Preface

Exploring Early Medieval English Eloquence: A Digital Humanities Approach with A Thesaurus of Old English and Evoke

The field of Old English studies owes a great debt of gratitude to the editors of *A Thesaurus of Old English* (*TOE*). Ever since its publication in 1995, *TOE* has been the point of departure for many scholars working on aspects of the language and culture of early medieval England. Whether doing a semantic field study or a literary-critical analysis, scholars have profited from the ability to look up which Old English words were available to denote particular concepts. This special issue of *Amsterdamer Beiträge zur älteren Germanistik* is devoted to this important lexicographic resource and how the web application Evoke has enabled scholars to further explore Old English lexis.¹

The issue opens with a contribution by Jane Roberts, who describes the genesis of *TOE*. Originating as a pilot study for the Glasgow *Historical Thesaurus* project, *TOE* grew into an essential resource in its own right; it was first published in 1995, with a second impression in 2000, and was then made available online in 2005. In its online form, *TOE* is from time to time updated and the editors continue to welcome suggestions for improvement. In her conclusion, Roberts suggests a number of future ways in which scholars might interact with the *TOE* data through the supplementation of additional information on individual words (e.g., dialects, origins, distribution across the corpus) and subsequent analysis of this information within the semantic hierarchy of *TOE*. These research opportunities are facilitated by the web application Evoke, developed by Sander Stolk, whose contribution logically follows that of Roberts within this special issue. Approaching the *TOE* from a digital humanities perspective, Stolk describes how Evoke was created in response to various research needs, including user-friendly navigation, viewing, extension, linking and analysis of thesaurus content. Using Semantic Web technologies in order to make thesaurus content available in Linguistic Linked Data form, Evoke enables researchers to supplement existing thesauri, such as *TOE*, without altering original

1 Some of the datasets underlying the contributions to this special issue have been made publicly available and can be browsed through the Evoke platform via <http://evoke.ullet.net/content>.

datasets. Stolk's contribution outlines how Evoke and a Linguistic Linked Data version of *TOE* create new opportunities for research. All subsequent contributions to this special issue demonstrate the potential of Evoke to impact the study of Old English and, more broadly, the ways in which digital approaches, like Evoke, may affect the future of lexicography and onomasiology.

The next three contributions each showcase how enriching the *TOE* dataset with custom-made labels through Evoke leads to new insights. First, Thijs Porck demonstrates how Evoke can be used to create 'onomasiological profiles' of individual Old English texts by tagging all words that occur in *Beowulf*, *Andreas* and the *Old English Martyrology*. This process has created workable prototypes of textual thesauri that can be browsed and analyzed within Evoke; Porck shows how a comparative analysis of these textual thesauri brings to light new and distinctive patterns of vocabulary use in these texts. Next, Amos van Baalen uses Evoke in a similar manner in order to create an onomasiological profile of an individual author, Ælfric of Eynsham. Rather than tagging all words known to have been used by Ælfric, van Baalen first establishes and categorizes those words that have been identified as being representative of 'Ælfrician' vocabulary; next, he analyzes these words through Evoke in order to comment on such aspects as the ambiguity, synonymy and semantic distribution of the words that may be said to represent Ælfric's lexical preferences. Turning to the field of Emotion studies, the contribution by Khan et al. constitutes an exploration of how Evoke may be used to visualize, navigate and explore conceptual mappings within the Old English vocabulary of *SHAME*.

Two further contributions report on efforts to use Evoke to link the Old English words captured by the *TOE* dataset to words in related languages. Rita van de Poel and Sander Stolk focus on the semantic field of *KINSHIP* in Old English and Old Frisian. They demonstrate how Evoke facilitates comparative analyses between these two languages on an onomasiological level and argue that such analyses can uncover new linguistic and cultural insights into how two language communities conceptualized aspects relating to family, ancestry, descent, and adoption. Taking a more technical route, Katrien Depuydt and Jesse de Does reflect on their experiments with manual and automatic techniques to link information from the *Dictionary of Old Dutch* to the *TOE* dataset available in Evoke. Can the existing onomasiological macrostructure of *TOE* be used to create a thesaurus of Old Dutch? Depuydt and de Does outline the possibilities and potential pitfalls involved in such an endeavour.

The last contribution to this special issue looks at the didactic potential of *A Thesaurus of Old English* and Evoke. Kees Dekker shares his experiences of using these resources in a classroom context through a series of increasingly challenging assignments. As Dekker demonstrates, Evoke is a valuable addition

to a teacher's tool set, as it invites students and researchers alike to explore Old English in novel and interesting ways.

Taken together, the contributions to this special issue show how the development of digital research tools can be a powerful impetus for future research. The development of Evoke has been greatly aided by the collaborative spirit of the scholars whose work is included here. Their projects were developed and presented at three workshops organized between 2019 and 2021, where collegial feedback and a cooperative atmosphere helped shape everyone's efforts. The concluding workshop was part of the *International Conference on English Historical Linguistics 21* (ICEHL-21) and the editors would like to thank the organisers as well as all participants for their helpful comments on the presentations. In addition, the editors would like to thank the anonymous peer reviewers whose feedback was essential for the contributions in this special issue. The project 'Exploring Medieval English Eloquence' was supported by the LUCAS Extra Resources Open Call-II Grant 2020, awarded by the Leiden University Centre for the Arts in Society, and the LUCDH Small Grant 2018, awarded by the Leiden University Centre for Digital Humanities. These grants enabled the organisation of the workshops as well as the hiring of student assistant Lucas Gahrman, whose assistance was fundamental throughout the project. Additional thanks are due to Rob Zandvliet and Arend Quak for their patience and support in bringing this volume to press.

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