



UNIVERSITÀ
DEGLI STUDI
DI PADOVA

Università degli Studi di Padova

Dipartimento di Studi Linguistici e Letterari

Corso di Laurea Triennale in Mediazione Linguistica e Culturale
Classe LT-12

Tesina di Laurea

Derivational issues in Old English:

Unexpected morphological features of the prefix ge-

Relatore
Prof. Davide Bertocci

Laureando
Andrea Lionzo
n° matr.1123408 / LTMZL

Anno Accademico 2021/2022

Contents

| | |
|---|-----------|
| <i>Introduction</i> | 1 |
| <i>1. Derivation and paradigmatic relations</i> | 3 |
| 1.1. Overview and lexical morphological properties of derivation..... | 3 |
| 1.2. Head of a derived word | 4 |
| 1.3. Restrictions on word formation processes and the Unitary Base Hypothesis..... | 4 |
| 1.4 Derivation without affixation: conversion/zero derivation..... | 6 |
| 1.5 Paradigmatic relations: homonymy and polysemy | 6 |
| <i>2. The Old English prefix ge-: features and functions</i> | 9 |
| 2.1. Morphological and etymological overview..... | 9 |
| 2.2. Meanings of <i>ge-</i> stated in historical grammars..... | 10 |
| 2.3. Meanings reported on further studies | 13 |
| <i>3. Derivational issues and inconsistencies of the prefix ge-</i> | 18 |
| 3.1 Derivational feature of <i>ge-</i> : change in word class..... | 18 |
| 3.2 Restrictions on word formation rules of the prefix <i>ge-</i> | 19 |
| 3.3 Performance of multiple functions: polysemy or homonymy? | 22 |
| 3.4 The role of diachrony and synchrony in the inconsistency of the functions of <i>ge-</i> | 23 |
| <i>Conclusion</i> | 27 |
| <i>References</i> | 29 |
| <i>Riassunto in italiano</i> | 31 |

Introduction

Prefixation was a prevalent phenomenon in the Old English language. The prefix *ge-* was extremely widespread during the Old English period, not only in verbs, but in other word classes as well. Yet, despite its diffusion, this prefix saw a decline in use which eventually led to its complete disappearance by the end of the Middle English period. While the other frequent prefixes in Old English seemed to perform to some extent a definite function, this is not the case with the prefix *ge-*. The difficulty in finding a clear pattern of the prefix can be understood by one of its first definitions written in the *Vocabularium Anglo-Saxonicum* from 1701, in which Thomas Benson stated that “*Ge- apud Saxones semper fere superfluum*” (‘Among the Saxons, *ge-* is almost always superfluous’). Despite this claim describing the prefix as being essentially meaningless, many academics in the last centuries have been analysing texts in Old English and have proposed several theories in the attempt to identify its semantic and morphological role in verbs and in the other word classes that exhibit it. One of the interesting and unusual functions of *ge-* is that of morphological derivation, in which the meaning and the word class of a word can be modified by the addition of the prefix. This is not the only function of *ge-*; in fact, the prefix had several functions that could apparently influence semantics, aspect, or inflection, yet in other cases it seemed to have no effect on the meaning of the prefixed word. Its etymology and evolution as a morpheme could shed light on its role in the Old English texts, but there are diachronic and synchronic aspects that hinder or even prevent the complete understanding of its uses and functions, particularly the fragmentary nature of the historical texts and the lack of a standard language variety and norm used throughout the area where Old English was spoken.

The first chapter will focus on the description of some of the basic concepts of derivation that were theorised by linguists through the observation of the typical morphological behaviours of many languages, as an attempt to formulate general rules that could summarise the conditions necessary for the formation of derived words. It will furthermore explain the paradigmatic relations between words, in particular the cases of homonymy and polysemy, and the role that etymology has on them. The second chapter will describe the features of the Old English prefix *ge-* reported in historical grammars and the ones proposed in recent research papers, mentioning the difficulties that scholars encounter in the attempts to identify its uses. The third chapter will make a comparison

between the characteristics, stated in the first chapter, that derivational morphemes typically share and the unusual aspects that cause *ge-* to differ from other prefixes; it will then analyse the relationship among its main functions to discuss its possible etymology, and finally it will explain the problems that diachrony and synchrony cause in the understanding of the prefix. The purpose of this paper is to highlight how all these aspects make the classification of *ge-* as a normal prefix difficult, and how synchronic and diachronic factors severely limit its complete understanding.

1. Derivation and paradigmatic relations

This first chapter will offer an overview about the processes of derivation and illustrate the characteristics of its elements and the restrictions that such processes are subjected to. It will then explain the concepts of homonymy and polysemy, describing the role that etymology has in these concepts. This information is the result of morphological analyses conducted by linguists on the derivation of words and on their semantics; in particular, the information presented below is based on the publications by Scalise (1986), Scalise & Bisetto (2008), and Lipka (1992).

1.1. Overview and lexical morphological properties of derivation

The process of derivation involves morphemes, which are the smallest units of language that carry a meaning, such as underived words (also defined as “simplex words”) or affixes. This process is what allows a word (called “base”) to modify its meaning through the attachment of an affix. Affixes can either be a prefix or a suffix, and they can define the lexical category of the derived word (also called “complex word”). The properties contained in every morpheme include (a) lexical category and (b) inherent features.

- (a) Lexical category, also called word class, is a group of words that share similar grammatical properties; those categories are for example verb, noun, adjective, etc.
- (b) Inherent features are the semantic properties that characterise a morpheme: a word such as ‘boy’ can contain properties like [+ human, + animate, + common], which are especially relevant when the word is compared with other words or affixes that show different properties, like ‘rabbit’ [- human, + animate, + common] or ‘book’ [- human, - animate, + common]. In the same way a verb like ‘climb’ can have properties such as [- strong, + progressive] compared to ‘know’, which is [+ strong, - progressive] (examples taken from Scalise 1986:4).

The aforementioned properties can be influenced and change depending on the combination of the constituents of the derived word.

1.2. Head of a derived word

Since a derived word is formed by a base word and an affix, and both constituents have their own properties (lexical category and inherent features), there must be one of the two constituents that copies its own properties to the derived word. The constituent that establishes the properties of the derived word is called ‘head’. For example, the suffix -ness in ‘sadness’, which causes the word to change its class from adjective to noun, is the head of the derived word, because it defines its word class. Even when the suffix does not really change the word class, such as -ship in the noun ‘citizenship’ (derived from the noun ‘citizen’), it still changes the syntactic and semantic inherent features of the base word: ‘citizen’ is [+ human, - abstract, + countable], but ‘citizenship’ is [- human, + abstract, - countable], making it a different noun altogether (Scalise & Bisetto 2008:86-87).

This however does not seem to apply to prefixes: while suffixes are always the head of a derived word, prefixes do not normally change the class of the base word. Any prefixed word results in a derived word whose class coincides with that of its base: e.g. national (adj.) > international (adj.); search (verb) > research (verb); president (noun) > ex-president (noun). For this reason, it is possible to state that the head constituent of a suffixed word is the suffix, whereas in a prefixed word it is the base, and rarely the prefix (Scalise & Bisetto 2008:86; Carstairs-McCarthy 2002:72).

Derivational processes usually follow specific patterns that are subjected to restrictions caused by “the syntactic category of the base [...] and the syntactic features of the base” (Scalise 1986:45). These two properties are the basis of a particular pattern called “Unitary Base Hypothesis”.

1.3. Restrictions on word formation processes and the Unitary Base Hypothesis

As mentioned, there are two properties of the base word that limit the possible affixes that can be attached: (a) its syntactic category (word class), and (b) its syntactic features.

- (a) Each base accepts only affixes that specifically combine with its syntactic category (such as verb, noun, adjective and adverb). An example is the suffix -able, which only attaches to verbs to form adjectives: ‘washable’ (wash_{verb} +

able) is acceptable, whereas *‘penable’ (pen_{noun} + able) or *‘blackable’ (black_{adj} + able) is not.

(b) Each base accepts only affixes that specifically combine with its syntactic features (i.e. its inherent features and its selectional restrictions). For example, the suffix -able can combine only with verbs with the inherent feature [+ transitive]: ‘washable’ is acceptable because the verb ‘wash’ is transitive, but *‘seemable’ is not, because the verb ‘seem’ is [- transitive]. An example of selectional restrictions is the suffix -ee, which only attaches to verbs that take an animate or indirect object: ‘employee’ (employ_{verb} + ee) is acceptable, whereas *‘tearee’ (tear_{verb} + ee) is not (Scalise 1986:45).

An important pattern of word derivation is the basis of a hypothesis called ‘Unitary Base Hypothesis’. This hypothesis states that every affix (particularly suffixes) tends to bind with a base belonging to a single word class (Scalise & Bisetto 2008:90-92). An example can be the suffix -ness, which is attached to adjectives to form nouns: sad > sadness; heavy > heaviness. There are however affixes that can bind with two word classes: such classes can be verb and adjective or noun and adjective, as the former classes share a predicative function, while the latter share the same inflectional morphology. Because of that, the theory was refined and thus called ‘Modified Unitary Base Hypothesis’. An example of a suffix that binds with two word classes is -ance, which can be attached to verbs and adjectives to form nouns: distant (adj.) > distance (noun); tolerate (verb) > tolerance (noun). For what concerns prefixes, they are not subjected to the same restriction as suffixes. In Indo-European languages their function is usually to modify word bases by conferring semantic values such as locative (**inter**section, **over**seas), temporal (**post**-operation, **ex**-wife), negative (**unk**nown, **in**expensive), augmentative (**over**grown, **hyper**inflation), diminutive (**mini**-game), or comitative (**co**habit, **coll**aborate) (Scalise & Bisetto 2008:111), although there are cases where they can have an inflectional function instead (e.g. the prefix *ge-* in Present-Day German, combined with the suffix *-t*, forms the past participle of verbs). Unlike suffixes, prefixes can be attached to all three word classes. Examples are *inter-*: international (adj.); interstate (noun); interweave (verb); or *pre-*: premature (adj.); prehistory (noun); presuppose (verb) (Scalise 1986:138-139).

1.4 Derivation without affixation: conversion/zero derivation

There are cases in which a word undergoes a process of derivation without any affix being added: this process is called conversion, or zero-derivation. In this process, a word changes its class without changing its form, e.g. verbs that are derived from nouns: hammer > to hammer, bomb > to bomb, pilot > to pilot, slice > to slice; nouns derived from verbs: to drink > drink, to cover > cover, to dump > dump, to attack > attack (Scalise 1986:86); verbs derived from adjectives: clean > to clean, clear > to clear, calm > to calm, open > to open. Another common example that acts as zero-derivation is the use of the past participle as an adjective: solved > a solved puzzle, used > a used car, forgotten > a forgotten empire.

1.5 Paradigmatic relations: homonymy and polysemy

Together with the notions regarding derivation and its processes, the concepts related to paradigmatic relations are another tool that can provide a better understanding of the morphological behaviours of the prefix *ge-*, since they offer useful insights in the analysis of its etymology.

As explained in Lipka (1992:134-139), a word, which is defined as a sign consisting of its spoken or written form (signifier) and its related meaning (signified), can be related to another word with whom it either shares the same signifier or signified. When two words share the same signifier, and thus are written or pronounced the same way – or both, but differ in their signified (i.e. each word has a different meaning), their relationship is called homonymy. There are different forms in which homonyms occur; the following are clarifying examples:

- (i) An example of two homonyms that are written the same way but are pronounced differently and have an different meaning is the verb *read*, which depending on how it is pronounced it can represent the infinitive (pronounced /ri:d/) or the past participle (pronounced /red/).
- (ii) An example of two homonyms that share the same pronunciation but are written differently is the words *flower* and *flour*, both of which are pronounced /flaʊəʳ/; a further example is the words *sun* and *son*, both pronounced /sʌn/.

(iii) A word that is both written and pronounced the same way but has two different meanings is the noun *bat*, which can either indicate a specific stick used to hit the ball in some games, or a rat-like nocturnal flying animal.

When the meanings of two words that are written the same way are related, their relationship is called polysemy. In this case, a word like *man* can mean ‘human being’ or ‘adult male human being’. Another example is the noun *fox*, which can indicate the wild animal, its fur, or a person as crafty as a fox.

While homonyms like *sun* and *son*, or *flower* and *flour* are objectively perceived as totally separated words, the situation for a word like *bat* or *fox* can be trickier. Being able to distinguish between a single word with multiple meanings or different words with distinct meanings who happen to be written the same way requires a distinguishing criterion. A common one is the criterion of etymology, which allows to categorise a word with many meanings as two (or more) originally different words who happened to become homonyms: this is the case of the word *bat*, which is derived from the Old English word *batt* ‘cudgel’ when referring to the stick used in games, whereas the original word that indicated the meaning related to the animal was a dialectal alternation of the Middle English word *bakke* (Harper). In the case of polysemy it is not easy to objectively decide whether a word with two related meanings should be categorised as two distinct words, because both meanings originated from the same original word. In fact, if only this criterion is taken into account, polysemous words should always be regarded as a single word.

Cases of homonymy and polysemy do not involve only words, but they can also be possible with morphemes. For example, a suffix such as *-ed* in English can act as a grammatical morpheme that indicates both the past simple and the past participle of regular verbs (e.g. ‘I **played** football yesterday’ vs ‘I have **played** football ever since I was a child’). Another example is the suffix *-ing*, which acts as a derivational morpheme (e.g. the noun ‘**hearing**’, indicating an official meeting, is derived by the verb ‘hear’), but also as an inflectional morpheme to form the present participle of verbs (e.g. ‘I am **writing** at the moment’). This observation will be particularly relevant for the discussion about the functions of *ge-* and its etymology.

2. The Old English prefix *ge-*: features and functions

As already mentioned in the introduction, and as it will be explained in more details in the last section of chapter 3, the Old English language presents some problems related to not having a uniform linguistic norm, unlike most nowadays languages, and to having only fragmentary Old English documents. As a result, it becomes difficult to get sufficient data to analyse, and the available sources of data are often inconsistent among each other, limiting the understanding of certain linguistic features of Old English. With that in mind, this second chapter aims to offer an overview of the research that has been done on the Old English prefix *ge-*. It will first show an analysis of the prefix from a morphological point of view and will give a summary of its theorised etymology. Secondly, it will describe the functions of *ge-* contained in some Old English grammars, and it will then summarise other functions that are not stated in historical grammars due to their unclear use.

2.1. Morphological and etymological overview

An interesting introductory analysis regarding the prefix *ge-* can be carried out from a morphological point of view. A prefix is a morpheme, and according to the Cambridge Dictionary, a morpheme is, as said above, “the smallest unit of language that has its own meaning”. This means that, in order to define *ge-* as a prefix, it must bear a meaning (Scalise & Bisetto 2008:49), and such meaning must fulfil a process of word formation (Lass 1994:190-191). If *ge-* is assumed to be meaningful, it is possible to further analyse it from a morphological point of view: it is of course a bound morpheme, on verbs it binds only to words and not to stems, and, interestingly, it seems to act both as an inflectional and derivative morpheme. This latter feature is unusual in prefixes, since they normally only modify the semantic value of their base word, or they act as inflectional morphemes on verbs, but not both. When *ge-* acts as an inflectional morpheme it marks the past participle in verbs, e.g. *gecēped* ‘kept’, *geholpen* ‘helped’ *getrymed* ‘strengthened’, *gefylled* ‘filled’; when *ge-* acts as a derivative morpheme it changes the meaning or the class of the word, e.g. *bān* ‘bone’ > *gebān* ‘bones’, *rīnan* ‘to rain’ > *gerīnan* ‘to wet with rain’, *lēaf* ‘leaf’ > *gelēaf* ‘leafy’ (Arista 2012:1-2).

However, in most Old English verbs the prefixation with *ge-* seems optional because apparently it does not change their meaning, thus in these cases it is not a derivational morpheme properly, e.g. *(ge)adlian* ‘be, become ill’, *(ge)semtian* ‘to empty’

(Kastovsky 1992:380). Although there are several words that undergo a process of derivation through the prefixation with *ge-*, the exact process of productivity remains difficult to understand, due to the lack of semantic transparency of the prefix and of a complete documentation of the other linguistic sub-varieties of the language identified by academics as Old English. Put more simply, the process of deriving words by prefixation with *ge-* in Old English is unclear because the meaning it gives to the complex word is either not clear or inconsistent (and thus it is opaque). Since there was already no consistent semantic correspondence among the prefixed words by the time of Old English, *ge-* is deemed to be at this stage an unproductive prefix (Arista 2012:6).

The etymology of the prefix also presents problems in being clearly identified, since there are reasons to believe that the functions of *ge-* changed over time; this resulted in a broad use of the prefix and in the performance of several functions whose evolution and development is opaque. In some historical grammars, such as in Lass (1994), quoted in the following section, an etymological definition of the prefix is stated, and it is generally accepted by other scholars (Arista 2012:1). Together with Gothic *ga-*, Old Frisian *gi-*, Old Saxon *gi-* and Old High German *gi-*, which are all cognates derived from the original Proto-Germanic prefix **ga-*, Old English *ge-* is believed to share a common origin with the Latin prefix *con-*, derived from the preposition *cum*, meaning ‘with’. In Wright and Wright (1908:290) *ge-* is described as “a preposition originally meaning ‘together’, which already in Proto-Germanic was no longer used as an independent word”. In Crouch (1995:4) it is stated that, by assuming that the Proto-Germanic prefix *ga-* was unstressed as in Old English, a possible reconstruction of its original prefix in Proto-Indo-European has been proposed as **kom-*. Through its analysis, Crouch concludes that, in order for the reconstruction to make sense, the prefix must have been originally a clitic that followed a common diachronic pattern of grammaticalization as a past participle marker that was eventually lost.

2.2. Meanings of *ge-* stated in historical grammars

When consulting some Old English grammars, specific information regarding the prefix *ge-* tends to be very limited. Authors such as Mitchell & Robinson (2012:58) and Hogg and Fulk (2011:138) mention the uncertain nature of the prefix by describing only a few of its original functions, while Kay (2012:317) states also its intermittent presence in certain verbs, without it changing their meaning. Conversely, other authors such as

Lass (1994) and Wright and Wright (1908:290) go further and offer a deeper overview of the main meanings of *ge-*, starting from its original meaning of ‘association’ as a preposition “etymologically equivalent to [the] L[atin prefix] *con-* ‘with’” (Lass 1994:204). Together with Kastovsky (1992:380) and Quirk and Wrenn (1957:110-111), who also provide a respectable overview, their description of the functions of the prefix can be summarised as it follows: (a) no apparent meaning; (b) marking the past participle of verbs; (c) marking perfectivity or resultativity on verbs; (d) marking collectivity or associativity on nouns, adjectives, adverbs and pronouns.

(a) No apparent meaning

This is one of the first theories regarding the prefix, as the quotation contained in the introduction from the *Vocabularium Anglo-Saxonicum* shows. Because of its optional use, some academics have suggested it bears no specific semantic or grammatical content, and others, cited in Dollinger (2001a:27), suggest that its function is that of a stylistic tool used to match the length of verse translations of Latin texts. The same function is stated in Godden (1992), in which he explains:

Sensitivity to rhythm seems to have played a part in the choice and ordering of language even where regular patterns of stress are not in use. Thus the prefix *ge-* had in many cases become quite functionless by Ælfric's time [circa 1000 CE]. Some words virtually always appear in his work with the prefix, but without any apparent difference in meaning from the simplex form used by other writers (e.g. *geceosan* ‘to choose’, *gecigan* ‘to call’), others only in the simplex form. But there are many words which he uses both with and without the prefix *ge-*, and it seems often to be rhythm rather than meaning which determines the choice (e.g. *niman*, *geniman* ‘to take’). (Godden 1992:530-531)

However, not all verbs that have a simplex or prefixed form can be used interchangeably. In fact, a research conducted by Klein (2022:7-9) showed that, although this is only a limited percentage, there are cases in which the prefixed form of a word is applied in particular contexts that give it a specific shade of meaning, though it is somehow often related to the meaning of the simplex word. Such cases are discussed in (c). It is worth noting that even current dictionaries, such as the *Dictionary of Old English (DOE)*, list all entries in their simplex form, implying that the distinction between simplex and complex form is considered to have little relevance. Examples of verbs without apparent difference between their simplex and prefixed form are *(ge)adlian* ‘be, become ill’, *(ge)semtian* ‘to empty’, *(ge)campian* ‘strive, fight’ (Kastovsky 1992:380), *(ge)hātan*

‘call, promise’, *(ge)healdan* ‘hold, keep’, *(ge)secgan* ‘say, tell’ (Quirk & Wrenn 1957:110).

(b) Marking the past participle of verbs

According to Lass (1994:166), the past participle of verbs in Old English was usually prefixed with *ge-*, but not always: although prefixation strongly favoured the past participle of transitive verbs, exceptions were not uncommon (Hogg and Fulk 2011:225). An attempt to explain the reason of its optional presence is made through an analysis carried out by Dollinger (2001b:21) which shows that this function of the prefix was rather limited during the earliest period of Old English. The reason he theorised is that in Old English the prefix was not a necessary element to mark the past participle, since suffixes, which already provided specific inflectional details, were the primary feature that performed such function. Despite that, the reason why prefixation of transitive verbs was preferred over intransitive ones remains unclear. Examples of prefixed past participles are *(ge)riden* ‘ridden’, from the verb *rīden* ‘ride’, *(ge)holpen*, from *helpan* ‘help’, *(ge)fyllad* ‘filled’, from *fyllan*.

(c) Marking perfectivity or resultativity on verbs

As mentioned in (a), there are cases in which the simplex and the prefixed form of the verb differ in meaning. By comparing texts containing both forms, scholars noticed that in certain cases the prefix seems to influence the meaning of the verb by adding a grammatical trait marking perfective or resultative actionality (also called “lexical aspect”). In the case of marking resultative actionality, *ge-* gives to the verb a shade of meaning that focuses on the achievement reached through the action of the simplex verb: examples are *geærnan* ‘gain by running’ (from *ærnan* ‘run, ride, gallop’), *geāscian* ‘gain by asking, discover’ (from *āscian* ‘ask’), *gewinnan* ‘gain by fighting, conquer’ (from *winnan* ‘fight’) (Lass 1994:204), *gesceran* ‘cut through’ (from *sceran* ‘cut, shear’), *gesittan* ‘inhabit, settle’ (Quirk & Wrenn 1957:110).

There are however examples provided in Dollinger (2001a:18-19) that contradict this resultative meaning added by *ge-*, since in those texts the verb expressing a resultative meaning is written in its simplex form. In the case of marking perfective actionality, which, as opposed to the imperfective actionality, indicates the “view of a situation as a single whole, without distinction of the various separate phases that make up that

situation” (Comrie 1976:16), *ge-*, as an alternative to other prefixes, was one of the morphemes used: “*siglde hē...swā swā hē mehte on fīf dagum gesiglan* ‘he kept sailing as far as he could (manage to) sail in five days’” (Quirk & Wrenn 1957:79). Further studies that focus on the actional use of the prefix (often defined as “Aktionsart”) have been made by scholars, and are discussed in section 2.3 at (b).

(d) Marking collectivity or associativity on nouns, adjectives, adverbs and pronouns

When *ge-* is attached to nouns, according to Kastovsky (1992:380), it often indicates “a collectivity of persons or objects, e.g. *gegeng* ‘body of fellow-travellers’, or a repetitive action, e.g. *gebeorc* ‘barking’”; whereas associativity “indicates that the subject performs an overt or implied action in conjunction with somebody else” (ibid.). This meaning relates to the etymology of *ge-* stated by Lass (1994:204) that appears to give the oldest sense provided by the prefix, namely that of ‘with, together’. Examples of *ge-* indicating associativity are *gefara*, *gegenga* ‘one who travels with another’, *gebedda* ‘one who lies in bed with another’, *gehada* ‘brother-monk’.

While Lass describes the meaning of *ge-* only on verbs and nouns, Kastovsky (1992:380) adds a description for adjectives, which acquire a sense of “being provided with” when prefixed. They can both occur with or without “an additional explicit derivative suffix”. Examples of the former are *gecladed* ‘clothed’, *geglofed* ‘gloved’; examples of the latter are *gebird(e)* ‘bearded’, *gecnsewe* ‘knowing, aware’. It is also stated that *ge-* can also indicate ‘associativity’ e.g. *gefederen* ‘having the same father’, *gemod* ‘of one mind, agreed’, *gelīc* ‘similar’.

Furthermore, in Quirk and Wrenn (1957:111) examples of *ge-* indicating associativity also on adverbs and pronouns are provided: *gehwanon* ‘from all quarters’, *gehwær* ‘everywhere’, *gehwā* ‘each’.

2.3. Meanings reported on further studies

Those reported so far are not the only meanings of *ge-* that have been identified. Since grammars of Old English tend to provide only information that is deemed to be reliable, there are several cases of prefixed words that are not described because they do not fall into any of the aforementioned meanings of *ge-*. The problem with such cases is that they often constitute an exception, are inconsistent among different texts, or the

amount of data is insufficient to reach a final conclusion about the role of their prefix. This has brought some academics to dig deeper into the topic with the use of electronic text corpora (e.g. Dictionary of Old English project, or the Helsinki Corpus of English texts), which are tools that gather all the texts of the Old English period and form a catalogue of all the words contained in them, allowing to filter words by word class, frequency, time period and form (simplex and prefixed); these tools offer the possibility to compare the number of simplex and prefixed words in the corpus, or analyse their frequency in different periods of Old English. Besides those contained in historical grammars, some of the meanings of *ge-* that have been proposed or examined further include: (a) being a deictic marker; (b) marking Aktionsart rather than aspect properly; (c) transforming intransitive verbs into resultative transitive verbs; (d) occurring in specific syntactic contexts; (e) being an intensifier of the verb's 'markedness'.

(a) Being a deictic marker

A theory proposed by Lindemann is that *ge-* had a deictic function, meaning that it could change depending on the context it was being used in. More precisely, he stated "that the action of the verb to which it is affixed is directed forward toward something or outward" (Lindemann 1970:63, cited in Dollinger 2001a:31), possibly corresponding to the "morphemes *to, on, onto, on to, forth, out and away, at times even up and down*" (ibid), and occasionally "as a continuative conveying the meaning of 'to continue to do', as in *geslepeden alle and geslepedon* 'they fell asleep and continued sleeping'" (Arista 2012:3).

A problem of this explanation is that in some contexts the prefix would be expected to appear, but it does not; the solution suggested by Lindemann (1970:42, cited in Klein 2022:4) is that the prefix was optional, and the writer could therefore decide whether to use it "to make a general statement or a specific descriptive one" or not, but few scholars have found it to be sufficiently convincing.

(b) Marking Aktionsart

Another theorised function of the prefix is related to Aktionsart, whose concept seems to be sometimes confused with that of verbal aspect. This theory came from the speculation that the gothic prefix *ga-*, related to Old English *ge-*, could perform the same function of a specific prefix present in Slavic languages that distinguishes between

imperfectivity (expressed when the verb is unprefixated) and perfectivity (expressed when it is prefixated). This original theory was criticised and rejected by scholars such as Lindemann (1965:71-82), who found examples of simplex verbs expressing perfective aspect and complex verbs expressing durative aspect (Klein 2022:3). Nonetheless, a connection with Aktionsart seems to exist. There have been scholars who insisted on drawing a clear line between the concepts of verbal aspect and Aktionsart: while verbal aspect “represents a syntactical meaning expressed by a special set of forms as, e.g., in English by the expanded form” (for example ‘I was eating’_{imperfective} or ‘I had eaten’_{perfective}), Aktionsart is based “on the lexical meaning of a verb”, namely on its semantics (Goedsche 1940:191). This means that the presence of *ge-* on verbs seems to depend on their semantic categories: as stated at (c) in the previous section of the chapter, the prefix is easier to be found attached to verbs that indicate specific actions, but further extensive studies have resulted in more elaborated patterns. Klein (2022) researched such patterns of preverbal *ge-* with the use of digital corpora and concluded that, when the prefix has an influence on the semantics of the verb, its presence is indeed favoured by verbs denoting accomplishment and achievement and disfavoured by verbs “expressing stative action or activity”. It was also confirmed that *ge-* has actually an influence on aspect, being more common on verbs expressing the result of an ongoing action (*faran* ‘travel’ vs *gefaran* ‘get to’) (ibid:12). However, certain patterns remain difficult to categorise and its presence “is never wholly consistent or predictable in its association with particular kinds of verbal action” (ibid:10). Another case in which *ge-* seems to act as a marker of Aktionsart is found in the examples analysed in Wedel (1997), in which both simplex and prefixated forms of the same verb appear in the translation of the New Testament from Latin into Old English, without apparent differences in their meaning. Wedel states that the use of prefixated forms in those translations were used to render Latin verbs expressing specific lexical aspect into Old English. The resulted prefixated forms thus seem to express a completive aspect, opposed to the simplex forms which are aspectually neutral forms.

(c) Transforming intransitive verbs into transitive (resultative) verbs

This is another theory that has been around for a long time, but remains limited in terms of validity for its limited possible applications: there are examples such as *gebiddan* ‘to worship sb.’ (Dollinger 2001a:33) or *geærnan* ‘search by riding’ (Klein 2022:3), but

there are cases of complex verbs that remain intransitive and are “followed by an accusative of direction or goal”. e.g., Beowulf 2100: “*ond he hean donan...mere grund gefeoll,*” ‘he fell on to (down to) the bottom of the lake,’ not “reached by falling”. (Lindemann 1965:69).

(d) Occurring in specific syntactic contexts

Several attempts have been made by some academics to find a pattern of preverbal *ge-* that could be influenced by the structure of the sentence in which it is contained. The first theories claimed that the presence of certain modal verbs influenced the possibility of the infinitive verb to appear in its complex form, but because of the very limited examples used to support this claim, those theories have been deemed as unreliable. Other research proposed a correlation between the prefix and the type of clause, but even this theory seems to be unconvincing (Dollinger 2001a:35-36).

(e) Being an intensifier of the verb’s ‘markedness’.

The theory proposed in another study sees *ge-* as a prefix that marks the strong variant of a verb, whereas the simplex form is the weak variant of a verb. Trobevšek-Drobnak (1994) bases this theory on the idea that languages have variants with different degrees of markedness, and the simple/unmarked or complex/marked form of the word is chosen according to: (1) the level of markedness of the grammatical context in which it appears, and (2) the level of clarity in the meaning of the conveyed message. Point (1) assumes that grammatical categories have specific levels of markedness, e.g. “the singular is less marked than the non-singular”, or “the present tense is less marked than the non-present tenses” (ibid:127-128). Point (2) assumes that the complex variant of a word “is more elaborate, it demands more effort from the speaker but it is easier to decode by the hearer”, whereas the simplex variant presents the opposite features (ibid:126). An example of a more complex variant is a periphrastic construction (*English teacher* > *teacher of English*), in which the former is the simpler variant which can be interpreted as ‘a teacher who teaches English’ or as ‘a teacher who comes from England’, and is thus ‘harder to decode’ due to its ambiguity; an example of a simpler variant is a contraction (*is not* > *isn’t*). Trobevšek-Drobnak thought of *ge-* as a verbal prefix that creates a complex variant of its unprefixed equivalent and that it is applied in specific contexts containing a marked grammatical category. This means that the function of *ge-* in those

cases is influenced purely by its grammatical environment, and bear no semantic meaning; for example, the prediction that the singular person is less marked than the plural person would mean that the verb should present a lower chance to be prefixed when it refers to a singular person. Another example is mood, where the prediction suggests that the prefix is more likely to appear in verbs that express non-indicative moods. The results from Trobevšek-Drobnak's research seem to confirm, at least in some cases, that the presence of *ge-* is related to the complexity (and thus markedness) of the grammatical environment of the verb, such as in the cited examples of the predictions; both in the prediction regarding number and mood, there is indeed a higher chance for the verb to be prefixed when it refers to a singular person or expresses non-indicative moods. However, not all the results respect the predictions; in some analysed texts the percentage of prefixed verbs is higher when in fact according to predictions it should be lower and vice versa, leaving those inconclusive results unexplained (ibid:139-140).

3. Derivational issues and inconsistencies of the prefix *ge-*

As explained in chapter two, the prefix *ge-* did not have a unique function in Old English, but instead it seemed to perform multiple functions. From a derivational point of view, *ge-* remains problematic, because it presents numerous features and behaviours that do not match the usual criteria of the other derivational morphemes. This third chapter will compare the derivational features that characterise *ge-* with the typical patterns and processes of derivation and their restrictions described in chapter one, highlighting the peculiarities of the prefix. It will then discuss the possible relation of polysemy or homonymy between two main functions of *ge-* as a tool to analyse its etymology. The last section of the chapter will provide information about the diachronic and synchronic aspects that make the complete understanding of the uses of the prefix difficult to achieve.

3.1 Derivational feature of *ge-*: change in word class

In section 2.1 it was stated that *ge-* in some nouns acts as a derivative morpheme to form denominal adjectives. In the noun *lēaf* ‘leaf’, the attachment of the prefix results in *gelēaf* ‘leafy’, which is an adjective. Other examples are *gefederen* ‘having the same father’, derived from *feder* ‘father’ (Dollinger 2001a:30) and *gefol* ‘with foal’, from *fol* ‘foal’ (Crouch 1995:170), *geswāt* ‘sweaty’, from *swāt* ‘sweat’, *gedēaw* ‘dewy’, from *dēaw* ‘dew’ (Arista 2012:2). Those cases represent adjectives that underwent a process of change in word class caused by prefixation with *ge-*. While it is common, as the Unitary Base Hypothesis states, for prefixes to bind to all the major word classes, and in some languages to other word classes as well, prefixes that cause a change in word class are an exception. Such process violates the norm regarding the head of a derived word since the constituent that functions as the head of the derived word is always either the base in prefixed words or the suffix in suffixed words, but never the prefix. Because of that, it could be reasonable to expect that its status as a prefix presents peculiarities whose features may be explained by analysing its origins.

Another derivational process of *ge-* that changes the word class is zero-derivation of adjectives from past participles, such as *geseted* ‘put’, *gefylled* ‘filled, fulfilled’, *gebletsod* ‘blessed’, *gegered* ‘prepared, made ready’ (Dollinger 2001b:5). In other cases, *ge-* is present in certain derived words along with other suffixes, but it is unclear if *ge-* has a role in the change of word class, e.g. *corōna* ‘crown’ > *gecorōnian* ‘to crown’, *gleng*

‘ornament’ > *geglengan* ‘to set in order’, *(ge)bīegan* ‘practice’ > *gebīgendlic* ‘inflectional’, *cnēoriscn* ‘posterity’ > *gecnēornes* ‘generation’ (Arista 2012:2).

3.2 Restrictions on word formation rules of the prefix *ge-*

For what concerns the restrictions on word formation rules, there seems to be some limitations in the verbs that can be prefixed by *ge-*: a research made by Klein (2022) provides data retrieved from corpora of Old English texts showing that there are specific verbs that almost always either avoid or take the prefix. As shown in table 4, verbs that seem to avoid the prefix are usually [+auxiliary] (*bēon/wesan* ‘be’ and *habban* ‘have’) and some are preterite-present verbs (*āgan* ‘own’, *cunnan* ‘know’, *dēag* ‘avails’, and *dearr* ‘dares’), all of which but *dēag* ‘avails’ function as [+ modal] and/or [+ auxiliary] verbs.

Table 4. Rate of *ge-* for auxiliary verbs.

| Aux Verb | <i>ge-</i> | no | % <i>ge-</i> | Usual senses |
|---------------|------------|--------|--------------|------------------|
| <i>bēon</i> | 10 | 100000 | 0.01 | be |
| <i>cunnan</i> | 3 | 1800 | 0.17 | know; be able to |
| <i>habban</i> | 35 | 12,700 | 0.27 | have |
| <i>āgan</i> | 3 | 900 | 0.33 | own, possess |
| <i>dearr</i> | 3 | 400 | 0.74 | dares |
| <i>dēag</i> | 1 | 110 | 0.90 | avails |

Other verbs shown in table 5 that tend to avoid *ge-* are often [+ stative] and [+ durative]: those are verbs that indicate a state or an action, such as *hatian* ‘hating’, *eardian* ‘dwelling’, *hangian* ‘hanging’ for ongoing states, and *flōwan* ‘flowing’, *bifian* ‘shaking’, *cēpan* ‘watching’ for ongoing actions (Klein 2022:8-9).

Table 5. Ge- “super avoiders”.

| Verb | ge- | no | % ge- | Usual sense |
|-----------------------|-----|--------|-------|-------------------------------|
| <i>drohtnian</i> | 0 | 120 | 0.00 | live, dwell |
| <i>hatian</i> | 0 | 500 | 0.00 | hate |
| <i>flōwan</i> | 1 | 250 | 0.40 | flow |
| <i>gyfan,gifan</i> | 3 | 500 | 0.60 | give, bestow |
| <i>hangian</i> | 1 | 150 | 0.66 | hang (intrans.), be suspended |
| <i>gyldan</i> | 3 | 450 | 0.66 | pay back, render |
| <i>bifian</i> | 1 | 140 | 0.71 | tremble, shake |
| <i>byrnan</i> | 4 | 450 | 0.88 | burn (intrans.), be on fire |
| <i>grymettan</i> | 1 | 110 | 0.90 | roar, bellow |
| <i>cēpan</i> | 1 | 100 | 0.99 | be intent on, watch |
| <i>herian</i> | 15 | 1300 | 1.14 | praise, extol the merits of |
| <i>cuman</i> | 120 | 8600 | 1.38 | come, move towards |
| <i>bodian</i> | 13 | 850 | 1.51 | announce, proclaim |
| <i>gēotan</i> | 2 | 130 | 1.52 | pour, pour out |
| <i>eardian</i> | 11 | 700 | 1.55 | dwell |
| <i>cweþan</i> | 275 | 17,500 | 1.55 | speak, say |
| <i>forhtian</i> | 4 | 250 | 1.57 | fear, be afraid |
| <i>hopian</i> | 4 | 250 | 1.57 | hope (for); look forward to |
| <i>findan</i> | 16 | 1000 | 1.57 | find, discover |
| <i>hrēowsian</i> | 2 | 120 | 1.64 | grieve, lament |
| <i>hebban</i> | 4 | 225 | 1.75 | lift (up), raise |
| <i>efestan,efstan</i> | 4 | 225 | 1.75 | hasten |
| <i>fretan</i> | 2 | 110 | 1.79 | devour, eat voraciously |
| <i>blōwan</i> | 3 | 150 | 1.96 | bloom, flower |

Furthermore, many verbs are usually unprefixes when they express “consumption (e.g. *bītan* ‘bite’, *etan* ‘eat’, *drincan* ‘drink’, *fretan* ‘devour’), speech or vocalisation (e.g. *cweþan* ‘speak’, *clipian* ‘call’, *cȳþan* ‘tell’, *āxian* ‘ask’, and-swarian ‘answer’), and movement (e.g. *cuman* ‘come, approach’, *gān* ‘go’, *farān* ‘go, travel’, *fylgan* ‘follow’)” (ibid:10-11). Conversely, verbs such as *weorþan* ‘become’, *niman* ‘take’, *halgian* ‘hallow’ and *hælan* ‘heal’, which are [+ resultative], have a high chance to be prefixed, together with certain verbs of perception such as *hrīnan* ‘touch’, *fēlan* ‘feel’, *hyran* ‘hear’, *frēdan* ‘feel’, *cnawan* ‘recognize’, as shown in table 6 (McFadden 2015:35-36).

Table 6. Ge- “super attracters”.

| Verb | ge- | no | % ge- | Usual sense |
|----------------------------|------|-----|-------|----------------------------------|
| <i>earnian</i> | 600 | 100 | 85.71 | earn, obtain as compensation |
| <i>fēlan</i> | 60 | 10 | 85.71 | feel, perceive |
| <i>hȳran</i> ¹ | 4400 | 600 | 88.00 | hear, perceive sound |
| <i>ed-lēanian</i> | 60 | 8 | 88.24 | pay back, give back |
| <i>endian</i> | 500 | 60 | 89.29 | end, finish |
| <i>flȳman</i> | 125 | 15 | 89.29 | cause to flee, put to flight |
| <i>fyllan</i> ¹ | 850 | 90 | 90.43 | make full |
| <i>cnāwan</i> | 250 | 22 | 91.91 | recognise |
| <i>dyrst-lāccan</i> | 125 | 11 | 91.91 | venture, undertake |
| <i>frēdan</i> | 70 | 6 | 92.11 | feel, perceive |
| <i>ēapmēdan</i> | 250 | 20 | 92.59 | humble, bring low |
| <i>efen-lāccan</i> | 100 | 7 | 93.46 | imitate |
| <i>byrian</i> | 650 | 30 | 95.59 | belong, be connected; befit |
| <i>dafenian</i> | 325 | 7 | 97.89 | be fitting or appropriate, befit |
| <i>fēon</i> ¹ | 450 | 8 | 98.25 | rejoice, exult |

For what concerns transitive verbs, although in some verbs the complex form appears with an object more often than its corresponding simplex form, there seems to be too many counterexamples that do not validate this association of the prefix with transitivity, as described in section 2.3 at (c) (Klein 2022:8).

Although the analysis showed some concrete patterns regarding which verbs are mostly simplex or complex, there are some inconsistencies: firstly, although auxiliary and modal verbs are basically never prefixed, there are rare cases where they compare with the prefix, as shown in the percentage column in table 4. Secondly, there are a few verbs that, despite being [+ resultative], are mostly unprefixed, such as *gyfan* ‘give’ or *gyldan* ‘pay back’; the exact opposite applies to certain verbs that are almost always prefixed despite being [+ stative], namely *byrian* ‘belong’ and *dafenian* ‘be fitting’ (Klein 2022:8-9).

Finally, it is important to stress that for the vast majority of verbs the prefix could be attached without it changing the meaning of the simplex verb at all (ibid:6) and that it was used inconsistently by scribes throughout the Old English period (Trobevsek 1994:125; McFadden 2015:43-44), making the understanding of potential typical morphological features of the prefix very complicated.

3.3 Performance of multiple functions: polysemy or homonymy?

As explained in section 1.5, etymology can be a distinguishing criterion to conclude if there is either a homonymous or a polysemous relation among words. This means that it is also possible to make assumptions about the origins of a word by analysing its possible meanings and their relationship: if a word has two or more apparently related meanings, it could be assumed it originated from a single word; on the contrary, if a word has two or more meanings that seem unrelated, it is possible to postulate that the word actually originated from unrelated different words. This is not limited to bases but also to suffixes and prefixes. To give an example, the present-day English words *untrue* and *unbind* both present the prefix *un-*, but the function of the prefix is not the same in both words: in the adjective *untrue* the prefix indicates negation (or absence in nouns, as in *unluck*), whereas in the verb *unbind* the prefix indicates reversal of the action expressed by the unprefix verb. The two prefixes are both written as *un-*, but they have a different etymology: the *un-* indicating negation is derived from Proto-Germanic **un-*, whereas the *un-* indicating reversal originated from Proto-Germanic **andi-*; this means that Present-Day English *un-* is a case of homonymy. Another example of a prefix with more meanings is *ex-*, which can mean ‘out (of)’, such as in *exit*, or ‘outside’, such as in *external*. The meanings of the prefix on the first two words are clearly related, and indeed originated from a single Latin preposition meaning precisely ‘out (of), from’. For the sake of completeness, it is necessary to say that *ex-* can also mean ‘former’, as in *ex-wife*: this can be explained by stretching the meaning a bit to match the original one: in Latin an ‘*ex consule*’ was a consul who was ‘out of his (former) position’. This confirms that the prefix *ex-* is a case of polysemy.

The fact that the prefix *ge-* can perform multiple grammatical and semantic functions (perfectivity and resultativity on verbs, collectivity and associativity on other word classes) may be an indicator of its origins, which would either mean that:

- (i) it is derived from a single lexical unit whose original function or meaning split into different but related semantic functions (polysemy), or;
- (ii) it originated from two different lexical units that later became complete homonyms performing different unrelated semantic functions.

In the first case, the functions of *ge-* are assumed to be closely related: for example, the grammatical function of marking the past participle of verbs and the semantic one of indicating perfectivity and resultativity both influence the relationship between the verb and time, either by modifying its tense or its aspect; this might be an indicator of a polysemic relation. The connection between the function of marking verbal tense and aspect and marking collectivity is less straightforward; it is however possible to compare it with the Latin cognate *con-*, which appears to share the same etymology as a detached lexical unit expressing collectivity and associativity. By observing that the Latin prefix *con-*, when it is attached to verbs, often expresses a resultative aspect, just as *ge-* does in Old English, there are reasons to believe that its meaning, which originally indicated togetherness, could have subsequently acquired the sense of completeness of the action, and thus of its resultativity. Another semantic function of *con-* derives from its original status of preposition *cum*, which had also the meaning of ‘against’; like phrasal verbs in Present-Day English, the prefix *con-* could give a ‘semantic direction’ to the verb, influencing its aspect and Aktionsart (cf. Bertocci 2018 and literature reported there). Assuming that *ge-* could have undergone a similar process of grammaticalization, since it seems to share both the same etymology and similar functions in modifying the aspect of prefixed verbs, the connection between its etymological collective meaning and its aspectual functions could be explained.

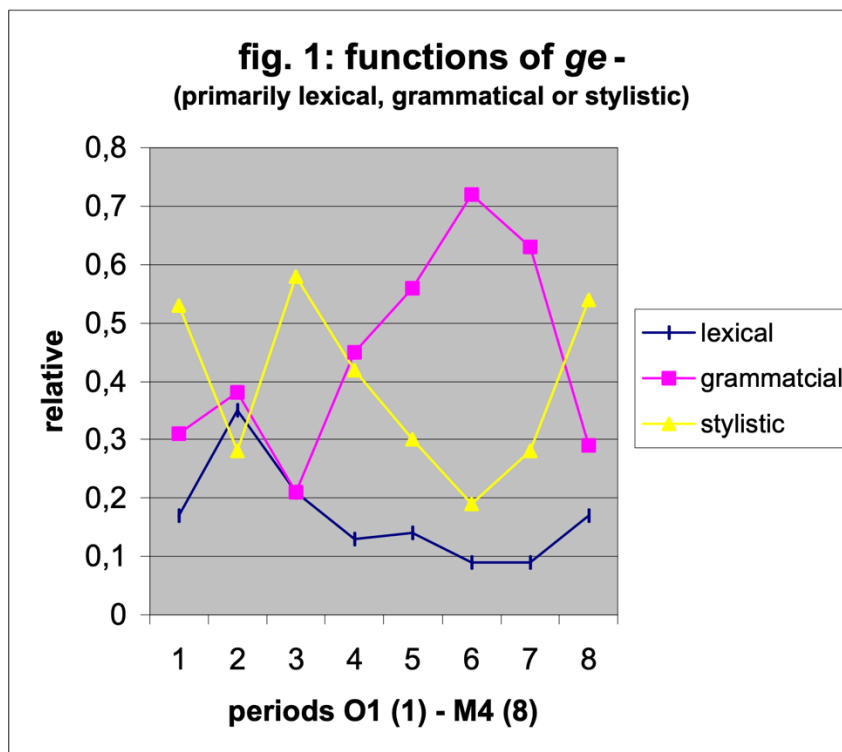
In the second case, at least two functions of *ge-* are assumed to be unrelated. This seems to be unlikely though, because there are no other lexical or grammatical functions that are widely accepted by academics and that are widespread enough to be compared to the other functions.

3.4 The role of diachrony and synchrony in the inconsistency of the functions of *ge-*

The reasons of the numerous inconsistencies and exceptions in the uses of *ge-* are difficult to explain exhaustively. When analysing Old English linguistic data, there are always exceptions that prevent the formulation of any fixed rule in the use of the prefix. It is however possible to identify some reasons that help to get a perspective on why the uses of *ge-* are neither constant nor consistent.

The first reason is time. While the different stages of a language are treated as being clearly separated between each other, this is just a scientific convention. In normal

circumstances, linguistic change happens gradually, although languages can be influenced more rapidly in certain cases (e.g. the Norman Conquest in 1066 CE, which marked the abrupt transition from Old English to Middle English language). This means that even during the Old English period the language saw significant changes in the use of the prefix *ge-*, and, in order to understand it properly, the period of each literary source of data needs to be taken into account. In the analyses of *ge-* conducted by Dollinger (2001a; 2001b), all words retrieved from the Helsinki Corpus of English Text were organised into four periods from the beginnings of Old English to 1150 CE, besides including also the period of Middle English. This allowed to discover patterns not only through the comparison between simplex and complex words, but also in the use of simplex and complex words during different periods of the Old English language. The results of such analysis showed that specific uses of *ge-* were favoured in the first periods of Old English and subsequently gradually declined in favour of other uses. In particular, it was found that its stylistic use (i.e. when both the simplex and the complex form of the same word were present in the same text) and its lexical uses (such as noun derivation from verbs, collectivity marker, and words in which *ge-* was fossilised and no simplex form existed) decreased gradually in favour of its grammatical use as a past participle marker (see fig.1, where the first four periods are Old English; taken from Dollinger 2001b:17).



By taking into account the period during which the analysed words were written, it is possible to gain more organised information about the use and the evolution of the functions of *ge-*, by which it is possible to understand that not all the functions were used with the same frequency in the same period, but in fact each function followed a trend that marked the linguistic evolution of the prefix. This kind of analysis, however, is not perfect, because the amount of data for each period is not the same, especially for the older one. The number of surviving documents varies for each period, and this can cause imbalances in the comparison among the data of each period, influencing the results of the analysis.

The second reason is geography, specifically the lack of a language standardisation. Nowadays, languages spoken in most countries tend to have a single variety that was chosen as the standard, and the widespread of literacy further strengthened the adoption of a single standard language in written documents and consequently in oral communication. But during the Old English period, although there have been attempts to define a standardised written form of the language lexicon (notably by Ælfric, an abbot who wrote many Old English texts around year 1000 CE), there was

not a single variety of the Old English language that was used in written documents and translations throughout the region where it was spoken. Depending on the area, the language was thus subject to geographic variations that created inconsistencies in the spelling and semantic shades of the lexicon (Lange 2012:1000). Another relevant aspect that prevented the rise of a written standard during the Old English period was the lack of literacy among the most part of the population (ibid:1001). Those geographic aspects render the logic behind the use of the prefix difficult to define, as it was possible that not all scribes of Old English perceived the distinction between simplex and complex forms of words in the same way, making the decision on the use of *ge-* an arbitrary choice.

Conclusion

The analysis conducted in this paper is an attempt to highlight the issues that the prefix *ge-* presents as a derivational morpheme. The work that linguists have made in finding a thread that connects the derivational processes of the Indo-European languages is remarkable, yet it has limitations in its application in a historical language context such as the Old English one. Despite proving that languages indeed follow many common patterns throughout their evolution and their morphological and semantic uses, such generalisations cannot always provide a way to categorise a lexical unit precisely, because it can present exceptions that make it different from the others. The fact that *ge-* can act as the head of a derived word by changing its word class is an example of an exception to the 'rules' that linguists formulated through the observation of derivational phenomena. Even the extensive use of *ge-* as a meaningless stylistic tool can be confusing since the definition of 'morpheme', and thus of 'prefix', is that of 'a lexical unit that has a meaning'. Most features of *ge-* however do match the classification as a prefix, since it attaches to words of various word classes and follows certain restrictive patterns which depend on the inherent features of the verbs to which it attaches. What causes one of the biggest problems in the understanding of *ge-* is why even those restrictive patterns sometimes are not respected; this is when the etymology of the prefix can be helpful. By analysing the paradigmatic relations between its main functions of perfectivity and collectivity, as well as comparing them with cognates such as Latin *con-/cum*, it might be possible to refine the theories about its etymology in order to explain the grammaticalization process that led *ge-* to its Old English status as an almost optional morpheme that was eventually lost in the following centuries. In case one of its functions were considered to be unrelated from the others, an additional etymology of the prefix could be postulated, and further studies could shed light on the inconsistencies that many Old English texts present. It must however be noted that the understanding of all these semantic, morphological and etymological issues is further complicated by aspects related to diachrony and synchrony. The functions of *ge-*, like all aspects of any language, are subject to variations caused by linguistic change, which happens throughout any period of time and modifies the current uses or creates new ones, and by geographical reasons, which are often responsible of inconsistencies in the lexicon of a language and cause orthographic or even semantic variants due to the absence of a standard language

variety. All in all, the unusual derivational features of *ge-* are the result of its evolutionary process of grammaticalization, which both from a semantical and morphological point of view was still underway during the Old English period. Although the etymology of the prefix may still possibly provide new insights about its evolution, certain diachronic and synchronic limits might be impossible to overcome.

References

- Arista, Martín Javier. 2012. "The Old English prefix ge-: A panchronic reappraisal". *Australian Journal of Linguistics*, Vol. 32, No. 4.
- Bertocci, Davide. 2018. "'Intensive' verbal preixes in Archaic Lain" - In: Bennacchio, Rosanna; Alessio Muro & Svetlana Slavkova (eds.) *The role of preixes in the formaion of aspectuality: issues of grammaticalization*. Firenze: Firenze University Press, pp. 41-58.
- Carstairs-McCarthy, Andrew. 2002. *An Introduction to English Morphology: Words and Their Structure*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.
- Comrie, Bernard. 1976. *Aspect: an introduction to the study of verbal aspect and related problems*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Crouch, Tracy A. 1995. "The Morphological Status of Old English ge-". *American Journal of Germanic Linguistics & Literatures*, Vol. 7, No. 2, pp. 165-178.
- Dollinger, Stefan. 2001a. *In search of linguistic replicators: A morphological case study on Old English and Middle English ge- in a neo-Darwinian framework*. MA thesis, University of Vienna.
- Dollinger, Stefan. 2001b. "The Old English and Middle English prefix ge- as a linguistic replicator: A morphological case study in a neo-Darwinian framework". *Vienna English Working Papers*, Vol. 10, No. 2, pp. 3-29.
- Goedsche, C. R. 1940. "Aspect versus Aktionsart". *Journal of English and Germanic Philology*, Vol. 39, No. 2, pp. 189-196.
- Godden, Malcom R. 1992. "Literary language" - In: Hogg, Richard M. (ed.) *The Cambridge History of the English Language Volume I: The Beginnings to 1066*. 7th edn. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 490-535.
- Harper, Douglas. *Online Etymology Dictionary*. <https://www.etymonline.com>. Accessed 2 June 2022.
- Hogg, Richard M. & R. D. Fulk. 2011. *A Grammar of Old English. Volume 2: Morphology*. Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell.
- Kastovsky, Dieter. 1992. "Semantics and vocabulary" - In: Hogg, Richard M. (ed.) *The Cambridge History of the English Language Volume I: The Beginnings to 1066*. 7th edn. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 290-408.
- Kay, Christian. 2012. "Old English: Semantics and lexicon" - In: Bergs, Alexander & Laurel J. Brinton, *English Historical Linguistics. An International Handbook. Volume 1*. Berlin: De Gruyter Mouton, pp. 313-325.
- Klein, Thomas. 2022. "Does preverbal Old English ge- have semantic or aspectual force?: evidence from the Dictionary of Old English", *Studia Neophilologica*.
- Lange, Claudia. 2012. "Standardization: Standards in the history of English" - In: Bergs, Alexander & Laurel J. Brinton, *English Historical Linguistics. An International Handbook. Volume 1*. Berlin: De Gruyter Mouton, pp. 994-1006.
- Lass, Roger. 1994. *Old English: A historical linguistic companion*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

- Lindemann, Richard J. W. 1965. "Old English Preverbal ge-: A Re-Examination of Some Current Doctrines". *The Journal of English and Germanic Philology*, Vol. 64, No. 1, pp. 65-83.
- McFadden, Thomas. 2015. "Preverbal ge- in Old and Middle English". *ZAS Papers in Linguistics*, Vol. 58, pp. 15-48.
- Mitchell, Bruce & Fred C. Robinson. 2012. *A guide to Old English*. 8th edn. Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell.
- "Morpheme." *Cambridge Dictionary*. Cambridge University Press.
<https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/morpheme>. Accessed 27 May 2022.
- Scalise, Sergio & Antonietta Bisetto. 2008. *La struttura delle parole*. Bologna: Il Mulino.
- Scalise, Sergio. 1986. *Generative Morphology*. 2nd edn. Dordrecht: Foris.
- Trobevšek-Drobnak, Frančiška. 1994. "The Old English preverbal ge- in the light of the theory of language change as strengthening or weakening". *Studia Anglica Posnaniensia*, Vol. 28, pp. 123–141.
- Quirk Randolph & C. L. Wrenn. 1957. *An Old English Grammar*. 2nd edn. London: Methuen.
- Wedel, Alfred R. 1997. "Verbal prefixation and the 'complexive' aspect in Germanic". *Neuphilologische Mitteilungen*, Vol. 98, No. 4, pp. 321-332.
- Wright, Joseph & Elizabeth Mary Wright. 1908. *Old English Grammar*. London: Oxford University Press.

Riassunto in italiano

Questa tesi è un'analisi del prefisso *ge-* dell'inglese antico, e in particolare delle sue caratteristiche morfologiche e derivazionali. Questa lingua era infatti caratterizzata dalla presenza di numerosi prefissi che svolgevano diverse funzioni di derivazione nelle parole alle quali venivano aggiunti. Ma nonostante *ge-* fosse tra i prefissi più presenti nel lessico dell'inglese antico, il suo utilizzo è gradualmente diminuito fino a sparire totalmente verso la fine del periodo dell'inglese medio. L'interesse verso questo prefisso che diversi studiosi negli ultimi secoli hanno manifestato è dato dal fatto che le sue funzioni in inglese antico non sono ben chiare, poiché sembrano essere molteplici, incoerenti, e, nel caso della maggior parte dei verbi, la sua presenza non sembra modificarne il significato. Lo scopo di questa tesi è di confrontare i processi di derivazione che caratterizzano le lingue indoeuropee con quelli che caratterizzavano le parole dell'inglese antico prefissate con *ge-*, evidenziandone gli aspetti che esulano dai normali processi derivazionali attraverso il riepilogo delle diverse funzioni e usi del prefisso teorizzati nel tempo dai diversi studiosi.

Nel primo capitolo vengono fornite alcune informazioni generali che caratterizzano i processi di derivazione più comuni, partendo dai concetti fondamentali, come la definizione di morfema e di parola derivata, i costituenti che le compongono e le loro proprietà, fino ad arrivare alle norme che le regolano, come le proprietà del costituente 'testa' nelle parole derivate, la condizione della base unica e le restrizioni che pone. Viene poi descritto il caso della conversione/derivazione zero e il concetto di relazione paradigmatica, dove vengono spiegati i casi semantici di polisemia e di omonimia, utili a fini etimologici che aiutano a comprendere meglio i processi morfologici di *ge-*.

Nel secondo capitolo vengono descritte le diverse funzioni del prefisso *ge-* teorizzate dagli studiosi attraverso l'analisi delle parole prefissate contenute nei testi dell'inglese antico. Nel primo paragrafo viene condotta una prima analisi del prefisso dal punto di vista morfologico-derivativo ed etimologico. Nel secondo paragrafo vengono descritte le funzioni del prefisso contenute nelle grammatiche storiche che trattano l'inglese antico, riassunte in (a) nessuna funzione; (b) marcatore del participio passato nei verbi; (c) marcatore aspettuale perfettivo o risultativo; (d) marcatore di valore collettivo o associativo nei sostantivi, negli aggettivi, negli avverbi, e nei pronomi. Nel terzo

paragrafo vengono descritti ulteriori usi di *ge-* proposti in articoli scientifici e tesi di diversi studiosi, spesso attraverso l'uso dei corpora per analizzare le relazioni tra le parole studiate in modo più dettagliato; tali usi sono però assenti nelle grammatiche storiche, in quanto frutto di ricerche che portano a risultati ritenuti spesso insufficienti, discutibili o parzialmente inconcludenti dagli altri linguisti. Essi sono riassunti in: (a) marcatore deittico; (b) marcatore di Aktionsart; (c) prefisso che trasforma i verbi intransitivi in verbi transitivi risultativi; (d) prefisso presente in determinati contesti sintattici; (e) intensificatore della marcatezza verbale.

Il terzo capitolo mette a confronto le caratteristiche e le restrizioni dei processi di derivazione descritte nel primo capitolo con le funzioni derivative attuate da *ge-* descritte nel secondo, evidenziando i punti dove tale prefisso non corrisponde ai comportamenti tipici dei morfemi derivativi delle lingue indoeuropee. Viene inoltre discussa la relazione paradigmatica di due delle principali funzioni del prefisso al fine di comprenderne meglio l'etimologia, e viene infine descritta l'influenza che i fattori diacronici e sincronici hanno nell'analisi dei testi e dei vocaboli dell'inglese antico che vengono analizzati dagli studiosi durante le ricerche sul prefisso *ge-*.

Le conclusioni a cui si è giunti nel terzo capitolo mostrano comportamenti di *ge-* che non rispecchiano pienamente le norme derivazionali più comuni. Nel primo paragrafo viene dimostrata una funzione del prefisso tra le più interessanti dal punto di vista derivativo, e cioè che in certe parole derivate *ge-* funge da costituente 'testa', cambiando la loro categoria lessicale da sostantivo ad aggettivo, nonostante questa sia tipicamente una caratteristica propria dei suffissi; un ulteriore processo derivazionale di *ge-* è quello della conversione/derivazione zero che converte i participi passati dei verbi ad aggettivi. In termini di restrizioni sui suoi processi derivativi, descritte nel secondo paragrafo, *ge-* è presente in verbi che hanno una maggiore tendenza ad evitare il prefisso: è il caso dei verbi ausiliari, stativi e durativi, e in minor misura di quelli che esprimono il consumo di cibi e bevande, verbi di parola e di movimento; al contrario, vi sono verbi, solitamente i risultativi, che presentano il prefisso molto spesso. È importante sottolineare che queste tendenze non sono assolute, in quanto presentano in misura variabile delle eccezioni. Nel terzo paragrafo viene descritta l'idea che la relazione tra due funzioni di *ge-* come quella semantica di perfettività/risultatività nei verbi e quella comitativa nei sostantivi possa indicare una relazione paradigmatica, che suggerirebbe che il prefisso è originato da

un'unica unità lessicale il cui significato è mutato nelle due diverse (ma collegate) funzioni di *ge-*, generando un caso di polisemia, oppure che il prefisso è derivato da due unità lessicali distinte che poi si sono evolute in due unità lessicali ortograficamente identiche ma non collegate, generando un caso di omonimia. Comparando il prefisso *ge-* con il prefisso latino *con-*, che si ritengono essere etimologicamente collegati, è possibile identificare nel prefisso latino un percorso evolutivo simile a quello presunto di *ge-*, ovvero di una preposizione originariamente comitativa il cui significato si è poi evoluto nell'esprimere un senso di completezza nel significato del verbo; un ulteriore significato di *cum* è locativo, e tale senso andrebbe a limitare l'evento verbale, conferendogli una lettura aspettuale. Nell'ultimo paragrafo vengono infine descritti i limiti che i fattori diacronici e sincronici causano durante l'analisi di dati risalenti al periodo dell'inglese antico: l'inglese antico infatti, come tutte le lingue, era in continua evoluzione, causando variazioni negli usi di *ge-* già all'interno di questo periodo i cui dati non sono disponibili in misura uguale o comunque sufficiente per ogni singolo "sottoperiodo"; pongono inoltre una grossa difficoltà i fattori sincronici, ovvero il fatto che durante il periodo dell'inglese antico non vi era una norma linguistica unica in tutto il territorio, e nemmeno un'unica varietà linguistica, con la conseguenza di forme lessicali diverse presenti all'interno dello stesso periodo storico e talvolta differenze nella loro interpretazione semantica. Per concludere, le caratteristiche morfologiche e derivazionali di *ge-* sono il risultato di un processo di grammaticalizzazione verso la funzione di marcatore del participio passato che, sia dal punto di vista morfologico che semantico, durante il periodo dell'inglese antico era ancora in corso. Nonostante ulteriori studi sulla sua etimologia possano fornire nuove informazioni sulla sua evoluzione, restano limiti diacronici e sincronici che potrebbero essere impossibili da superare.