

## THE SCOPE OF METAPHOR FOR FRIENDSHIP IN OLD ENGLISH AND OLD NORSE: A CONTRASTIVE ANALYSIS

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**ABSTRACT.** *The present paper studies the scope of metaphor which forms the abstract concept of FRIENDSHIP in Old English and Old Norse; that is, it analyses the range of application of particular source domains to the target domain of FRIENDSHIP to see how this abstract concept was conceptualised in this period of the languages in question. It intends to find out whether the source domains from which FRIENDSHIP in these languages derives its metaphorical system are culture specific or, on the contrary, more general and common to later periods of those languages. The identification and analysis of metaphorical systems of older periods of languages -as the one presented- can help in the reconstruction of the human conceptual systems of these periods as well as in the explanation and corroboration of synchronic theory -in this case metaphor theory. The paper is the first part of a broader research project which intends to study the metaphorical mappings for the most basic EMOTION CONCEPTS -FRIENDSHIP, LOVE, ANGER, JOY, FEAR and SORROW- in Medieval Germanic languages.*

**KEYWORDS.** *Metaphor, friendship, Old English, Old Icelandic.*

**RESUMEN.** *En este trabajo se estudia el dominio conceptual de la metáfora de la AMISTAD en inglés e islandés antiguos. Es decir, se analizan todos los dominios fuente que conforman el dominio destino de la AMISTAD, con el fin de entender cómo se conceptualizaba esta categoría abstracta en los periodos más antiguas de las lenguas mencionadas. El objetivo último del trabajo es el de descubrir si los dominios fuente de la AMISTAD coinciden en ambas lenguas y con los periodos posteriores de las mismas o si, por el contrario, muestran características culturales específicas. Estudios como el presente no sólo colaboran en la reconstrucción de los sistemas conceptuales de periodos antiguos, sino que también permiten corroborar premisas teóricas de la lingüística sincrónica, en el caso que nos ocupa, la teoría cognitiva de la metáfora. Este trabajo forma parte de un proyecto en el que nos proponemos analizar las proyecciones metafóricas de los sentimientos básicos de la AMISTAD, AMOR, IRA, ALEGRÍA, MIEDO y TRISTEZA en las lenguas germánicas antiguas.*

**PALABRAS CLAVE.** *Metáfora, amistad, inglés antiguo, islandés antiguo.*

## 1. INTRODUCTION<sup>1</sup>

This paper studies the *scope of metaphor* which forms the abstract concept of FRIENDSHIP in Old English and Old Norse; that is, it analyses the range of application of particular source domains to the target domain of FRIENDSHIP to see how this abstract concept was conceptualised in this period of the languages in question. It intends to find out whether the source domains from which FRIENDSHIP in these languages derives its metaphorical system are culture specific or, on the contrary, more general and common to later periods of those languages.

This study follows the recent trend in linguistic theory which considers synchrony and diachrony to be two complementary accounts of language rather than two opposing dichotomies (Geeraerts 1983, 1997; Traugott 1989; Traugott and Heine 1991; Sweetser 1990; Bybee, Perkins & Pagliuca 1994). It intends to show, therefore, how synchronic theory can help to explain diachronic issues, in this case to reconstruct the conceptual system of two Medieval Germanic cultures, and vice versa, how the analysis of older stages of languages can help to explain and corroborate synchrony, in the case under study, metaphor theory.

This paper is organised as follows: section 2 gives an outline of the corpus, in section 3 I discuss the analysis of the data in both Medieval languages, and finally, section 4 presents the preliminary conclusions reached so far.

## 2. METHODOLOGY AND CORPUS

Dictionary definitions of emotion terms tend to show more vagueness and circularity than other more concrete words<sup>2</sup>. Thus, trying to define emotion terms, as we know, is anything but a simple task in a contemporary language. With no informants to describe what they feel about FRIENDSHIP and with the restrictions imposed by written data this task seems almost impossible. Nevertheless, with the help of Linguistic Theory and the tools of Linguistic Corpora of older periods of languages, much more than initially thought can be achieved.

The Old English linguistic material used in this study comes from the *Anglo-Saxon Poetical Records* listed in the *Toronto Microfiche Concordance to Old English* (Healey and Venezkey 1980) and the Anglo-Saxon dictionaries Bosworth & Toller (1991) and Clark (1984). The Old Norse material analysed comes from Early Medieval Icelandic literature (*Poetic Edda* and Sagas) and from the following dictionaries: Holthausen (1948), de Vries (1975) and Zöega (1967). The corpus comprises around 95 terms of which 75 (60 Old English and 15 Old Norse) mean 'friend', 'companion', 'kinsman', 'comrade' and 20 (10 Old English and 10 Old Norse) refer to the more abstract meaning 'friendship'. On the whole, around 1200 contexts<sup>3</sup> have been analysed ranging from the 9th to the 14th centuries. Of these, the most fruitful for this study have been the more general and epic contexts, rather than the religious ones.

The most prototypical members of this category, in Old English and Old Norse are<sup>4</sup>:

FRIEND

Old English: *freond, þegn, mæg, wine, gesiþ, gefara, eaxgestealla, geneat, gemæcca, gehlepa, geselda, gædeling, ...*

Old Norse: *vinr, frændi, mágr, sinni, félagi, spjáll, hirðmaðr, húskarl, ...*

FRIENDSHIP

Old English: *blis, freod, freondlufu, freondcsipe, gefercsipe, sib, siblufu, þegnscipe, winescipe, ...*

Old Norse: *vinskapr, venzl, vinátta, lag, bliða, félag, vinfengi ...*

### 3. ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

That abstract concepts such as FRIENDSHIP are metaphorically understood in terms of concrete concepts is a well-known fact in the literature<sup>5</sup> (Black 1962; Reddy 1979; Lakoff and Johnson 1980; Johnson 1987; Lakoff and Turner 1989; Lakoff 1993). In addition, metaphor theory has been applied to emotion terms in contemporary languages (Lakoff & Kövecses 1987; Kövecses 1990, 1995), but systematic studies of the mappings and submappings of emotion terms in older periods of languages seem to lack until the moment.

We can also infer, because of the great number of lexical terms belonging to this semantic field, the importance and institutional character of FRIENDSHIP in Germanic society; importance which is corroborated as well by the work of Tacitus and Benveniste, among others. Let us then see how the abstract concept of FRIENDSHIP was structured in Old English and Old Norse and from which concrete source domains it derives.

Six large metaphorical systems have been identified by Kövecses (1990, 1995) as source domains for FRIENDSHIP in Contemporary English: *communication* metaphors, *emotion* metaphors, *state* metaphors, *complex systems* metaphors, *event structure* metaphors and *positive-negative* evaluation metaphors. In this paper, I concentrate mainly on the *communication*, *emotion*, *state systems* and *complex systems* metaphors, which are the most productive in the data analysed.

#### 3.1. *The communication system*

The first source domain from which FRIENDSHIP in Old English and Old Norse as a target domain inherits its mappings is the communication system. In these languages, as well as in Contemporary English, communication is a basic property of friendship. The basic mappings, as Kövecses (1990, 1995) states for Contemporary English, are the following:

- COMMUNICATION BETWEEN FRIENDS IS SHARING ONE'S INNERMOST EXPERIENCE/ THOUGHTS; that is, OBJECTS and
- FRIENDS ARE CONTAINERS THAT OPEN UP TO EACH OTHER

Feelings, experience and thoughts are thus conceptualised as objects which are transferred from one person or container to another (an idea that overlaps with Reddy's 1979 'conduit' metaphor).

We find very clear examples of this communication system metaphor in the data analysed:

- one of the greatest pains is not to have someone to share thoughts and feelings with: *Wanderer* 8, 116
- friends also exchange counsel: *Solomon and Saturn* 490, *Guthlac* 451 and *Daniel* 409

Within this metaphorical system, the exchange of thoughts, counsel and feelings is the equivalent in emotional terms of the exchange of material gifts, as we will see in the analysis of the state metaphor system. There are also compounds which show this communication or exchange of feelings system: OE *weagesip* 'friend in grief or woe' and *nydgestealla* 'friend in need or adversity' and ON *mál-vinr* 'friend to speak with', *trú-vin* 'confidential friend' and *spjalli*, literally 'one who converses with another'.

### 3.2. The emotion system

A second source domain from which Old English and Old Norse FRIENDSHIP is created is the emotion system. Although not a very prototypical one, FRIENDSHIP can be considered an emotion since it involves intimacy, affection and respect among other feelings. One of the metaphorical mappings that derives from this system (Kövecses 1995) is:

- AN EMOTIONAL RELATIONSHIP IS A DISTANCE BETWEEN TWO ENTITIES or, in other words:
- FRIENDSHIP IS CLOSENESS

The saliency of the closeness metaphorical system in the data analysed can be exemplified by the great number of terms that mean 'close friend' and which are mainly related to different body parts such as Old English *exalgestealla*, *handgesella*, *handgestealla*, *handþegn*, *heafodmæg*, *neahfreond*, *sibgemæg* and *sundorwine* among others, literally 'shoulder', 'hand', 'head' and 'near companions'; and Old Norse *ná-frændi*, *návistar*, *hugðar-maor*, *höfuðs-vinr*, these meaning 'near', 'heart' and 'head friend' and *sam-lag* or *sam-sinni* 'fellowship', literally, 'those that lie or are together'.

Examples of this metaphorical system in Contemporary English are expressions such as 'they were bosom friends', 'we were tight as a glove', 'we are attached at the hip', etc.. (Kövecses 1995).

Among the contexts or domains which show closeness and affection we can point out the following:

- there is always a shortcut to a friend, even if he is far away: *Hávamál* 34

- a lord shows his friendship to his vassal or thane by kissing and embracing him and letting tears fall from his eyes: *Beowulf* 1870
- a lord lies on his vassal's shoulder to rest: *The Meters of Boethius* 9.55; and vice versa
- a vassal likes to embrace, kiss his lord and lay his hands and head on his knee: *Wanderer* 40-46
- companions are always together, laughing or crying: *Solomon and Saturn* 348

### 3.3. *The state system*

In the third place, FRIENDSHIP, as other feelings such as love, can be conceptualised as a permanent state. Within this metaphorical system, by which states are conceptualised as objects, we find the following submappings -which correspond to those of Contemporary English studied by Kövecses (1990, 1995):

- FRIENDSHIP IS A POSSESSED OBJECT
- FRIENDSHIP IS A BOND and
- FRIENDSHIP IS AN ECONOMIC EXCHANGE

#### 3.3.1. *FRIENDSHIP IS A POSSESSED OBJECT*

In the first place, as in Contemporary English, FRIENDSHIP both in Old English and Old Norse is conceptualised as an object which people can possess, hold fast or keep: *læstan* (*Elene* 1204), *healdan* (*Guthlac* 715), *habban* (*Resignation* 111); gain or obtain (*begietan* (*Andreas* 478), *gewinnan* (*Seasons* 111); encounter: *metan* (*Juliana* 216); strive after: *fundian* (*The Order of the World* 98); give: *syllan*, *giefan* and *forgiefan* (*Andreas* 94); divide or share: *dælan* (*Christ* 164). Examples involving friendship in Old Norse include verbs such as *eiga* and *halda* meaning 'to have, possess', *taka* 'to take', *binda*, which literally means 'to bind, tie or fasten', *reikna* 'to reckon or calculate' and *skipta* 'to share' (de Vries 1975).

References to the *wineleas*, *winepearfende* or *freondleas mon* 'the friendless man' or 'outlaw' and to *freonda feasceaft* 'poverty of friends' in Old English and to the *höfoingja-lauss* 'chiefless man' and *rekingr* or *skógar-maðr* 'outcast' in Old Norse are well known and very frequent in Old English and Old Norse literature. Just to mention some of the most prototypical contexts:

- the friendless unhappy man takes wolves as his companions...who very often tear him: *Exeter Maxims* 146-7
- wretched is he who must live alone...: *Maxims* 172-3
- it is important to have a friend to visit, a safe place to stay, an open door, a light: *Metrical Charms* 11.31, 11.37; *The Grave* 18, *Guthlac* 290
- one feels rich if he has a friend: *Hávamál* 47
- even if one is ill, he is happy if he has friends: *Hávamál* 69

This metaphorical mapping is closely related to the 'positive negative evaluation' system, studied by Kövecses (1990, 1995), by which FRIENDSHIP is the most valuable

commodity or treasure a man can have. This is attested by the existence of Old English terms for FRIEND such as *wilgeheþa*, *wilgesip*, *wilgestealla*, and *wilgeþofta* all, literally meaning ‘wishful, willing or desirable companions’. In this sense, the term *wilgestealla* is very interesting because it does not refer to a human being but to a real material object: earthly goods or wealth (*Genesis* 2139). In Old Norse we also find many terms denoting wealth of friends or kinsmen such as *frænd-afli* and *vina-styrkr* ‘strength of friends’ and *vin-sæll* ‘blessed with friends’, among others.

### 3.3.2. FRIENDSHIP IS A BOND

In the second place, FRIENDSHIP in Old English and Old Norse is also conceptualised as a PHYSICAL BOND or link, which is based on a strong sense of fidelity as we will see. A friend, thus, becomes almost like a second brother. This is attested by the fact that most of the terms of this corpus, both Old English and Old Norse, can refer to blood as well as non-blood relations.

In the Old Norse data this metaphor seems more productive than in Old English. We find terms which emphasise the permanent character of FRIENDSHIP as a stable state or link such as the nouns *vin-festi* ‘steadfastness in friendship’ and *venzl*, literally ‘tied by bonds’, the past participle *vin-tengdr* ‘bound in friendship’ and the adjective *vinfastr* ‘steadfast as a friend’.

### 3.3.3 FRIENDSHIP IS AN ECONOMIC EXCHANGE

In the third place, the state metaphor system can also be understood as an ECONOMIC EXCHANGE. Within this metaphorical submapping FRIENDSHIP in Old English and Old Norse, as in Contemporary English, is conceptualised as a two-person business in which partners are supposed to fulfil their obligations and share responsibilities and benefits. This means that ECONOMIC EXCHANGES or FRIENDSHIP RELATIONS are reciprocal and supposed to produce a benefit to both participants or friends (Kövecses 1995).

In this sense, we know that FRIENDSHIP in traditional Germanic cultures, as well as in most ancient Indo-European ones, has to be understood in relation to the social and vassalage structure (*commitatus* or *Gefolgshaft* structure) of the time; that is, it should be understood as a real institution with a double function in war and in peace. FRIENDSHIP is, therefore, based on a personal contract of mutual fidelity between vassal and lord and among vassals, on which the survival of the whole community depended.

The complete list of mutual obligations or gifts within this ECONOMIC EXCHANGE metaphor is too long to be included here, but I will mention some of the most important ones appearing in the corpus. The lord’s obligations (that is, those of the Old English *wine*, *winedrihten*, *freawine*, *goldwine* and Old Norse *dróttinn*, *höfðingi*) are to support and protect his vassals and friends (his *þegnas*, *gesipas*, *geferan*, *gesteallan*, *gædelingas*, *geseldan* in the Old English data and his *seggr*, *rekkr*, *draugr*, *húskarl*, etc..

in Old Norse). The lord shares his table with his *beodgeneatas* and *heorþgeneatas* ‘table and hearth companions’. The banquet, therefore, is the social event *par excellence*: in it disputes, reconciliations, alliances, battle strategies, etc. are debated; but above all, it is in the banquet where the booty or treasure is shared out. The most esteemed of the lord’s qualities is thus his generosity – as is clearly indicated by the term *goldwine* in Old English (*Wanderer* 34, *Judith* 21, *Beowulf* 1473, 2428, *Hyndluljóð* 2) and *gjaf-vinr* ‘open-handed friend’ in Old Norse. In exchange for these favours, the vassals take an oath of fidelity to their lord, which means that they are pledged to defend him in battle even after his death (*Beowulf* 1382, 2392, 2484). The most esteemed of the vassal’s qualities are, therefore, loyalty, strength and courage; cowardice or abandonment of the battle-field is the worst disgrace, which is usually accompanied by exile and solitude (*The Gifts of Men* 78, *Beowulf* 194, 1228, *Andreas* 401). Honour, glory and fidelity are thus conceptualised as material goods that are exchanged (*Beowulf* 922, *Hamðismál* 30). Old Norse *verðung* and Old English *weorðung* are clear examples of this mapping, since they both mean ‘wage’, ‘payment received from lord’ and ‘honour’. Finally, vassals also have obligations among themselves: companions have to cooperate and support each other in order to ensure the survival of the whole community (*Beowulf* 1572, 2166, 2977, *Hávamál* 24, 25 and 156).

In this sense, an important difference between the Old Norse and the Old English contexts is that in the latter, FRIENDSHIP between equals is given less prominence than FRIENDSHIP between thane and lord, as the *Hávamál* contexts 41 to 44, 52 and 78 show.<sup>8</sup> According to Byock (1982), the Anglo-Saxon relations between thane and lord are parallel to those represented in Medieval Icelandic society by *goði* and *bóndi*; that is, a contractual pledge of mutual support or friendship –*vinfengi*– between farmers of almost equal power.

#### 3.3.4. FRIENDSHIP IS A LOCATION

To finish with the state metaphor system, although very rare in the data, we also find instances of the metaphorical mapping STATES are LOCATIONS. In this case, FRIENDSHIP is a LOCATION or PLACE you can ‘turn away from’, as the Old English verbs *wendan* (*The Meters of Boethius* 2.14) and *ahwierfan* (*Genesis* 23) show or ‘enter into’ as the Old Norse *leggja* –literally ‘lay, place’– denotes when applied to friendship (de Vries 1975).

#### 3.4. Complex systems metaphor

Finally, the fourth source domain from which Old English and Old Norse FRIENDSHIP is created is the more general complex systems metaphor. Within this system human relations are conceptualised as complex or STRUCTURED OBJECTS which have a purpose or function and therefore can be made or created and thus, also

destroyed. In the corpus we find examples of Old English *wyrcean* 'make', 'work' (*Instructions for Christians* 96) and *offeallan* 'destroy' (*The Riming Poem* 24) and Old Norse *gøra* 'make', 'build' (de Vries 1975).

### 3.5. Other source domains for FRIENDSHIP in OE

Other source domains which appear in the data and which can be considered to be more specific of medieval cultures are:

- WISDOM or BOOKS are a man's best friend: *Riddles* 26.18, *Seasons* 111
- A SWORD (*gupwine*) is man's best friend in battle: *Beowulf* 1810, 2732
- A HORN is a king's/thane's/soldier's best friend in duress: *Riddles* 80.1, *Elene* 1259
- A WOLF and GRIEF are the friendless man's closest companions: *Wanderer* 29, *Maxims* 146-7

## 4. CONCLUSIONS

As pointed out at the beginning, this paper intends to show how the abstract concept of FRIENDSHIP was conceptualised in two different Medieval Germanic cultures in contrast to contemporary ones. Further research on other medieval cultures, both Germanic and non-Germanic, is needed in order to confirm my preliminary conclusions:

In the first place, FRIENDSHIP in these medieval languages seems to be a *gestaltic* concept constructed on the bases of the interaction of four source domains mainly: the *communication*, *emotion*, *state* and *complex systems*. In contrast to Kövecses' analysis of Contemporary American English, the *event* metaphor system in which FRIENDSHIP is conceptualised as physical motion or a journey, is not realised in the data analysed till the moment. As for his *positive/negative* metaphor system, in our data it seems to interact with the concept of FRIENDSHIP as a valuable object which can be exchanged of the *state* metaphor system.

Second, the fact that these four metaphorical systems exist in medieval as well as contemporary cultures indicates that the system has existed in these languages for at least 10 centuries, from what we can conclude that it is very widespread, even universal.

Third, other peripheral source domains, such as WISDOM or WEAPONS, show that Old English and Old Norse, as medieval cultures, had specific conceptualisations of FRIENDSHIP different from contemporary ones.

Finally, the identification and analysis of metaphorical systems of older periods of languages can help in the reconstruction of the conceptual systems of these periods as well as in the explanation and corroboration of synchronic theory -in this case, metaphor theory.



## NOTES

1. This paper has been written with the support of the Spanish DGICYT Research Contracts PS 94-0014 and PS 95-0049.
2. It is not the purpose of this study to try to delimit the polysemy shown by most of the members of this category. The vagueness and circularity of terms for FRIEND has been thoroughly analysed in Romano (1994, 1996).
3. This first use of the term context refers to Halliday's or Dijk's term co-text, that is, to the 'real' physical occurrence of the words in the manuscripts. The length of the contexts is not the same for each term, it depends on the information needed to understand and define the different domains. The average length of the contexts ranges from 1 to 10 lines or 10 to 100 words.
4. For a complete list of the Old English terms see Romano (1994, 1996).
5. The theoretical model on which this work is based, the cognitive approach to metaphor theory, is not further explained in this paper because it has been extensively developed and applied to languages all over the world during the last 20 years. See following bibliography.
6. These are not literal translations from texts, but rather paraphrase or summarise the main ideas which reflect as closely as possible the domain in question. Because of this, the original contexts in which the domains appear have not been included, and also of their length (see note 3).
7. See Romano (1994, 1996) for more details.
8. See Larrington's (1993) study based on *Hávamál* and Byock's (1982) study on the concept of feud in the Icelandic Saga.

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