

## On the prehistory of Old Engl. *eom* vs. *bēo(m)* ‘be’

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### The issues

- Old English (OE): two present-tense paradigms for ‘be’ – one from PIE *\*h<sub>1</sub>es-* ‘be’ with unmarked function (E), the other reflecting *\*bhuH-* ‘be(come)’ with habitual or future function (B)
- Continental West Germanic (CWG): The two verbs appear to be merged into a single paradigm
- A similar distinction in (Old and) Middle Welsh and the other (Insular) Celtic languages

### Illustration 1

	OLD ENGLISH		OLD SAXON	OLD HIGH GERMAN
	E-forms	B-forms		
1SG	eom/(e)am	bēo(m)/bīo(m)	bium	bim
2SG	eart	bis(t)	bis(t)	bis(t)
3SG	is	bip	is(t)	ist
1PL {				birum
2PL }	sind(-on)/(earon)	bēoþ/bi(o)ðun	sind(-un)	birut
3PL {				sint(-un)

### Illustration 2

	MIDDLE WELSH		OLD IRISH	
1SG	wyf/oef	byddaf	am	bíuu/-bíu
2SG	wyt	byddy	at	-bí
3SG	yw/oes/ys	bydd [bið]	is	bíid/-bí
1PL	ym	byddwn	ammi	bímmi/-biam
2PL	ywch	byddwch	adib	---
3PL	ynt	byddan(t)	it	bíit/-bíat

“**Anglocentric**” position (e.g. Lutz 2009, Wischer 2010; see also Keller 1925, Tolkien 1955, Trudgill 2011) –

- The OE double paradigm reflects Welsh substratum
- ... under extremely unequal social conditions
- The single CWG paradigm is original
- No account for derivation of OE double paradigm from earlier single paradigm
- No explanation for the single paradigm of CWG

### Schumacher (2007) –

- The double paradigm is Common West Germanic
- Continental Celtic (Gaulish) influence
- CWG merged the two paradigms
- OE preserved the double paradigm because of Welsh contact
- Proto-Celtic function: “Habitual”, plus meaning ‘become’
- Middle Welsh Future is secondary.

**Lutz (2009)** – Schumacher’s proposed Continental West Germanic paradigm merger is highly unlikely

### This paper

- Evaluate the different proposals
- Show that a (modified) version Schumacher’s 2007 account can be sustained
  1. Some form of the double paradigm was shared by West Germanic, Celtic, **and Latin/Italic**
  2. Original meaning: ‘become, happen, come about’  
Original function: perfective  
Habitual and future functions are language-specific or regional innovations
  3. Similarities between Welsh and English reflect contact, which may have been bidirectional (DNA evidence, Schiffels et al. 2022).

*Illustration 3: The E-paradigm (square bracketed forms are innovated)*

	PIE	pre-Gmc	PGmc.	Goth.	Old Norse	Old English
1SG	*h <sub>1</sub> ésmi	*ésmi	*imm	im	em	eom/eam
2SG	*h <sub>1</sub> ési	*ési	*is	is	es-t → ert	[eart]
3SG	*h <sub>1</sub> ésti	*ésti	*ist	ist	es → er	is
1PL	*h <sub>1</sub> smé/ó-[*esmé/ó]	[*izum]	[sijum]	erum		[sind(-on)]
2PL	*h <sub>1</sub> sté	[*esté]	[*izuþ]	[sijuþ]	eruþ	[sind(-on)]
3PL	*h <sub>1</sub> sénti	*senti	*sind	sind	[eru]	sind(-on)

### B-paradigm

- Thematic OE, Celtic, Latin forms derivable from **thematic** \*bh<sub>1</sub>ye/yo- (Lühr 1984, LIV<sup>2</sup>, and Hill 2012 – some disagreements/uncertainties)
- PIE: \*bh<sub>1</sub>H- **perfective** vs. imperfective \*h<sub>1</sub>es- ‘be’

(1) OLD ENGLISH

a. Habitual

*selre bið æghwæm /*  
better B.PRS.3SG everyone.DAT.SG

*þæt he his freond wrece*  
that he his friend avenge.SUBJV.3SG

‘It is better for everyone that he avenge his friend.’ (Beowulf 1384-1385)

b. Future

*ne bið þe wilna gad*  
NEG B.PRS.3SG you.SG.DAT desire.GEN.PL dearth.NOM.SG

‘There shall be no dearth of desires for you.’ (Beowulf, 661)

c. Both E and B in Habitual function

*fader urer ðu arð t bist*  
father our you.NOM.SG E.PRS.2SG or B.PRS.2SG

*in heofnum t in heofnas*  
in heaven.DAT.PL or in heaven.ACC.PL

‘Our father (who) thou art or “be’s” in the heavens.’ (Lindisfarne Gospels, Matth. 6.9)

(2) OLD AND MIDDLE WELSH (but only Habitual in Breton)

a. Habitual

*bit amlwc marchawc*  
B.PRS.3SG visible horseman

‘A horseman is (always) visible.’

b. Future

*ny byd gwaeth it yno nocet y arthur*  
NEG B.PRS.3SG worse for you there than to Arthur

*yn y llys*  
in the palace

‘It won’t be worse for you there than for Arthur at the royal palace.’

(3) OLD IRISH

Habitual

*ní-bi lesach nach súanach*  
NEG.B.PRS.3SG successful any/some lazy

‘A lazy person is not successful.’

**Residual meaning ‘become’ of B-paradigm – Old English, Old Irish**

- (4) *gecwæð þæt þas stanes hlafes bēon t gewærðe*  
say.IMPV.2SG that these stones loaves B.SUBJV.PL or become.SUBJV.PL  
‘... say that these stone should B or ‘become’ stones.’ (Rushworth Gospels, Matth. 4.3)

- (5) a. *com·bi*                      *descipul*  
           so that-be.PRS.3SG disciple  
           ‘so that he becomes a disciple’  
       b. *com·bi*                      *dias mór*  
           so that-be.PRS.3SG ear    great  
           ‘so that it becomes a great ear’

Middle Welsh: Verbal compounds with *bydd-* as second member ‘add the meaning ‘become’ to verbs indicating a state of being’ (Pederson 1913), as in *bwy-bydaf* ‘I know’, *bwy-byd* ‘knows’.

**‘Become’ in Latin/Italic**

B-forms are suppletive passive of *faciō* ‘do, make’, but commonly still mean ‘become, come about, happen’

*Illustration 4*

	Latin E-forms	Latin B-forms
1SG	sum	fīō
2SG	es	fīs
3SG	est	fīt > fīt
1PL	sumus	fīmus
2PL	estis	fītis
3PL	sunt	fīunt

*Illustration 5*

	Old English	Middle Welsh	Old Breton Cornish	Old Irish	Latin/Italic
‘become’	(+)	(+)	?	(+)	(+)
Habitual	+	+	+	+	-
Future	+	+	-	-	-

**English dialectal paradigm merger** (counterevidence to Lutz)

*Illustration 6* (Darlington 1887, Kruisinga 1904, Lass 1984, Laing 2010)

	Cheshire/ Shropshire	Warwickshire/ Somerset	West Somerset	Early Southern Middle English
1SG	<b>bin</b>	<b>be</b>	<b>bī</b>	AM
2SG	<b>bist</b>	<b>be</b>	(Ā)RT	ART
3SG	IST	IS	Z	IS
PL	<b>bin</b>	<b>be</b>	<b>bi, m</b>	<b>be(o)p</b>

- Similar paradigm merger in certain Italian dialects with HAVE in first and second persons and BE in the third person (or other merger patterns); e.g. D’Alessandro 2017, Baldi & Savoia 2019
- Note also Skt. *pratyāñc-/pratīc-*

Illustration 7

	PGmc. E	PGmc. B	Old Saxon	Old High German
1 SG	*IMM	*biū	biuM	biM
2 SG	*IS	*bis	bis-t	bis-t
3 SG	*IST	*biþ/ð	IST	IST
1 PL	*IZUM	*bi(j)um	{	biRUM
2 PL	*IZUþ/ð	*bi(j)uþ/ð	{ SIND(-ON) }	biRUT
3 PL	*SIND	*bi(j)un	}	SINT(-UN)

**W(erðan) in competition with B-paradigm** (Diewald & Wischer)

**W-paradigm: perfective, tending toward future use**

- (6) Greek *ésontai* *gàr hoi ánthrōpoi* *phílautoi*  
 be.FUT.3PL for the man.NOM.PL.M self.loving.NOM.PL.M
- Goth. *jah wairþand mannans sik frijondans*  
 & W.PRS.3PL men.NOM.PL refl.ACC loving.NOM.PL.M  
 ‘... for/and people will be lovers of themselves.’ (2Tim 3:2A)
- (7) a. *sem þeir eiga eða eigandi verða*  
 REL they own.PRS.3PL or owning.N.PL.M W.PRS.3PL  
 ‘... which they own or will own.’
- b. *jeg verð búinn á morgun*  
 I W.PRS.1SG make.ready.PFV.PPL.N.SG.M in the morning  
 ‘I will be ready in the morning.’
- (8) Latin *et spiritu sancto replebitur*  
 & holy spirit.ABL fill.FUT.PASS.3SG
- OHG *inti heilages geistes uuirdit gifullit*  
 & holy spirit.GEN W.PRS.3SG fill.PST.PPL
- OE & *gaaste haleg gefylled bið*  
 & holy spirit.DAT fill.PST.PPL B.PRS.3SG  
 ‘... and they will be filled with the Holy Spirit.’
- (9) OHG *Súnter thaz giscrib min wirdit bézira sin,*  
 but my writing W.PRS.3SG better be.INF  
*búazent síno gúati thio mino míssodati.*  
 atone.PRS.3PL his qualities my mistakes  
 ‘But my writing will be better (if) his (the reader’s) qualities atone for my mistakes.’ (Otfrid 5.25.45)
- (10) a. *seo eaðær wyrð to miclum sæ*  
 that river there W.PRS.3SG to (a) great sea  
 ‘The river there becomes a great sea.’
- b. *sume wurdon to wulfan*  
 some W.PST.3PL to wolves  
 ‘Some became wolves.’

- (11) a. *tacnu wurðap on eow*  
 signs W.PRS.3PL on you [PL]  
 ‘There will be signs on you.’  
 (Lat. *erunt* [FUT] *in te signa*; Deut. 28.46)
- b. *ne wyrð her nan to lafe*  
 NEG W.PRS.3SG here no-one to remnant  
 ‘Nobody will be left (Exod. 10.26)’

*Illustration 8: OE relation between B and W*

	B-paradigm	W-paradigm
‘become’	(+)	+
Future	+	(+)

### Modals in future function and marginalization of B-paradigm in English

- (10) a. Old High German  
*nu scal mih suasat chind*  
 now SHALL.PRS.3SG I.ACC.SG own child.NOM.SG.N  
*suertu hauwan*  
 sword.DAT.SG.N slay.INF  
 ‘Now (my) own child will slay me.’ (Hildebrand)
- b. **Old English**  
*ic wille wyrcean min setl*  
 I.NOM WILL.1SG establish.INF my seat.ACC.SG.N  
 ‘I will establish my throne’ (Ælfred’s transl. of Gregory’s *Cura pastoralis*. Latin original: *ponam FUT sedem meam.*)

*Illustration 9: Merger as regional result of marginalization*

“Type 1” Southern Middle English

	E-paradigm
1SG	AM
2SG	ART
3SG	IS
1/2/3PL	<b>be(o)þ</b>

### Modals and/or W-paradigm marginalize B-paradigm in CWG

*Illustration 10: Regionally different mergers*

	OHG	MIDDLE DUTCH	OLD SAXON	OLD (E) FRIS.	MOD. W FRIS.
1SG	bim	bem/(bim)	<b>bium</b>	bim	bin
2SG	bis(t)	bes(t)/(bis(t))	bis(t)	—	bist
3SG	ist	es/is	is(t)	is	is
1PL	birum	[sijn]	{ sind(-un) {	send }	} <b>binne</b> }
2PL	birut	[sijt]			
3PL	sint(-un)	[sijn]			

## 5. Summary and outlook

- Coexistence of athematic E-paradigm *\*h<sub>1</sub>es-mi* with thematic present B-paradigm *\*bh<sub>1</sub>yō* – Regional Indo-European innovation of Latin (Italic), Celtic, and West Germanic. (No clear evidence for the rest of Germanic.)
- The original meaning and function of the B-paradigm – ‘become, come about, happen’, perfective
- (Insular) Celtic innovation – Habitual function of B-paradigm
- Welsh – Future function, a regional innovation, **after Anglo-Saxon arrival** (not found in Breton, which leaves for the continent)
- West Germanic – competition of B-paradigm with pan-Germanic W-paradigm, both perfective and tending toward Future
- For Future there was also competition by Modals
- In CWG, W-paradigm (High German) or Modals prevailed, marginalizing the B-paradigm, which merged with the unmarked E-paradigm in regionally different ways
- Lutz’s argument against this merger cannot be sustained in light of the similar merger in regional post-Old English (see also Italian, Sanskrit)
- In English, the B-paradigm (temporarily) prevailed over the W-paradigm in Future function, competing with Modals
- ... it also acquired a new Habitual function
- Post-Old English: Modals in Future function marginalized the B-paradigm.
- Southern/southwestern varieties merged the B-paradigm into the E-paradigm, in regionally different ways.
- Both Welsh and English developed Habitual **and** Future functions for the B-paradigm, and apparently at the same time (the arrival of the Anglo-Saxons)
- ... in Middle Welsh the Future function was innovated
- ... in Old English the Habitual function was innovated
- Welsh might perhaps have innovated first and Old English acquired both Habitual and Future functions from Welsh
- Or – Middle Welsh acquired Future function from Old English; Old English acquired Habitual function from Middle Welsh
- If correct, the latter account has implications for understanding the interaction between Welsh and English during the Old English period – note recent genomic study of Schiffels et al. (2022)
- At any rate, the Anglocentric proposal is oversimplified and fails to account not only for Old English but also for Continental West Germanic (and perhaps even for Welsh)

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