EARLY OLD ENGLISH ANAPHORA,
TOPIC MARKERS,
AND PARTICIPANT IDENTIFICATION

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The problem of anaphoric reference and participant identification in Early Old English is discussed. A reanalysis of the function of the articles, demonstratives and third person pronouns is proposed whereby the third person pronoun marks topic, and the particles an, sum 'one', se 'that' mark a change in topic. This reanalysis makes the reference of all heretofore ambiguous anaphora explicit, simultaneously predicting subsequent changes in English morphology and syntax.

The purpose of this paper is to suggest a possible analysis of the Early Old English participant identification system. The analysis will be based on internal evidence from the first 23 main clauses of the Parker version of "Cynewulf and Cyneheard", an early example of Old English historic narrative, and on indirect evidence from later stages of English. The basic question is this: was there in Early Old English a system other than inference for determining the reference of third person singular anaphora when there was more than one possible referent? I believe that there was, and that this system was different from that of later English.

"Cynewulf and Cyneheard" is both an ideal, and virtually the only text with which to test this hypothesis. In this version, it is the earliest extant historic narrative of sufficient length and complexity to allow any analysis of the participant identification system at all. Commonly found in introductory readers, it is a source of much confusion to the beginning student of Old English, due to the large number of participants and
therefore, of anaphora in a relatively short space. It is difficult to know to whom the anaphora refer, although the chain of events the narrative describes is not in itself hard to follow. There are two possible causes for the ambiguity of the piece:

1) the chronicler responsible for "Cynewulf and Cyneheard" was an extremely poor writer, or

2) there is a system, of which we are unaware, which makes the reference of the anaphora clear.

In general, anaphors function to avoid repetition and to shorten utterances. They are usually shorter than the nouns they replace, zero anaphora much more so. However, except when the same participant is repeated within one clause, it is largely a matter of choice whether a previously mentioned participant is referred to fully, or anaphorically by a pronoun or zero. A basic assumption of this paper is that which of these three alternatives is chosen is not random, but has a reason behind it.

Indeed, it is by far most common for a noun phrase which repeats in the following clause to be referred to by an anaphor of some kind. However, in the situation where two participants repeat in the following clause, a problem arises. If both participants may be referred to by an anaphor, how do we know which participant is referred to by which anaphor? There are several possibilities. One could infer from what had preceded which participant would be most likely to fulfill which role; there could be several different pronouns to distinguish participants; one could be referred to by a pronoun, the other by a zero anaphor; or only one of the two could be referred to by a pronoun at a time.

1 cf. Latin *ipse, iste, ille* and English the former; the latter
Several of these possible solutions to the dilemma are found in "Cynewulf and Cyneheard". At times, one participant will be referred to by a zero anaphor and the other by a pronoun; at others, one is referred to by a pronoun, the other by a noun. There are further restrictions on these two statements. A participant cannot be referred to by a zero anaphor unless it was the subject of the preceding main clause, nor can it be referred to by a pronoun unless it was also referred to by a pronoun in the preceding main clause, or had been specially marked in some way, usually morphologically, occasionally syntactically. I will further introduce two concepts, that of topic and that of a hierarchy of topics. The topic, loosely defined, is that participant which a unit of discourse is 'about'. A hierarchy of topics will allow us to have a primary topic over a large unit discourse, with secondary topics for smaller units of discourse within the larger one. The primary topic and the secondary topic may, in fact, coincide.

The primary topic can be determined from the content of the discourse and is also often marked as such in the introductory sentence of the discourse. The secondary topic refers to a participant which only a section of the discourse is 'about'. It is my argument that topic is marked in two ways in Early Old English, by first position in the clause and by reference by a pronoun. Thus, the participant mentioned first in the introductory sentence will be the primary topic while in following sections the referent of the pronoun (which occupies first position) is the secondary topic. Furthermore, I hypothesize that one of the func-

1 H.A. Gleason in lectures
tions of the particles se 'that', an, sum 'one, a certain' was to signal a change of topic from one section of discourse to the next and hence, of the referent of the pronoun.

I will now give the arguments for the above analysis in detail, first with data from "Cynewulf and Cyneheard" and then from later stages of English. It will be convenient to think of its author as having been confronted with a series of choices in narrating this series of events. Undoubtedly, some details have been omitted. Similarly, some information has been included which is not strictly necessary for comprehension. I assume that in "Cynewulf and Cyneheard", one of the determining factors in the choices that were made was linguistic and not style alone.

In the very first line of "Cynewulf and Cyneheard" we have an example of the kinds of choices the author was required to make. The first sentence of a narrative generally has the function of introducing the major participants and the situation. This is the case here also. Two human participants are introduced, Cynewulf and Sigebrýht. The event is one taking the kingdom of Wessex from the other, due to misdeeds. Normally, nouns are inflected for case, so that we know their role in the event in any word order. However, proper names are not distinguished inflectionally for nominative and accusative case. In this situation, Old English has an unmarked obligatory word order, S/O. From this and the fact that Cynewulf precedes Sigebrýht, we know that it is Cynewulf who deprives Sigebrýht of the kingship and (by inference) that he replaces him as king.

It is significant however, that this has been stated in an
active sentence rather than in a passive one. Both are possible and the choice of which one to use depends, I believe, on which participant you wish to mark as topic of the entire discourse by putting it in first position in the sentence. That is, by putting Cynewulf first, the author has indicated that the discourse as a whole is about Cynewulf and not Sigebrýht.

The author was confronted with a second choice in this sentence. rice 'kingdom, power' cannot stand alone, but must be qualified. There are several possible possibilities, þæs rícês 'of that kingdom' or his rícês 'of his kingdom' referring to either Cynewulf or Sigebrýht by his. The author chose his rícês and by its position immediately following Sigebrýht, we know that his refers to him. The only purpose that could be served by qualifying rícês with his rather than þæs would be to signal that the topic of the next section of discourse, therefore the referent of any pronouns was to be Sigebrýht and not Cynewulf. In fact, through lines 2-6 inclusive, the reading we are led to by inference from other sources and the one proposed coincide.

4 In line 4, Cynewulf reappears, specified by name. An anaphoric form is impossible here, since he did not appear in the preceding clause. However, it is possible that the he in line 5 might refer to Cynewulf. In line 4, the author had the choice of referring to Cynewulf as either Cynewulf or se Cynewulf 'that Cynewulf' (because he is both definite and known from being previously mentioned). I have argued that what conditions this choice is whether the author intends the reintroduced participant to serve as the topic of the next section of discourse or
1) Her Cynewulf benam Sigebryst his rices
and Westseaxna wiutan for unryhtum dedum
buton Hamlunscire
In this year Cynewulf and the Wessex
council deprived Sigebryst of his kingdom
with the exception of Hampshire

2) ond he hefde ba
and he had it

3) ob he ofaslog bone aldorman be him
lenges tunode
until he killed that alderman that
stayd with him longest

4) ond hiene ba Cynewulf on Andre adræfde
and Cynewulf then drove him into the
forest of Andre

5) ond he bor tunode
and he stayed there

6) ob bat hiene an swan ofstang at
Pryfrtis flodan
until one swineherd stabbed him to death
at Privet

7) ond he wæc bone aldorman Cumbran
and he avenged that alderman Cumbran

8) ond se Cynewulf oft miclum gefeothum feahht
wib Bretwalum
and that Cynewulf often fought against the
Welsh with great battles

9) ond ymb xxxi wintra hes he he rices hefde
he wolde adrsfan anna shelung
and around 31 years after Cynewulf came to
power, he wanted to drive away one prince

10) se wes Cyneheard haten
that was called Cyneheard

11) ond se Cyneheard wes hes Sigebryttes
brobur
and that Cyneheard was that Sigebryt's
brother
CHAIN OF EVENTS

CYNEWULF — ag — DEPRIVE — — eg — SIGEBRYHT
KINGDOM — — — —

HAVE — — — — eg —

ALDORMAN — gl — KILL — — ag —

CYNEWULF — ag — DRIVE — — gl —
ANDRED — — — — —

—— STAY — — — — ag —

SWAN — ag — KILL — — gl —

—— ag — AVENGE —

CYNEWULF — ag — FIGHT —

—— ag — WANT — — gl — CYNEHEARD
DRIVE OUT —

AN SWAN

HE

ANNE MELING

SE = CYNEHEARD

SE CYNEHEARD =

DES SIGEBRYHTES BROPUR
12) and he geascode he bone cyning lytle
    werode on wifcybbre on Merantune
    and then he discovered that king with
    a small band at Merton with a woman
13) ond hine bar berad
    and overtook him there
14) ond bone burg utan beeode
    and that chamber outside
    surrounded
15) se hine ha menn onfundun be
    mid ham kyninga werun
    before the man that were with the
    king should find him
16) ond ba ongeat se cyning be
    and then perceived that king that
17) ond he on ba duru eode
    and he to the door went
18) ond ba hine unheanlice werde
    and then him nobly defended
19) ob he on bone spealing locude
    until he at the prince looked
20) ond ba ut wesde on hine
    and then rushed out at him
21) ond hine miclum gewundode
    and him greatly wounded
22) ond his alle werun on bone cyning
    fechtende
    and they all were against that
    king fighting
23) ob hie hine ofslægenne hæfdon
    until they him dead had
not. If this is correct, since Cynewulf was not marked by se, he will not be the topic of line 5 and the pronoun will continue to refer to Sigebruyht.

6 In line 6, the subject is an swan 'a certain swineherd' and the direct object is hine 'him'. Again we have been confronted with the results of several choices. an swan means a specific swineherd whose identity the author does not know, or does not care to specify. Moreover, since his identity is either unknown or unimportant, he could have been referred to as man 'someone', even as an mann 'a certain man'. A reason for not calling him the unmarked man would be because he was intended as the topic of the next section of discourse. A reason for identifying him as a swan rather than a mann would be to explain his subsequent actions. From cultural knowledge and from what had preceded a contemporary reader would know that:

a) Cumbra was the alderman of Hampshire
b) Sigebruyht had murdered him
c) the forest of Andred was largely in Hampshire
d) other than outlaws (e.g. Sigebruyht), only people such as swineherds had any legal business in the forest
e) murders had to be avenged and only kinsmen or followers of the victim could do so

7 Given this information and line 7, ond he wræc bone aldorman Cumbran 'and he avenged that alderman Cumbra', the he of line 7 can only refer to the swineherd.

By the end of that line, two of the human participants men-
tioned so far, Cumbra and Sigebrught, are dead, while a third, an swan, has fulfilled his function of avenging his lord. This leaves us with Cynewulf. If I am correct in saying that he is the primary topic of the discourse, the story cannot end here, for he has not yet been the secondary topic. Nor does it. Line 8 introduces Cynewulf referring to him as se Cynewulf. Thus marked, and as the only remaining participant, the next two he forms refer to Cynewulf. However, in line 9, another participant is introduced, ane wælæing 'a certain prince'. ane should signal a change in topic and of reference of any pronouns. In line 10, the demonstrative pronoun se stands alone and, as it should, can only refer to the prince.

Lines 10,11 are of a different type than those preceding. They do not narrate but describe, thereby serving several purposes. By giving the name of the prince, he may be referred to two ways by a noun when necessary, thus reducing repetition. By identifying him as Sigebrught's brother all his final actions are explained as are Cynewulf's. As Sigebrught's brother, Cyneheard is duty bound to avenge his brother's death by killing Cynewulf, thus explaining Cynewulf's desire to send him into exile.

In line 12 then, he refers to Cyneheard and pone cyning, 'that king' (by inference) to Cynewulf. pone 'that' marks Cynewulf as the new topic and so the hine in line 13 refers to him. In this line, there is another choice of sorts, whether to refer to Cyneheard by an anaphor or not. Since the pronoun is already "taken" as it were, the only anaphor left is zero. This anaphor can only be used if the referent is the subject of the sentence
and was also the subject of the immediately preceding sentence.

Since both these conditions are fulfilled, Cyneheard may be deleted from line 13. Line 14 has no surface subject, so by my reasoning, Cyneheard must again be its subject. Or, conversely, since from the context, Cyneheard must be the subject of line 14, he may be referred to in it by a zero anaphor.

There is an interesting situation in line 14. Cynewulf, the topic of line 13 does not appear, while Cyneheard and the inanimate _bur_ 'chamber' do. In addition, _bur_ is marked by _pone_ 'that'. Can non-human participants be the topic of an Old English discourse? If not, does Cynewulf's non-appearance signal that he is no longer the topic? In line 15 'before the men who were with the king discovered him', the _hine_ makes most sense if it refers to Cyneheard. This would mean that a participant ceases to be the topic if once it is not mentioned and that barring marking of a newly introduced participant as topic, the subject of the first sentence in which the former topic does not appear is the topic.

In the subordinate clause contained within line 15, _cyning_ 'king' is marked with _bam_ 'that' and again in line 16. This is the evidence for the system not holding for constituents of subordinate clauses.

In line 16 then, the marking of _cyning_ with _se_ signals that Cynewulf is once again the topic. Thus the pronouns in lines 17, 18, 19 refer to Cynewulf. In line 18, there is no overt subject, but since the previous subject is a pronoun which refers to Cynewulf, he must also be the subject of line 18. Furthermore, the direct object of the verb _werede_ 'defended', refers not to some
third party, but to Cynewulf himself, since it appears in a pronominal form.

19 In line 19, the direct object *speling* is marked as the new topic and the subject *he* still refers to Cynewulf. Thus, the direct object of the verb *ut ræste* 'rushed out' in line 20, *hine*, now refers to Cyneheard, while the zero subject refers to the previous subject, *he*, which refers to Cynewulf. Line 21 is parallel, with again a zero subject and a direct object *hine*, therefore, both subject and object refer to the same participants as in the sentence before.

22 In line 22, a new participant is introduced as subject, *hie alle* 'they all', that is, Cyneheard and the band which, by implication, was accompanying him. Once more *cyning* is marked with *bone*, signalling that Cynewulf is the new "singular" topic and the next *he* form refers to him, which in line 23 it does. However, Cyneheard, as a part of *hie alle* the subject of line 23, is part of the plural topic. As both the plural and the singular of the third person pronoun can be used to mark topic, one could expect that if both were to appear in one clause, their ordering would be determined by which was the subject and which the object, with the subject coming first. This is the case in line 23, where the subject *hie* precedes the object *hine*.

I will now review all the predictions and implications of this proposal and suggest further evidence to support it. I have proposed that there was a series of choices of whether to qualify a noun or not, and if yes, how to qualify it. This is best seen as giving a privative marked/neutral value for some character-
istic. It is important to note that unmarked does not mean not possessing a certain characteristic, but EITHER not possessing it OR not specified as having it. Thus a noun could be marked as +/Ø definite, if +definite then as +/Ø known, if +known then as +/Ø near. Since these are options, a participant which was near to the audience, known to the audience and definite could be marked as any of:

+NEAR +KNOWN +DEF or
ØNEAR +KNOWN +DEF or
ØNEAR ØKNOWN +DEF or
ØNEAR ØKNOWN ØDEF

I propose the below as the morphemes filling these categories.

<table>
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<tr>
<th></th>
<th>an, sum</th>
<th>se</th>
<th>bis</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ø</td>
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<tr>
<td>ØDEF</td>
<td></td>
<td>+DEF</td>
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<td>Ø</td>
<td>Ø KNOWN</td>
<td></td>
<td>+KNOWN</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ø</td>
<td>Ø NEAR</td>
<td>+NEAR</td>
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One of the major developments in the English language has been the loss of the Ø marking for Ø definite. In the subsequent restructuring of the system many morphs changed slots in the above chart. For example 'a, an' means much the same as did Ø, 'the' much the same as an, sum and 'this' often functions as did se. This shift in categories is one reason why it is difficult to understand "Cynewulf and Cyneheard". In addition, ensuring that the number of categories remained the same, se split in two, with an analogical masculine form 'the' taking over the function 1 cf Martin Joos, The English Verb pp 99, 112
of an and the neuter form 'that' retaining se's function of marking \+KNOWN \+DEFINITE.

In a discourse where two participants may appear in a particular sentence, marking one as definite even though the other may actually BE equally definite serves to identify one of the two as topic and the only referent of any pronouns. This implies that if a sentence has two potential participants and is of the form he...hine, it will mean only 'he₁...himself₁' and never 'he₁...him₂'.

Some of these predictions may be tested elsewhere. The prediction that he...hine will be reflexive in sense is corroborated in that, unlike all other early Germanic languages with the exception of Old Saxon, Old English has no third person reflexive pronoun₁. A reflexive was expressed by NP₁...hine or he₁...hine₁. Thus, my hypothesis explains why Old English almost alone among the Germanic languages has lost the inherited reflexive pronoun. It was not needed. Indirect evidence for the proposed system is the later development of an overt reflexive pronoun. It is my belief that the innovation and spread of the '...self' reflexive of the earlier system where reflexives were redundant. I have also proposed that se meant definite and known (from previous mention or general knowledge), in other words, aforesaid. In fact the Old English equivalents foresad, forespecen are common in Late Old English and extremely rare in early texts. The increased usage of 'aforesaid' should reflect the change of its function to that of an.

It should be possible to test some of these statements em-

1 with the exception of sin 'his, her, its' and sweseg 'own's own' both possessives are extremely rare, restricted to poetry
pirically. The Parker version of the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle was written in five different, consecutive hands, an implication being that the five hands represent a series of five scribes, each living to some time near the date of the last entry in their script. If so, the five hands can be taken to represent five consecutive periods in the development of English. Thus a measure of frequency could be made for each period for the particles in question. If I am right, several things should be found:

1) the ___syf should increase as a percentage of all reflexives from one stage to the next

2) the ratio of frequency of third person ___syf reflexives to the frequency of first or second person ___syf reflexives should decrease, i.e. they should spread from the 3rd person to the others

3) the frequency of use of foresprecen, foresæd will first be low, increase and then decrease once the system had been restructured.

In addition, if the lack of a reflexive pronoun implies such a topic switching system, then Old Saxon should at some time have behaved similarly. This would be difficult to test, though, since Old Saxon texts are very few.

In conclusion, this analysis of the Old English participant identification system makes the reference of all anaphora in "Cynewulf and Cyneheard" clear; a suitable goal in itself. Moreover, it gives a possible explanation for the Old English loss of the Common Germanic reflexive pronoun. I would also hope that it might help advance our understanding of how the morphology and syntax of English have changed.