

Booster prefixes in Old English – an alternative view of the roots of ME *forsooth*¹

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Prefixes attached to adjectives/adverbs which are functionally equivalent to booster adverbs, i.e. booster prefixes, are frequent in both Present-day German and Old English. Among the Old English booster prefixes, whose inventory is here discussed in a first survey, *for-* is by far the most frequent, with respect to both types and tokens. In a more detailed analysis, the study investigates the Old English roots of ME *forsooth(e)*, an emphazier which became highly frequent at the beginning of Middle English. *Forsooth* is commonly considered to be a unverbated and lexicalized form of an Old English prepositional phrase *for soþ* ‘for truth’ (comparable to PDE *indeed* (< ‘in the deed’) or *in fact*). Yet analyses of the inventory of booster prefixes in Old English and the booster prefix *for-* in particular show that an alternative etymology may be suggested: Old English *for soþ* can also be analysed as the (endingless) accusative singular neuter of the adjective *forsoþ* ‘very true’.

1 Introductory remarks

English adverbs which function as positive ‘scaling devices’ (Quirk, Greenbaum, Leech & Svartvik 1985: 445), i.e. adverbs such as Old English (OE) *swiþe* or *ful*, Middle English (ME) *ful* or *riht* or Present-day English (PDE) *very* or *terribly* have received much attention from both a diachronic and a synchronic perspective, and in both theoretical and corpus studies.² A prototypical, and indeed the most frequent function of these INTENSIFIERS – which are in more narrow definitions called BOOSTERS (Quirk et al. 1985: 445, Peters 1993) – is that of modifying adjectives, in particular gradable adjectives, which are scaled upwards from an assumed norm with regard to their extent (*very tall/long/young/old*, etc.) or intensity (*terribly noisy/funny*, etc.). Nevertheless, even adjectives which are claimed to be nongradable because they have inherently absolute (PDE *dead, true, unique*) or superlative (PDE *perfect*) meanings are frequently modified by boosters, this being ‘not at all unusual in conversation, for example: . . . *That’s very true*’ (Biber, Johansson, Leech, Conrad & Finegan 1999: 526; on the gradability of these adjectives, see Paradis this issue).

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² For the various terms, wide and narrow definitions and a survey of research, see Peters (1993: 1–39), Méndez-Naya (2003: 373–5).

2 Booster prefixes in Present-day English

Adverbs functioning as boosters are not the only devices used for positive scaling; crosslinguistically, another very common means is the prefixation of adjectives. Functionally speaking, prefixes – i.e. bound morphemes occurring in initial position in word formations – are equivalent to adverbs when they modify an adjective or a verb (see, e.g. Kastovsky 1992: 377, who gives the Old English examples *sin-ceald* ‘perpetually cold’ and *mis-cweþan* ‘to speak ill’).

In Present-day English, booster prefixes attached to adjectives are, in contrast to Present-day German (PDG) and Old English (see sections 3 and 4 below), not very common.

Literature on Standard Present-day English only lists the following three booster prefixes:³

- {*hyper-*} *hyperactive*, *hypercritical* (*OED* s.v. *hyper-* prefix II)
 attested as a booster prefix in English from Late Middle English; used extensively from the seventeenth century
 Nonbooster uses: local ‘over, beyond, above’: *hypercreaturely*
 Etymology: Old Greek *ὑπέρ* (adv., prep.) ‘over, above’;
 cf. Old Greek prefix *ὑπέρ-* ‘immensely’ (e.g. *ὑπέρμεγας* ‘immensely great’, *ὑπέρκαλος* ‘immensely beautiful’)
- {*super-*} *super-intellectual*, *super-moral* (*OED* s.v. *super-* prefix II)
 attested as a booster prefix in English from the fifteenth century
 Nonbooster uses: local ‘over, above, at the top of’: *superaerial* ‘situated above the air or atmosphere’, *superlabial* ‘placed over the lip’⁴
 Etymology: Latin *super* (adv., prep.) ‘over, above’;
 cf. Late/Medieval Latin *super-felix*, *super-beatus* ‘exceedingly happy’ (see Stotz 2000: 428)
- {*ultra-*} *ultra-leftist*, *ultra-modern*, *ultra-conservative* (cf. *OED* s.v. *ultra-* prefix 3)
 attested as a booster prefix in English since the eighteenth century
 Nonbooster uses: a) local: ‘lying spatially beyond’ – PDE *ultraterrestrial* (*OED* s.v. *ultra-* prefix 1);
 b) ‘going beyond, surpassing the limits of’ – PDE *ultra-human*, *ultra-natural* (*OED* s.v. *ultra-* prefix 2).

³ See the lists in Marchand (1969: 139–208), Quirk et al. (1985: 1542–3 (I.24)), Bauer & Huddleston (2002: 1678–80) and the account of *mega-*, *ultra-*, *super-* and *hyper-* in Fischer (1994), who examines the frequency of these prefixes (with nominal, verbal and adjectival bases) in different sections of the *Guardian*. Intensifying prefixes are, for example, not discussed at all in Biber et al. (1999). For earlier booster forms meaning ‘beyond, more than’, such as *extra-special*, see Marchand (1969: 165–6).

⁴ In these local uses, *super-* sometimes varies with *supra-* (the strict antonym of *infra-* ‘below, beneath’), e.g. *super-/supra-local*, *super-/supra-orbital*.

Etymology: Latin *ultra* ‘beyond’ (adv., prep.); employed as a prefix in postclassical Latin in the sense ‘lying spatially beyond or on the other side of’ (cf. *ultramontanus* ‘beyond the mountain’); according to the *OED* (s.v. *ultra-* prefix), the English booster sense originated in French with the terms *ultra-révolutionnaire*, *ultra-royaliste*, etc.

Frequency counts of the *Guardian* 1991 by Fischer (1994) show that, with adjectival bases,⁵ *ultra-* (48 types) and *super-* (39 types) are far more frequent than *hyper-* (16 types) and the as yet nonstandard *mega-* (five types).⁶ In addition to the small number of booster prefixes in Present-day English, it is striking that none of them is of native origin. All of them date back to (neoclassical) Latin or Greek prepositional or adverbial roots with a local/dimensional meaning ‘over, above, beyond’, i.e. a local/dimensional source domain which Peters (1993) has argued is prototypical for adverbial boosters (see below, section 3). Most of them are so-called ‘internationalisms’, since they are used as booster prefixes in many contemporary European languages, such as German, French or Spanish (see, e.g., *OED* s.v. *ultra-* prefix; for German, the list in section 3, below; for Spanish, Varela & Martín-García 1999: 5026–7). In Present-day English none of them is exclusively used in a booster function, but all of them also keep their original local/dimensional meaning ‘over, beyond’. Scaling adjectives (or adverbs) by prefixation is thus not a very common means for speakers of Present-day English; accordingly, new booster prefixes are not coined on a regular basis.

3 Booster prefixes in Present-day German

In Present-day German on the other hand, positive scaling by booster prefixes is very common, with prefixes such as *hoch-* ‘high’ or *höchst-* ‘highest’, *ober-* ‘over’, or *ur-* (a lexicalized form of ‘out of’). In fact, new booster prefixes are coined regularly, especially in youth/teenager language and slang: see, for instance, the very recent use of *end(s)-* (< ‘end’ (+ {s})) in *end(s)geil* ‘very appealing’, *end(s)langweilig* ‘very boring’

⁵ *Super-* and *ultra-* are also frequently used to modify nouns, e.g. *supermarket*, *superman*, *ultra-feminist*, *ultra-nationalist*, etc. Other prefixes attached to nominal bases are *arch-* (e.g. *arch-hypocrite*, *arch-enemy*) and *mega-* (e.g. *megacity*, *mega-hit*, *megamarket*, *megamerger*). For all attestations – i.e. the prefixes attached to nominal, verbal and adjectival bases – Fischer’s analysis yielded the following numbers: *super-* (132 types / 312 tokens), *ultra-* (61 types / 92 tokens), *mega-* (36 types / 60 tokens), *hyper-* (29 types / 110 tokens); see Fischer (1994: 88, 91–3).

⁶ In the literature, *mega-* (cf. *OED* s.v. *mega-* combining form) is classified as a prefix modifying nouns only, which itself may be converted into an adjective, as in (i) *It’s really mega!* (Bauer & Huddleston 2002: 1678). Not surprisingly, therefore, a cursory check on the internet suggests that *mega-* is now quite frequently used as a booster prefix modifying adjectives in colloquial language (e.g. forms such as *megacool*, *megacute*, etc.). Fischer (1994: 88–91) only finds institutionalized forms with nominal bases; for adjectival derivatives, she lists *mega-budgeted*, *mega-charitable*, *mega-fundraising*, *mega-international*, *mega-layered* and *mega-trendy* (six types).

or forms such as *sauspännend* ‘lit. pig-interesting; very interesting’ or *oberaffengeil* ‘lit. upper/over monkey-cute; very appealing’, etc.).

In their survey of Present-day German word formation, Fleischer & Barz (1995: 230–4) list about 25 booster prefixes which are recurrently used as positive degree prefixes modifying adjectives and adverbs.⁷

With regard to the origin of these booster prefixes, a first analysis shows that four of the source domains of these booster prefixes correspond to those identified by Peters (1993) as the five main sources for booster adverbs: (i) a local/dimensional source domain (e.g. PDE *highly*, *extremely*), (ii) a quantitative source domain (cf. PDE *much*, *vastly*), (iii) a qualitative source domain (e.g. PDE *terribly*, *violently*) and (iv) taboo/swear words (e.g. PDE *damned*).⁸

(i) *Local/dimensional*

{grund}	‘ground’	PDG <i>grundgütig</i>	‘very kind’
{hoch}	‘high’	PDG <i>hochmodern</i>	‘very modern’
{höchst}	‘highest’	PDG <i>höchstfein</i>	‘very tasty’
{ober}	‘over’	PDG <i>oberfaul</i>	‘very lazy’
{über}	‘over’	PDG <i>überglücklich</i>	‘very happy’
{ur}	‘< out of’	PDG <i>urkomisch</i>	‘very funny’
{tief}	‘deep’	PDG <i>tieftraurig</i>	‘very sad’

Loans:

{erz}	‘arch’	(cf. Greek <i>archi-</i> ‘the highest’)	PDG <i>erzdumm</i>	‘very stupid’
{extra}	‘extra’	(cf. Latin <i>extra</i> ‘out, outside’)	PDG <i>extrastark</i>	‘very strong’
{hyper}	‘hyper’	(cf. Greek <i>ὑπέρ</i> ‘above, beyond’)	Colloquial PDG <i>hypermodern</i>	‘very up-to-date’
{super}	‘super’	(cf. Latin <i>super</i> ‘above’)	Colloquial PDG <i>superlustig</i>	‘very funny’
{ultra}	‘ultra’	(cf. Latin <i>ultra</i> ‘beyond’)	Slang PDG <i>ultranervig</i>	‘very nerve-racking’

(ii) *Quantitative*

{allzu}	‘all to’	PDG <i>allzuoft</i>	‘very often’	
{höchst}	‘highest’	Superlative of <i>hoch-</i> ‘high’ (see (i)):	PDG <i>höchstinteressant</i>	‘very interesting’
{viel}	‘many’	PDG <i>vielbeschäftigt</i>	‘very busy’ ⁹	

(iii) *Qualitative*

{bitter}	‘bitter’	PDG <i>bitterernst</i>	‘very serious’
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⁷ This count does not include prefixes with fewer than five different derivational bases, i.e. lexicalized adjectives such as *nagelneu* ‘nail-new’, *pudelnass* ‘poodle-wet’, *wunderschön* ‘wonder-beautiful’, etc.

⁸ The fifth category, that of emphasers (e.g. *really*), is not applicable to prefixes (and seems to be a tautology also for booster adverbials).

⁹ *Viel-* (just like *wohl-* as in *wohlbekannt*, etc.) is mainly used with adjectives formed from a verbal (past participle) basis.

(iv) *Taboo/swear words***Digestion/Faeces**

{arsch} ‘arse’	Slang PDG <i>arschklar</i> ‘very clear’
{scheiß} ‘shit’	Slang PDG <i>scheißlustig</i> ‘very funny’
{stink} ‘stench’	Colloquial PDG <i>stinkreich</i> ‘very rich’

Animal names which are also used as swear words

{affen} ‘monkey’	Slang PDG <i>affengeil</i> ‘very appealing’ ¹⁰
{hunde} ‘dog’	Colloquial PDG <i>hundemüde</i> ‘very tired’
{sau} ‘pig’	Slang PDG <i>saulangweilig</i> ‘very boring’

Death

{tod} ‘dead’	Colloquial PDG <i>todschick</i> ‘very elegant’ ¹¹
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This survey shows that prefixes which have their origin in a local/dimensional source domain (both native as well as loans meaning ‘over, above, higher’) are by far the most frequent ones in Present-day German. Prefixes originating in taboo words are, of course, mainly restricted to colloquial language or slang.

4 Booster prefixes in Old English

4.1 *Outline*

So far, the history of prefixation as a scaling device in English has received only scant attention. While verbal prefixes have been studied more widely, in particular with respect to the relation of prefixed and phrasal verbs (see Lutz 1997), literature on the diachrony of English nominal and adjectival prefixation in general is rather scarce, and those accounts which are available mainly provide inventories of prefixes, cataloguing their prototypical meanings without discussing issues of wider relevance (notable exceptions are Marchand 1969: 129–208 and Kastovsky 1992: 377–81; see Dietz 2004: 562–4 for a survey on the literature and its criticism). Only recently has a fuller, more systematic description of Old English prefixes been attempted by Dietz (2004).

Old English exhibits a greater degree of similarity to Present-day German than to Present-day English in that a larger number of booster prefixes is attested. In the following section, I will briefly introduce the items which function as booster prefixes in Old English. In a more detailed account, the study will then investigate the Old English roots of ME *forsooth(e)*, an emphazier which became very frequent at the beginning of the Middle English period. It will be suggested that *forsooth* – which is commonly considered to be a unverbated and lexicalized form of an Old English prepositional phrase *for soþ* ‘for truth’ – may alternatively be analysed as an (endingless) accusative singular neuter of an adjective *forsop* ‘very true’.

¹⁰ See also formations with further prefixation by local/dimensional *ober-* as in Slang PDG *oberaffengeil* ‘very appealing’.

¹¹ PDE *dead* as in *dead certain*, *dead right*, etc. is commonly classified as an endingless adverb (see, for example, *OED* s.v. *dead* a. (n.¹, adv.) C.2.a.).

4.2 *The inventory*

In table 1 I list the items which have been suggested as booster prefixes modifying adjectives or adverbs in the research literature on Old English prefixes (Quirk & Wrenn 1957: 110; Kastovsky 1992: 377–81, 2006: 233–4, 263; Dietz 2004; Sauer 2006; Mitchell & Robinson 2007: 58–9) and in the relevant Old English dictionaries (BT; Clark Hall 1960; the *DOE* for the letters A–F). Since the different dictionaries do not always agree on the classification of certain prefixes and on their acceptance of the relevant individual adjectives/adverbs as prefixations (not, for instance, as compounds or syntagms of intensifying adverb and adjective), I list all of the items in question alphabetically, together with all of their attested individual coinages; doubtful or ambiguous prefixes, most of which will be discussed later in the text, are marked in the table by ? and their alternative interpretation is given in the last column. Single doubtful adjectives are also marked by ?, with explanations given in the respective footnotes.¹²

According to the criterion that a productive prefix must have a high number of different types, regardless of the number of tokens (referred to as *Reihenbildung* ‘formation of series’ in Dietz 2004; for the relevance of the type–token relation, see section 4.4 below), a core of five unambiguous Old English booster prefixes emerges: *for-* (35 types),¹³ *ofer-* (12 types), *frae-/fræ-* (10 types), *heah-* (5 types) and *or-* (4 types).

For various reasons, most of the other linguistic elements listed above are not prototypical intensifying prefixes. Because they retain much of their original meaning, they are restricted to a limited set of derivational bases, and thus should be classified as compound adjectives. This suggests, for example, a purely qualitative interpretation of the prefixes *æ-* ‘... of old’ (e.g. *ærglæd*, *ærgod* ‘glorious/good of old’) and *sin-* (e.g. *sinceald* ‘perpetually cold’; see Dietz 2004: 593–4).

Other combinations, containing prefixes such as *brego-* or *cyne-*, are best interpreted as compounds with a metaphorically employed first element, i.e. ‘like a ruler/king’ (e.g. *brego-rof* ‘brave as a ruler’) or ‘royally, like a king’ (e.g. *cyne-beald*, *cyne-god*, *cyne-ðrymlic* ‘bold, excellent, glorious as a ruler’). A metaphorical interpretation is also most likely for *deop-ðancol* ‘deep-thinking > very thoughtful’, which implies the transfer that the better or more intense thoughts are to be found deep in one’s mind.

Two of the prefixes – *fela-* and *ful-* – are semantically and/or syntactically polyfunctional, and their functions are not easy or (in the case of *ful*) even impossible to differentiate. *Fela-* ‘many’ (cf. *DOE* s.v. *fela*, *MED* s.vv. *fēle* indef. num., *fēle* adv., *OED* s.v. *fēle* adv. (quasi-sb.) and a.) retains its numeral sense in forms such as *felafeald* ‘manifold’, *felaspræce* ‘talkative’ or *felageonge* ‘very much travelled’ (and

¹² As for German (see above, footnote 7), I do not list booster prefixes such as *blod-read* ‘blood-red’, *hunig-swete* ‘honey-sweet’, etc. which are only found with one particular derivational base; for a list of such forms, see Kastovsky (2006: 233–4).

¹³ To this could be added the six forms with *fore-* and *forþ-*. On the merging of the forms *for-*, *fore-*, and *forþ-*, see table 1 notes f and g.

Table 1. *Items suggested as booster prefixes modifying adjectives and adverbs*

Prefix	Types	Attested adjectives/adverbs	Alternative interpretation
?{æ1-}, {eall-} 'all' ^a	10	<i>eall-beorht</i> 'very bright' <i>æ1-ceald</i> 'very cold' <i>eall-cræftig</i> 'very powerful' <i>eall-god</i> 'very good' <i>eallgrene</i> 'very green' <i>ealhalig</i> 'very holy' <i>eallisig</i> 'very cold' <i>eallniwe</i> 'very new' <i>eallrihte</i> 'just, exactly' <i>ealltela</i> 'quite well'	compounds (Dietz 2004: 587) 'all-bright' 'all-cold' 'all-powerful' 'all-good' 'all-green' 'all-holy' 'all-icy' 'all-new' 'all right' 'all well'
?{æ1r-} 'earlier, of old'	2	<i>æ1r-glæd</i> 'very glad' <i>æ1r-god</i> 'very good'	compounds '# of old' (<i>DOE</i> s.vv.) 'glorious of old' 'good of old'
?{brego-} 'ruler'	1	<i>brego-rof</i> 'very brave'	compound (OE <i>brego</i> 'ruler') 'brave as a ruler'
?{cyne-} 'king, royal'	3	<i>cyne-beald</i> 'very bold' <i>cyne-god</i> 'excellent' <i>cyne-ðrymlig</i> 'very glorious'	compounds ^b 'royally #', '# as a king'
?{deop-} 'deep'	1	<i>deop-ðancol</i> 'very thoughtful'	compound (Kastovsky 2006: 234) 'deep-thinking'
{fela-} 'many' ^c	10	<i>fela-fæcne</i> 'very treacherous' <i>fela-frecne</i> 'very bold' <i>fela-geomor</i> 'very sad' <i>fela-geong</i> 'very young' <i>fela-hror</i> 'very vigorous' <i>fela-leof</i> 'very dear' <i>fela-meahtig</i> 'most mighty' <i>fela-modig</i> 'very bold' <i>fela-synnig</i> 'very guilty' <i>fela-wlanc</i> 'very stately'	
{for-} 'for'	35	<i>forçylled</i> 'very cold' <i>fordyslic</i> 'very foolish' <i>foreaþe</i> 'very easily' <i>foreaþelice</i> 'very easily' <i>forfæger</i> 'very beautiful' <i>forfela</i> 'very many' <i>forfyrht</i> 'very frightened' <i>forgearwe</i> 'very well' <i>forgeorne</i> 'very readily', 'very well' <i>forheard</i> 'very hard' <i>forhearde</i> 'very much' <i>forhraþe</i> 'very quickly' <i>forhrædlice</i> 'very quickly' <i>forinlice</i> 'very thoroughly' <i>forinweardlice</i> 'very thoroughly' <i>forlangsum</i> 'very time-consuming' <i>forlustlice</i> 'very gladly' <i>forlytel</i> 'very little' <i>formanig</i> 'very many' <i>formære</i> 'very illustrious'	

Table 1. *Continued*

Prefix	Types	Attested adjectives/adverbs	Alternative interpretation
		<i>formicel</i> ‘very great’ <i>forneah</i> ‘very nearly’, ‘almost’ <i>fornean</i> ‘very nearly’, ‘almost’ <i>fornytlice</i> ‘very usefully’ <i>foroft, forofte</i> ‘very often’ <i>?for-scyldig</i> ‘very guilty’, ‘very wicked’ ^d <i>forstrang</i> ‘very strong’ <i>forsweotole</i> ‘very clearly’ <i>forswiþ</i> ‘very strong’, ‘very great’ <i>forswiþe</i> ‘very much’, ‘very’ <i>?for-swollen</i> ‘very swollen’ ^e <i>forþearle</i> ‘very much’, ‘very severely’ <i>forþearlice</i> ‘very much’, ‘entirely’ <i>forwel</i> ‘very well’, ‘very’ <i>forwurþfullc</i> ‘very fine’	
{fore-} ^f ‘before’	4	<i>foremære</i> ‘very illustrious’ <i>foremihhtig</i> ‘very mighty’ <i>foremihhtiglic</i> ‘very strong’ <i>foresnotor</i> ‘very wise’	
{forþ-} ^g ‘forwards’	1	<i>forþsnotor</i> ‘very wise’	
{fræ-}{fræ-} {fræ-} ^h (cf. Latin <i>prae-</i> ‘before, earlier’)	10	<i>fræ-beorht/freā-beorht</i> ‘very bright’ <i>fræ-fætt</i> ‘very fat’ <i>fræ-festlice</i> ‘very quickly’ <i>frea-gleaw</i> ‘very wise, prudent’ <i>fræ-hraedae/freā-hraede</i> ‘very quickly’ <i>fræ-mære</i> ‘very glorious’ <i>fræ-micel</i> ‘very great’ <i>frea-torht</i> ‘very bright’ <i>fræ-welig/freā-welig</i> ‘very rich’ <i>frea-wlitig</i> ‘very beautiful’	
{ful-} ⁱ ‘full’	12	<i>full-æðele</i> ‘very noble’ <i>full-bliðe</i> ‘very glad’ <i>full-clæne</i> ‘very clean’ <i>?full-cuð</i> ‘well-known’ <i>full-georne</i> ‘very eagerly’ <i>full-hal</i> ‘thoroughly well’ <i>ful-neah/full-neah</i> ‘very near’ <i>full-oft</i> ‘very often’ <i>full-raðe</i> ‘very quickly’ <i>full-ricene</i> ‘very quickly’ <i>full-wearm</i> ‘very warm’ <i>full-werig</i> ‘very tired’	<i>full</i> (adv.) + adj. (see <i>DOE</i> , s.vv.) ‘fully known’
{heah-} ‘high’	5	<i>heah-eald/heah-yldest</i> ‘excellent’ <i>heah-fæst</i> ‘very lasting’ <i>heah-hlutor</i> ‘very pure’ <i>heah-steap</i> ‘very high’ <i>heah-sunn(e)</i> ‘very sinful’	
{in-} ^j ‘in’	1	<i>in-frod</i> ‘very aged, experienced’	

Table 1. *Continued*

Prefix	Types	Attested adjectives/adverbs	Alternative interpretation
{ofer-} 'over'	12	<i>oferceald</i> 'excessively cold' <i>oferceald</i> 'very old' <i>oferhat</i> 'very hot' <i>oferheah</i> 'very tall, lofty' <i>oferhlud</i> 'very loud' <i>oferleof</i> 'very dear' <i>ofermicel</i> 'very much' <i>oferprut</i> 'very proud' <i>ofersælig</i> 'very happy' <i>oferswiþe</i> 'very strong' <i>oferwelig</i> 'very rich' <i>oferwyrðe</i> 'very worthy'	'too #'
{or-} 'originally' ^k	4	<i>or-cnæwe</i> 'well-known' <i>or-eald</i> 'very old' <i>or-gyte</i> 'well-known, very manifest' <i>or-mæte</i> 'excessive, intense'	
?{sin-} 'perpetually'	1	<i>sinceald</i> 'very cold'	compound (Dietz 2004: 593–4) 'perpetually cold'

^a For a critical view on the relation of *æl-* and *eall-*, see Dietz (2004: 587–8). For a more general account of the functions of *eall/all* in the history of English, see Buchstaller & Traugott (2006). OE *eall-mihtig/æl-mihtig* is not listed here, because it is generally considered to be a loan-translation of Latin *omni-potens* (see *DOE* s.v. *eall-mihtig*, *æl-mihtig*), which suggests its interpretation as an *æl*-compound.

^b For a discussion of borderline cases between compounds and prefixations (also labelled PREFIXOIDS), see Kastovsky (1992: 363–4).

^c I do not list unambiguous compound formations such as *fela-feald* 'manifold' or *fela-sprecol* 'talkative, loquacious' here (see *DOE* s.vv. *fela-feald*, *fela-sprecol*, *fela-specol*).

^d The *DOE* relates this word to the prefix *for* for modifying the adjective *scyldig* or, alternatively, to a prefixed verb *forscyldigian* 'only in past participle: made or become guilty/wicked' (see *DOE* s.v. *forscyldigian*).

^e This could also be interpreted as a verbal prefix, i.e. the past participle of a verb *for-swellan* (which, however, is not attested in Old English; see *DOE* s.v. *for-swollen*).

^f Dietz (2004: 602) points out that some of the coinages with *fore-* seem to be mergers of OE *for-* and *fore-*. *Fore-mære* and *for-mære*, for instance, are listed in one entry in the *DOE* (s.v. *fore-mære/for-mære*; cf. also the *DOE* s.v. *fore-*).

^g On *forþ-* as a nominal and verbal prefix, see Dietz (2004: 601–2) and the *DOE* (s.v. *forþ-*).

^h For a full discussion of this prefix, see Dietz (2004: 568–9) and, especially, Sauer (2006). Most of the coinages are modelled on Latin adjectives intensified by the Latin booster prefix *prae-/pro-* (cf. Latin *prae-clarus* – OE *fræ-beorht* 'very bright', Latin *prae-pinguis* – OE *fræfætt* 'very fat', etc.) and are therefore to be considered as loan formations (for the etymology of OE *fræ-*, see Sauer 2006: 11–16).

ⁱ Verbs with the prefix *ful-* (cf. OE *ful-don* 'achieve', *ful-endian* 'bring to an end' or *ful-fillen* 'fulfil') have commonly been treated as 'compound verbs' (see, e.g., Kastovsky 1992: 374–6). For their analysis as prefixed verbs, see Dietz (2004: 584–95, 606). On the nominal forms, see Dietz (2004: 595–6).

^j Because of its only sporadic occurrence Dietz (2004: 591) now rejects the view of Holthausen, who regards *in-* as an intensifying prefix in *in-frod* (see Holthausen 1934: s.v. *in*).

^k On the lexicalization of the prefix *or-*, see Dietz (2004: 570).

other forms with verbal bases, none of which are listed above), but has a very clear intensifier meaning in *felasynnig* ‘very guilty’ or *felamodig* ‘very bold’.

Distinguishing between various functions proves almost impossible for combinations of *ful* + adjective. Since word division is not at all systematically coded or morphologically induced in Anglo-Saxon manuscripts, these may be analysed as combinations of the adverb *ful* plus an adjective or, alternatively, as prefixations. As a prefix, *ful-* may retain its original meaning ‘having no space empty, full’ with past-participle derivational bases in particular (e.g. *full-ripod* ‘fully grown’, *full-mannod* ‘fully peopled’ or *ful-wepned* ‘fully armed’). With most of the other forms listed above, it is almost impossible to decide whether we have an adverbial booster or a booster prefix. This is reflected in the treatment of these words in different dictionaries: while Clark Hall (1960), for instance, lists all of the items above as prefixations, the *DOE* only has two entries which are classified as prefixations, namely for *full-cuð* ‘well-known’ (22 occ.) and *fullneah* ‘very near’ (70 occ.). Campbell, on the other hand, clearly favours a prefix interpretation for most of the coinages, pointing to the fact that the ‘intensive prefix *full-* is subordinated in stress to the following element’ (1959: §86). While there can be no doubt that *ful* was used as an adverbial booster in Old English (see Méndez-Naya 2003: 386–7), interpreting it as a prefix modifying adjectives and adverbs might be possible or even preferable for certain of the coinages listed above. This view is corroborated by the distributional patterns of types and tokens, since *ful-*, just like *for-*, has a number of rare or single occurrences (HAPAX LEGOMENA), but also some high-frequency lexemes, such as *full-oft* or *full-neah* (see below, section 4.4).

With regard to their source domains, Old English booster prefixes make use of the same domains which are used for the coinage of English adverbial boosters and Present-day German booster prefixes (see section 3 above and Peters 1993). Even if the source domains of some of the coinages have become opaque due to lexicalization processes (e.g. in the prefixes *for-*, *fræ-/frea-* and *or-*), two source domains emerge unambiguously as the principal ones: (i) the local/dimensional domain and (ii) the quantitative domain.

- (i) *Local/dimensional*: *heah-*; *fore-*; *forþ-*; *ofer-*;
no longer fully transparent: *fræ-/frea-*; *for-*;¹⁴ *or-*
- (ii) *Quantitative*: *eall-*; *fela-*; *full-*

The lack of expressions coined from category (iv) taboo/swear words¹⁵ is most probably due to the nature of our extant Anglo-Saxon texts. Taboo booster prefixes are predominantly found in spoken language, particularly in colloquial language or slang. So it therefore comes as no surprise that they are not attested in our Old English written sources, most of which belong to a religious, highly literary or scientific genre.

¹⁴ The source domain of *for* – though already lexicalized and semantically bleached in Old English – is clearly local/dimensional: ‘From the predominant meaning of the root, it may be inferred that the primary notion expressed by the prefix is that of “forward, forth”’ (see *OED* s.v. *for-* prefix¹).

¹⁵ For those originating in category (iii) qualitative source domain, see the discussion of *brego-*, *cyne-*, *sin-* and *or-* above.

4.3 OE *for-*

OE *for-* is clearly the booster prefix with the highest number of different types (35). In Old English, *for-* is a highly frequent and polyfunctional prefix which may be attached to nominal as well as verbal bases (just like Latin *per-*). In its much more frequent function as a verbal prefix,¹⁶ it may code a negative meaning (e.g. *forswerian* ‘to commit perjury’, *forwyrca* ‘to be guilty of’), but much more frequently expresses a perfective or telic aspect (e.g. *forbærnan* ‘to burn up, to burn to the end, to consume by fire’, *fordon* ‘to destroy’).

With regard to its use as a booster prefix, it is interesting to see that the etymologically related Latin *per-* is also used as a booster prefix for adjectives and adverbs, in particular in Medieval Latin (e.g. *perdelectabilis* ‘very enjoyable’, *perhumilis* ‘very humble’, *peravidus* ‘very greedy’, *persaepe* ‘very often’ etc.; see Stotz 2000: 132.1).

Its Old English booster use, however, is certainly not only due to Latin loan influence. The booster function is also attested in Old Norse (e.g. *for-rikr* ‘very powerful’, *for-vitr* ‘very intelligent’) and, more importantly, *for-* can be shown to be a highly productive prefix in Old English. To test this issue, it is revealing to look at the number of DOEC occurrences of the individual adjectives and adverbs prefixed by *for-* (as given by the *DOE*):

1 occurrence:

fordyslic ‘very foolish’, *foreape* ‘very easily’, *foreapelice* ‘very easily’, *forfæger* ‘very beautiful’, *forfela* ‘very many’, *forgearwe* ‘very well’, *forgeorne* ‘very readily/well’, *forheard* ‘very hard’, *forhearde* ‘very much’, *forhrædlice* ‘very quickly’ (in multiple MSS), *forinlice* ‘very thoroughly’ (in two MSS), *forlangsum* ‘very time-consuming’, *forlustlice* ‘very gladly’, *fornytlice* ‘very usefully’, *forstrang* ‘very strong’, *forsweotole* ‘very clearly’, *forswip* ‘very strong/great’, *forswollen* ‘very, badly swollen’, *forwurpfullc* ‘very fine’

2 to 20 occurrences:

forcylled ‘very cold’ (2), *forinweardlice* ‘very thoroughly’ (2), *forpearlice* ‘very much/entirely’ (2), *forlytel* ‘very little’ (3), *formicel* ‘very great’ (4), *formanig* ‘very many’ (5), *forscyldig* ‘very guilty’ (5), *forswibe* ‘very much/very’ (9), *forhræpe* ‘very quickly’ (11), *forpearle* ‘very severely/much’ (16)

over 40 occurrences:

for-/fore-mære ‘very illustrious’ (c. 40), *fornean* ‘very nearly/almost’ (c. 45; see also *forneah*), *forwel* ‘very well/very’ (c. 70), *forneah* ‘very nearly, almost’ (c. 90; see also *fornean*), *foroft*, *forofte* ‘very often’ (c. 100).

This distribution of types and tokens is – according to Baayen (see, for example, Baayen 1993 or Baayen & Renouf 1996) – tremendously important for the question of the productivity of an element. In essence, Baayen’s research reveals that the number

¹⁶ In her corpus compiled for a Munich MA thesis (supervisor Hans Sauer), Bianca Walter finds 3 nominal types (5 tokens) as against 28 verbal types (47 tokens).

of words that occur only once in a given corpus (i.e. hapax legomena with respect to the given corpus) correlates with the number of neologisms and is therefore highly indicative of the productivity of a morphological element:

[If] a word-formation pattern is unproductive, no rule is available for the perception and production of novel forms. All existing forms will depend on storage in the mental lexicon. Thus, unproductive morphological categories will be characterised by a preponderance of high-frequency types, by low numbers of low-frequency types, and by very few, if any, hapax legomena, especially as the size of the corpus increases. Conversely, the availability of a productive word-formation rule for a given affix in the mental lexicon guarantees that even the lowest frequency complex words with that affix can be produced and understood. Thus large numbers of hapaxes are a sure sign that an affix is productive. (Baayen & Renouf 1996: 74)

In view of these findings, *for-* can be considered a most productive prefix in Old English. As seen above, it is the booster prefix with the highest number of types (35). Moreover, in the large Old English corpus (c. 3 million Old English words are collected in the DOEC) we have more than 15 hapax legomena with *for-*,¹⁷ but also a number of high-frequency words. Prototypically, the high-frequency items with more than 50 occurrences are used as adverbial downtoners (e.g. *forneah*, *fornean*) or boosters (e.g. *forwel*).

5 OE/ME *forsooth*: Etymology and morphological make-up

5.1 *Introductory remarks*

The above survey has shown that booster prefixes modifying adjectives and adverbs are much more frequent in Old English than in Present-day English. Among the core set of booster prefixes, *for-* is the most frequent prefix, with respect to both types and tokens. In the following section, I will suggest a further candidate for such a prefixation with *for-*, by trying to shed some light on the diachrony of ME/PDE *forsooth* ‘truly’. This analysis will also need to incorporate a discussion of the history of other Old English adverbials meaning ‘truly’, because *forsooth(e)* is merely attested six times in Old English and only becomes a high-frequency item in Middle English – first supplementing and eventually ousting the semantically and functionally similar adverbs and prepositional phrases *soplice*, *sopes* and *to sope/to sapan* (cf. Appenzeller-Gassmann 1961: 47–8; Swan 1988: 259; Lenker 2003: 272–84, 2007: 83–90).

5.2 *Old English adverbials meaning ‘truly’*

The core items signifying the concept ‘truth; true’ in Old English are the neuter noun *sop* ‘truth’ and the formally identical adjective *sop* ‘true’. The adverbial function – ‘truly’ – can be expressed by derived adverbs in *-e* or *-es* or by prepositional phrases.

¹⁷ I am deliberately vague here because of the adjective/adverb hapaxes such as *forheard* and *forhearde*.

Derivational adverbs are *sobe* and *soplice* (< *soplic* adj.) in *-e* and *sopes* (with genitive suffix *-es*). Among the phrasal items, prepositional phrases with *to* (governing the dative) are most important, namely *to sobe* and *to soþan*, as opposed to the scarcity of *for sob* and *mid sob*. In the DOEC, *soplice* (4,806 occ.) is by far the most frequent of these items, followed by the prepositional phrases *to soþan* (109 occ.), *to sobe* (66 occ.) and the derivation *sopes* (57 occ.). *For sob*, by contrast, is attested only six times in Old English.

Apart from idiolectal differences,¹⁸ the distribution of the various lexemes and prepositional phrases also shows a distinction between poetry and prose, as well as exhibiting functional differences in prose. The Old English poetical texts almost exclusively employ the phrase *to sobe*, most often in collocation with a verb of communication such as *secgan* ‘tell’:

- (1) Gif þu him **to soðe** sægst hwylce þu selfa hæfst bisne on breostum.
 ‘If you tell him **truly** which exemplary precept you yourself hold in your bosom.’
 (GenA,B 570, DOEC)¹⁹
- (2) Secge ic þe **to soðe**, sunu Ecglafes, þæt . . .
 ‘I tell you **for sure**, son of Ecglaf, that . . .’
 (Beo 590, DOEC)

Soplice, on the other hand, is extremely rare in poetry (25 instances in total), but is employed in various ‘layered’ functions in Old English prose: on the phrase level, it is – albeit rarely – used as a manner adjunct. Similar to the contexts cited above for *to soðe*, the adjunct use is predominantly found in direct speech with a first person subject in phrases such as *ic secge soplice* ‘I tell (you) truly’.

- (3) Nacode he scrydde, and **swa ic soðlice secge**, ealle nyd-behæfnysse he wæs dælende þam þe þæs behofodon;
 ‘The naked he clothed; and, **as I truly tell**, he distributed to every necessity of them that had need thereof.’
 (LS 8 (Eust) 8, DOEC)

These instances of *soplice* (and similarly ME *soothli* and *forsooth*) as manner adjuncts with a verb of communication are crucial for all their additional uses as emphasizees, style disjuncts and pragmatic markers. First, this underlying and possible substitute phrase – ‘I tell you truly’ or ‘I tell you for sure’ – gives rise to the adverb’s use as an intensifier or ‘emphasizer’ (Quirk et al. 1985: 485), predominantly in direct speech.

- (4) Ic eom **soðlice** romanisc. and ic on hæftnyd hider gelæd wæs.
 ‘I am **truly** a Roman, and I was brought hither in captivity.’
 (LS 8 (Eust) 344, DOEC)

In Old English narrative prose (i.e. not in direct speech), *soplice* mostly serves a different function, that of a sentence adverbial, in which it loses much of its original meaning, extends its scope from the phrase level to at least the sentence or even discourse level, and at the same time develops a metatextual function as a discourse

¹⁸ Ælfric, for example, never uses *sopes*.

¹⁹ For the list and full references to the short titles of Old English texts used, see the list ‘Short titles’ in the *DOE*.

marker, e.g. indicating the beginning of new episodes in the gospels or highlighting certain sentences on the local level of discourse (for a fuller account and examples, see Lenker 2000, 2007).

5.3 *ME* forsooth

Soothly (< OE *soplice*) continues to be highly frequent in Middle English in all of its Old English functions, i.e. manner adverb, emphasizer, and discourse marker (see Lenker 2007: 83–9). From the beginning of the thirteenth century onwards, however, *forsooth* begins to be frequently attested in similar contexts and functions in all dialects of Middle English (see *OED* and *MED* s.v.; Appenzeller-Gassmann 1961: 47–8; Swan 1988: 259–62). It appears in various regional and orthographical forms, such as (to list only the main variants) *for sob* and *for sope* and also the unverbated forms *forsop*, *forsope*, *forsuth*, *for-sute*, and Southern *vor zope*, *vorzope* (*OED* s.v. *forsooth*, *MED* s.v. *forsoth*). It is used in all of the functions attested for OE *soplice*, but is primarily employed in an emphasizer function in direct speech – often in answers to questions, both positive and negative ones (see also *MED* s.v. *forsoth* 2.b).

- (5) Boece. ‘Ye/Yis, **forsothe**’, quod I (Chaucer, *Boece*3, pr11.203; pr12.57, CME)
 (6) ‘Nay/No **forsothe**’, quod I (Chaucer, *Boece*3, pr12.150; 4, pr2.100 etc., CME)

In this function, it is not only attested in translation texts but is also quite frequent in original Middle English prose, for example in Malory’s *Morte D’Arthur*:

- (7) ‘Ye **forsothe**’, said the queen . . . (Book 13, cap. vii; etc., CME)

This predominant use of *forsooth* in interactive dialogue as an emphasizer is also reflected in its further history, when – as noted in Samuel Johnson’s *Dictionary* – it even becomes an honorific, a ‘word of honour in address’ (Johnson 1755: s.v. *forsooth*); for these uses, see Lenker 2003: 262–4, 283–6).

5.4 *Etymology and morphological make-up*

5.4.1 *Traditional view: prepositional phrase for sob*

Because they correspond with the functions attested for OE *soplice* and OE *to sope/to soþan*, the gradually more frequent Middle English attestations of *forsooth* do not present any problems. With regard to its etymology and morphological make-up, *forsooth* is commonly considered to be a unverbated and lexicalized form of the Old English prepositional phrase *for sob*. The *OED* (s.v. *forsooth*), for example, states that *for* (prep.) and *sob* (n.) are ‘written as one word’. In this view, the preposition *for* governs the (endingless) accusative of the neuter noun *sob*. Yet, since it is peculiar in its use of the accusative (and not the dative),²⁰ the *DOE* entry for *for* reserves a separate

²⁰ OE *for* can govern the dative, accusative and genitive, but with a difference in meaning (see BT, *DOE*, *OED*, *MED* s.v. *for* and Appenzeller-Gassmann 1962: 49–58). For the use of the accusative, see *DOE* s.v. *for* A.12. ‘in the character of, as equivalent to, as’ (something *acc.*, rarely *dat.*). See also the rather complex history of

slot for *for sob* in A.12.d. Traditionally, the whole phrase is thus seen as an alternative – with change of preposition – to the much more frequently attested prepositional phrases *to soþe* and *to soþan*.

Even if this explanation seems highly plausible in view of later lexicalizations of prepositional phrases such as *indeed* or *in fact*, it is not as straightforwardly indisputable as it first appears. The main problem is that *for sob* is not at all a common expression for Old English ‘truly’. In contrast to *soblice* (4,806 occurrences in the DOEC) and the prepositional phrases *to soþe* or *to soþan* (175 occ.), the phrase *for sob* is only attested six times in Old English (seven if we count the manuscript variants attested in two versions of a Vercelli homily separately; see examples (13) and (14) below).²¹

The instances, moreover, are attested in very similar co-texts: six of them are found in interactive dialogue (three times in imperatives) and all of them modify verbs of communication or mental activity (*secgan* ‘say’ or *witan* ‘know’). This co-textual restriction is again a sign that another interpretation of the form might be called for, and I here suggest an interpretation of *forsob* as the adverbially used accusative form of the adjective *forsob*. The adjective *forsob* itself is in this view formed by the common pattern booster prefix *for* + adjective *sob*, that is, an adjective which is functionally analogous to PDE *That’s very true*, which, as has been mentioned above, is ‘not at all unusual in conversation’ (Biber et al. 1999: 526; see above, section 1). This alternative interpretation is possible because word division is not very systematic in Anglo-Saxon manuscripts and therefore not indicative of the morphological make-up of an Old English word.²²

5.4.2 Data

For a better understanding of the following morphological and contextual analysis, I here list all the attestations of OE *for sob*. Four instances are found in translations which have been traditionally placed in King Alfred’s circle;²³ three of them modify the verb *witan* ‘know’:

- (8) Ic **for soð** wat, þæt þæt nis minre gegearnunge . . .
 ‘And I know **truly/very truly**, that this is not my credit . . .’
 (Bede 3, 11.190.29, DOEC)

Two of them are imperative constructions *Wite þu for soð* ‘Know truly . . .’

the Present-day German prepositions *vor* (locative; with dative) and *für* (‘instead of’, etc.; with accusative) whose distinct meanings were only fixed in the eighteenth century; cf. Grimm & Grimm (1854–1971 (relevant fascicle 1878): s.v. *vor*).

²¹ The latest Old English attestation given in the DOEC cannot be regarded as Old English, because all of the surviving copies of this charter of King Æthelstan are from the sixteenth or seventeenth century; the example is (ii) *I will forsooþe þat he come* ‘I truly want that he comes’ (Ch 451.1 [Birch 1339], 23, DOEC); for the date of the documents, see the *Anglo-Saxon Charters* website.

²² In the manuscripts of the Old English translation of Boethius’ *De Consolatione Philosophiae*, for example, established prefixations such as *forwel* or *forswiþe* are recurrently spelt in two words, i.e. *for* [space] *wel*, etc. I would like to thank Malcolm Godden for checking these instances for me.

²³ Recent research by Malcolm Godden now rejects this attribution of authorship to King Alfred (see Godden 2007).

- (9) Wite þu **for soð**, gif þæt þine agne welan wæron . . .
 ‘Know you **truly/very truly**, if that were your own riches . . .’ (Bo 7.17.20, DOEC)
- (10) Wite þu **for soð** þæt nan god ne dereð þæm þe hit ah.
 ‘Know you **truly/very truly** that no good harms him who owns it.’
 (Bo 14.32.31, DOEC)

The fourth ‘Alfredian’ instance is found in collocation with a verb of communication – *secgan* ‘say’ – and is again an imperative:

- (11) Sage him **for soð**, ðæt he ne mæg þone siðfæt gefyllan, þe he gemynted hæfð . . .
 ‘Tell him **truly/very truly** that he cannot take the path he had intended . . .’
 (Bede 5, 9.410.17, DOEC)

The other two attestations are also collocates with the verb *secgan* ‘say’ as well, as in *Maxims II*:

- (12) Næni eft cymeð hider under hrofas, þe þæt her **for soð** mannum secge hwylc sy meotodes gesceaft . . .
 ‘No one returns here below the heavens who might tell people **truly/for certain** what the creation of the Lord is like.’
 (Max II, 63, DOEC)

Finally, *for soþ* is attested in two manuscripts of one of the versions of Vercelli Homily I ‘De Parasceve’:

- (13) And **for soð** ic eow sæcge, cwæð he, þætte þæt nuhwænne gelimpeð <þæt> ge geseoð mannes Sunu sittende on þa swiðran healfe þæs ælmihtigan Fæder . . .
 ‘And I tell you **truly/very truly**, he said, that this will never happen that you will see the Son of Man sitting on the right hand of the Almighty Father . . .’
 (HomS 24.2 (Schaefer), 190, DOEC)

and its second attestation in a manuscript variant.

- (14) & **for soð** ic eow secge, cwæð he, þætte . . . (HomS 24.1 (Scragg), 194, DOEC)

This instance translates Latin *Verumtamen dico uobis* . . . (Matth XXVI.64) and is particularly interesting because only two of the manuscripts give the variant *for soþ*; manuscript H replaces this expression by the much more common prepositional phrase *to soþan* (Scragg 1992: 24).

The phrase *for soþ* is also not used in the other version of this homily either (Vercelli I), which translates Latin *uerumtamen* by

- (15) **soð** is þonne þæt ic eow secge . . . (Scragg 1992: 22)²⁴

5.4.3 Morphological ambiguities

Example (15) is morphologically and syntactically ambiguous and thus evokes the alternative interpretation of the make-up of ME *forsooth* proposed here: since the noun and adjective *soþ* are formally identical in Old English, there is no way to decide

²⁴ A similar case of avoidance of *for soþ* is attested in the earliest example listed in the *MED* (s.v. *forsooth*). A manuscript of the life of St Juliana (c. 1225) replaces the form *for soð* by at that time clearly more common *to soðe*.

whether *sop* is *bonne þæt* in this example should be analysed as ‘it is true’ or ‘it is the truth’.

More importantly for the present analysis, there are many instances of syntagms of *sop* with a verb of verbal communication or cognition followed by a *þæt*-clause, a context where an adverbial interpretation is far more likely (‘I tell you truly . . .’ rather than ‘I tell you the truth, namely that . . .’). We very frequently find phrases such as

(16) *sop* ic þe talige þæt . . . (Beo 532, DOEC)

(17) *þæt þu soð* wite hu . . . (ChristA,B,C 440, DOEC)

In these examples, the form *sop* is used adverbially as a manner adjunct with a verb of communication or cognition (‘I tell you truly’, ‘that you truly know how . . .’). Campbell (1959: §668) points out that there are some adjectives which use the accusative singular neuter adverbially, among them *sop* (especially in Northern dialects; see *ibid.* n.1).²⁵ Thus an endingless form *sop* modifying a verb of communication or mental activity can be interpreted as either a noun or an adjective used adverbially.

5.4.4 *New interpretation*

There are therefore no formal reasons why OE *forsop* should not similarly be analysed as an (endingless) accusative singular neuter of the adjective *forsop* (with a booster prefix *for-*) used instead of the simple adjective *sop* as a manner adjunct in collocates with verbs such as *secgan* and *witan*. As has been mentioned above, word division in Anglo-Saxon manuscripts provides no morphological evidence. Hence, ME *forsoothe* could also be alternatively analysed as an adverb formed from an adjective OE *forsop*/ME *forsooth* by the Old English adverbial suffix *-e*.²⁶ The adjective *forsop* would then be regarded as a composite form of the adjective *sop* and the booster prefix *for-*.²⁷

There are a number of contextual and morphological parallels which support this alternative interpretation. As seen above, four out of the seven examples of *forsop* occur in what are traditionally called ‘Alfredian’ works. It is therefore most interesting to note that the booster prefix *for-* is exceptionally common in the works of the ‘Alfredian’ circle (see Wülfing 1897: §277). Most of these coinages in the ‘Alfredian’ texts are adverbs. This constraint is even more pertinent in Ælfric, who unexceptionally uses the booster prefix *for-* with adverbs, e.g. *for-eape* ‘very easily’, *for-eapelice* ‘very easily’, *for-hrape* ‘very quickly’, *for-oft* ‘very often’, *for-swipe* ‘greatly’, and the intensifier *for-wel* ‘very’ (only with *fela*, *menige*, *oft*; see Godden 2000: Glossary). In Byrhtferth, the

²⁵ Grimm & Grimm (s.v. *fürwahr*) point out similar problems as regards the interpretation of German *fürwahr* (which is structurally identical to English *forsooth*). It appears in Middle High German in the adjectival form *vür war* and the nominal form *vür ware* which finally merge into German *fürwahr*.

²⁶ This analysis more easily explains the most frequent Middle English form *forsoothe* with the suffix *-e*: the analysis as a prepositional phrase would have required a case shift from the attested forms *forsop* (*for* plus endingless accusative) to *for* governing the dative in *-e*, which seems strange for a frozen form such as *forsope*. Orthography, in particular final <-e>, is, of course, not very reliable in the Late Old English and Early Middle English period.

²⁷ The *MED* may perhaps also advocate this assumption, because it gives *forsop* (one word) as the Old English word; only then it states ‘also *for soth* (phrase)’. Clark Hall (1960) also lists *forsop* ‘indeed, verily’. However, both works may also consider it to be an already lexicalized form.

only relevant booster prefixation is *forwel* ‘very’; this is exclusively used as a booster in the phrase *forwel oft* ‘very often’ (eight times; Baker & Lapidge 1995: Glossary).

The alternative view is also strengthened by the paucity of OE *for sob* – in contrast to the frequent prepositional phrases *to soþe* and *to soþan* – and, in particular, the prevalence of its attestations in interactive dialogue in contexts with verbs of communication or mental activity.

It might be inadvisable to ask for a watertight, single etymological explanation for a phrase which came to be used by many speakers of Middle English who may have had both interpretations in mind (see below, section 5.4.5). It would, thus, be equally unwise to regard either of the two possibilities as completely unacceptable. Yet – at least for Old English – the alternative theory, which centres on the intensifying force of *forsooth* by its prefix *for-*, is in my opinion the preferable one, since the co-texts and the distributional pattern of the forms and occurrences correspond in a better way to prefixations with the booster prefix *for-* than to the prepositional phrases. This word-formation pattern is, as has been shown above, very productive in Old English and may have been – as a common booster device – even far more common in spoken and in particular colloquial language than our preserved language data allow us to infer.

5.4.5 Middle English

In the Middle English period, the ambiguity of the expression *for sob(e)* certainly increased due to loan influence from French, in particular through the influx of many prepositional phrases from French and through English expressions coined on the French model. French usually prefers prepositional phrases to adverbs, e.g. *en vérité* instead of English *soplice/soothly*. In her monograph on Middle English prepositional phrases functioning as emphasizees, Appenzeller-Gassmann (1962: 48–58) lists a number of expressions with *for* which were modelled on French *per* or *pour* (< Latin *pro* (*por*), *prae*, *per*),²⁸ e.g. *par fay*, *par dee*, *for Godes/Christes/my love*, *for Goddis sake*. None of these, however, is semantically similar to *forsooth*, and hence *forsooth* is assigned a separate category in Appenzeller-Gassmann’s study. And even though the intensifying force of *forsooth* may have been bolstered by these frequently used functionally similar prepositional phrases which were employed as oaths and vows in French and Middle English, it is a Middle English coinage – the adverb *forsoothli* – which in particular supports the alternative view set out in this article. Because of its distinctive adverbial suffix *-ly*, there is no way to analyse ME *forsoothli* as a prepositional phrase: it can only be seen as an adverb *forsoothli*, formed by attaching the booster prefix *for* to the adverb *soothli* (MED s.v. *forsoothli*) or by adding the adverbial suffix *-li* to the adverb *forsooth*.²⁹

²⁸ For Anglo-Norman *par*, see AND s.v. *par* (var. *per*, *por*, *pur*). It is important to note that French *par* may not only function as a preposition, but may – just like English *for* – also be employed as an intensifying prefix. Accordingly, Anglo-Norman expressions such as *pur vrai* (Latin *vere*) or *par/pur veir* are also ambiguous (see AND s.vv. *vrai*, *veir*).

²⁹ This might also allow a reanalysis of high-frequency expressions in Chaucer, such as ME *for soothly* as in (iii) *For soothly, as wikke it is ...* (Chaucer, *ParsT* (10) 567) or (iv) *for soothly, but if thow feede hym, thou sleest*

6 Conclusions

In addition to adverbial boosters such as *swipe* and *ful*, Old English frequently employed booster prefixes such as *for-*, *fore-*, *forþ-*, *fela-*, *heah-* or *ofer-* (just like Present-day German, but unlike Standard Present-day English, which in this function basically uses only the internationalisms *hyper-*, *super-* and *ultra-*). These booster prefixes are functionally equivalent to booster adverbs modifying adjectives or adverbs: adjectives or adverbs are scaled upwards from an assumed norm with regard to their extent (*for-/ful-neah* ‘very near’, *ofer-heah* ‘very tall’) or intensity (*for-heard* ‘very hard’, *fela-leof* ‘very dear’). Just as with Present-day English adverbial boosters, even adjectives/adverbs which are claimed to be nongradable because they have inherently absolute or superlative meanings, may be modified by booster prefixes (OE *heah-yldest* ‘excellent’). With regard to their lexical source domains, Present-day German as well as Old English booster prefixes correspond to the main categories found for adverbial boosters by Peters (1993): they are primarily lexicalized from local/dimensional (OE *heah-* ‘high’, *ofer-* ‘over’, etc.) or quantitative sources (OE *fela-* ‘many’, *ful-* ‘full’).

Among the Old English booster prefixes, *for-* is clearly the most frequent one, both with respect to types and tokens. The high number of hapax legomena also shows that the booster prefix *for-* was highly productive in Old English. In view of this productivity and the fact that *for-* coinages are often employed in an adverbial function as emphasers and intensifiers (e.g. *fulwel*, *forswipe*), the study suggests another candidate for such a prefixation with *for-*: OE *forsop*, an emphaser which became highly frequent at the beginning of the Middle English period. ME *forsooth(e)* is commonly considered to be a unverbated and lexicalized form of an Old English prepositional phrase *for sob*, ‘for truth’. This interpretation is disputable when viewed in the wider perspective of the very few Old English attestations of *forsop* (in contrast to highly frequent prepositional phrases such as *to sope* etc.) and, particularly, in the wider perspective of Old English word formation, i.e. the frequent use of booster prefixes in Old English in general and of *for-* in particular. Analyses of the inventory of booster prefixes in Old English and the intensifier prefix *for-* in particular show that an alternative etymology may be suggested for ME *forsoothe*: OE *for sob* can also be analysed as an (endingless) accusative singular neuter of the adjective *for sob* ‘very true’.

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hym (Chaucer, *ParsT* (10) 570). *For soothly* may perhaps not only be interpreted as a conjunction plus adverb, but as an adverb *forsoothly*. The conjunction *for* only appears at the beginning of the Middle English period (see *MED* s.v. *for* conj.).

Dictionaries and corpora

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