

# Word Loss in the History of the English Language: A First Attempt of Quantifying Losses in the Vocabulary from Old English to Present Day English

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While the adoption of new words into the English lexicon through processes like borrowing or word-formation has been extensively researched, the other side – the loss of words from the English lexicon – has not been given nearly as much attention. Aside from the more expectable cases of words dying because the concept they refer to is no longer relevant to a speech community, there are many instances of word loss in English in which the concept indeed survives and is now expressed by a new, oftentimes borrowed form. Although the fact that English has lost huge amounts of its inherited, Germanic vocabulary is well-known, what is, for instance, lacking so far is data attempting to quantify this. However, this is a rather difficult task given the patchy record of stages of the language that still retained much of the Germanic vocabulary on the one hand and the difficulty of clearly defining a ‘time of death’ of a word on the other hand.

The aim of this project is to quantify the amount of loss (and survival) of simple lexemes (i.e., lexemes containing only one free lexical morpheme) attested in Old English in the course of time up until Present Day English. Two different approaches will be taken: First, the 200 most frequent words of the frequency-based word list by Cichosz et al. 2022, comprising the 2725 most frequent words appearing in prose texts written in Old English that are included in the *York-Toronto-Helsinki Parsed Corpus of Old English Prose* (Taylor et al. 2003), will be compared to the last 200 words of the list, which will give some indication on the question of how the frequency of lexical items determines their tendency to survive. Second, all simple lexemes listed under the letter G in the *DOE* will be assessed regarding survival rates into PDE. Following quantification, the data will be further analyzed qualitatively, critical cases will be highlighted in order to illustrate methodological challenges of such a study and potential causes of loss will be discussed.

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