

Identifying the Old English exponent of the semantic prime DIE

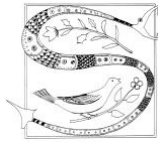
Raquel Mateo Mendaza (*Universidad de La Rioja* – raquel.mateo@unirioja.es)

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This research takes the approach of the Natural Semantic Metalanguage (NSM) model (Goddard 2002) which states that semantic primes are universal concepts that can be used to describe complex meanings in terms of simpler ones. The NSM team has worked on the identification of prime exponents in living languages; however, some authors have focused on exponent identification in a historical language such as Old English (Martin Arista and Martín de la Rosa 2006, de la Cruz Cabanillas 2007). Recent research on this topic has proposed a methodology that allows for the identification of primes by analysing candidate words in terms of their morphological, textual, semantic and syntactic features (Mateo Mendaza 2013, 2021). Within this framework, the aim of this research is to identify the Old English exponent of the semantic prime DIE. To do so, a full description of DIE in terms of the NSM model facilitates the selection of candidate words for prime exponent since, given the metaphorical implications of the verb under analysis (Ower 1996), the extensive list of Old English verbs presented in the *Historical Thesaurus of the Oxford English Dictionary* (Kay et al. 2009) expressing the meaning 'to die' can be reduced to the verbs *sweltan*, *steorfan*, *cvelan* and *deadian*. Following the methodology established in previous research, these verbs are examined by means of the information found in relevant sources such as *The Dictionary of Old English* (Healey et al. 2018) and its corpus (Healey et al. 2009), and *Nerthus* database (www.nerthusproject.com). The analysis of the verbs against the four aforementioned criteria selects *sweltan* as the most appropriate candidate for prime exponent. Nevertheless, since for some criteria *sweltan* and other verbs show similar results, the search for examples within different Old English texts of *sweltan* along with the adjuncts related to DIE confirms the suitability of this verb as prime exponent.

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Contact data

Raquel Mateo Mendaza
Departamento de Filologías Modernas
Universidad de La Rioja
Edificio de Filologías
c/San José de Calasanz 33
26004 Logroño, La Rioja