The prosody of the Old English prefix *ge-*

Tina Bögel, Chiara Riegger and George Walkden

University of Konstanz

ESHP6

Overview

Research question:
Are prosodic words determined by syntactic structure or by rhythmic principles?

- The phrasing of prosodic words:
    - $\rightarrow$ via syntax-prosody correspondence
    - $\rightarrow$ via rhythmic principles
- Evidence from the *ge*-prefix:
    - A corpus study of Old English
    - A corpus study of Old High German
    - ?? An experimental study of the *ge*-prefix in Modern German
- Conclusion

Reflections on the syntax-prosody interface

- Starting point: prosodic constituent structure reflects syntactic constituent structure to a large extend (a.o., Selkirk 1986, Nespor and Vogel 1986, Selkirk 2011)
- → e.g., MATCH THEORY (Selkirk 2011) proposes that
    - each syntactic clause corresponds to an intonational phrase (ι)
    - each syntactic phrase corresponds to a phonological phrase (φ)
    - each syntactic word corresponds to a prosodic word (ω)
- But: evidence of extensive non-isomorphism between syntactic and prosodic structure (a.o., Jun (1993), Gee and Grosjean (1983), Cheng (1973), Ferreira (1993))
- → Especially with respect to the difference between function words and lexical words (a.o., Truckenbrodt (1999), Selkirk (1995))
- → Assumption of an independent prosodic structure with several influencing factors – among them: syntactic structure (e.g., Shattuck-Hufnagel and Turk (1996), Beckmann (1996))

Rhythmic organisation of prosodic structure

Prosodic phrasing in Germanic languages:

$\rightarrow$ 'leftwards' oriented enclitisisation of function words regardless of syntactic constituency

$\rightarrow$ supports independent prosodic structure, which can be influenced by, but is often independent of syntactic structure

$\rightarrow$ trochaic foot as the fundamental driving force, also across word boundaries (Abercrombie (1964), see also Cutler (1996))

$\Rightarrow$ Is prosodic structure determined by rhythmic principles? (a.o., Sweet (1885), Sievers (1901), Lahiri and Plank (2010))

Focus in this talk: prosodic words

Elusive definition – some assumptions:

a) Lexical words form prosodic words, functional words don't - except if they are placed at the initial or final position of an intonational phrase, are in focus, or are 2+syllabic (see discussion in Shattuck-Hufnagel and Turk (1996), Bögel (2021))

b) Possible acoustic indication: increased closure duration of stops in word-initial position (Cooper 1991)

c) Prosodic words can be larger or smaller than lexical words

d) Based on foot structure: "minimally a stressed foot [...] and maximally a single lexical word combined with any associated unstressed function words" (Wheeldon 2000)

The rhythmic phrasing of prosodic words

Unclear: whether a prosodic word can be 'split' between two lexical words

$\rightarrow$ Predicted by rhythmic phrasing ...

morphosyntactic phrasing:	x́] [x x́ x]
prosodic phrasing:	x́ x)(x́ x)

$\rightarrow$ ... and found in the literature

Abercrombie (1964):   *Know then thy|self, pre|sume not | God to |scan*

Sweet (1904):   -pijpl̩ juwsttəþiŋkði əəþ wəzəkaindəv flæt keik`,

[aimə freid]   ('Im afraid')

Rhythmic phrasing

If phrasing according to trochaic feet is assumed:

$$('Ball) (ge'treten) \longrightarrow ('Ball \; ge) ('treten)$$

Some evidence for rhythmic phrasing:

- Old English and Old High German orthography
- ?? German experimental data

The *ge*-prefix in Old English

- Pronounced [jə], short form in script: g̃
- Unstressed (Old English has very regular stem-initial stress)
- Very common across word categories
- In verbs: often participle forms, but not restricted to them. Also: not obligatory.
- → Often indicating resultativity (see McFadden 2015)
- Less regular in Middle English (form: *i-*)
- Vanished in Modern English (except for remnants in words like *alike, aware*)

Old English orthography

Word division is less strict:

- Short words often run together
- Compounds are often divided into two parts
- Occasionally, the *ge-* prefix can be found
    - attaching to previous words
    - detaching from the following stem
    - or both

Example from Parker/Winchester Chronicle:

(Corp. Chris. MS 173, facsimile by Flower and Smith 1941)

... and him with gefuhton and hie gefliemdon ...

(year 917)

Are these prosodic reflexes?

Hardly any research on this topic - mentionings in, e.g., Nübling (1992), Frey (1988), Fleischer (2009), and Parkes (1992)

Historical reasoning:

- Greek and Roman tradition after the first century was the *scriptio continua*
- Written word was a record of the spoken word, texts were read out loud (*elocutio*)
- → "An early medieval text was always either a program for or a record of the spoken word" (Treitler 1984, 141)
- → Preparation for a declamation: finding the right spot to take breath, and when to pause to indicate a sense unit
- ⇒ Not far-fetched to assume leftovers of these traditions in the scripts of the Old English period
- Note: variable word division is also found in Old Irish, Old High German, etc.

Corpus study: the Old English *ge*-prefix

Text used: facsimile of the Anglo-Saxon Chronicles (Parker/Winchester chronicles) (Corp. Chris. MS 173, facsimile by Flower and Smith 1941)

- 'History' of England on 62 pages
- Written by single scribe until 891 (then followed by others)
- Ends in 1070

Method:

- Automatic search for ge-prefixed verbs and their preceding neighbours in transcription (modern word division, non-tagged)
- Manual search in the facsimile for orthographic varieties
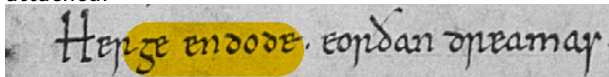
Results

Four possible orthographic distributions of *ge-* sorted by previous word category (lexical or function word)

Type of division	Total	Prec. function word	Prec. lexical word
1. word ge – verb	215	72	139
2. word – ge verb	40	35 (15 are ⌐)	5
3. word – ge – verb	87	77 (21 are ⌐)	10
4. word ge verb	43	18	24

- If *ge-* attaches to previous word, then preferably to a function word
- Majority of the preceding function words are
  - part of the verbal complex VC (46), e.g., auxiliaries
  - sentence-initial adverbs (29) like *here, there, etc* ...
- Rest are subject/object pronouns or stranded prepositions

Results

- In the VC: variation possible: 17 out of 46 cases *ge-* does not attach to the previous material.

→ Not surprising, can be assumed to form a prosodic phrase

- Sentence-initial adverb: close to obligatory, only 2 of 29 cases are not attached.

Her geendode eorТHan dreamas meaning?   (year 975)

→ Cannot be explained via MATCH, but typical Wackernagel position, incidentally often forming a trochaic foot

Results

Further indications for trochaic feet:

- Correlation test for some of the scribes (147 occurences of *ge-*):
- Significant relationship between the (non-)attachment of *ge-* to the previous word and the following verb stem:
  - → If *ge* attaches to the previous word, it is more likely to detach from the following verb stem (χ^2=11.57, df=1, p < 0.001).
- ⇒ Essentially adds weak material to the previous prosodic unit and allows for the next unit to have a strong start