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ETYMOLOGICAL ANALYSIS OF OLD ENGLISH ADJECTIVES DENOTING NEGATIVE APPRAISAL

The study is dedicated to the etymological analysis of adjectives denoting negative appraisal in Old English (OE). The aim of the work is to model the etymological specificities of the concept BAD by identifying the primary sources from which negatively evaluative concepts arose, and tracing their evolution from specific meanings to abstract ethical judgments. Evaluation is an interlevel linguistic category expressing attitude toward reality. In contemporary axiological linguistics, negative appraisal demonstrates structural asymmetry and greater semantic stability compared to positive appraisal (the so-called polarity effect), which is related to communicative risks and the social weight of condemnation. Negatively evaluative vocabulary functions as a tool for social regulation and reflects the value orientations of the linguistic community. Historical reconstruction of axiological systems is necessary for understanding the transformations in notions of socially acceptable and unacceptable behavior. The methodology included component analysis of dictionary definitions, identification of the archiseme “negative evaluation”, and the use of an etymological dictionary to trace the transformation of initial meanings. A corpus of 48 Old English adjectives containing the sememes “bad”, “evil”, “wicked”, or “hateful” was compiled. The analysis revealed five primary etymological sources of negative evaluation: the domain of sensory experience, the domain of visibility, the domain of physical deviation, the domain of emotions and mental activities, and the domain of ritual and social failure. A key morphological strategy was also identified: the inversion of positive concepts (e.g., unweorþlic, gōdléas). This strategy demonstrates that “good” was the primary state of cognition, and “bad” was defined secondarily, as a deficiency or lack of good. The modeling of the etymology of the concept BAD proves that the Old English axiological category formed a binary system of value and anti-value that evolved from concrete, functional attributes to more abstract, ethical judgments. These results underscore the urgent need for further diachronic studies of negative appraisal for a complete understanding of the origins and evolution of modern English axiological systems.

Key words: negative appraisal, axiological system, etymological analysis, diachronic research.

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ЕТИМОЛОГІЧНИЙ АНАЛІЗ ПРИКМЕТНИКІВ НЕГАТИВНОЇ ОЦІНКИ В ДАВНЬОАНГЛІЙСЬКІЙ МОВІ

Дослідження присвячене етимологічному аналізу прикметників, що позначають негативну оцінку в давньоанглійській мові. У статті пропонується моделювання етимологічних особливостей прикметника “bad” шляхом ідентифікації первинних джерел, з яких виникли негативно-оцінні концепти, та простеження їхньої еволюції від конкретних значень до абстрактних етичних суджень. Оцінка є міжрівневою лінгвістичною категорією, що виражає ставлення до дійсності. У сучасній аксіологічній лінгвістиці негативна оцінка демонструє структурну асиметрію та більшу семантичну стійкість порівняно з позитивною (так званий ефект полярності), що пов'язано з комунікативними ризиками та соціальною вагою засудження. Негативно-оцінна лексика функціонує як інструмент соціальної регуляції та відображає ціннісні орієнтири мовної спільноти. Історична реконструкція аксіологічних систем необхідна для розуміння трансформацій уявлень про соціально прийнятну і неприйнятну поведінку. В дослідженні використовували метод компонентного аналізу словникових дефініцій для визначення архісеми «негативна оцінка». Матеріал етимологічного словника дозволив простежити трансформації початкових значень. Було сформовано корпус із 48 давньоанглійських прикметників, що містять семми “bad”, “evil”, “wicked” або “hateful”. Аналіз виявив п'ять первинних етимологічних джерел негативної оцінки: домен сенсорного досвіду, домен видимості, домен фізичних відхилень, домен емоцій і розумової діяльності, домен ритуальної та соціальної невдачі. Також було визначено ключову морфологічну стратегію: інверсію позитивних концептів (наприклад, “unweorþlic”, “gōdléas”). Ця стратегія демонструє, що «добро» було первинним станом пізнання, а «погане» визначалося вторинно, як дефіцит або брак добра. Моделювання етимології концепту “bad” доводить, що давньоанглійська аксіологічна категорія формувала бінарну систему цінності і антицінності, яка еволюціонувала від конкретних, функціональних атрибутів до більш абстрактних, етичних суджень. Ці результати підкреслюють нагальну необхідність подальших діахронних досліджень негативної оцінності для повного розуміння витоків і еволюції сучасних аксіологічних систем англійської мови.

Ключові слова: негативна оцінка, аксіологічна система, етимологічний аналіз, діахронне дослідження.

Evaluation, as a linguistic category, occupies a central place in the system of linguistic means used to express human attitude toward reality, functioning as an interlevel category that permeates various levels of the language system.

In contemporary linguistics, there are numerous approaches to classifying evaluation. For our study, the axiological interpretation of evaluation serves as the main approach. The two values of the axiological operator – “good/bad” – allow for the distinction of two types of evaluation: positive (meliorative) and negative (pejorative, derogative). O.L. Biessonova identifies two main poles in the structure of the evaluative category: positive and negative evaluation, which form the fundamental opposition of GOOD / BAD, defined as the “highest level of abstraction”, since these features “can function as a substitute for an axiologically more specifically colored feature”. This classification is the most generalized, as it relies on the axiological basis of the evaluation category to answer the question: whether the author’s statement expresses a positive or negative attitude toward the object of reality, and whether it acknowledges or denies its value (Biessonova, 2003). A.M. Sovenko and V.O. Dorda note that transformations of

evaluation types are possible at the speech level, for instance, neutral lexical units can acquire a positive or negative connotation within a specific context (Sovenko, 2012).

In this system, negative evaluation is not a simple contrast to positive evaluation; it performs specific functions in the axiological organization of reality. As I.V. Onyshchenko notes, negative evaluation often proves to be the marked member of the opposition, which is reflected in the greater semantic density and cultural significance of negatively evaluative concepts (Onyshchenko, 2004).

A fundamental discovery in modern linguistics is the polarity effect, according to which negative evaluation exhibits greater semantic stability compared to positive evaluation. Research by L. Baumgartner, P. Willemsen, and K. Reuter demonstrated that “negative evaluations were significantly harder to cancel compared to positive ones” (Baumgartner, 2022), regardless of whether the evaluative terms were applied to a person’s character or their behavior.

The polarity effect is not limited to isolated lexical units but demonstrates a systemic nature within evaluative semantics. The explanation for the polarity effect lies in the realm of social norms and communicative risks. As researchers note,

“uttering a positive evaluative term without an intention to commit to a positive evaluation seems relatively harmless. Misunderstanding in the case of negative evaluative terms has potentially greater impact” (Baumgartner, 2022). Negative evaluations cause harm to others by diminishing their social status and reputation, which is why people are less inclined to accept the cancellation of a negative evaluation.

Negatively evaluative vocabulary plays a key role in social regulation and maintaining social relationships. R. Anderson et al. argue that “although both praise and condemnation are important for maintaining social relationships and facilitating social regulation, condemning each other has significant social costs for both the condemner and the condemned” (Anderson, 2020). Negative evaluation carries serious social consequences: “Being condemned can have serious consequences, such as loss of reputation and social alliances, social exclusion, or punishment. Hence, wrongfully attributing a condemnation that unfairly causes these negative consequences to a person is itself an act of serious social impact” (Anderson, 2020).

The use or avoidance of negatively evaluative vocabulary functions as a marker of social identity and class affiliation. T.A. Kosmeda notes that evaluation “is a way of verbalizing the value orientations of a certain linguistic community”, where negative evaluation serves to delimit the socially acceptable and unacceptable (Kosmeda, 2020).

The historical reconstruction of axiological systems is essential for understanding the evolution of a society’s value orientations. H.I. Prykhodko emphasizes that the “category of evaluation in the context of changing linguistic paradigms” requires a diachronic approach to reveal the transformations in the conceptual space of evaluation (Prykhodko, 2016). T. Kots supports this view, stating that “the positive or negative content scale of evaluation is formed in accordance with the social, national-cultural, and moral values defined in society”, and that “the natural processes of language development require the renewal of lexical means, expressing various shades of meaning” (Kots, 2021). These changes reflect the evolution of cultural taboos and the transformation of notions about socially unacceptable speech behavior. As Zh.V. Krasnobaieva-Chorna notes, the dynamics of

socio-cultural changes lead to the transformation of evaluative standards (Krasnobaieva-Chorna, 2016).

The reconstruction of historical axiological systems faces methodological difficulties due to the indirect nature of the sources. P.J. Grund points out: “We cannot hope to understand what the representation of speech entails without understanding the linguistic tools that language users employ to represent speech in writing and the varying functions and implications of the choices at the user’s disposal. These mechanisms cannot simply be dismissed or peeled away to reveal the essence of the spoken language; rather they have to be analyzed, described and theorized as a vital part of reconstructing the spoken language of the past” (Grund, 2023).

This emphasizes the need for a comprehensive approach that combines the analysis of linguistic forms with the reconstruction of the social and cultural contexts of their use. This paper models the corresponding etymological peculiarities for negative evaluation (the concept BAD). This comparative approach provides a holistic view of the Old English axiological spectrum by identifying how Old English categorized negative value. A corpus of negative adjectives was compiled using *An Anglo-Saxon Dictionary Online* (Bosworth, 2014) to identify lexemes containing the core sememe “bad”, “evil”, “wicked”, “vicious”, “terrible” or “hateful”. This resulted in a list of 48 adjectives, as shown below in Table 1.

In the procedural-methodological stage, we conducted an analysis of the formed corpus to determine the peculiarities of each word’s meanings and their connection to etymology. Component analysis of the dictionary definitions of each word was performed to isolate the archiseme “negative evaluation” for all words. We analyzed the etymology of the studied words using the *Handbook of Germanic Etymology* (Orel, 2003) to trace their acquisition of evaluative potential through the transformation of initial physical or concrete meanings into abstract concepts and to reveal their implicit meanings.

Based on Table 1, the Old English adjectives meaning “bad” can be profiled by analyzing how their meaning shifted from concrete, physical, or social concepts into the abstract quality of “badness” or “evil”. The etymological analysis of the negative lexemes confirms that concepts of

Table 1

Old English adjectives with the meaning bad

Word	Dictionary Meaning (Bosworth, 2014)	Etymology (Orel, 2003)
1	2	3
forcuþ	perverse, bad, infamous, wicked	PIE *pro- (“before, in front of”) + *ǵneh₃- (“to know”).
mæte	moderate, mean (between two extremes), small, poor, bad	PIE *med- (“to measure”).
yfel	evil, ill, bad	PIE *h₂upélos, from *h₂wep(h₁)- (“bad, evil”).
lāþ	hateful, repulsive	PIE *h₂leytos (“abhorrence, loath”), from *h₂leyt- (“to do something hateful”).
lýðre	evil, wicked, base, mean, poor, sordid, vile	Proto-Germanic *ludraz (“useless; worthless; bad”); PIE *lewk- (“to see, shine”).
mān	wicked, false, base	Proto-Germanic *mainą (damage, sin), evolved from “false oath”.
rædléas	lacking what is advantageous or beneficial, miserable, desolate	PIE *Hréh₁dʰos, from *Hreh₁dʰ- (“to think, arrange”).
unþeāwfæst	of bad habits, vicious, ill-mannered	PIE *(s)teh₂- (“to stand, place”).
wamful	evil, guilty, criminal, flagitious	PIE *wemh₁- (to vomit).
wōh	not right, perverse, froward, wrong, unfair	PIE *wónkos (“crooked, bent”), from *wenk- (“to bend, twist”).
feōnd-lic	devilish, outrageous, hostile	Proto-Germanic *fijandz (present participle of *fijāną “to hate”).
unleóf	not dear, not beloved, odious, hateful	PIE *lewbʰós (“beloved”), from *lewbʰ- (“to desire, love”).
atol, eatol	dire, terrific, terrible, horrid, foul, loathsome	PIE *h₃sed- (“to hate”).
grim	horrible, grievous	PIE *ǵʰrem- (“to resound, thunder, grumble, roar”).
egeful	terrible, horrible	PIE *h₂égʰos (distress).
egelic	terrible, horrible	PIE *h₂égʰos (distress).
unweorþlic	ignoble, disgraceful, infamous	PIE *wert- (“to turn”).
sceand-full	shameful, infamous, vile	PIE *(s)keh₃- (“dark(ness)”).
yfelic	poor, mean, common.	From Proto-Indo-European *h₂upélos, from a root *h₂wep(h₁)- (“bad, evil”).
cystléas	fruitless, reprobate, bad	From Proto-Germanic *kustiz, *kustuz (“choice, trial”), from Proto-Indo-European *ǵéwstus (“try”).
earglic	cowardly, craven, timid	From Proto-Indo-European *h₃orǵʰ-o-s, from *h₃erǵʰ- (“to copulate; ardent”).
fracuþ	vile, filthy, unseemly, hateful, abominable, worthless, useless	2) from Proto-Indo-European *ǵnǵh₃ti, from *ǵneh₃- (“to know”); from Proto-Indo-European *pro- (“before, in front of”).
gōdléas	without good, miserable, wretched	Traditionally derived from Proto-Indo-European *ǵʰutóm (neuter past participle), either meaning “(that which is) invoked”, from *ǵʰewH- (“to call, to invoke”), or “libated, poured as part of a liquid offering”, from *ǵʰew- (“to pour”).
ungōd	not good, evil, bad	Traditionally derived from Proto-Indo-European *ǵʰutóm (neuter past participle), either meaning “(that which is) invoked”, from *ǵʰewH- (“to call, to invoke”), or “libated, poured as part of a liquid offering”, from *ǵʰew- (“to pour”).
lāþwende	evilly disposed, evil, hostile, malignant	2) from Proto-West Germanic *wandī, from Proto-Germanic *wandijaz (“turning, directed”).
lýðerlic	sordid, mean, vile	From Proto-Germanic *ludraz (“useless; worthless; bad”); Proto-Indo-European root lewk- (“to see, shine”).
mānful	evil, wicked, flagitious, producing an evil effect, dire	From Proto-Germanic *mainą (damage, sin); From the same ultimate source as *mainijaną (“to think, mean”), evolved from an earlier sense of “false oath”.
mānidel	wicked and vain	1) from Proto-Germanic *mainą (damage, sin); From the same ultimate source as *mainijaną (“to think, mean”), evolved from an earlier sense of “false oath”; 2) a denominative adjective, from pre-Germanic *ih₁-tlo- or *ih₁-tolos, from Proto-Indo-European *yeh (year; growing season or harvest season).

Continuation of Table 1

1	2	3
nāwiht	good for nothing, worthless, naughty	From *naiw +†*wiht (from Proto-Germanic *wihtą (“entity, thing”)).
rædléas	3) lacking what is advantageous or beneficial, miserable, desolate	From Proto-Germanic *rēdaz (advice) from Proto-Indo-European *Hréd ^h os, from *Hreh ^h d ^h - (“to think, arrange”).
þurh-láð	very hateful, odious	1) from Proto-Germanic *þurhw, from Proto-Indo-European *terh ₂ - (“to pass through”); 2) from Proto-West Germanic *laiþ (“loath, hateful”); Proto-Indo-European *h ₂ leytos (“abhorrence, loath”), from *h ₂ leyt- (“to do something hateful, abhorrent”).
awyrgeðlic	detestable, abominable	From Proto-Germanic *wurgijanaþ, from *wargaz (“outlaw”) (Old English wearg), or from Proto-Indo-European *werg ^h - (“bind, squeeze”).
bismer-full	polluted, abominable, disgraceful	To *smilijanaþ (“to smile”), from Proto-Indo-European *(s)mey- (“to laugh”).
ge-hyspeðlic	despicable, abominable	From Proto-West Germanic *huspijan, from *husp, *hosp, variants of Proto-West Germanic *husk, *hosk (“mockery”); From Proto-Germanic *huskaz, *huskaþ, from Proto-Indo-European *kewd- (“to be naughty, shout, mock”).
for-hogd	despicable, contemptible	From Proto-Germanic *hugjanaþ (“think, consider”), as *hugiz (“understanding, mind”), possibly from Proto-Indo-European *kk-í-s ~ *kk-éy-s, from *kek- (“to be able, capable”).
unweorþlic	3) ignoble, disgraceful, infamous	From Proto-Germanic *werþaz (“towards, opposite”), used substantively as a noun; from Proto-Indo-European *wert- (“to turn”).
sceand-full	shameful, infamous, vile	From Proto-Germanic *skandō (shame), from Proto-Indo-European *(s)keḥ ₃ - (“dark(ness)”).
angrislic	horrible, dreadful	Watkins suggests Proto-Indo-European *g ^h er- (“to grind, rub”), while Orel derives the term from Proto-Indo-European *g ^h rey- (“to smear, paint”).
unfulfremed	Imperfect	From Proto-Germanic *framjanaþ (“to perform, promote”), from Proto-Indo-European *pro-mo- (“forward, front”) + un-.
and-sæte	odious, hateful, abominable	From Proto-West Germanic *sātu, from Proto-Germanic *sētō (ambush), from Proto-Indo-European *sed- (sit).
sæmra	inferior, worse	Proto-Germanic *sēmaz (“half?”).
træg (trægj?)	evil, bad	From a Proto-Indo-European or post-PIE root *d ^h rag ^h - (to pull).
weorr	Bad, grievous	From Proto-Germanic *wirsizō (“worse”), from Proto-Indo-European *wers- (“to rise; peak”).
wiðerweard	5) opposed to the good or pleasure of anything, unfavourable, adverse, hurtful, pernicious, disagreeable	From Proto-Germanic *wiþraþ, from Proto-Indo-European *wíterom, adverbial accusative of *wíteros, from *wí (“apart”).
wirslíc (wyrslíc)	mean, vile	From Proto-Germanic *wirsizō (“worse”), from Proto-Indo-European *wers- (“to rise; peak”).
wāc (-lic)	3) poor, mean, not of great value or in high esteem; vilis. v. wāc-lic, -ness Poor, mean, of little dignity or worth	From Proto-West Germanic *waikw, from Proto-Germanic *waikwaz; reflecting Proto-Indo-European *h ₃ woyg-wo-s and *h ₃ woyg-o-s, with sense development “giving way” > “weak, pliable”.
wōh	2) not right, perverse, froward, wrong, unfair	From Proto-West Germanic *wāh, from Proto-Germanic *wanhaz (bent, crooked); Proto-Indo-European *wónkos (“crooked, bent”), from *wenk- (“to bend, slant, incline, twist, turn”).
an-drysne, on-drysne dryslic, on-drysnlic	terrible, fearful, dreadful	Watkins suggests Proto-Indo-European *g ^h er- (“to grind, rub”), while Orel derives the term from Proto-Indo-European *g ^h rey- (“to smear, paint”).

negative attitude arose from concrete, physical, or social phenomena, subsequently undergoing conceptual metaphorization to acquire abstract meaning. Five primary sources of negative evaluation are observed:

1. From the domain of sensory experience: noise, touch, and disgust

A significant portion of Old English vocabulary for “bad” originates from intense physical sensations – noises, visceral reactions, or terrifying

tactile experiences. In this domain, “evil” is something that assaults the senses. The adjective **grim** (fierce, horrible) traces back to the PIE root ***g^hrem-**, meaning “to resound, thunder, or roar”. Here, the semantic shift moves from a terrifying natural sound to the emotional quality of being fierce, terrifying or cruel. Similarly, “badness” can be vocalized through social aggression. **Bismerfull** derives from PIE ***(s)mey-** (“to smile or laugh”), shifting from a neutral gesture to a hostile “smirk” or mockery. **Ge-hyspendlic** (abominable) follows a similar path from PIE ***kewd-** (“to shout, mock”), where the act of vocal abuse defines the object as worthy of that abuse. **Wamful** (corrupt, sinful) originates from the root ***wemh₁-** (“to vomit”), identifying moral corruption with physical nausea. Finally, **Atol** (dire, loathsome) comes directly from the emotional reflex itself, deriving from PIE ***h₃ed-** (“to hate”); if an object provokes hate, it is intrinsically “bad”.

2. From the domain of visibility: light and darkness

The interplay between light and dark offers a complex, dualistic evolution of “bad”. On one hand, evil is associated with hiding or with the fear of unknown and unseen. Thus, **sceand-full** (“shameful, vile”) derived from PIE ***(s)keh₃-** (“darkness” or “shadow”) is obvious evolution of the meaning.

On the other hand, the adjective **lyðre** (wretched, wicked) presents an etymological paradox. It derives from the PIE root ***lewk-** (“to see, shine, light”) and in certain specific contexts, the meaning shifted from “shining/visible” to “exposed”, thus, supposing that to be **lyðre** is to be exposed and unprotected.

3. From the domain of physical deviation: bent, twisted and broken

This domain relies on a geometric metaphor: “good” is straight and whole; “bad” is bent, broken, opposing or defective.

The most prominent example is **wōh** (wrong, perverse), which comes from PIE ***wenk-** (“to bend, twist”). A “wrong” action is simply one that deviates from the straight path. Similarly, **wiðerweard** (hostile) comes from a root meaning “apart” or “against”, suggesting spatial opposition.

Defective measurement also signifies badness. **Māete** (poor, bad) comes from ***med-** (“to measure”). The meaning deteriorated from “measured/moderate” to “small” and finally “insufficient”.

Wāc (vile, weak) evolved from ***h₃woyg-** (“pliable/yielding”). Physical flexibility was reinterpreted as a lack of moral strength (“weak”), which eventually became a moral failing (“vile”).

4. From the domain of emotions and mental activities

In this domain, “badness” is not a physical property but a psychological one. It is defined either by a failure of the intellect (bad judgment, lack of wisdom) or by the emotional recoil (fear, hatred, rejection) that an object provokes. Here, the “bad” is simply that which the mind rejects or the heart fears. A significant strand of Old English vocabulary equates “bad” with “stupid”, “ill-advised”, or “thoughtless”. In this worldview, virtue requires intelligence and foresight; therefore, a lack of mental activity leads to a “bad” or miserable state. **Cystléas** (reprobate, fruitless) comes from Proto-Germanic **kustiz** (“choice, trial”), rooted in PIE **g^hewstus** (“to taste, try”). The privative form **cystléas** implies a failure of the discriminative faculty – an inability to choose the good, resulting in a “worthless” or “reprobate” character. **Feōnd-lic** (hostile, devilish) is derived from the present participle of the verb **fi^hānā** (“to hate”). The adjective captures the active emotional state of hostility. To be “bad” is to actively project hatred toward others.

5. From the domain of ritual and social failure

Mān-ful (wicked, criminal) illustrates this concept. It is derived from Proto-Germanic **mainā** (“harm” or “sin”), which evolved specifically from the concept of the “false oath”. In this worldview, lying under oath was not merely dishonest; it was an act of metaphysical violence. **Awyrge^hndlic** (detestable, accursed) reveals the ultimate social punishment. It traces back to the Proto-Germanic **wargaz**, meaning “outlaw”. The “bad” person is conceptually linked to the criminal who has been banished to the wilderness. Here, “evil” is the state of being legally severed from humanity.

Another important fact to be mentioned about the etymology of adjectives denoting “bad” in the Old English period is word formation, namely the inversion of positive concepts.

Rather than relying solely on unique roots to describe “bad” (such as **yfel** or **lāp**), Old English frequently constructed negative evaluation by simply negating positive appraisal. This morphological strategy reflects a specific

worldview: “bad” is not necessarily an independent item, but rather a deficiency or a lack of “good”.

Through the use of the negative prefix **un-** and the privative suffix **-léas**, the language implies that “good” is the primary state of cognition, and “bad” is defined through as a secondary one: **unweorþlic, unþeāwfæst, rædléas, gōdléas**.

Thus, the conducted research confirms that negative appraisal is a complex, multifaceted phenomenon that requires an integrated approach in its research. Negative evaluative vocabulary is

distinctly culturally conditioned, closely tied to taboos and social conventions and development. The modeling of the evolution of adjectives belonging to the concept BAD in Old English, suggests primary sources of negative evaluation (from the domain of sensory experience, domain of visibility, domain of physical deviation, domain of emotions and mental activities, and of ritual and social failure) and proves that the Old English axiological category is formed from concrete, functional attributes to more abstract, ethical judgments.

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