spirits, tricks or deceit by means of magic
sel/seld	<b>Primary, adv-derived</b>	Rare, seldom-seen	-	
self/seolf	Secondary, pronoun	Reflective	-	
simel/simbel	Secondary, adj or adv	Constant, forever, eternal	-	
sin/syn	<b>Primary</b>	Perpetual, endless, eternal	-	Usually poetic, such as “sinniht” (eternal night, see: se'ennight)
sóþ	Secondary, adj	"Sooth", true, confirmed	Positive	
steop/stēp	<b>Primary</b>	Step-, adopted, without relatives	-	
sub (sub-, <b>Latin</b> )	<b>Primary, borrowed</b>	Sub-	-	Below in status, hierarchy, or authority
sundor	Secondary, adv	Special, individual, private, apart	-	Emphasizes privacy or exclusivity
þeód	Secondary, noun	Great, big, mighty	-	Enough to affect whole nations, universal
þri/þre/þrie/þry	Secondary, num	Three, triple	-	
þurh	Secondary, adv	Through, over, thorough	-	Implies the use of great force or effort
to/te	Secondary, prep	Separation, division, taken apart	-	Can also be used as a generic intensifier
twi/tweo/twig/twy	Secondary, num	Two, twice, double	-	
under	Secondary, prep/adv	Under, below	-	
up	Secondary, adv	Up, upward	-	
ut	Secondary, prep	Out, outward	-	
ūtan/ūta/ūten	Secondary, prep/adv	Outside, foreign, strange	Negative	
wæl	Secondary, noun	Mortal, deadly, fatal	Negative	Something which leads to death

weden	<b>Primary, noun-derived</b>	Mad, insane	Negative	Connotations of rage and fury
wel	Secondary, adv	Well, good, every-	Positive	Sometimes “applicable to everything, pleasing to all”
wip/wiper	Secondary, prep	Anti-, against, counter to	Negative	Opposition or hostility of any kind, used in “Antichrist” (wipercrest)
wude/ wudu	Secondary, noun	Of the wood/forest	-	Wild, untamed, potentially magical
ymb/emb/ umb	Secondary, prep	About, around, by	-	