

A GRAMMAR OF OLD ENGLISH

Volume 1
Phonology

RICHARD M. HOGG



WILEY-BLACKWELL

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A John Wiley & Sons, Ltd., Publication

This paperback edition first published 2011
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Edition history: Blackwell Publishers Ltd, (hardback 1992)

Blackwell Publishing was acquired by John Wiley & Sons in February 2007. Blackwell's publishing program has been merged with Wiley's global Scientific, Technical, and Medical business to form Wiley-Blackwell.

Registered Office

John Wiley & Sons Ltd, The Atrium, Southern Gate, Chichester, West Sussex, PO19 8SQ, United Kingdom

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350 Main Street, Malden, MA 02148-5020, USA

9600 Garsington Road, Oxford, OX4 2DQ, UK

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Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Hogg, Richard M.

A grammar of Old English / Richard M. Hogg,
p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 978-0-6311-3672-9 (hardback); ISBN 978-1-4443-3933-8 (paperback)

1. English language—Old English, ca. 450–1100—Grammar. I. Title.

PE131.H6 1992

429'.5—dc20

91-26092 CIP

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library.

This book is published in the following electronic formats:

ePDFs 9781444341331; Wiley Online Library 9781444341355; ePub 9781444341348

Set in 10/12 pt Sabon by Graphicraft Limited, Hong Kong

Printed in Malaysia by Ho Printing (M) Sdn Bhd

A Grammar of Old English

In memoriam B.M.H.S., C.E.B., N.H.

Preface

This present work is intended as the first of two parts of a contribution to the study of Old English phonology and morphology. Here I deal only with the phonological aspects; the second part will deal with the morphological aspects.

Like many of my predecessors, I do not expect, or even hope, that this present book will supersede those already written. But in the last quarter of a century, since the publication of Campbell's *Old English Grammar* and the third edition of Sievers-Brunner's *Altenglische Grammatik*, there have been major developments of both an empirical and a theoretical nature which have considerably enhanced our understanding of the linguistics of Old English and, perhaps, made the publication of this present book, which tries in some small way to reflect these developments, not unnecessarily premature. One might mention as examples the *Dictionary of Old English* project initiated by Angus Cameron at Toronto, the massive work on Old English syntax by Bruce Mitchell, and, on the theoretical linguistic side, the development of generative linguistics in its several forms.

At this point it may be worth making a few remarks on the so-called philology–linguistics debate, or, if one prefers, the debate between empirically oriented and theoretically oriented scholars, especially as this debate has been strongly focused on Old English by, for example, the discussions in Mitchell (1990a, 1990b). At the risk of seeming appallingly faint-hearted, I cannot help but confess that I do not always find the debate helpful: data, it is true, cannot be validated except in a theoretical context; but nor can a theory be validated except by the examination of data. Whether the chicken came before the egg or vice versa is rather less important than the acknowledgement that the two have a necessary, symbiotic relationship. It is my hope that the reader will observe at various points in this book a sufficiency of instances to confirm the truth of this claim. Furthermore,

I have attempted to take in this work a positive, but conservative, approach to current linguistic theory. The result is that although I make reference to such current theories as non-linear phonology, or, more generally, to generative theory as a whole and to sociolinguistic theory, I prefer to take as my foundation phonemic theory, so that issues are not muddled by theoretical squabbles. In this way I have attempted to allow the reader to determine for himself or herself his or her own conclusions.

Whether this work differs from its predecessors in any of the above respects, I would not wish to say. However, I hope that readers will note that there are other differences, for example the greater emphasis on Late West Saxon than on Early West Saxon, for which the arguments have been well rehearsed elsewhere and need no repetition here. I have tried also to give a slightly greater emphasis to the non-West Saxon dialects, although that, of course, is not always possible given the dominance of West Saxon in our extant texts. I have not, however, attempted to give any systematic treatment of poetic texts, whose phonology and morphology, I believe, are best tackled after the elementary facts have been studied.

This book could never have been written without the help and encouragement of many friends and colleagues, but my main debt, of course, is to my predecessors, such as Brunner, Bülbring, Campbell, Girvan, Luick, and Sievers. But not merely to such as they, also to the many students of individual texts, for example, Brown, Cosijn, Lea, Lindelöf, Zeuner, and those who have followed in later years, most obviously J.D. Pfeifer and J.B. Wynn.

But I owe more personal debts too. Firstly, to Angus McIntosh, John Anderson, O.K. Schram, and David Tittensor, who introduced me as an undergraduate at the University of Edinburgh to the study of Old English. They encouraged me also to write this book, and if it had not been for their encouragement, and also that of Barbara Strang, C.E. Bazell, Stan Hussey, Sir Christopher Ball, and Roger Lass, I might never have undertaken the enterprise.

Secondly there are those who have commented on parts of this manuscript in one or more of its forms: those whom I have already mentioned and others also: Fran Colman, Martin Durrell, Elan Dresher, Jacek Fisiak, Dorothy Horgan, Chris McCully, Patrick Stiles. Thirdly, there are those with whom I have corresponded or whose brains I have picked informally. They, alas, are too many to mention here, except that I cannot refrain from noting the help of the scholars at the Toronto *Dictionary of Old English* project. It is a source of regret to me that I cannot offer this book to Angus Cameron and Ashley Crandell Amos, but at least Toni Healey can accept my thanks on their behalf and on her own. Fourthly, I have had the benefit of help from many colleagues at Manchester. Brian Cox and David Palmer would not pretend to a primary interest in Old English studies, but I am

all the more grateful to them for their advice and support. David Denison and Nigel Vincent have helped in many more direct ways, and my other colleagues have given me support in measures greater than I could have expected. Maxine Powell, Alison Weldrick, Mary Syner, and Shelagh Aston have exercised a degree of control and efficiency over my affairs which I could never have exercised myself, in addition to their invaluable help in the production of this book.

At the publishers, Philip Carpenter has both encouraged and exhorted me, with a degree of patience he must surely have found difficult to sustain. At home Margaret, Daniel, and Robert have shown a discerning lack of interest in Old English studies, but yet given me that loving environment which has made the production of this work both easier and more enjoyable. If I had not posthumous debts to pay, this book would surely have been dedicated to them.

Richard Hogg

List of Abbreviations

General

Angl	Anglian
C	consonant
EGmc	East Germanic
eME	early Middle English
eNbr	early Northumbrian
eOE	early Old English
EWS	Early West Saxon
Ger	German
Gmc	Germanic
Got	Gothic
Grk	Greek
IE	Indo-European
IGmc	Inland Germanic
IPA	International Phonetic Alphabet
Kt	Kentish
lNbr	late Northumbrian
Lat	Latin
Li	<i>Lindisfarne Gospels</i>
lLat	late Latin
lOE	late Old English
LVD	<i>Liber Vitae Dunelmensis</i>
LWS	Late West Saxon
MCOE	<i>Microfiche Concordance of Old English</i> (= Healey and Venezky, 1980)
ME	Middle English
Merc	Mercian
ModFris	Modern Frisian

N.	northern
Nbr	Northumbrian
NGmc	North Germanic
NMerc	North Mercian
NNbr	North Northumbrian
NSGmc	North Sea Germanic
nWS	non-West Saxon
OE	Old English
OED(S)	<i>Oxford English Dictionary</i> (and <i>Supplement</i>), see References
OFris	Old Frisian
OHG	Old High German
ON	Old Norse
OSax	Old Saxon
PDE	Present-day English
PrGmc	Primitive Germanic
Ru1	<i>Rushworth Gospels</i> (Mercian portion)
Ru2	<i>Rushworth Gospels</i> (Northumbrian portion)
S.	southern
Scand	Scandinavian
SE	south-eastern
SNbr	South Northumbrian
V	vowel
WMerc	West Mercian
WS	West Saxon

Special

a	aanmerking (in citations of Dutch texts)
A	Anmerkung (in citations of German texts)
n	note (in citations of English texts)
†	form not found in MCOE
>	develops to
<	develops from
⊃	is a member of
*	reconstructed or hypothetical form
**	form not known to occur in Old English

Grammatical

a.	adjective
acc.	accusative

comp.	comparative
dat.	dative
fem.	feminine
gen.	genitive
imp.	imperative
ind.	indicative
inf.	infinitive
infl.	inflected
instr.	instrumental
loc.	locative
masc.	masculine
n.	noun
neut.	neuter
nom.	nominative
pa.	past
part.	participle
pl.	plural
pr.	present
pret.	preterite
pron.	pronoun
sb.	substantive
sg.	singular
str.	strong
subj.	subjunctive
superl.	superlative
v.	verb
wk.	weak
1sg., 2sg., 3sg. etc.	first person singular, etc.

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Introduction

1.1 The term 'Old English' is the usual current term for the historical period of English beginning with the first settlements of people speaking a Germanic language and ending about fifty years after the Norman Conquest.¹ This term is to be preferred to 'Anglo-Saxon', see OED Anglo-Saxon,^{2,3} Sweet (1871: v), Campbell (1959: §1n1). The period covered by Old English, therefore, is approximately 700 years (from *c.*425 to *c.*1125). Within this span there is a clear-cut division between the pre-textual or prehistoric period and the textual or historic period, with the first textual records appearing from about the beginning of the eighth century. For further chronological divisions see the discussion in §1.4.

¹ Standard handbooks on the topic of the present works are: Brunner (1965), Bülbring (1902), Campbell (1959), Girvan (1931), and Luick (1914–40) (the last deals with phonology only, the others deal also with morphology). Other important, but less full, works include Pilch (1970), Quirk and Wrenn (1957), and J. Wright and Wright (1925).

² However, the OED sense IB of Anglo-Saxon, that is the southern (WS and Kt) dialects of Old English as opposed to Anglian for the northern dialects, has nothing to commend it and is avoided here.

³ For the term 'Anglo-Saxon', see further Malone (1929).

1.2 The English-speaking area of Britain during the Old English period naturally varied somewhat over the years. Generally speaking it may be said to have covered the whole of present-day England excluding Cornwall but together with Scotland south of the Forth–Clyde valley and with Offa's Dyke as its western boundary with Wales. Naturally not every part of the country within these definitions would have been exclusively, or, in some cases, at all, English-speaking, but the large majority of these areas would have been dominated by English, and all would have had the potential to be so dominated. For further details of the geography of Anglo-Saxon

2 Introduction

England see Hill (1981), whilst Stenton (1971) is the most authoritative general history of the period and country. For discussion of geographical (dialect) variation in Old English, see §§1.5–12 below.

1.3 English belongs to the Germanic branch of Indo-European. Conventionally the Germanic languages have been divided into three groups: East Germanic, North Germanic, and West Germanic, and English is there considered to be part of the West Germanic group. However, such a division is difficult to sustain in a rigid manner, both on grounds of general theories of linguistic development and on the basis of the characteristics of the various Gmc languages. Amongst various theories which have been widely espoused,¹ perhaps the most probable is that the first major separation of the Germanic languages saw the emergence of East Germanic, in particular, Gothic, between the second century BC and the second century AD. The remaining (North–West) Gmc dialects retained some unity and shared innovations for some time after that, but probably by the end of the fourth century, the major separation of these dialects into North Gmc (that is, Scandinavian languages), Inguaeonic or North Sea Gmc (OE, OFris, OSax), and Inland Gmc (High German) had taken place. The often-supposed unity of North Sea and Inland Gmc as West Gmc (that is, in opposition together to North Gmc) is not easy to establish, although the geography of Gmc settlements speaks to some extent in its favour. In this work we shall group the various Gmc dialects under the terms: (1) Gothic; (2) Scandinavian Gmc; (3) WGmc. However, where we are dealing with phenomena that are exclusive to the group containing OE, OFris, and OSax, we shall use the term N(orth) S(ea) Gmc (in contrast to I(nland) Gmc) as an alternative classification to WGmc, without any implication that NSGmc is a later development of a previously united WGmc.

¹ For a detailed account of current thinking concerning the dialects of Gmc and their development, see Kufner (1972). Prokosch (1939: 25–34) remains useful on the same topic. Much remains unclear and uncertain, but it can safely be stated that a simple tripartite division of Gmc according to the *Stammbaum* model (into EGmc, NGmc, WGmc) is untenable on both theoretical and empirical grounds.

1.4 In dealing with a stretch of language over 700 years, it must firstly be recognized that there will inevitably be structurally significant changes during that period. An initial division of OE is possible as follows. Firstly, **prehistoric** or **proto-OE**, namely the period for which we have no, or no significant, textual material. This period stretches from the first settlements in the fourth century to *c.*700. It is generally held that the principal OE sound changes, such as breaking, palatalization, *i*-umlaut, etc., belong to this period, but it is clearly the case that other changes, such as smoothing and back umlaut, are partly in this period and partly in the next, and there

are other important changes, such as the varied development of diphthongs, which belong in large part to later periods. Secondly, it is noticeable that the characteristics of the earliest texts are often quite different from those of a later time, notably in the lack of a stable, general orthographic system. Such texts may be grouped together under the rubric of early OE, c.700–900, or, rather, up to and including the time of the Alfredian texts, see §1.10. Thirdly, there begins to emerge in the latter part of the tenth century a written standard language or *Schriftsprache* with a stable orthographic system. The *Schriftsprache* is most obviously associated with the works of Ælfric, see §1.10, but is more generally found, and it may be taken as the basis of a standard or classical OE, extending for about the last hundred years before the Norman Conquest. Finally there is the period when the OE scribal and orthographic traditions are beginning to break down, even if the language is still characteristically OE rather than ME and the traditions of the *Schriftsprache* are still evident. This period may be termed that of transitional OE, although it is often taken together with the immediately preceding period as late OE.¹ It should be noted that the above divisions are made here entirely in terms of scribal and orthographic practice, but it is possible to associate the periods also with varying linguistic structures, particularly, perhaps, the status of inflexions.²

¹ For the status of texts belonging to this transitional period see Clark (1970). C. Sisam and Sisam (1959) and Vleeskruyer (1953) also provide important discussions in the introductory material to their editions of transitional texts.

² Thus we may characterize proto-OE as the period when inflexions, especially inflexional vowels, were maximally differentiated; in early OE the front vowels of unstressed syllables (and hence inflexions) were beginning to merge; and in classical OE we can trace a gradual merger of the back unstressed vowels; finally in transitional OE all unstressed vowels are merging. Such a division is, of course, highly schematic, and hides, for example, differences between dialects or even individual texts. On the other hand, it shows that the suggestion of Malone (1930) that Middle English begins c.1000 is based on the false assumption that OE is to be characterized, following Sweet (1874: 620), as the period of full inflexions as against ME, the period of levelled inflexions.

1.5 The origins of the dialectal diversity of Anglo-Saxon England have been the subject of much dispute, see for full references DeCamp (1958), Samuels (1971). Some of the difficulties of the division of Gmc referred to in §1.3 stem from variation within and overlap between Gmc dialects, and therefore it is natural to assume that some distinctive dialect characteristics of OE had their origins on the Continent rather than in Britain. On the other hand the tradition which stems from Bede of a tripartite division at the time of the settlements into Angles, Saxons, and Jutes must be regarded warily, see Hogg (1988) *contra* Campbell (1959: §5). The differentiation of dialects during the OE period must have been a continual process, with the differences being at least equally a result of linguistic circumstances