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Author(s): Manuela Romano

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Revising Old English Definitions of FRIEND: A Cognitive Account¹

Manuela Romano
Universidad Autónoma de Madrid

While Cognitive Semantics has offered interesting explanations of the present state of languages, it is only recently that it has been applied to diachrony mainly through the work of Sweetser (1984,1990,etc..) and Traugott (1982, 1985,1986,etc..). Fruitful results have been obtained and new lines of research opened, however, more research is still required in this area, especially in the updating of the lexicography of older stages of languages. With this paper I offer another study in this line. By analyzing the lexicon of FRIENDSHIP in the Old English (OE) period within the cognitive paradigm, my aim is twofold. On the one hand, I wish to call attention to the fact that historical lexical studies need a solid theoretical basis; that is, they need to participate in and benefit from the results of research in synchronic linguistics in general — until very recently, historical lexical studies have not incorporated theoretical issues into their descriptions (Strite 1989). Because of this, I would like to unify the research methods, both theoretical and empirical, of diachrony and synchrony. And on the other hand, this linguistic analysis also intends to contribute to the reconstruction of the social reality of the OE period. In this paper then, I briefly explain the methodology: the selection and analysis of the corpus, the theoretical premises of Prototype Theory and then show the results of the application of the semantic premises of Prototype Theory to the analysis of FRIENDSHIP in OE.²

METHODOLOGY

With respect to the corpus, the field of FRIENDSHIP was selected for various reasons: first, because the more abstract vocabulary — excepting the lexis of emotions such as 'joy' and 'sorrow' — has tended to be neglected within empirical field studies. Second, because the more abstract vocabulary, such as FRIENDSHIP, has always been and still is one of the most controversial and, at the same time, most challenging for the explanation and corroboration of the different semantic theories. This is due mainly to the vagueness inherent in the abstract lexicon and also to the fact that it seems to be intimately related to and deeply rooted in human cognitive and perceptual systems. And third and last, because of its closeness to the field of SOCIAL TERMS, and therefore its potential to help in the reconstruction of the social reality of the OE period.

Once the semantic field was selected, I used the Anglo-Saxon dictionaries Hall (1988) and Bosworth and Toller (1991) to isolate all those words that can mean 'friend', 'companion', 'comrade', 'kinsman', etc. The corpus was then restricted to Anglo-Saxon poetry. This was not only for methodological and practical reasons, but also because of the character of Anglo-Saxon poetry itself; that is, a special vocabulary in which we find exclusively poetical terms and unique rhetorical devices such as *heiti*, *kenningar*, etc.

The corpus, therefore, was restricted to 63 nouns which can mean 'friend', 'comrade', 'kinsman', 'companion', etc. — that is, 63 near synonyms (see Appendix 1) — and to the analysis of about 850 contexts belonging to the *Anglo-Saxon Poetical Records* (ASPR). The search for all these contexts was greatly facilitated by the *Toronto Microfiche Concordance to Old English* (Healey and Venezkey 1980).

Finally, the analysis of each of the terms proceeded as follows: (1) etymology; (2) number of contexts appearing in the *ASPR*; (3) different meanings or senses³ of each term; (4) type of context, that is epic, religious or neutral; (5) referents; (6) stylistic function; and finally the (7) prototypical domains that the words reflect, which, as we will see, have been specially useful to decide whether a term is a central or peripheral member of the category, whether it is polysemous and also how it is to be distinguished from near synonyms.

THEORETICAL BASIS

The main aspect of the theoretical basis of this project I would like to insist on is the advantages of Prototype Theory (PT) over the structural model of semantic fields or Structural Field Theory (SFT) in the analysis of FRIENDSHIP in OE. The main linguistic and semantic premises defended by Prototype Theory (summarized in the table in Appendix 2) that contrast with the classical or structural model, are the following⁴:

1. PT defends a non-autonomous, integrating approach to language and semantics, in contrast with the objectivist-autonomous view supported by SFT. Within the cognitive paradigm, language — and so semantics — is, therefore, considered as a non-autonomous system which is integrated within the organism it belongs to, that is, within the broader human cognitive capacities, the sensory and processual systems and within the physical and social environment it exists in. This theory, thus, questions the absolute arbitrariness of the linguistic sign and understands that linguistic structures are motivated in nature and in the way they are perceived and understood by the human being. According to PT, then, the relationship between reality and the mind can only be understood through the body, which is what links them.

2. In addition, PT also seems to contrast with the logical-algebraic approach to language and thought developed by SFT and Logical Semantics. PT conceives language and thought not as a simple mirror of the objective or real world, but as an active and creative system, as a living and dynamic gestalt.

3. Concerning its general notion of a semantic field or category, PT follows a center based model (Figure 1 in Appendix 3, from Wildgen 1987), whose origins go back to Heraclitus. In this model the structure of the semantic field is seen as a clear conceptual center, where the prototype lies, surrounded by a vaguer periphery or a gradation of less central members 'flowing' towards the center. This model contrasts with the model of semantic fields based on Aristotle's categories and supported by SFT (Figure 2 in Appendix 3, from Wildgen 1987): a field perfectly delimited by its membrane or frontier.

The cognitive approach to semantic fields is intimately related to the non-algebraic or non-atomistic view of language and semantics mentioned before. PT contrasts with the componential approach to field studies, whose main objective is to determine the indivisible and abstract components of meaning. Its view, on the contrary, is holistic: categories or fields are 'gestalt configurations in which the whole is perceptually and cognitively far more simple than the different parts (Lakoff 1987:74).'

4. In addition, in the cognitive field there is a more basic or salient level of categorization, a preconceptual structure of language in which gestalt perception of forms and functions, mental imagery and motor movement are formed; this is the level at which we interrelate with and talk about reality -as observed by Rosch (1975). In the structural paradigm this level does not exist; all members of a field are equally salient.

5. Another premise which contrasts with the structural model of semantic fields is the notion of similarity and gradience. Prototype Theory states that the concept of gradience underlies every process of categorization and is crucial in the psychological and functional mechanisms of the human mind. Thus, the more similar an element is to the prototype, the more central or better member of the category; and vice versa; the less similar or the more peripheral, the worse it represents its category. In SFT, membership is a binary matter; an element either belongs or does not belong: there are no vague nor better or worse members.

6. In relation with this last point, PT considers that lexical concepts and categories have vague or fuzzy boundaries. Within the cognitive paradigm, vagueness is not a defect of the lexical system, but a necessary condition for human communication.

7. With respect to categorial structure, PT prefers polycentric or polysemic structures — Lakoff's radial or cluster models (Lakoff 1987), that is, categories in which it is not always possible to establish a set of essential common attributes. In these categories (the majority of natural categories) membership is determined by contrasting the members with different prototypical representations of the category by means of attribute chains.

8. Finally, and related to the dependent and integrating nature of cognitive semantics, within this theory it is impossible to understand and describe the meaning of words without contrasting them with the cognitive structures they are integrated in: domains, frames, spaces, etc. Therefore, semantic description cannot separate what the structural model has called *linguistic* meaning and *extralinguistic* or *pragmatic* meaning.

In general terms, Prototype Theory has helped to re-interpret fundamental aspects of traditional semantics, some of which, such as meaning and category extension, polysemy, synonymy and semantic change, have been practically ignored by the classical-objectivist theories. Let us now see how the notions of *vagueness*, *gradience* and *flexibility* are applied to the description of the semantic field of FRIENDSHIP in OE.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

From the application of Prototype Theory to the category of FRIENDSHIP in OE we now have evidence that supports the following conclusions:

1. First, in order to understand the meaning of each of the terms, as well as their relationships within the category, it is essential to know the social and vassalage structure (*Gefolghshaft*) of traditional Germanic culture. This means that we cannot describe or understand the concept of FRIENDSHIP in the OE period without bearing in mind its extralinguistic meaning, the experiential reality that surrounds the concept: the fact that it was a real 'institution' with a double function — in war and in peace — where its members acquired a series of strict obligations based on mutual fidelity. In this sense, we know that the clan (represented in our category by the term *mæg* and its compounds) was the basis of Germanic life and society. This ancient Indo-European institution, multi-ethnic and exogamic, was based on a personal contract between vassal and lord, on which the survival of the whole community depended. The complete list of mutual obligations is too long to be included in this paper, but I will summarize

some of the most important ones, all of which appear in the domains reflected by the members of the category.

The lord's obligations of *wine*, *winedrihten*, *freawine*, *goldwine*, etc. are to support and protect his vassals and friends (*þegnas*, *gesipas*, *geferan*, *gesteallan*, *gædelingas*, *geseldan*, etc.). The lord shares his table with his *beodgeneatas* and *heorþgeneatas* ('table and hearth companions'). The banquet, therefore, is the social event *par excellence*: in it disputes, reconciliations, alliances, battle strategies, etc. are debated; but above all, it is in the banquet where the booty or treasure is shared out. The most esteemed of the lord's qualities is, thus, his generosity as is clearly indicated by the term *goldwine*. In exchange for these favours, the vassals take an oath of fidelity to their lord, which means that they are pledged to defend him in battle even after his death. The most esteemed of the vassal's qualities are, therefore, fidelity, strength and courage; cowardliness or abandonment of the battle-field is the worst disgrace, which is usually accompanied by exile and solitude. Finally, vassals also have obligations among themselves: companions have to cooperate and support each other in order to ensure the survival of the whole community.

Without this experiential meaning, how is it possible to understand a term like *goldwine*? As a golden friend? a friend that possesses gold? or as a friend who shares gold?

2. Second, regarding the categorial structure of FRIENDSHIP in OE, we find a clear conceptual center (exemplified by the superordinate category FREOND) which covers the concept of FRIENDSHIP in general and within which a set of submodels or different representations of FRIENDSHIP in OE are related by means of chain relationships. This implies that there are more representative members of the category — determined by formal and statistical criteria as well as by the domains profiled — such as: *þegn*, *mæg* and *wine*; and more peripheral members such as *gesip*, *gestealla*, *geneat*, *gefera*, etc. Among the most basic frames that structure the category we find: FRIENDSHIP in the CLAN and FRIENDSHIP in BATTLE within the BATTLE/PEACE frame and FRIENDSHIP among EQUALS, FRIENDSHIP from LORD to VASSAL and from VASSAL to LORD within the SOCIAL HIERARCHY frame; all united by means of chain relationships. The category of FRIENDSHIP in OE, thus, can only be understood as a polycentric category, as in Lakoff's *radial model* (Lakoff 1987).

Thus, on a prototypicality scale, *freond* (70 contexts) is the most basic term of the category, in spite of the fact that *freond* appears in fewer contexts than *þegn* or *mæg*, since it is monomorphemic, highly frequent and it profiles the broadest variety of domains both within the BATTLE/PEACE and SOCIAL HIERARCHY frames. Examples of these domains are: the advantages of living in the community in contrast with the dangers of exile and solitude; fidelity to one's friends and lord: obligation to fight for one's friends and lord until death, to

revenge the death of a friend and lord, to celebrate victory in the banquet, to share the treasure, etc. *Freond*, therefore, represents the superordinate category on which converge all the different submodels of FRIENDSHIP in OE: FRIENDSHIP in the CLAN, in BATTLE, from LORD to VASSAL, from VASSAL to LORD, among EQUALS, etc.

Immediately after *freond* is *þegn* (156 contexts) which represents the conceptual center of the FRIENDSHIP in the BATTLE submodel both from the perspective from LORD to VASSAL and among EQUALS. It is also surrounded by other BATTLE submodels such as *gesip*, *gestealla* and *geneat*. *Þegn* is much more frequent than *freond*, but its range of domains is clearly epic; that is, most of the contexts reflect the personal contract between the *þegn* or vassal and his lord in the battlefield. Next on the prototypicality scale, we find *mæg* (100 contexts), the conceptual center of the FRIENDSHIP in PEACE or in the CLAN submodel. The majority of its domains, therefore, profile the safe and peaceful life within the community, the rights and obligations of both community and individuals, as well as the sad and lonely life of the outlaw if obligations are not fulfilled. *Wine* (41), also belongs to the BATTLE submodel but in contrast to *þegn*, the domains profiled by this subcategory reflect the obligations between the wine or lord and his vassals from the perspective of the vassal. This cline continues until the whole or general concept of FRIENDSHIP in OE is built up, which is much more simple than its different parts. An aerial view of these different submodels of the category is provided in Figure 3 (Appendix 3).

3. In third place, we observe that the category has vague boundaries both internally and externally. Externally, the category of FRIENDSHIP in OE 'encroaches' on the domains of other categories such as: KINSHIP, SOCIAL RANK, MILITARY RANK, SERVANTS, etc. The internal delimitation is also represented by a gradation or continuum of meaning. Therefore, most terms are polysemic; that is, we need to contrast them with two or more frames to define them.

4. Nevertheless, the fact that there are no precise limits between the different terms and their meanings, or the fact that most terms may be distributionally and referentially equivalent in some contexts does not imply that they are perfect synonyms as the Anglo-Saxon dictionary definitions suggest. Each term has its own categorial structure: each one reflects different domains and has a prototypical meaning. These, then, are the definitions I suggest for the most basic terms of the category:

**Freond*: (1) person to whom one must always be loyal, (2) especially in adversity and (3) even after death, because (4) one's own survival depends on this relationship. (5) If this person fulfills his part of the contract, he

receives protection and gifts in exchange, but (6) if the contract is broken, the outcome will be exile and self-destruction. (7) The relationship of *freond* exists at all levels of society and in both directions: from superior to inferior and vice versa, and (8) both within the domains of peace and war.

**Ďegn*: (1) vassal whose functions are mainly restricted to the domain of war and (2) whose survival depends on keeping his oath of fidelity to his lord. (3) This relationship is mainly on the vertical axis from superior to inferior, and on the horizontal axis among equals.

**Mæg*: (1) vassal whose functions are mainly restricted to the domain of the clan or situation of peace, (2) who has obligations both in the community and (3) in battle. (4) Not fulfilling these obligations means self-destruction and exile. (5) This relationship is usually on the horizontal axis, and on the vertical axis from superior to inferior.

**Wine*: (1) friend and lord whose functions are mainly restricted to the domain of war. (2) His main obligations are to protect and show generosity to his vassals since (3) he is their only means of survival and vice versa.

CONCLUSION

I suggest that from this study we now have evidence that shows that a full semantic description of the category of FRIENDSHIP in OE has to include notions such as *extralinguistic meaning*, *graduality* and *vagueness*. This does not mean that within the cognitive paradigm the definition of each of the members of the category needs to be vague, since, as we have seen, a prototypical domain and a prototypical meaning have been defined for each term. It seems clear, then, that not only semantics and lexical field studies in general, but also the lexicographic research of older periods of a language such as the one studied can benefit from this theory. The cognitive model not only comes closer to the flexibility and multidimensionality of lexical meaning than the traditional objectivist theories, but it also helps to show that meaning is socially constructed.

NOTES

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2. I would like to thank all those whose cooperation made this paper possible. In particular, I would like to thank Professor Enrique Bernárdez for his knowledge and support. I am also grateful to Rachel Whittaker and Eve Sweetser for their useful comments and criticism. All mistakes are, of course, mine.

3. In this paper the terms *meaning* and *sense* are used as synonyms.

4. These premises are based mainly on Lakoff 1987 and Langacker 1987. My interpretation of the Structural Field Theory is based mainly on Geckeler 1971 and Coseriu 1977.

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**APPENDIX 1: LIST OF SUBCATEGORIES AND TERMS FROM MORE
PROTOTYPICAL TO MORE PERIPHERAL**

<u>FREOND</u>	70	<u>GEFARA</u>	16
WORULDFREOND	1		
<u>DEGN</u>	156	<u>EAXLGESTEALLA</u>	4
AMBIHTDEGN	4	FOLCGESTEALLA	2
DURNDEGN	1	FYRDGESTEALLA	2
EALDORDEGN	2	HANDGESTEALLA	2
HANDDEGN	1	LINDGESTEALLA	2
HEAHDEGN	1	NYGDESTEALLA	1
HEALDEGN	2	WILLGESTEALLA	1
MÆGENDEGN	1		
MAGODEGN	8	<u>GENEAT</u>	2
METEDEGN	1	BEODGENEAT	2
SELEDEGN	1	HEORÐGENEAT	6
<u>MÆG</u>	100	<u>GEMAECCA</u>	6
CNEOMÆG	15	<u>GEHLEÐA</u>	2
FREOMÆG	6	WILGEHLEDA	1
HEAFODMÆG	5		
HILDEMÆG	1	<u>GESELDA</u>	3
HLEOMÆG	5		
LEODMÆG	2	<u>GÆDELING</u>	3
SIBGEMÆG	1	TREOWGEDOFTA	1
WINEMÆG	8	WILLGEDOFTA	1
WORULDMÆG	1		
<u>WINE</u>	41	<u>HANDGESELLA</u>	1
FREAWINE	4	<u>SIBÆDELING</u>	1
GOLDWINE	9	<u>GEHALA</u>	1
GUDWINE	2	<u>GEONGRA</u>	13
IUWINE	1		
MÆGWINE	5	<u>SCEALC</u>	27
SUNDORWINE	1	.	
TIRWINE	1	.	
WINEDRIHTEN	12	.	
<u>GESIÐ</u>	29	.	
DRIHTGESIÐ	1	.	
EALDGESIÐ	2	.	
FOLCGESIÐ	3	.	
GESIÐMÆGEN	1		
WEAGESIÐ	1		
WILLGESIÐ	2		
WYNGESIÐ	1		

**APPENDIX 2: THEORETICAL PREMISES OF PROTOTYPE THEORY (PT)
THAT CONTRAST WITH STRUCTURAL FIELD THEORY (SFT)**

	SFT	PT
1. <i>Language/semantics</i>	autonomous	integrating
2. <i>Language /thought</i>	atomistic	dynamic gestalt
3. <i>Semantic Field</i>	perfectly delimited and componential	center based and holistic
4. <i>Vocabulary/field hierarchy</i>	all levels equally salient	there is a perceptually and cognitively more salient or basic level
5. <i>Field membership</i>	binary	gradual
6. <i>Meaning</i>	perfectly delimited and precise	vague and fuzzy
7. <i>Categorial structure</i>	determined by set of essential common attributes	determined by attribute chains
8. <i>Semantic description</i>	limited to linguistic meaning	it is impossible to separate linguistic and extralinguistic meaning

APPENDIX 3: FIGURES

Figure 1

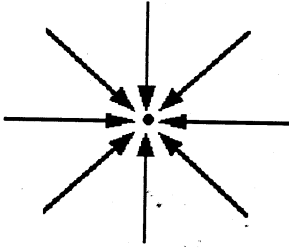


Figure 2

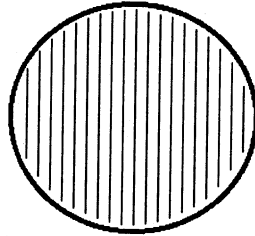
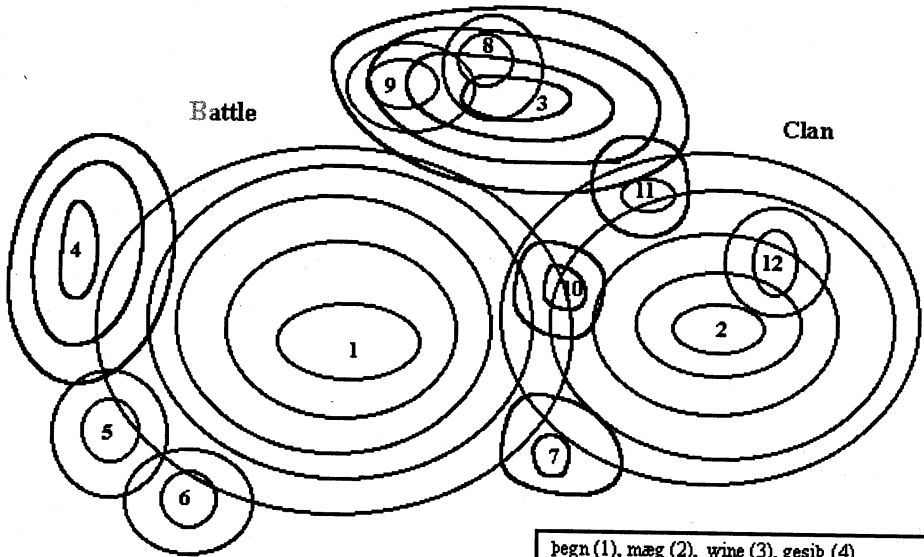


Figure 3



begn (1), mæg (2), wine (3), gesib (4),
 gestealla (5), geneat (6), gefera (7),
 winedrihten (8), goldwine (9), magobegn (10),
 winemæg (11), cneowmæg (12)