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## ***Cweþan* lost, *say* and *tell* gained: Changes in speaking verbs from Old to Modern English**

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The verbs *say* and *tell* are listed as high-frequency items of Present-Day English (Biber et al. 1999: 368, 373–374; *OED* s.vv. *say*, v.<sup>1</sup>). In Old English, by contrast, attestations of *secgan* and *tellan* are substantially outnumbered by those of *cweþan* ‘to speak, to say,’ which is recorded roughly 6,000 times per one million words in the *Dictionary of Old English Corpus* (*DOEC*). Today, *cweþan* only survives as the fossilized and archaic *quoþ* after having been replaced by *say* and *tell* in typical modern usage (*OED* s.vv. †*queath*, v. and *quoþ*, v.). However, the exact causes, trajectories, and consequences of these changes as well as possible explanations remain largely unexplored.

In order to investigate the changes affecting English speaking verbs, I will first summarize the findings of two of my studies on the use and function of the speaking verbs *cweþan*, *secgan*, *sp(r)ecan*, and *tellan* in various Old English texts and on the development of these patterns across several English translations of the Gospel of Matthew. These tendencies are further explored using the *Helsinki Corpus* (*HC*) in order to trace the exact chronological progression of the changes in both the frequency and the syntactical complementation of English verbs of speaking. In addition, the possible influence of various variables, such as genre and dialect, among others, on the changes at hand is investigated. Moreover, several theories of language change are discussed in order to account for the developments involving speaking verbs.

**References:** • Biber, D., S. Johansson, G. Leech, S. Conrad, and E. Finegan (1999): Longman Grammar of Spoken and Written English. Pearson. • DOEC = Healey, A. et al. (2009): Dictionary of Old English Corpus. Dictionary of Old English Project. • HC = Rissanen, M., M. Kytö, L. Kahlas-Tarkka, M. Kilpiö, S. Nevalinna, I. Taavitsainen, T. Nevalainen, and H. Raumolin-Brunberg (1991): The Helsinki Corpus of English Texts. The HIT Centre, University of Bergen. • OED = The Oxford English Dictionary. Oxford University Press.