History of English I
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Lecture 4

Beowulf
(Oleg Mutt, Selections, p. 3)

ÞÆT ÞE GARDE

na ingear dagum. þeod cyninga
þrym ge frunon huða æþelingas elle
fremedon. oft scyld sceping sceaþe
na þreatum monegū mægþum meodo setla
of teah egsode eorl syððan ærest wear
ð fea sceaft funden he þæs frofre geba
weox under wolcnum weorð myndum þah
oð þ him æghwylc þara ymb sittendra
ofer hron rade hyran scolde gomban
gyldan þ wæs god cyning. ðæm eafera wæs
æfter cenned geong ingeardum þone god
sende folce to frofre fyren ðearfe on
geat þ hie ær drugon aldor ease. lange
hwile him þæs lif frea wuldres wealde
worold are for geaf. beowulf wæs bren
blæd wide sprang scyldes eafera scede
landum in. Swa sceal geong guma gode
ge wyrcean fromum feoh giftum on fæder

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LP2FyVbymTg

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4L7VTH8ii_8

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Fyrst forð gewat.   Flota wæs on yðum,
bat under beorge.   Beornas gearwe
on stefn stigon;   streamas wundon,
sund wið sande;   secgas bæron
on bearm nacan   beorhte frætwe,

guðsearo geatolic;   guman ut scufon,
weras on wilsið,   wudu bundenne.
Gewat þa ofer wægholm,   winde gefysed,
flota famiheals   fugle gelicost,

For reading, check also the following link

http://www.beowulftranslations.net/beorefs/beowulf-audio-0194a-0224a-benslade.mp3

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LP2FyVbymTg

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4L7VTH8ii_8

NB! Just like in Oleg Mutt's Selections from Old, Middle and Early Modern English, a word in capital letters (e.g. FIRST, BOAT) stands for the Modern English descendant of an Old English word.

Fyrst – two different words in Old English, come from two different (though possibly related) Proto-Indo-European roots.

Fyrst 1, FIRST alternative form **fyrest –** means "first", superlative of **forma, Proto-IE *peri** meaning "forward, over, out, through" (cf Russian "переходить", "первый", "вперёд", etc, English "perimeter", etc).

Cf Present-Day German **Fürst** (Estonian **vürst** – early Low German loan) – prince (i.e., first man in the principality)

Fyrst 2, alternative form **first, frist** - means "time, also: armistice" , has not survived in ´Modern English. **Proto-IE *pres, *peres –** meaning "before" (cf. Russian **перед**)

Cf Present-Day German **Frist** – deadline

In the passage from "Beowulf" **fyrst** means "time" (i.e., the second meaning)

Metathesis (a type of sound change) I

Pronounced with stress on the second syllable: me'tathesis (from Greek meta – (involving change) and thithenai – to place).

Two sounds, at least one of which is a consonant, change places inside a word. (Cf Oleg Mutt Introduction p. 26, however, his statement that the sounds need to be consecutive, i.e. follow one another, is not correct). When one of the sounds is a vowel,the other is usually /r/.

Fyrst/first/frist – a typical case of metathesis.

Another case in the passage: **beorht/briht.**

Metathesis (a type of sound change) II

In the Introduction, notice the case of **ascian/acsian**. **Ax** in the meaning of "ask" has survived not only in some British dialects, but also, e.g. in some circles in New York.
(A true story told to me by a student: an
Estonian translator of an American movie had to translate a sequence that ran something like the following:
"Why didn't you do anything about it?"
"But I axed him!" – subtitle: "Aga ma ju lõin teda kirvega!")

Metathesis (a type of sound change) III

Hors/hros – some theories claim that "Russian" comes from "hros"

Metathesis (a type of sound change) IV

Metathesis present in many languages, a universal phenomenon.
For Instance, Proto-Indo-European had two roots – *spek-** and the metathetical ***skep-**, both with the basic meaning of "look, observe, examine". The first is behind Latin words that produced such English loans as **spectacle, spectator, expect, inspect, perspective**, etc. The second is behind the Greek word for "examine" with the derivatives **sceptic, sceptical, scepticism** (one who examines things inevitably becomes sceptical about them!).

Psycholinguistic reasons for the universality of metathesis I

Metathesis, essentially in the same sense, is also
a term used in psycholinguistics.
People **assemble whole words in the brain,
before actually uttering them**. Thus, it is not
unusual for slips of the tongue to happen in which
sounds of the same word change places. e.g. "brake fluid"
turns into "blake fruid"
"past fashion" > "fast passion" (Freudian?)

Psycholinguistic reasons for the universality of metathesis II

The same principle applies to whole phrases and even sentences, which shows that they, too, are largely **preassembled** in the mind before being uttered.
On the sentence level sometimes the term "spoonerisms" is used < Reverend Spooner (19th century) – famous for metathetic slips of the tongue:
"You have tasted two worms" (pro "You have wasted two terms").

Psycholinguistic reasons for the universality of metathesis III

The defining feature in the case of metathesis is that **all sounds remain in the word (sentence), they just change places**. It is this feature that allows psycholinguists to infer that words and sentences are preassembled in the mind: all sounds are there but the order gets mixed up in the process of actual uttering/pronouncing.

Psycholinguistic reasons for the universality of metathesis IV

NB! Slips of the tongue in which sounds of a word or sentence are not dropped but merely change places
1) **are made possible by preassembling** and **therefore**
2) **serve as evidence of preassembling.**

What causes slips of the tongue, including metathetical slips of the tongue, in the first place, and why some people are more prone to them than others is not yet clear: more needs to be known about how the brain works. However, for the present purposes this question is immaterial.

For language history it is important that sometimes the metathetical slips of the tongue "catch on", i.e. the new form remains in the language, at times parallel to the old form, often later replacing it.
Why?

Why do metathetical forms oust old forms? I

Basic reason: **ease of pronunciation**.

Cf children's language:

Estonian

Traktor> tarktor

Ketshup> kepsut

Spa**g**ettid> **p**a**sk**etid

Inim**en**e> i**m**i**n**e**n**e

Ignoreerima> i**rg**oneerima

General "mistake" in Estonian suhkrut> suhkurt

NB! Not all forms in child language are metathetical (could be, e.g., **assimilation**: "tellikult" pro "tegelikult").

Why do metathetical forms oust old forms? II

NB! **Ease of pronunciation** differs in different languages (i.e., varies with the language), depending on the language's **phonotactic rules** (see Part 2, Pronunciation).

Notice that all examples from child language have to do with loan-words. **Sp** would be easy for an Italian or a speaker of English, but is difficult for Estonians.

Why do metathetical forms oust old forms? III

Another reason (related to ease of pronunciation): **analogy.**

Nucular pro **nuclear**

Cf circular, muscular

Why do metathetical forms oust old forms? IV

Phonotactic rules **change in the course of the history of a language** and differ from one dialect to another. Change in phonotactic rules brings about the establishment of new, metathetical forms.

Fyrst forth gewat – Time forth went

gewat – praeterite (i.e., past) form of
gewitan – to go
(has not survived).

flota wæs on ythum – ship was on the waves.

flota – ship (FLOAT not only a verb but also a raft, a buoy, cf also FLEET)

yth – wave (poetic synonym, has not survived, see below). On ythum – Dative Plural

Beorg – Proto-IE ***bherg-** meaning "high; with derivatives referring to hills and hill-forts" (logical **metonymic** relationship: towns, in order to be able to defend themselves and serve as forts, had to be built on hills/mountains, cf Estonian "linnus" = "linnamägi"). Cf German **Berg –** hill, mountain, Russian **берег** (kallas), Estonian **perv** (a loan-word).

Proto-Germanic

1)*bergaz (hill, mountain) and
2)*burgs (hill-fort)

Old English

1) **beorg** (hill, mountain)
2) **burg, burh, byrig** (town).

Modern English

1) BARROW (kalme, burial place with a pile of stones on it), ICEBERG
(via Middle Dutch bergh);
2) BOROUGH, -
BOROUGH (e.g. SCARBOROUGH), -BURY
(CANTERBURY), -BURGH (EDINBURGH).

Modern German **Berg** and **Burg** – exactly the old Proto-Germanic meanings.

The "travellling" of words

Proto-Germanic *burgs** >

> Late Latin **burgus** >

> Old French **burg** >

> Modern English (late loans from French!) **BOURG** (cf Cherbourg!) **BOURGEOIS BURGESS BURGLAR**

(cf Estonian **pürjel** – linnakodanik)

bat – cf Modern English BOAT, Estonian "paat" (old Low German loan)
(other words for "ship" in this extract – **flota, stefn, naca, wudu,** cf. Oleg Mutt Introduction p. 37).

The abundance of synonyms caused not exactly by the importance of the notion but rather the requirements of alliterative poetry. (For instance, the linguistic myth that the Eskimos have hundreds of words for snow is **wrong**, they actually have four or five). However, in alliterative poetry which, moreover, required repetition, numerous synonyms for most frequently used notions were inevitable. Most of these synonyms went out of the language or survived in special constructions when continental poetic conventions, including end-rhyme and excluding alliteration, were introduced.

Bat under beorge - the ship under the cliff (the action is laid in Southern Sweden, where steep mountains "grow out" of the sea).

Beorn (plural **beornas**) – poetic synonym for "man", went out of use together with the demise of alliterative poetry. Other synonyms for "man, warrior, hero" (these were the same!) in the extract: **secg** (plural **secgas** – again went out of the language when alliteration ceased to be used and the need for numerous synonyms disappeared), **guma** (plural **guman**, has survived in BRIDEGROOM), **wer** (plural **weras,** has survived in WEREWOLF).

Old forms in general survive more easily in

1. compound words (BRIDEGROOM, WEREWOLF),
2. place names (SCARBOROUGH, CANTERBURY),
3. idiomatic phrases (e.g. OVER HILL AND DALE, HALE AND HEARTY),
4. rarely used archaic words with special meanings (e.g. WROUGHT IRON, where "wrought" is the old Past Participle form of "work").

gearwe – ready, eager (cf Scottish, i.e. archaic English YARE)

stefn – stern ("ahter"), stem of the ship, metonymically: ship (STEM, Estonian "tääv")

stigon – stepped (simple past = praeterite), from **stigan** (infinitive) (cf Present-Day German "steigen", "aufsteigen" – to go up)

Assimilation (a type of sound change)

Stefn > STEM – assimilation (cf Introduction p. 25).

Assimilation, like metathesis, related to ease of pronunciation. Cf Latin loans: "**in**credible", "**il**legible", "**im**moral", **"ir**religious": the original negative prefix **in-** changed according to the environment.

In the Estonian word "tääv" /v/ has survived, in the English word "stem" - /m/ as a nasal (close to /n/ - another nasal, the inermediate form was "stemn")

Beornas gearwe   on stefn stigon –

Men ready (eager)   on the stern (of the ship) stepped

Stream (plural **streamas**) – stream (STREAM) – a metonymical synonym for "sea". Other synonyms for sea in this extract: **yth** (wave – has been dropped from the language), **sund** (sea, strait, large channel, swimming), **waeg-holm** (surging sea, literally "way over the hill") (see, again, Introduction p. 37)

wundon (praeterite from **windan)** – wound, curled

windan > TO WIND /waɪnd/

the same root as WIND (noun) /wɪnd/

Why is the present-day pronunciation of "to wind" and the noun "wind" different?

Lengthening of vowels I (a type of sound change)

Cf Introduction p. 23.

Short /i/, /u/ became long before consonant combinations **-ld, -nd, -mb.**

Thus, **cild** /kild/ became /ki:ld/, **wild** /wild/ became /wi:ld/, **windan** /wind/ became /wi:ndan/, **bindan** became /bi:ndan/, **sund** /sund/ became /su:nd/. However, if the combination was followed by **yet another consonant**, there were too many sounds in the syllable for the vowel also to become long. Later, during the Great Vowel Shift (from 16th century onward, some linguists say from 14th century onward – difficult to pin down) long vowels turned into diphtongs, e.g., /i:/ into /ai/ and /u:/ into /au/. Short vowels, however, remained unchanged.

Lengthening of vowels II

Hence, today we have "child" /tSaild/ but the plural has remained "children" /tSildren/, we have /waild/, but /wildərnis/ ("wilderness", earlier "wildreness"), OE **sund** has become "sound" /saund/. We also have the verb "wind" /waind/ but the noun "wind" /wind/. The reasons for the latter case are not entirely clear. The most plausible hypothesis is that the word **wind** was very often used in the compound **windmill,** which yielded **ndm** – three consonants, enough to stop the vowel from becoming long.

sund – sound, strait, sea, swimming (SOUND **not in the meaning of "heli/звук"** **– this is a loan from Latin "sonus">** **French "son", but** SOUND **in the** **meaning of "strait/väin",** cf Present-Day German **Sund –** this is a perfect case of **homonymy)**

with – here in the meaning of **"against".**
Originally stood for direction and not necessarily closeness, now closeness has ousted direction. **Metonymical change**.
However, we still have "fight with somebody" exactly in the same meaning as "fight against somebody" (think of wrestling!).
Also, "with" has the meaning of "against" in the present-day compound words "**withstand**" (=resist, be against), as well as "**withdraw**" and "**withhold**" (both of the latter also involve the opposite direction, e.g. "withdraw one's content", "withhold information").

Sund with sande – sea/waves [beat/buffeted] **against** the sand (shore).

secgas – men, warriors, heroes (see above)
bæron – praeterite plural from **beran** – to bear, carry (TO BEAR)
bearm – lap (poetic, has not survived)
nacan – genitive singular from **naca** – ship (poetic, has not survived, see above)
on bearm nacan – onto the lap of the ship
beorht/briht – bright (BRIGHT), see **metathesis** above
frætwe – weapons (cf FRET in the meaning of an "ornamental design contained within a band or border, consisting of repeated, symmetrical and often geometric figures").
Why were weapons carefully decorated/adorned?

Fret ornament

Why were weapons carefully decorated/adorned?

The earliest known runic script – 3th century, on a helmet. "God protects me – I am invulnerable".
Magic function of ornamentation!

guth-searo geatolic – war-gear/weapons splendid (poetic words, have gone out of the language). Notice the **reversed** repetition: "bright weapons,/ weapons/war-gear splendid".

beorhte fraetwe, guth-searo geatolic (a Viking sword)

guma – man (cf above), **guman** - Nominative Plural

BRIDEGROOM (Old English **bryd-guma**)– the /r/ sound inserted later (when "guma" was already out of the language) on analogy with "groom" (**folk etymology,** i.e. explanations based not on scientific etymological research but surface analogy).

ut – out

The **spelling** changed in the Middle English period under the influence of French where **ou** stands for /u:/.

The **pronunciation** changed much later: during the Great Vowel Shift (16th century onward), when /u:/ > /au/.

Cf German "Kuh" /ku:/ ("lehm/корова"), Modern English "cow" /kau/, German "nun", Modern English "now" /nau/ (Old English "nu").

scufon – shoved (praeterite plural) (infinitive: **scufan**), SHOVE.
f pronounced as /v/ (between vowels!).
sc turned into /S/ (chiefly before /i/ but also elsewhere)
guman ut scufon - men out shoved

wer (plural **weras**) – man, warrior, hero (cf above). Incidentally, in Early Old English **wer** stood for a human being (like Estonian "inimene" or Russian "человек").

wer-man(n) – male human being

wif-man(n) – female human being

Later metonymic change, **man(n)** and **wer** both started to denote the male of the species, **wif-man(n) > woman**

wil-sith – desired journey (cf Estonian "sõit")

weras on wil-sith – men on the desired journey

wudu – wood, metonymically "ship", WOOD

wudu bundenne – timber-bound ship

bindan – to bind /baind/ cf **windan** above.

tha – then

holm – islet in a bay, hill (in Proto-IE - ***kel-** - to be prominent, hill; cf Stockholm – again town related to hill! Russian холм. Latin derivatives from ***kel-** have given a number of loans, such as COLONEL, COLUMN, etc).

gefysed – past participle of **fysan** – to move, drive, FAZE, FEEZE (Am. English – to move emotionally, to disturb, to disconcert, to shock, esp. in, e.g., "he remained UNFAZED", but also "this did not FAZE her at all").

Gewat tha ofer waeg-holm - went then over the surging sea (metaphorical!)

wind – WIND

winde gefysed – driven by the wind

fami-heals – foamy-necked (cf. Present-Day German **Hals** – neck)

fugol – bird, German Vogel, FOWL
Spelling changed in the Middle English period (**fowl /fu:l/**),
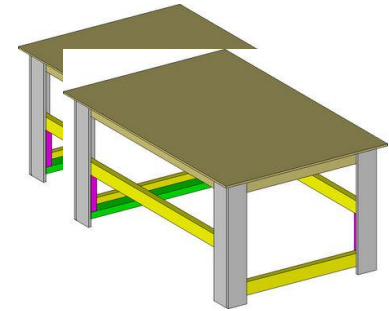**pronunciation** during the Great Vowel Shift (/faul/, cf above **ut, cu, nun**).

Semantic triangle

Signifier("table")

Meaning
/denotation/thought   Referent
(TABLE)

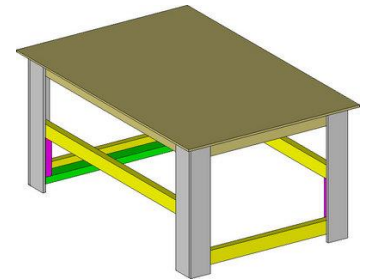# Semantic triangle

Signifier   ("table")

Denotation   Referent
(TABLE)

Prototypes I

What kind of bird (table) do you think of when the word "bird" (resp "table") is uttered? This is the **prototypical bird** for you.
(Eleanor Rosch)

Prototypes II

A notion introduced by Eleanor Rosch, stands roughly for the most typical specimen of a category. For instance, penguin and chicken are less prototypical birds than, say, pigeon or sparrow. A prototypical bird is the one that first comes to mind when one has to think of a bird. Prototypes vary with the period, the people, etc.

In my experience, urban Estonians usually name "sparrow" as a prototypical bird, but "swallow" is also mentioned. With Russian students I have heard even the "eagle" pointed out as a prototypical bird, also "pigeon" is mentioned more often than in the case of Estonians. The British prototypical bird tends to be robin. Usually, what is relevant for a person becomes also prototypical (since it is more noticed).

Robin – the English prototypical bird these days

Meaning changed on the basis of the change of the prototypical bird

Old English "bird" stood for a **small bird**, the prototypical bird, denoted by "fugol>fowl", was large (like a fawk, a partridge, a goose); with industrialisation and urbanisation the prototypical bird turned into a small bird, the word "**bird"** started to mean generic birds, **"fowl"** got a more special meaning (=poultry), i.e., its meaning was narrowed, as opposed to the extension of the meaning of **"bird"**. The old meaning survived in
FOWLER (also a surname), also Biblical idioms such as "FOWL IN THE AIR" and phrases such as "WILD FOWL".

gelicost – most like
lice – original meaning: body, shape
Has survived in **LIKE** (similar) and the
adjectival and adverbial endings **–LY** (as in "friendly" and "beautifully").
German Leiche – dead body
Cf Estonian "laip" – not a loan but a word coined by Johannes Aavik, who was subconsciously influenced by the German word. Other "new" words coined by Aavik that were subconsciously modeled on Indo-European words include "roim" (crime!), "siiras" (English "sincere", French "sincère"), etc.

Lychgate

As a noun, **lice** has survived in very rare compounds were the first part is **"lych-".**

LYCHGATE – a deep gate under which the hearse with the coffin of the dead stopped, waiting for the priest to consecrate it so that it could enter the sacred territory (see also next slide).
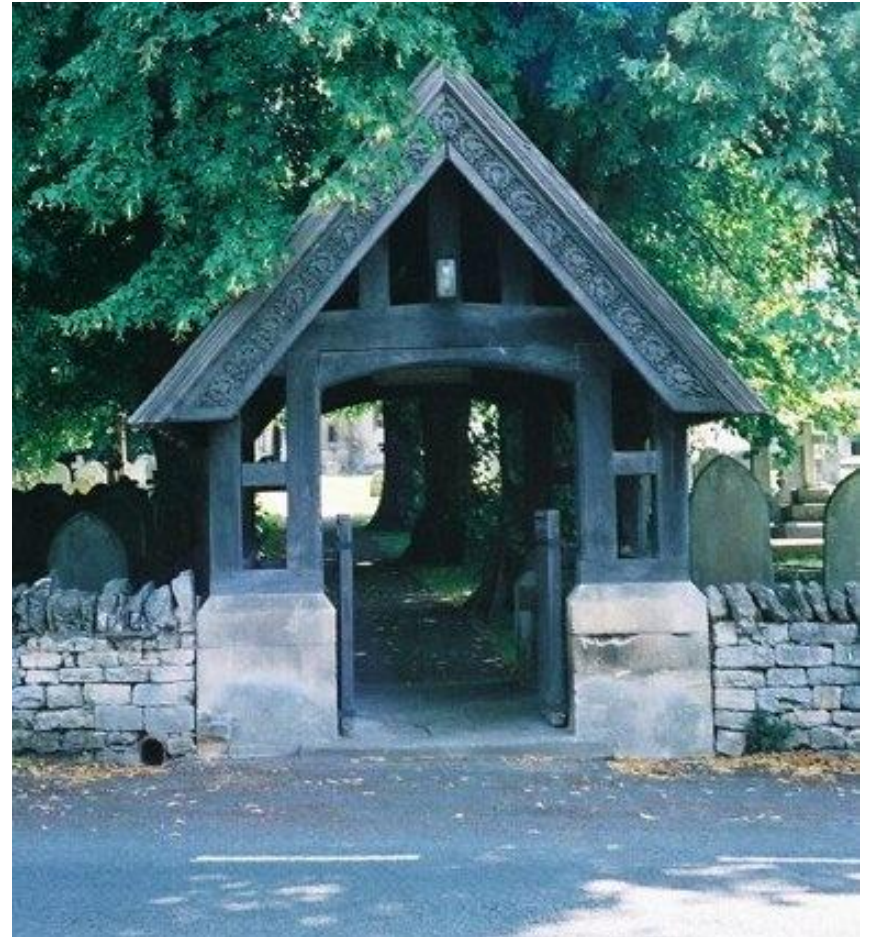
Another example of a lychgate

flota fami-heals, fugle gelicost – foamy-
-necked ship, most like a bird.

A rough translation (only to be used as a general aid, a more detailed translation should be the result of studying the preceding slides)

Time passed by;   the ship was on the
    waves,

the boat under the cliffs;   the warriors ready
stepped up into the prow   -   the currents curled
    round,
Sea (buffeted) against sand.   the men bore
into the bosom of the boat   bright arms and armour,
war-gear noble;   the fellows shoved off,
men on a welcome voyage,   a timberbound ship.
Went then over the water-waves   urged by the
       wind,
the foamy-necked floater   remarkably bird-like.