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“Metaphoric and metonymic processes
in the representation of the Comitatus
milieu in *Beowulf*.”

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Abstract

Kennings are one of the most appealing tools used by poets in Old English and Skaldic poetry. Their functionality emerges from the mechanisms of logic they employ to economise language while reflecting the knowledge and principles of a specific culture.

The poet of *Beowulf* makes use of these compounds to convey and spread the values of the comitatus principle.

My purpose in this work is to show the composition of these kennings, the function of their parts and the processes of metaphor and metonymy through which the mind is capable of inferring meaning from them.

My approach will make use of the theory of the Prismatic Model for its adequacy in the decomposition and understanding of these compound forms.

Keywords: Comitatus, kennings, metaphor, metonymy, Prismatic Model.

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Introduction

When I first read *Beowulf* through the study of Ejes de la Literatura Inglesa (de la Concha Muñoz, Ángeles and Moreno (2010)), I learned it was one of the most valuable and epically influential poems of Anglo-Saxon literature.

The poem was composed in a vernacular that was suitable for and accustomed to the various conventions and principles of the Germanic society, and the historic memory of the Anglo-Saxon society was reflected in grand detailing. Their customs and traditions are common to the Scandinavian and Germanic tribes, where the deeds of heroes and the succession of adventures abound. These certain characteristics are indeed what give the work its historic richness allowing itself to still pique the interest of present-day readers.

Later, through the study of some of the poets which followed the course, I could wholesomely appreciate the influence of the poem in the variety of subsequent works which have taken its thematic concepts, its alliterative pattern or its structure, as well as the vivacity of its style or the formula of action that the events follow; such as the alternation between battles, the celebration of victory and foreshadowing of future events.

I found that the theme in *Beowulf* could also be attractive for the Homeric reader, for its succession of heroic deeds and personal struggles, as it reflects with special detail the mentality of the Anglo-Saxon warrior and the principle of loyalty that was the pillar in which all actions were sustained, in the vein of the Roman poet Tacit, who called the concept "comitatus".

This principle, reflected throughout the poem in the relationship between the hero and his lord, appealed to me mostly. The importance of honour in the way the warriors are meant to fight and the commitment among men is a principle that I believe ennobles and glorifies people; reflecting a tradition of the pagan tribes based on the struggle for the common welfare, a moral which contrasts that of individual glorification and self-profit spread by Christianity.

However, the richness in *Beowulf* does not lay solely in its themes. For the reader interested in the form, *Beowulf* is a linguistic treasure full of formal

Scandinavian traditions. Its long verses composed of short lines are rhythmical, they are sustained by alliterative patterns and the repetition of sounds, as well as concepts, which make the work a literary beauty, both for the learned and the common reader, who can delight in its liveliness and phonetic magnetism.

In its origins, the epic genre was spread by rhapsodes, or “scops”, so it was not a fixed text, and this is an extraordinary characteristic for a text of such extent that it is so rich when describing battles and their warriors.

The chief point in the transmission of *Beowulf* and its preservation in the form of a manuscript must have been the use of a formulaic language, inherited through generations to help the poet bind a thought with its expression. The poem is composed of epithets and periphrastic formulas that the rhapsodes used to associate the stories to their characters.

The language of these poets had to be exceedingly creative; it had to be able to take an idea and transform it into some figurative language in a way that it maintained its consistency and appeal all through the poem. A task which had to have been extremely difficult for the oral poet when composing a narrative, in verse and in a tongue that back in that time was a very synthetic language full of inflections.

The poet then had to recur to metaphor and metonymy; useful resources to conceptualise the person's experience of the real world. Each mental concept reflects how the mind can adapt to the environment, thus, all the language expressed in such manner is the attestation of the mental process that the poet had to undertake in the construction of his work.

The kenning is another fascinating and useful technique which seduced me as it had to have meant a significant contrivance for the audience of the time, with its combination of words conveying a metaphoric or descriptive passage.

Beowulf is brimming with kennings and epithets, either metaphoric, metonymic or descriptive, that are used to depict the suit of armour or equipment for battle or they refer to monsters, the Devil or the King of the tribe.

The way by which objects and events of this heroic feat, repeated along the verses, have gained the attention and comprehension of the audience, who could identify in these kennings the hero, their king, or the warlike descriptions, is a skill as superb as it is intriguing on a pragmatic level.

The relevance of these mechanisms of identification, for the transmission and conservation of the principle of comitatus, among the population of the time and following, constitutes what I believe to be the key aspect in the magnificence of the poem.

And it is this technique which is the object of my study. I am determined to analyse the processes with which these metaphors or kennings are built because they are the sheer reflection of the principle of loyalty between the warrior and his lord, his incentive for the fight and confrontation with death, a deed that praises the hero.

In my quest to find a pattern in this kenning technique, I will fracture its compositional parts and locate the base and the means through which the poet infers the meaning of concepts, as well as those attributes which are shared by the topic and its vehicle of expression.

It is of my special interest to unearth how the poet, using an accurate logic-analytic skill, resorts to the most characteristic notions with which the audience recognizes, and to the process of assembling these kennings so that it will help him remember and spread his tales, which has favoured the survival of the epic genre and has preserved the social and cultural insights of a time when courage, resilience and personal sacrifice took precedence over the personal benefit of the individual.

In order to achieve these objectives, I shall resort to an array of books, articles and literary sources that I believe may put myself in good stead, starting with authors such as Arthur Gilchrist Brodeur's *The Art of Beowulf* (Brodeur (1959)); papers about the oral-formulaic character of Anglo-Saxon narrative poetry, the use of kenning in Old English, or various works on metaphor and metonymy.

I will also make use of the various dictionaries and translations available to help me identify and understand some of the Old English kennings found in *Beowulf*.

State of the Art

Beowulf is an epic poem created from an oral-formulaic tradition which was bequeathed and extended through various generations. For its composition, the Germanic poet had to resort to some strategies that allowed him to compensate the restrictions imposed by the Anglo-Saxon alliterative verse.

One of the most important tools the poet used were the kennings, a term that means 'to name after' or 'make known by'. This stylistic device was composed of two or more words and it was made possible by the construction of systems that used synonyms for the common and proper names. The function of the kenning was to replace the objects and people it referred to, thus expanding greatly the compositional possibilities as well as contributing to the complexity of narration.

The style of *Beowulf* is the product of a traditional compositional technique which has been studied and discussed by many authors such as Francis P. Magoun. In his studies of the Anglo-Saxon narrative poetry, he focused on the use of compound nouns and the repetition of their elements in the formation of new and different ones. (Magoun, Francis P (1953): 446-67).

In modern studies concerning kennings, we can find authors such as Rudolf Meissner (Meissner (1921)), who understands the kenning as a circumlocution made up with various parts. Some other authors like Andreas Heusler¹ however, consider that the kenning is a type of metaphor and find in it a visual imagery that was not observable in the skaldic poetry from which the Anglo-Saxon poetry inherited its compositional resources.

¹ Heusler, Andreas. 1922. Review of Rudolf Meissner. 1921. *Die Kenningar der Skalden*. Bonn and Leipzig: Schroeder. *Anzeiger für deutsches Altertum und deutsche Litteratur* 41, 127-34.

Notwithstanding, all these authors agree on the substitutive function of the kenning, on its composition of at least two parts and on how it replaces a noun of common use; resorting to variation to form new concepts. These two parts in which the kenning is divided can be positioned in various ways regarding their syntactic and semantic functions. There is a general acceptance to call these constituent parts Base-word and Determinant or Limiting-word. In the same light it is understood that they form a genitive construction or a compound name. The choice is established by the metric demands.

Elena Gurevich in her study of the kenning, considers its bipartite structure in which the Determinant must correspond with that to which it refers and it must denote certain characteristic distinctive of the referent in the Base-word to help in the deciphering of the kenning. The function of the Base-word thus proves more obvious when combined with other Determinants, revealing the environments in which it can be used and the concepts it can replace. (Gurevich, Elena (1994): 139-56).

Poets would create new kennings from old ones, alternating these patterns. Through paradigmatic substitution, in which the elements of the compound can be replaced with others with the same syntactic function, allowed the poet to gain a greater complexity in his compositions, using the same Base-word and playing with various other Determinants.

The technique provided the poet with the perfect device to adjust meter and rhyme in order to enrich the content of the narrative through the allusive use of the already known signifiers.

Throughout the various types of kennings, we can distinguish kennings appellative of a common noun or concept and kennings which refer to a personage and can be identified as representative of a certain type of individual.

These personage kennings allude to characters in the narrative with respect to their deeds and achievements, their connexion with other objects or with other myths which characterise them.

Mitchell and Robinson give us examples of the different kennings that we can find in *Beowulf* and which appear in the verse either in a genitive construction

of the type 'breaker of the ring', or as a compound such as 'ring-breaker', both referring to an altruistic man. The use of one form or another being tied to the demands of the line composition (Mitchell and Robinson (1998)).

For the purpose of this study, I intend to select the kennings which appear only as compounds and more specifically those which belong in the Germanic Comitatus milieu, which the poet of *Beowulf* exploits to articulate the qualities of its warriors and bring them closer to his audience at the time that it embellishes the narration.

Theoretical Framework

Many studies have been carried out from Cognitive Linguistics to understand how we process figurative language. Research on these processes has resulted in a number of models that represent the various ways in which the mind constructs paths to acquire meaning.

This work has been constructed under the perspective of the **Prismatic Model** of Geeraerts (Geeraerts, (2002): 435), which provides clear and useful tools for the study of compounds. It is based on the **Blending Theory** of Fauconnier and Turner (Fauconnier and Turner (1998): 113-130), but it allows more detailed analysis to fully comprehend the construction of meaning in composite expressions such as compounds and idioms.

As an initial step to understanding these processes, I have taken a general approach to the **Blending Theory**, originally designed to explain the way we understand language and construct meaning. It was used to describe the cognitive steps we take to map ideas from specific language domains and blend them into a new space, ordering us to understand the world around us more comprehensively.

The theory proposed blending as a cognitive process that uses analogy, metaphor and metonymy to show the interactions of the mind when it constructs an image from one or various sources.

The schema it proposes is a conceptual integration network composed of mental spaces which lead to a blended space. The elements of the inputs merge in this new space to provide an image, so the resulting new structure reflects how we construct meaning.

However, for the specific study of kenning formation and its mechanisms, the theory is incomplete. There is an area in the schema, the generic spaces, where the inputs share features and merge, that is not easily identifiable when analysing a kenning.

To offer an example, when we try to analyse the kenning “hronráde” whose translation is ‘sea’, we can see it is composed of the word “hron”, which means ‘whale’ and the word “rád”, which is ‘road’, or ‘riding-place’. Brady’s translation was (‘the riding place of the whale’).

For the Conceptual Integration Theory, it is of paramount importance to share a correspondence of contents in the input spaces, because it is the similarity which constructs the generic space.

However, it is not always as easily identifiable to find this common space in kennings. We could find a possible generic space if we take into consideration that the whales travel in the sea and as a means of transportation, people use roads. The generic space would then be a place where some sort of movement is involved.

To construct the blended space we should consider the whale as a vehicle that traverses throughout the sea, as a result, comparing the sea to a road, and yet, it is unclear how we jump to the idea of the movement space as a generic space to construct the meaning of the sea. The semantic structure of kennings proves much more complex to be explained with the Conceptual Blending Theory alone.

To understand kennings in full depth it is necessary to study the mechanisms through which the audience infers meaning, and that requires to focus on more cognitive work, on the hidden processes that are different from the initial input spaces. These complex cognitive mechanisms are based on

metaphoric and metonymic processes which are easier to identify through the Prismatic Model.

So, for the scope of this study, I have relied on a method which compliments the Blending Theory; the **Prismatic Model of Geeraerts** (Geeraerts, (2002): 435). The model uses a distinction of the **paradigmatic** and **syntagmatic** levels of meaning to interpret idioms and compounds.

The study of the syntagmatic and paradigmatic relations between concepts was introduced by Saussure who categorized signifiers and showed how they could be substituted by others which had a similar meaning or shared a similar syntactic function.

Through these dimensions, one can have a view of the myriad of ways the literal meaning and the derived meaning of expressions are constructed.

The paradigmatic perspective shows the elements of the same syntactic category and how they associate, and then through the syntagmatic perspective, we understand their compositional relationship, the meaning of their constituents separately and the meaning of the resulting expression, reached through a reinterpretation process.

These type of systematic relationships in compounds can be shown as a prismatic structure regarding their isomorphic characteristics, that is, the correspondence one-to-one between the formal structure of the expression and the structure of its semantic interpretation. There also exist some motivational characteristics, allowing for a transition from the literal meaning of an expression to its idiomatic meaning.

This is an appropriate model for the interpretation of kennings because the relationships between the parts do not rely on mere intuition and it provides a view of the interaction between the paradigmatic and syntagmatic axes in the construction of compounds showing how metaphor and metonymy intervene in the process.

Metaphor is understood as a process through which there is an equation of terms based on similarity whereas metonymy is a cognitive process in which a

conceptual image provides mental access to another conceptual image that belongs to the same domain. These processes, which occur in the mind naturally and unconsciously, are of paramount importance to understand the meaning of idioms, because they link the information that images project to the meaning of each expression, an essential procedure to comprehend the functioning of composite expressions.

The kenning has the characteristic feature of including a condensed simile. In the case of the example proposed above, the kenning “hronráde” includes the comparison of the whale to a ship. It is not a mere description of a ship, but rather a two-part figure with a metaphoric base and a determinant.

The Base-word comprises an information that serves to compare the referent, and the determinant, linking the meaning of the Base-word and its referent.

With this model, we solve the problem of the generic, intuitive space of the two inputs as we can easily identify each of its elements. This approach will help identify each of the inputs that form the kenning, and it will also show in better detail how each word constructs the final concept that the people identify with and comprehend. As opposed to the Blending Theory, where there is no explanation of how the blended space is constructed.

Objectives

The aim of this work is to determine if the patterns used in the representation of the principles of comitatus through the use of different combinations of base words and determinants in kennings, explain the construction of a mental image through metonymic and/or metaphoric principles.

I will identify which categories of kennings are used to establish the basis for the understanding and representation of the various distinctive features of the ancient Germanic culture, that is, the identification of the hero and his skills.

I will try to envision and shed light on how the mechanisms through which the mind processes the meaning are contained in these special compounds, which will lead us to understand why the poet of *Beowulf* resorted to these

rhetoric devices in his effort to forge a work which represented the Germanic values of the time.

Approaching this study through a methodology of classification, comparison and analysis, I will contribute to the perception of the style of this poet and his creative intentions, based on his aim to succeed in the transmission of paramount cultural knowledge of the time.

Methodology

The methodology for this work will involve the compilation and decomposition of a series of selected kennings and their classification based on their prismatic structure. I shall consider the **paradigmatic dimension** of their original and derived meaning and their **syntagmatic dimension**, focusing on the relationship between the interpretation of their constituent parts and the interpretation of the expression as a whole.

Each compound will be studied according to its syntagmatic level, where the relationships between the inputs are isomorphic, meaning that there is a one-to-one correspondence between the elements of the image as a whole and the elements of the constituent parts separately. This is an active force in the mind of the language user which helps construct the resulting words.

Compounds will then be observed under a paradigmatic view, where there is a transition from the literal meaning of an expression to its figurative or idiomatic meaning, through means of motivation. This transition can occur with processes such as **metaphor, metonymy or a combination of both**.

Within the first stage of the analysis process I will take the kennings and identify their component parts; their Base-word and their Determinant, using a prismatic figure to view how they frame the compositional meaning through the division and classification of their elements. For a clearer classification I will group all these different types of kennings according to the references they make to the concepts of warriors and the ideas of comitatus they aim to convey.

The decomposition of the kennings in this way is useful to appreciate how the various parts that form the kenning can correspond to words in isomorphic mapping, and how motivational processes can be necessary in order to compose the derived meaning. To explain the way the prismatic model works I will draw a prism like the one in Figure 1:

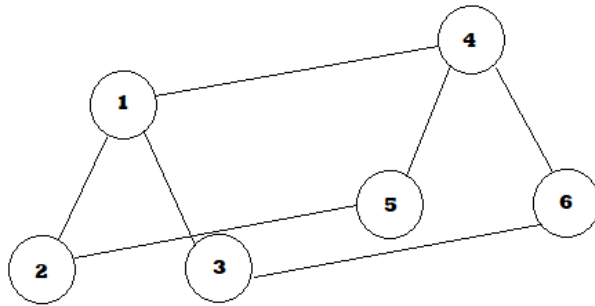


Figure 1. The prismatic model

At the front of the prism, I will place the literal expression as a whole and its constituent parts. At the backside I will place the resulting idiomatic expression derived from the reading of the literal constituent parts, as well as the resulting idiomatic interpretations separately. The transition from the expressions in the front part of the prism to the expressions at the back of the prism can occur through a process of metaphor, metonymy, or simply by identifying the original expression with its counterpart in a straight way, through reinterpretation processes.

Analysis and Results

This study will encompass the compound kennings which are applicable to the persona of the warrior, who is exemplified through compound adjectives referring to his dexterity and skills, and various compound nouns which depict the atmosphere of battle as well as the warrior's weapons.

Most of the kennings found in *Beowulf* are built with the Base-word "warrior", nouns with the suffixes -rinc, -wiga, -guma...etc. I have not treated these as kennings because one rule of these formations is that in the Base-word the person described must be called something different. The determinant does

name a certain feature but since the Base-word is so self-explanatory, these types of compounds are not suitable for the study.

Thus, I will focus on compounds that at first sight do not refer to a warrior or fighter in a strict way, but rather depict a man whose physical and psychological skills are those of a warrior or who is wearing specific fighting gear; characteristics that defined these men, or groups of men.

To summarize all these features that the poet represented through the kennings I have chosen the following compounds:

1. Kennings which refer to the warriors

They refer to the persona of the fighter and specifically the skills that characterize a suitable fighter.

1) **Hildedeór**, translated as:

'The beast of war, the human war-beast, war-beasts'. Thorpe, Benjamin. *The Anglo-Saxon Poems of Beowulf: The Scôp Or Gleeman's Tale, and the Fight at Finnesburg*. Reeves and Turner, 1889. Web. March, 11th.

The meaning of the words separately are:

"Hild". f. War, battle, combat. Hall, John R. A Concise Anglo-Saxon Dictionary. Рипол Классик, 1970. Web. March, 11th

"Deór". n. Animal, beast. Hall, John R. A Concise Anglo-Saxon Dictionary. Рипол Классик, 1970. Web. March, 11th

This is a kenning because its Base-word, "deór", does not reflect literally the concept to which it refers, a wild beast is not literally a warrior. It appears in the text in several passages.

Here's an example of the decomposition of this kenning using the prismatic model:

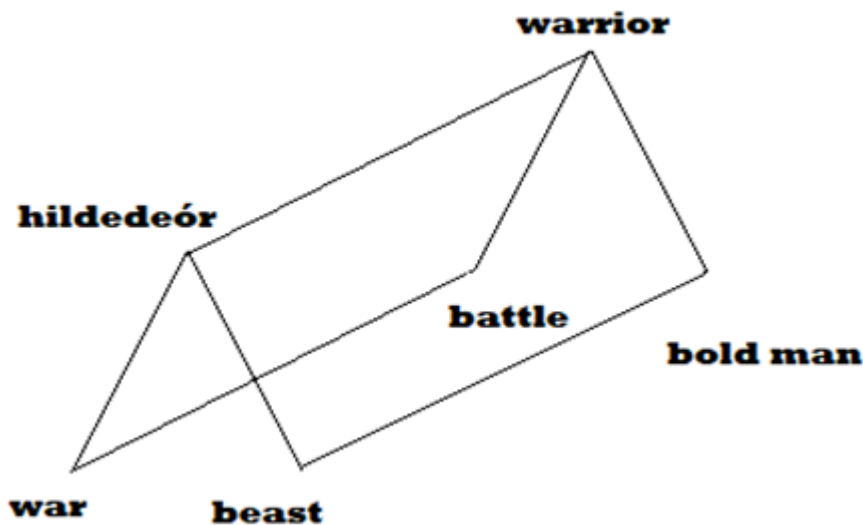


Figure 1. Prismatic model for **hildedeór**

Figure 1 shows how on a **syntagmatic level**, the isomorphic characteristic of the compound words allow us to map each of the elements one-to-one to the meanings of its constituent parts, thus it is easy to map war as a battle, or fight; and beast as a sort of creature or figure characteristic by its brute strength and ferocity. On a paradigmatic level: The motivational characteristics make use of **metaphorical tools** to identify the referents, so we can imagine a literal picture of the resulting warrior as a fierce, formidable man, thus, the typical prototype of the Germanic hero.

In metaphor there are two abstract domains which are understood in terms of each other, thus, the logic of the beast domain is mapped onto the logic of the brave attributes of the warrior. The combination of the figurative meaning of 'battle' and 'bold man' gives way to the interpretation of the compound, taken as a whole, which is: a warrior, a fighter or some sort of human soldier who is brave in battle.

2) **Mægenágende**, translated as:

'Possessing strength, might'. Bosworth-Toller, Anglo-Saxon Dictionary, and J. Bosworth. "Toller, N., an Anglo-Saxon Dictionary. Bd. 1-2." Oxford 92 (1882): 1908-21. Web. March, 11th

'Mighty ones'. Mitchell, Bruce, and Fred C. Robinson. *Beowulf: An Edition*. Wiley-Blackwell, 1998. Web. March, 11th

This kenning alludes those few men who had survived the dragon's poisonous breath, that same dragon that killed *Beowulf*. As a kenning, it does not reflect literally the concept of warrior, since the image is reached through the skills of the person². The component parts of this kenning, separately mean:

"Mægen". Bodily strength, might, power, vigour, value. Hall, John R. A Concise Anglo-Saxon Dictionary. Рипол Классик, 1970. Web. March, 11th

"Ágend". Owner, possessor, master, lord. Hall, John R. A Concise Anglo-Saxon Dictionary. Рипол Классик, 1970. Web. March, 11th

Prismatic model for **mægenágende** (see **Appendix A**. Figure 2)

On a **syntagmatic level**, as it happened with *hildedeór*, the concepts follow an isomorphic mapping, where strength and owner correspond to the domains of the warriors. On a **paradigmatic level**, the resulting expressions are also motivated. Strength is a feature which identifies a warrior, and it does so through a **metonymic process** where the relationship is that of POSSESSED FOR POSSESSOR. During this metonymic process, the mind accesses one conceptual entity via another entity, as in the **mægenágende** kenning, in which the mental image of a warrior is accessed through means of the man's fighting skills.

2. Kennings which describe the warrior through his weapons

3) **Lindgestealla**, translated as:

"A companion in arms". Bosworth-Toller, Anglo-Saxon Dictionary, and J. Bosworth. "Toller, N., an Anglo-Saxon Dictionary. Bd. 1-2." *Oxford 92* (1882): 1908-21. Web. March, 11th

"A shield companion". Thorpe, Benjamin. *The Anglo-Saxon Poems of Beowulf: The Scôp Or Gleeman's Tale, and the Fight at Finnesburg*. Reeves and Turner, 1889. Web. March, 11th

² Chapter XXXVIII. Line 2837. appears in line 2837 of *Mitchell and Robinson's Beowulf, An Edition*, and Slade, B. "Beowulf on Steorarume." *Online edition*, <http://www.heorot.dk> (2003). Web.

“Lind” here works as a determinant word that has evolved to mean shield (of wood), however its literal translation is lime-tree, a type of tree used to make shields³: ‘The linden or lime-tree’. Bosworth-Toller, Anglo-Saxon Dictionary, and J. Bosworth. "Toller, N., an Anglo-Saxon Dictionary. Bd. 1-2." *Oxford 92* (1882): 1908-21. Web. March, 11th

“Gestealla”. Companion. Bosworth-Toller, Anglo-Saxon Dictionary, and J. Bosworth. "Toller, N., an Anglo-Saxon Dictionary. Bd. 1-2." *Oxford 92* (1882): 1908-21. Web. March, 11th

Prismatic model for **lindgestealla**. (see **Appendix A**. Figure 3)

When we draw its prismatic structure, we can see that there is an isomorphic mapping of the items and their counterparts, and shield is identified with battle through a **metonymic relationship** of PART FOR WHOLE, as a shield is a piece of garment you find in a battle. As for the motivational process, the process is **metaphoric** and we identify a companion or a comrade as belonging to the same domain, and the whole expression is motivated as it is easy to identify a warrior as any companion in battle holding a shield. So, the transition from literal to figurative meaning helps to identify a warrior through his furnishings for war.

4) However, the kenning **Guðwine**, is translated:

“A comrade, a friend in war”. Bosworth-Toller, Anglo-Saxon Dictionary, and J. Bosworth. "Toller, N., an Anglo-Saxon Dictionary. Bd. 1-2." *Oxford 92* (1882): 1908-21. Web. March, 11th

This kenning is used for the word “sword”, as in the poem it refers exclusively to Hrunting, the sword given to *Beowulf* by Unferth and used to fight Grendel’s mother. Some other translations for this kenning include:

“Battle-friend, weapon”. Hall, John R. *A Concise Anglo-Saxon Dictionary*. Рипол Классик, 1970. Web. March, 11th

The translation of each of the components are:

³ There are literary references to the use of the light wood of the lime for shields, so that *lind* was actually used to indicate “shield” [...]. And the linden shields are usually mentioned in poems such as *Beowulf*. Hooke, Della. *Trees in Anglo-Saxon England: literature, lore and landscape*. Vol. 13. Boydell & Brewer, 2010.

“Gúð”. War, battle, fight. Bosworth-Toller, Anglo-Saxon Dictionary, and J. Bosworth. "Toller, N., an Anglo-Saxon Dictionary. Bd. 1-2." *Oxford 92* (1882): 1908-21. Web. March, 11th

“Wine”. A friend. Bosworth-Toller, Anglo-Saxon Dictionary, and J. Bosworth. "Toller, N., an Anglo-Saxon Dictionary. Bd. 1-2." *Oxford 92* (1882): 1908-21. Web. March, 11th

Prismatic model for **guðwine**. (see **Appendix A**. Figure 4)

There is no doubt the elements are isomorphic, they map the situation of the previous kenning, that of a battle and a comrade or companion to fight along the warrior. However, the transition from the word ‘friend’ to that of ‘weapon’ is **not motivational**, because it is not clear if a friend would be a person or an object. For this transition it is necessary to use a process of **metaphor**, by which the audience can identify that the magnificent friend the kenning refers to is the mighty Hrunting, and that the access to this image of the sword is assisted by the surrounding lines in the poem, which describe the “beloved iron”⁴.

The aforementioned kennings are appropriate examples to distinguish their function from other compounds that depict warriors through the gear they carry, such as *helmberend* (helm-bearer), *randwiga* (warrior with a disc or shield), *garwiga*, (spear-fighter or spearman) *sweordfreca* (swordsmen). In these compounds, the Base-word and determinant are words which identify literally both the warrior and his weapon. They are not considered kennings, because their base word reflects literally the object or concept to which it refers.

However, there are many other, considered kennings with a different form:

5) “**Lindhæbbende**”. Shield-bearer, warrior. Bosworth-Toller, Anglo-Saxon Dictionary, and J. Bosworth. "Toller, N., an Anglo-Saxon Dictionary. Bd. 1-2." *Oxford 92* (1882): 1908-21. Web. March, 11th

The component parts of the kenning are ‘lind’, lime-tree and the verb ‘habban’.

⁴ Chapter XXVI. Line 1810, “hé þone guðwine “. Slade, B. "Beowulf on Steorarume." *Online edition*, <http://www.heorot.dk> (2003). Web.

“Habban”. To HAVE, possess, hold, keep. Bosworth-Toller, Anglo-Saxon Dictionary, and J. Bosworth. "Toller, N., an Anglo-Saxon Dictionary. Bd. 1-2." *Oxford 92* (1882): 1908-21. Web. March, 11th

Prismatic model for **Lindhæbbende**. (see **Appendix A**. Figure 5)

As we have seen above, it is unclear that the determinant term ‘lind’ refers to a shield unless we know that at the time shields were made with Lindenwood.

We must bear in mind that the audience at the time understood the figurative meaning but for the modern reader the words would not map the situation described and the expression would **not be motivational**, as it would be difficult to identify why a certain type of tree should come to indicate that specific piece of battle garment. The transition process performed by the audience of that epic verse would be first that of a **metonymy MATERIAL CONSTITUTING AN OBJECT FOR THE OBJECT**, as the lime tree wood was back then characteristic for the making of shields, then followed by another process of reinterpretation, in which the **metonymy PART FOR WHOLE** is put at work, as it takes a specific part in the garment of a fighter to identify the fighter himself.

6) Another example of this characteristic type of construction, is **Æscwiga**.

‘A spear-warrior’. Bosworth-Toller, Anglo-Saxon Dictionary, and J. Bosworth. "Toller, N., an Anglo-Saxon Dictionary. Bd. 1-2." *Oxford 92* (1882): 1908-21. Web. March, 11th

However, the determinant word in this kenning is **æsc**, or ash tree, a type of tree which was commonly used to make spears.

“**æsc**”. An ash-tree. Bosworth-Toller, Anglo-Saxon Dictionary, and J. Bosworth. "Toller, N., an Anglo-Saxon Dictionary. Bd. 1-2." *Oxford 92* (1882): 1908-21. Web. March, 11th

“**wiga**”. Warrior. Bosworth-Toller, Anglo-Saxon Dictionary, and J. Bosworth. "Toller, N., an Anglo-Saxon Dictionary. Bd. 1-2." *Oxford 92* (1882): 1908-21. Web. March, 11th

Prismatic model for **æscwiga**. (see **Appendix A**. Figure 6)

The elements in these two kennings are isomorphic, but they are **not motivational**, as the literal meaning of ‘ash’ and ‘lime-tree’ is unclear for the

modern reader. We would have to become familiar with the legends of the ash tree in mythology, so this kenning is a significant example of the richness of these compounds in the understanding of the Germanic culture.

3. Kennings which depict battle sounds and atmosphere

The sounds of battle are a characteristic feature in *Beowulf's* poetry, they enhance the efforts of the warriors, their mighty strength and their struggle, and they help readers and audience understand the circumstances and the atmosphere in which the warriors had to survive. The poet uses the Germanic Comitatus language to depict with intensity the movement and sound of battle using many compounds as visual images, so that the scenes are brought closer to the reader. Some of the kennings which help to convey this atmosphere are:

7) **Isernscure** Translated in general as a burst of swords:

"The iron showers". Thorpe, Benjamin. *The Anglo-Saxon Poems of Beowulf: The Scôp Or Gleeman's Tale, and the Fight at Finnesburg*. Reeves and Turner, 1889. Web.

The meanings of the words separately are:

"Isern". Iron, an iron tool. Bosworth-Toller, Anglo-Saxon Dictionary, and J. Bosworth. "Toller, N., an Anglo-Saxon Dictionary. Bd. 1-2." *Oxford 92* (1882): 1908-21. Web. March, 11th

"Scúr". A shower, storm of rain, snow, hail. Bosworth-Toller, Anglo-Saxon Dictionary, and J. Bosworth. "Toller, N., an Anglo-Saxon Dictionary. Bd. 1-2." *Oxford 92* (1882): 1908-21. Web. March, 11th

Prismatic model for **isernscúre**. (see **Appendix A**. Figure 7)

We can appreciate the isomorphic mapping of its elements. The expression is also fully motivated, as it is easy to identify the determinant word, 'iron' with 'sword' through a **metonymic process** of MATERIAL CONSTITUTING AN OBJECT FOR THE OBJECT. The word 'storm' is also motivated as the audience can visualize the approach of objects as in a torrent or violent downpour. Here, the mental process is that of a **metaphor**, as we understand the conceptual

domain of the storm in terms of another domain, that of an assault or an onslaught.

8) Another kenning related to the sounds of battle is **Gryreleoð**. The various translations for this kenning are:

“Terrible song”. Hall, John R. *A Concise Anglo-Saxon Dictionary*. Рипол Классик, 1970. Web. March, 11th

“A song of terror” Bosworth-Toller, *Anglo-Saxon Dictionary*, and J. Bosworth. "Toller, N., an Anglo-Saxon Dictionary. Bd. 1-2." *Oxford 92* (1882): 1908-21. Web. March, 11th

This kenning gives us a rich and visual depiction of what would be the terrible screams of battle. It belongs to the passage where a terrifying wail echoed through the hall of the Danes, and it was so piercing that “the North Danes ‘stood in ghastly horror’”⁵.

The meaning of each of the component parts of this kenning are:

“Gryre”. Horror, terror, dread, something horrible, dreadful. Bosworth-Toller, *Anglo-Saxon Dictionary*, and J. Bosworth. "Toller, N., an Anglo-Saxon Dictionary. Bd. 1-2." *Oxford 92* (1882): 1908-21. Web. March, 11th

“Leoð”. n. A song, poem, ode, lay, verses. Bosworth-Toller, *Anglo-Saxon Dictionary*, and J. Bosworth. "Toller, N., an Anglo-Saxon Dictionary. Bd. 1-2." *Oxford 92* (1882): 1908-21. Web. March, 11th

Prismatic model for **gryreleoð**. (see **Appendix A**. Figure 8)

With the aid of the corresponding figure it is easy to appreciate that the words terror and song map their figurative meanings. The expression is also motivated; terror stands for something frightening and we process the word sound as a **metaphor** of song, or even a **metonymy** PART FOR WHOLE, as songs are inevitably made of sounds. It is the combination of the Base-word ‘sound’, and

⁵ Chapter XI, lines 783-784. Slade, B. "Beowulf on Steorarume." *Online edition*, <http://www.heorot.dk> (2003). Web.

the determinant 'frightening', that leads us to think or interpret the kenning as a dreadful scream all through Heorot's hall.

9) **Laðbite**; This kenning has been translated as:

"The hate-bites of the body". Slade, B. "Beowulf on Steorarume." *Online edition*, <http://www.heorot.dk> (2003). Web.

This kenning appears in the passage where Hnaef, ruler of the Scyldings of Denmark was killed during a battle with the Frisians, as was Hildeburh's son whose mother wailed over them as the fire consumed their bodies: "the wound-gates burst open, then blood sprang out, from the hate-bites of the body"⁶.

Taken separately, these compound words mean:

"lað". 'what is hateful or harmful', harm, evil, injury. Bosworth-Toller, Anglo-Saxon Dictionary, and J. Bosworth. "Toller, N., an Anglo-Saxon Dictionary. Bd. 1-2." *Oxford 92* (1882): 1908-21. Web. March, 11th

"Bite". Bite, sting or sword-cut, and as pain, the biting or pain of a wound, a biting disease or cancer. Bosworth-Toller, Anglo-Saxon Dictionary, and J. Bosworth. "Toller, N., an Anglo-Saxon Dictionary. Bd. 1-2." *Oxford 92* (1882): 1908-21. Web. March, 11th

Prismatic model for **laðbite**. (see **Appendix A**. Figure 9)

This kenning is fully isomorphic because each of the parts map their figurative meanings, and motivational because it is easy to see the literal meaning of cuts as bites and a harmful, hateful act as something causing pain and injury.

The resulting meaning, which can be translated as 'deathly wound' is reached through a process of **metaphor**, where we can identify cuts as bites.

Then, through another process of **metaphor** we can appreciate how under the idea of evil, mortal, the audience can easily identify an image which allows for the bites to be seen as the result of a physical injury.

10) **Hiorodrync** or (heorudrync) which is translated as:

⁶ Chapter XVI. Lines 1121-1122. Slade, B. "Beowulf on Steorarume." *Online edition*, <http://www.heorot.dk> (2003). Web.

'Drinking by the sword, a wound'. Bosworth-Toller, Anglo-Saxon Dictionary, and J. Bosworth. "Toller, N., an Anglo-Saxon Dictionary. Bd. 1-2." *Oxford 92* (1882): 1908-21. Web. March, 11th

This kenning is found in *Beowulf's* explanation on how Hrethel's heir died 'in the drink of sword'⁷. Separately, the words mean:

"**Heoru**". heoro, hioro; A sword. Bosworth-Toller, Anglo-Saxon Dictionary, and J. Bosworth. "Toller, N., an Anglo-Saxon Dictionary. Bd. 1-2." *Oxford 92* (1882): 1908-21. Web. March, 11th

"**Drync**". es; m. A drink, draught. Bosworth-Toller, Anglo-Saxon Dictionary, and J. Bosworth. "Toller, N., an Anglo-Saxon Dictionary. Bd. 1-2." *Oxford 92* (1882): 1908-21. Web. March, 11th

Prismatic model for **hiorodrync**. (see **Appendix A**. Figure 10)

The prismatic figure shows that this kenning combines a Base-word which denotes a liquid and a determinant to express 'weapon'. They are combined to encompass the referent, describing an element which is not specifically that referent in the verse. Both Base-word and determinant are isomorphic, and their motivational characteristics make use of synonymic substitutions in both the Base-word and Determinant categories, so there is no need to resort to metaphoric or metonymic processes. In this case it is interesting to see how a process of personification of the sword drinking blood is used to depict the act of wounding.

11) Finally, **Wærest**, (wælræste) which is translated as:

'Resting place for the slain' or 'deathbed'. Mitchell, Bruce, and Fred C. Robinson. *Beowulf: An Edition*. Wiley-Blackwell, 1998. Web.

We find this kenning in the section when Wiglaf commands that the outcome of the battle be told to all the men and the messenger announces that *Beowulf* is dead.⁸ Separately, the words mean:

"Wæl". 'slaughter, carnage'. Hall, John R. A Concise Anglo-Saxon Dictionary. Рипол Классик, 1970. Web. March, 11th

⁷ Chapter XXXIII. Line 2358. Slade, B. "Beowulf on Steorarume." *Online edition*, <http://www.heorot.dk> (2003). Web.

⁸ Chapter XL. Lines 2900-2902. Slade, B. "Beowulf on Steorarume." *Online edition*, <http://www.heorot.dk> (2003). Web.

And “Rest”. Rest, quiet, repose, sleep. Hall, John R. A Concise Anglo-Saxon Dictionary. Рипол Классик, 1970. Web. March, 11th

Prismatic model for **wærest**. (see **Appendix A**. Figure 11)

This kenning is isomorphic because ‘the slain’ would correspond to dead warriors and ‘bed’ would correspond to a resting place. The motivational features of the compound make use of **metaphorical tools** matching a resting place with a bed, and also the slain, or the fallen, as the dead people in battle.

As it has been made evident, the determinant is added to a Base-word to create a relation to the referent, and although this referent is not mentioned directly and it does not appear in the structure of the kenning, it is nonetheless reached through the relations held by the Base-word and the determinant.

It is quite significant how these terms are connected to point together to a third term, the referent, and at the same time, they are pointing at different domains, which taken separately and read at a literal level, do not give a hint about the absent referent they aim to identify.

This target referent is understood by a combination of various terms which represent the object or replace one term with another of a similar domain. Thus, the minds of the users must resort to metaphor or metonymy.

Conclusions

The use of the Prismatic Model for the deconstruction of kennings has allowed us to visualize and determine which are the patterns used in the formation of compounds which represented the principles of comitatus. This model has offered a better analysis of the semantic structure of the kenning than the Blending Theory, because it distinguishes the interpretation of a compound noun as a whole and the interpretation of its component parts, in both their literal and figurative meaning.

As stated throughout the various analysis of the selected kennings, the use of different Base-words combined with determinants were the methods used by

the poet of *Beowulf* to help the audience construct a mental image and interpret those compounds which referred to the warriors and their skills. And the processes the mind puts at work to reach these figurative meanings were metaphoric and metonymic principles.

These examples also show that kennings were important to create new expressions and provide a wider scope of material for the poet to enrich the narrative of the deeds of its hero.

When reading the poem or listening to the “scops” and rhapsodes, the audience would search through the different perspectives of the referent to be able to interpret a kenning. This process entailed the exploration and selection, among the various possibilities, of one item which belonged to a common domain in order to find out which elements could be involved.

The determinant was the element which reduced an otherwise incredibly large amount of possibilities belonging to the same field that the Base-word proposed, thus, being the term which helped find an interpretation. The determinant was the keyword to solve the kenning.

So, when the Old English listener received the information, he had to identify which process was at work, a metonymic or a metaphoric one. In the case of metaphor, the elements in the same domain would be immensely large, so it was the intersection of both Base-word and determinant which helped him reduce the possibilities until he reached a culturally known or familiar term.

It was a process of deciphering what the poet encoded. And the poet did an arduous task when creating an expression, which involved searching and selecting each of the terms that formed the kenning, choosing those possibilities that led him to an archetype that could form a referent people could recognise.

The kenning was a vehicle to travel in two worlds, the domain of the figurative world represented by the Base-word and the real world represented by a determinant.

The listener must view the referent under two perspectives at the same time: he must view a warrior as someone who is in war (the real world) and as a beast (the figurative world in which he becomes a bold man), as in the analysis of kenning 1, Hildedeór.

Through the various possibilities that the poet had to represent the world, he selects which to combine and delights in using as vehicles those whose meaning is radically distanced from the accepted general knowledge of the term.

Kennings can be particularly difficult to understand to modern speakers. In some cases, an explanation was needed in order to really capture the essence of what the poet meant to express. The search for isomorphism on the figurative level has been an easy task in the various kennings used for analysis in this work, but in the case of motivation, there have been cases where the modern reader would have found it difficult to identify the referent of the kenning from the separate meaning of its compound forms.

I have encountered various inconveniences when performing this study: There have been many kennings that I have not been able to analyse because the translation was not clear, because the different authors interpreted them as best they suited them, or because the kennings did not match an interpretation that the modern reader would understand.

On the other hand, this study is limited to the field of the warrior, its weapons and a few representations of sounds in war, which exemplify a small area in the global concept of Comitatus. I believe many other studies could be performed to expand the interpretation of the concept, and also regarding other topics of interest in the poem, such as the depiction of monsters, animals, or the significance of nature and land for the people.

One could even begin research on how the concept of death is portrayed and accepted, all through the use of these kennings and the function of their component parts.

Nonetheless, kennings served to grab the audience's attention by means of defamiliarizing the concepts people were accustomed to. The audience had to

look at these concepts in a radically different way and draw new links between terms and ideas that they might not have considered before.

Several questions can be put forward regarding the use of the kenning technique:

1) Did the audience enjoy and repeat these kennings so often as to have them incorporated into their lexicon for future use, since they were compacted expressions, susceptible to be useful in the interpretation of the knowledge of the world?

2) Did these techniques of kenning and riddle allow the common user to invent new ones for his everyday life the way other poets did to enrich their works?

In my opinion, the technique and the bright use of these kennings was key in the success of the poem. There is no doubt that the appearance of these formulaic tools would have delighted the audience for their wit and vivacity, and that the ingenious management of their component parts has been the perfect means to spread the Germanic *comitatus* culture, through lands and time.

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Appendix A

The following figures show the various Prismatic Figures for the representation of the kennings analysed in the work.

Figure 2. Prismatic model for **mægenágende**

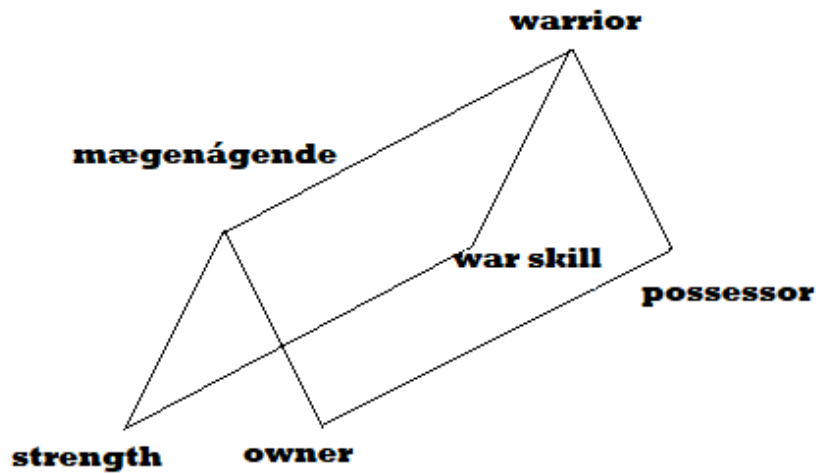


Figure 3. Prismatic model for **lindgestealla**.

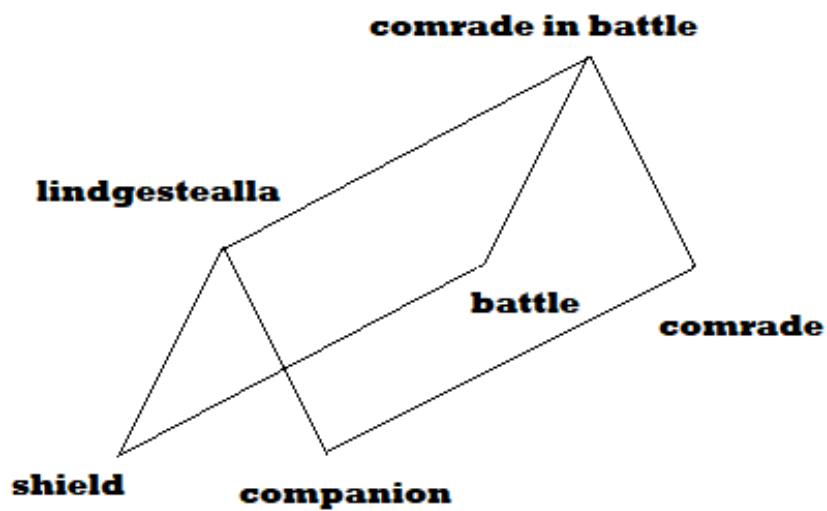


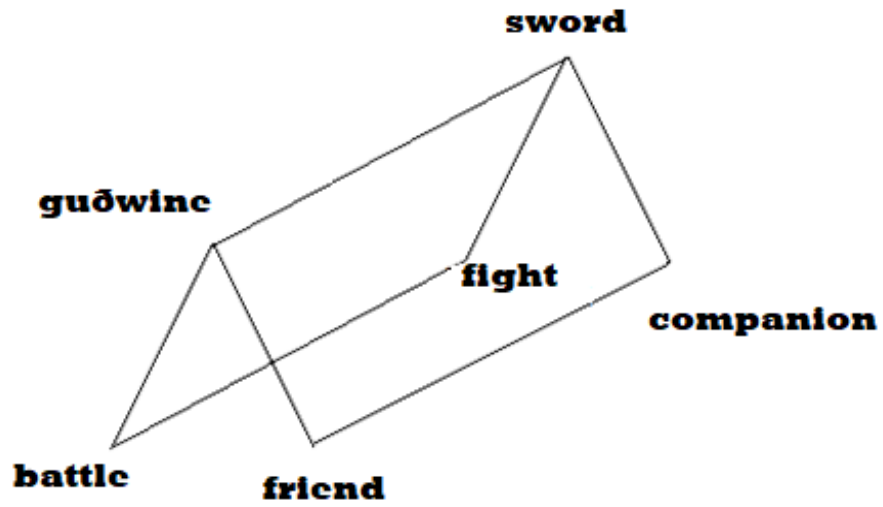
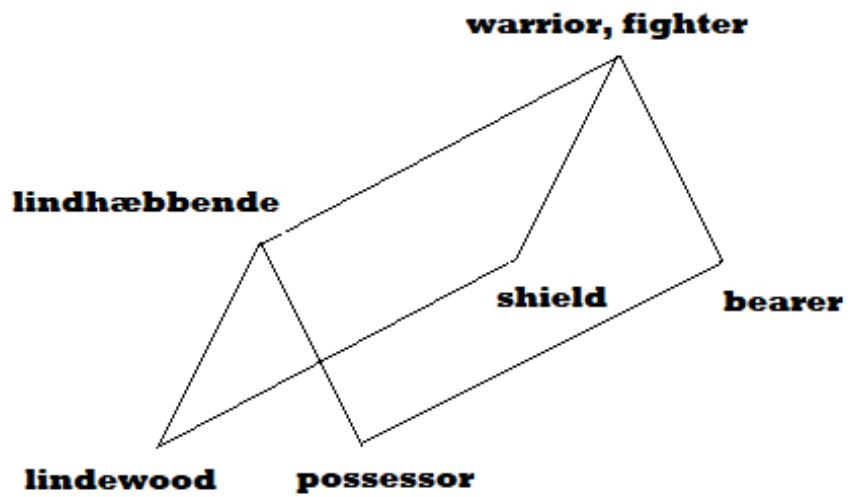
Figure 4. Prismatic model for **guðwine**.Figure 5. Prismatic model for **lindhæbbende**

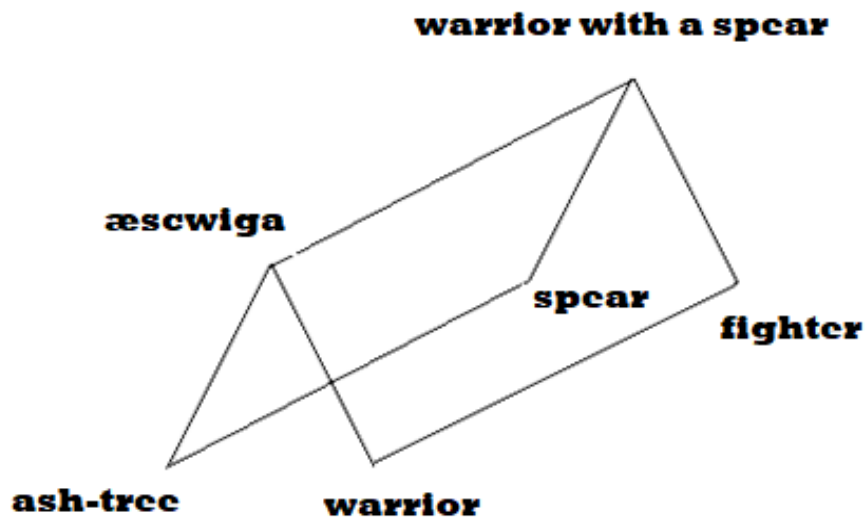
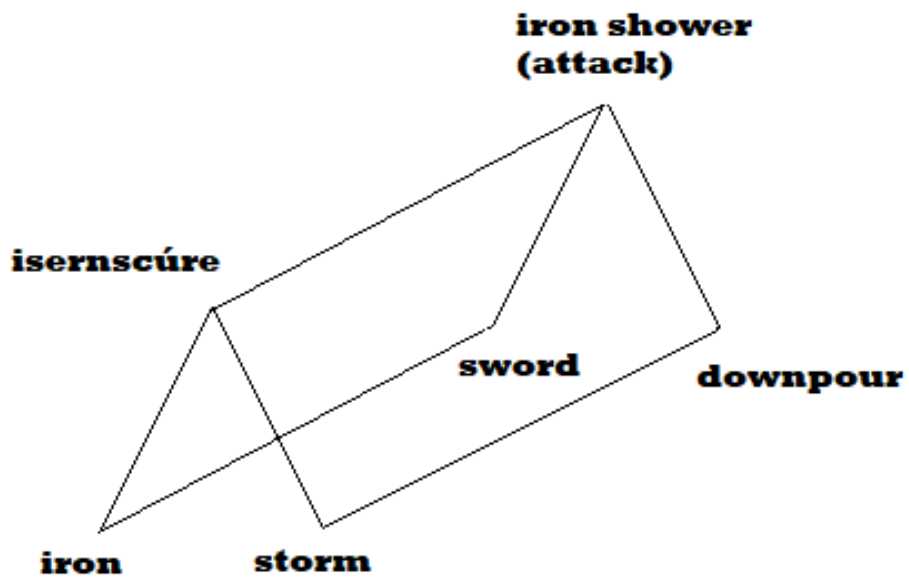
Figure 6. Prismatic model for **æscwiga**.Figure 7. Prismatic model for **isernscúre**.

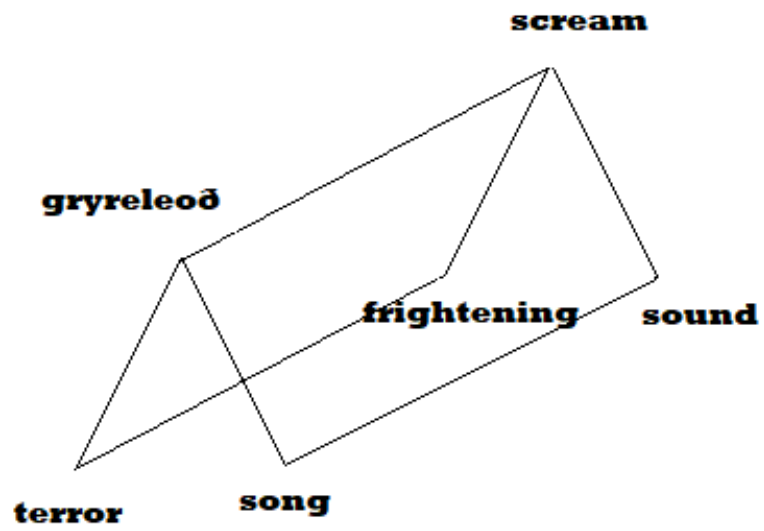
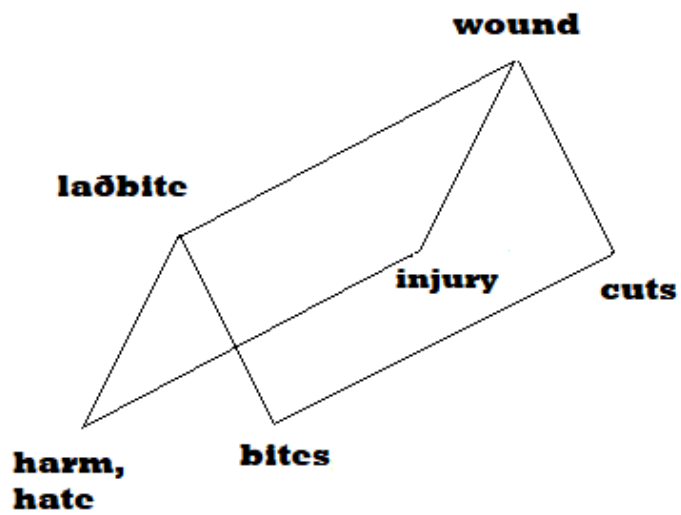
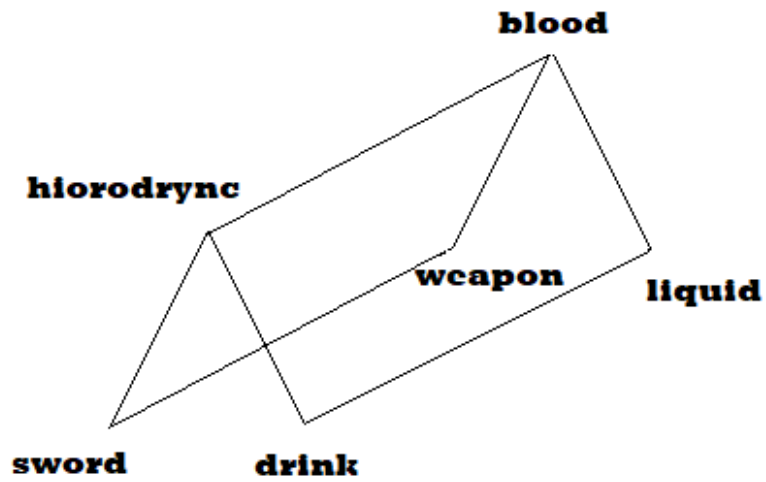
Figure 8. Prismatic model for **gryreleoð**.Figure 9. Prismatic model for **laðbite**

Figure 10. Prismatic model for **hiorodrync**Figure 11. Prismatic model for **wælrest**