PAPER SUBMITTED FOR ORAL PRESENTATION

Quantifying and assessing the spelling consistency of Old English. A corpus-based analysis.

It is a well-known fact that the spelling of Old English texts shows variation, on which the editors of specific works usually comment. An overall picture of the consistency and the associated variation of Old English spelling has not been offered so far, though. For this reason, the aims of this paper are to quantify the spelling variation of Old English and to assess its degree of orthographic consistency. These aims comprise the following tasks: (i) to identify the sets of variants by text and, when possible, by author; (ii) to classify variants by word position (prefix-stem-suffix), morphological feature, lexical class, and word origin; and (iii) to analyse the correlation between spelling variation and textual frequency. On the explanatory side, the question of whether or not variation predicts change is addressed. The analysis is exhaustive (token level) and is carried out by text. This allows for generalisations involving types of texts and the whole corpus. Further methodological aspects include the source of data (around 1.5 million tokens, prose texts), which have been retrieved from the *York-Toronto-Helsinki Parsed Corpus of Old English Prose* (Taylor et al. 2003); and the scope, which is restricted to inflectional forms with the same morphological features, as shown in the example.

Token	Category	Tag	Text code
bigengum	noun	N^D	coaelhom.o3.pos
biggengum	noun	N^D	coaelhom.o3.pos
biggencgum	noun	N^D	coaelhom.o3.pos

The main conclusion of the paper is that, when considered by text, the spelling of Old English prose is fairly consistent. An initial analysis turns out approximately 5,000 sets of spelling variants in 1.5 million tokens. It also suggests that not all spelling variations can be attributed to change in progress. Conclusions are expected too as to individual texts, text types, authors, textual frequency, lexical categories and word origin.

References
Taylor, A., A. Warner, S. Pintzuk and F. Beths. 2003. *The York-Toronto-Helsinki Parsed Corpus of Old English Prose* [https://www-users.york.ac.uk/~lang22/YcoeHome1.htm].