

God Phenomenon in Anglo-Saxon Mythological Image of the World

Tetiana Guzii¹

Abstract

Linguistics and cognitive linguistics are considered to be the theoretical basis of concept analysis. Concept retains the knowledge, experience and cognition world processes of linguistic community; it reflects their culture and history and appears to be a kind of bridge that unites linguo-cultural, linguistic and cognitive approaches. The effectiveness of social interactions and appropriate communicative practices depends largely on the focus concept / conceptual cluster that turns out to be "interpretative prism". The concept *GOD* in Old English, which is the key one in mythological and religious image of the world is examined. In the mythological image it is seen in pagan traditions, in religious one – in the Christian culture. This paper highlights the concept in Anglo-Saxons mythological image of the world, the features of the pagan worldview, etymological and semantic properties of the concept *GOD*. The author represents linguistic features of concept *GOD* based on the material of Old English literature.

Keywords: Concept; *GOD*; Mythological image of the world; Anglo-Saxons

1. Introduction

In the center of linguistics research priorities there are such concepts as *GOD* (Аникушина 2008, Поліна 2004, Bluemel, Nemickiene), *FATE* (Арутюнова 1994, Урбанович 2007, Троць 2008), *LOVE*, *HAPPINESS* (Воркачев 2004, Panasenko 2012, 2013), *INSANITY* (Ермакова 2003, Селин 2011, Wilce 2007), *TRUTH* (Волошина 2013, Степанов 2001), and others.

¹ PhD student, Department of Germanic and Finno-Ugric Philology, Faculty of Germanic Philology, Kiev National Linguistic University, Ukraine, Kiev. Phone: +380504488571, E-mail: freunde_tn@mail.ru

What is more, concepts like *GOD*, *WEALTH*, *DESTINY*, *DEATH* appear to be historically stable. They undergo certain modifications within the historical development of linguistic community, however they continue to function as the "configurators" of ethno-national image of the world, as outputs of axiomatic constructs that define the specific national outlook (КОЛЕСНИК, 2011). These concepts are basic for outlook of each individual linguistic community and reflect its moral and spiritual values.

In my paper, highlighting the concept *GOD* in Old English, I define it as a concept-mythologeme (КОЛЕСНИК, 2011, 52), in which the information that reflects the cultural aspect of the original nature-centric version of the world order is embedded.

The specificity of the concept *GOD* in Old English consists in a combination of pagan and Christian worldviews. This concept is the key one in mythological and religious image of the world. In mythological worldview it is seen in pagan traditions, in religious ones – in the Christian culture.

In my research, I emphasize that the concept must be tied to a particular place and a particular area, as these notions influence to a considerable extent the mentality of linguistic community. The mentality is reflected in the culture and language, which is the main tool for insight into human mentality in general and mental features of the linguistic community in a given period of its history, which ultimately determines not only the conceptual perception in a period of time, but also changes in mentality, for example, during the Old English period (under the influence of Christianization) and in later periods, up to the present moment. Diachronic research makes it possible to compare the conceptual peculiarities of concept of *GOD* in different periods of the British community and at the same time it would contribute to the ability of comparing features, for example, worshipping in different ethnic groups.

The aim of this paper is to analyze the lexical-semantic features of the concept *GOD* in mythological image of the world of Anglo-Saxons, its language representation in Old English literature.

2. Origin of the Word God

In order to reveal the essence of the concept *GOD / DEITY* we must first clarify the etymological meaning of the word. The name of god in the Germanic languages *guda* is not entirely clear. This word is compared with PIE. *būtá* – "called", *hávātē* "call" (therefore, *ghuto* – "who is caused by magic") or Proto-Indo-European (PIE.) *juhóti* "add fuel to the fire, sacrifice " (hence, *guda* – "one, who is worshiped who is honored") (Левицький, 2006, 68). In the focus of my attention there is also the origin of PIE. *ghut* – "which is invoked, called "from the root *gheu (e)* – "to call, invoke". Possibly, the original meaning meant the supreme power, which was caused, invoked by man.

As the etymological dictionary points, *god* does not correlate with *good*. Initially this noun was of neuter gender, but after the adoption of Christianity it became masculine. Old English word *god* is probably closer in meaning to the Latin *numen* (divine spirit, supreme deity). Noun *deity* appeared in the late 14th

century and originated from Old French *deité*, Latin *deitatem*, supplanted by Augustine from Latin *deus* "god" from *deivos*.

Based on the existence of analogic words in other Germanic languages (Gothic, German, Norman – which have the same root base), logically, we find that the concept *GOD* is universal, it is significant in the history and culture of different nations (Аникушина, 2008, 38). For the purpose of more detailed verbalization of the concept *GOD* in Old English, let us analyze the ancient Germanic pagan worldview.

3. The Pagan Pantheon of Anglo-Saxons

Anglo-Saxons were ancient Englishmen, who had been formed from the tribes of Angles, Saxons and Jutes and lived in northern Germany. In the middle of the 5th century they came to the British Isles and started exploration of that territory.

The pagan pantheon of Anglo-Saxons was characterized by polytheism; they worshiped of different gods.

Tacitus wrote about Germans, that among all the gods they respected Mercury most of all; because on the certain days even people were sacrificed to him. But if we turn to the later records in the Middle Ages to Scandinavian tradition, it will be cleared up that Odin in Norse, Germanic Woden was the supreme leader, distinguished by the ability to penetrate into all world creation and therefore resembled messenger of the gods in ancient traditions (Петрухин, 2011, 26).

The vision of God is contradictory. According to S. Tokarev it has an element of nature mythological impersonation: Woden – god of storms swirl. On the other hand, it also served as a god of the dead, lord of the underworld kingdom, head of souls. Presumably, in the era of military democracy and constant inter-tribal wars Woden (Odin) took the first place in the assembly of the gods (Токарев, 1986, 220).

In Old English, it was the noun *wōp* "song, sound" that corresponds to Old Scandinavian *óðr*, which means both "fury" or "poetry, inspiration" (Davidson, 1965). We can suggest that Woden could be both cruel and kind: send punishment and give grace.

The highest god of war for ancient Germans was Tiwaz or Tiw, whom Snorri and other later authors called Tyr. He was not only a master of battle, but the god of the sky, and from the philological point of view the name "*Tiwaz*" may be associated with the name of the Greek sky god *Zeus* (Todd, 2005, 51): *tīwaz* Greek *Zeus* (<Δje-us) *Zeus*, Latin – *Deus* "god" PIE *dēwáh* "god", Russian *дуво*, PIE. *div* – "Heaven", Lat. *Jovis*. If for the ancient Indians, Greeks and Romans *diva-/zeus* was the god of heaven and the supreme deity in general (cf. PIE. *dyáus-pitár* = *Zeus-pater* = *Jū-piter* "sky-father"), for the Germans *Tiw* was the god of war. From the phonetic point of view German *tīwaz* < IE. *deǵeu* – a variant of the root with heteroclitic stem – *eu*, /-n: *deǵeu-/deǵen*, both versions from IE. *deǵi-/di-* "to shine" (Левицький, 2006, 66). This shows that God *Tiwaz* was god of the sky and the light.

It is an interesting fact that the rune t ↑ is named after Tyr and is correlated with this god. In the runic literature we find the mentioning of this god:

Tir bib tacna sum, healdeþ trywa wel
wib sebelingas; a bib on faerylde
ofer nihta genipu, nsefre swiceb
Tiw is a guiding star; well does it keep faith with princes;
it is ever on its course over the mists of night and never fails (Dickins, 1915, 18).

If we compare these names in various Indo-European nations, it will become clear that the functions of the same gods changed frequently depending on the traditions of each nation. Thus, the supreme deity of the Greeks was Zeus, of the Romans – Jupiter, whose name once was more known for the name Zeus, because it sounded as Diez-Pater (Father Diez). Indians-Aryans have the corresponding name, their celestial god was Dyaus, but he was not the Thunderer. Eventually, the German war god Tiw (Scandinavian Tyr) has received the same name, but he was not also the Thunderer. Only by hypotheses and reconstructions we can guess that the primitive past Indo-Europeans knew Indian deity Dyaus who represented daylight, serene sky, the function of this deity changed in various Indo-European nations in the process of their separation and settlement, but the ancient name remained recognizable (Петрухин, 2011, 24).

Alongside with Tiwaz and Woden, Germans worshiped the third god of war – Donar, Tor or Tunar (da. Þunor), who was also the god of thunder (German *Þunraz* "thunder" is derived from I.E. (s) ten-/ ton – "thunder, clatter" (Левницький, 2006, 67). Many northern Germans in later pagan period considered him to be the noblest and the most powerful god, and his influence seemed to have increased considerably after the end of the Great Migration. Originally Tunar was the god of nature forces, and his constant companion – hammer Mjølñir – symbolized thunder, the most magnificent natural phenomenon. However, apart from the weather, Tunar was responsible for other things. He was a brave soldier, a traveler, a glutton, but also a great sage, cunning deity, who could change shape to achieve his aims (Todd, 2005, 51). It is confirmed again, that pagan gods were carriers of both positive and negative traits, there was no idealization of their features.

You can see, that in the images of the other great gods the natural mythological features are strongly dominated. Thus, Scandinavian Thor (South German Donar) was considered to be the god of thunder and lightning with his lightning hammer, Tiw – as god of shining sky; Balder – as bright deity of fertility, spring and vegetation; Loki – as sly and cunning god of fire; Freyr is also associated with fertility. Most of these gods had a particular relevance to agriculture, there is supposition that Thor, for example, was more honored by rural populations, unlike Odin – the god of militant aristocracy.

However, it is quite possible that some of the gods, who entered the common Germanic pantheon, were originally local and tribal gods: Thor was worshiped mainly in Norway and Iceland, Freyr – in Sweden (Токарев, 1986, 220).

Sources from the late pagan period show clearly that Freyr was at that time in Northern Europe a respected deity of fertility, but we can not clearly imagine how he took such a prominent position. In the Roman period and the era of the Great Migration both women's and men's fertility deities were honored. Some scholars even thought that Nerd and Nerta were a married couple, and Nerd (later – his son Freyr) became to play the leading role in this couple. However, specialists have not still come to a certain conclusion (Todd, 2005, 53). The name *Nerthus* was Latinized form from Proto-Germanic *Nerþuz*, which is the Proto-Germanic precursor to the Old Norse deity name *Njörðr*, who was a male deity. Women's fertility deity was goddess Freya, but she did not have such reverence as Freyr.

Anglo-Saxon days of the week were namely formed from the names of the gods which are used today. Compare (Robertson, 1991, 180):

Sunday	Sunnandæg	(Sun's Day)
Monday	Monandæg	(Moon's Day)
Tuesday	Tiwesdæg	(Tiw's Day)
Wednesday	Wednesdæg	(Woden's Day)
Thursday	Thuresdæg	(Thor's Day)
Friday	Frigedæg	(Frigg's Day)
Saturday	Saeternesdaeg	(Saturn's Day)

4. Verbalization of the concept of **GOD** in the Old English Literature

I want to concentrate my attention on the oldest monuments of the Anglo-Saxons "Beowulf" (VII-XI century), "The Battle of Maldon" (X-XI), "The Husband's Message" (X), "The Seafarer" (VI-VII), "The Wanderer" (X), "Deor" (X), "Waldere"(VIII).

Kernel area of concept God in Old English is presented by the word God, perikernel area – Deity. Peripheral category consists of the following lexical tokens of God:

drihten – ruler, lord, the Lord
waldend – ruling, almighty
metod – creator
weard – guard, warder, watchman
hælend – healer, Saviour, Jesus
hálig – holy
nergend – saviour, preserver
cyning – king, ruler, emperor
foeder – father
dema – deemer, thinker, judge, an umpire (see Figure 1).

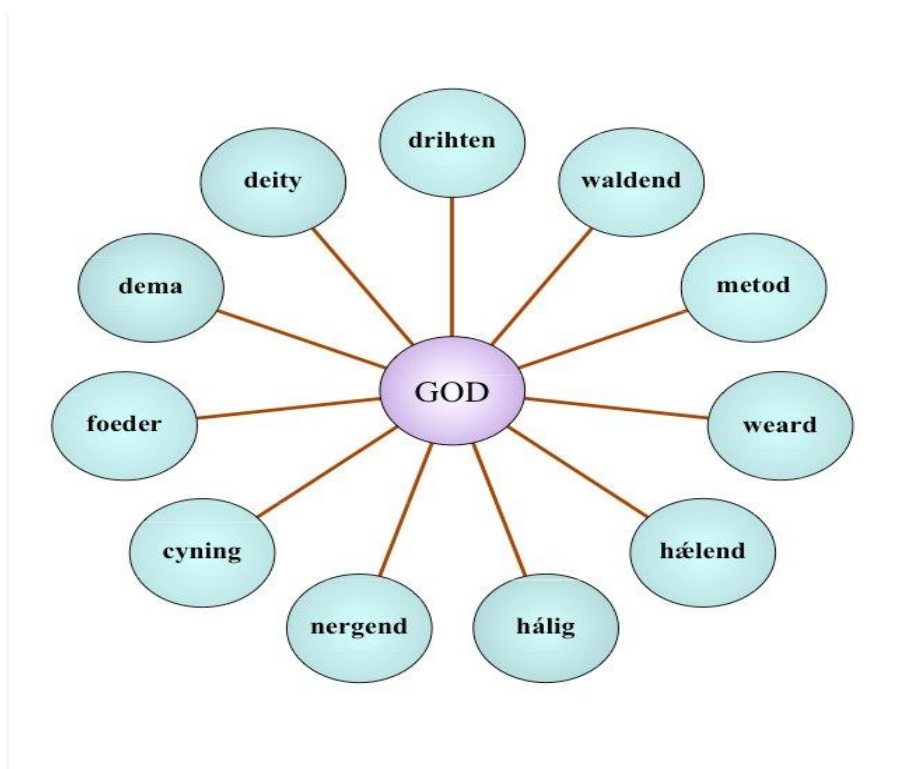


Figure 1. Lexical tokens of concept GOD in Old English

At the time of writing heroic epic works Christianity had already been adopted in Anglo-Saxon society and, indeed, in the text we do not find the whole pantheon of gods which was listed above, in the poems only one god is mentioned.

Despite of Christian themes that are presented in the heroic era, pagan idea was not yet eradicated and can characterize the mythological vision of God.

Analyzing the concept *GOD* in mythological consciousness, we consider it necessary to draw attention to the fact that the pagan ideology is characterized by **deification of nature**. In *Beowulf* we observe the description of natural phenomena as living beings, the poetic inspiration of nature. We illustrate it on the material of Old English epos:

Old English *ofer ylða bearn oþres dogores, sunne sweglwered supan scineð* (*Beowulf* 605-606) – “this morrow morning o'er men of earth, ether-robed sun from the south shall beam”.

Old English *lað gewidru, oðþæt lyft drysmap, roderas reotað* (*Beowulf* 1375-1376) – “evil storms, and air grows dusk, and the heavens weep”.

These quotes indicate the divine status of nature. At the same time God is nature in the mythological world.

Let us consider the concept *GOD* in more details and its verbalization in Old English literature (see Figure 2).

God as Ruler:

Old English *ne his gifena þæs god, ne in geogupe to þæs hwæt, ne in his dædum to þæs deor, ne him his dryhten to þæs hold, þæt he a his sæfore sorge næbbe, to hwon hine dryhten gedon wille* (*Seafarer* 40) – “For there's none so proud-minded, no man on this earth, nor so generous of goods, nor so bold in his youth, nor so dread in his deeds, nor so dear to his Lord, that he in sea-faring has never a care as to what Fate may will for him”.

Anglo-Saxons see in God the almighty ruler, who owns all that is on earth.

God as Presenter of Natural Phenomena (Light, Sun, Storm):

Old English *beorht beacen godes; brimu swapredon, þæt ic sænæssas geseon mihte (Beowulf 570-571) – “came bright God’s beacon; the billows sank, so that I saw the sea-cliffs high”.*

All natural phenomena which brought happiness or disasters to hero were sent by God.

God as Weaver of Weal:

Old English *Ac him dryhten forgeaf wigspeda gewiofu, wedera leodum, frofor ond fultum, þæt hie feond heora ðurh anes cræft ealle ofercomon (Beowulf 696-699) – “But comfort and help, war-weal weaving, to Weder folk, the Master gave, that, by might of one, over their enemy all prevailed”*

These lines indicate that it is God who is the bearer of good fortune, which was very important for the Anglo-Saxon society, as it promoted victory in battle.

God as Grantor:

Old English *hu mihtig god manna cynne þurh sidne sefan snyttru bryttað, eard ond eorlscipe (Beowulf 1725-1727) – “how to sons of men Almighty God in the strength of His spirit sendeth wisdom, estate, high station”;*

Old English *fædde beagas, ond he þa forðgesceaft forgyteð ond forgymeð, þæs þe him ær god sealde, wuldres waldend, weorðmynda dæl (Beowulf 1750) – “he gives for his pride; the promised future, forgets he and spurns, with all God has sent him, Wonder-Wielder, of wealth and fame”.*

The most valuable gifts for the ancient Germans were power, wisdom, and gold. With the adoption of Christianity values were reinvented and the spiritual wealth became the highest value

God as Owner of Fate:

Old English *swa he hyra ma wolde, nefne him witig god wyrd forstode ond ðæs mannes mod (Beowulf 1055-1056) – “as he would have more of them, except for them wise God, that fate had prevented”.*

It should be noted that in Christian worldview there is no notion of destiny, it is a pagan term. The ancient Germans did not give events a logical, rational vision, instead they executed blindly verdict of fate, explaining and describing everything that happened to them as its verdict (Trots, 2008, 69). With the introduction of Christianity the fate continued to determine people's actions, but by God's will.

God as King:

Old English *Gepancie þe, ðeoda waldend, ealra þæra wynna þe ic on worulde gebad (The Battle of Maldon 170) – “I thank thee, Wielder of peoples, for all those joys I had in the world”.*

The relationship between God and human beings in the Anglo-Saxon culture, similar to the relationship between the lord and his subordinates, which indicates a low spiritual development of people in the pagan time and worshipping before the king's power.

God as the One That May Punish:

Old English *wonsæli wer weardode hwile, siþðan him scyppend forscrifen hæfde (Beowulf 105) – “the hapless wight a while had kept, since the Creator his exile doomed”.*

As you can see, the pagan God could get angry with hero and send lifelong misery. In Christianity, God, though he can punish people, but he loves them equally, regardless of whether or not they sin and punishment is sent as a lesson to improve soul.

The verbalization of concept *GOD* can be introduced in the form of the following figure (see Figure 2):

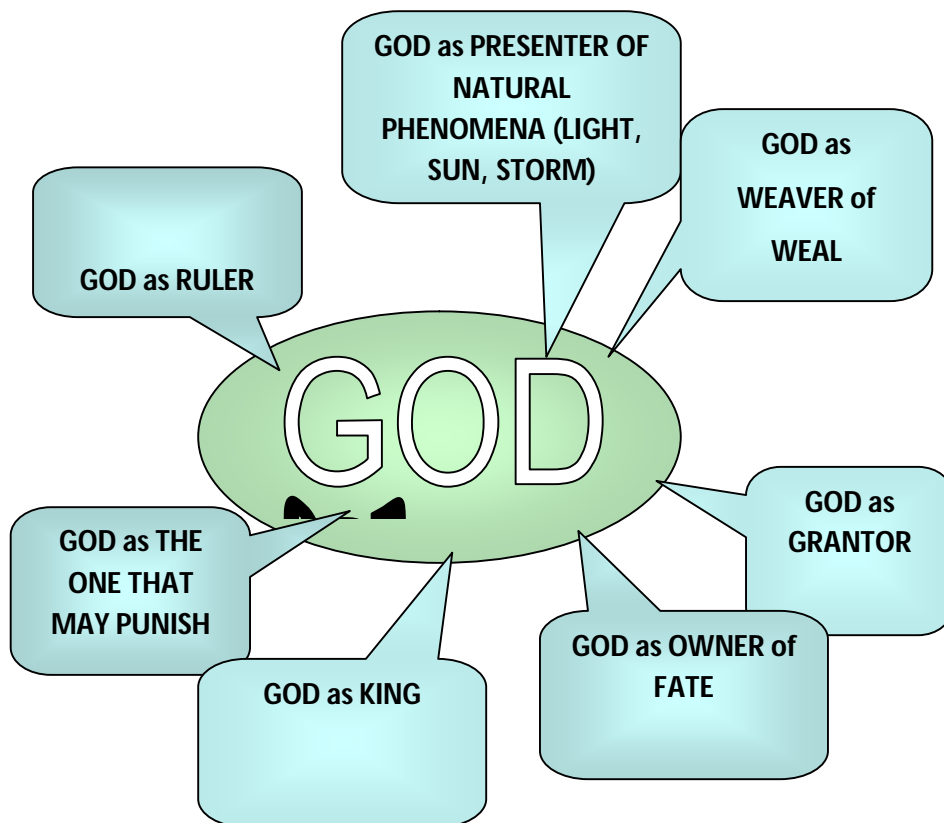


Figure 2. Verbalization of concept *GOD* in the Old English literature

5. Conclusion

As it has been mentioned above, in the etymological analysis of the word God, we noticed that its additional meaning – “good” – appeared after the introduction of Christianity. Analyzing the context of the concept usage, we noticed that the concept *GOD* in the mythological worldview is not associated with notions of kindness and love. Anglo-Saxons did not have a distinct division between good and evil, among the gods there were not the only ones who offered grace, but also misery, though they were worshiped as the highest powers that ruled the world.

In my opinion, the extracts of Old English literature which were given above, suggest that the relationship between God and human beings in paganism is more pragmatic and mercenary, in comparison with Christianity, where the relationship between God and man are more spiritual: to accept God means to put him in your life, your soul and compare all your actions with God's laws.

In the Anglo-Saxon mythological image of the world God is seen as a strict lord, who rules people, can punish and send misfortune, on the assumption of benevolence brings good luck, fame, power, gold and other benefits that were important for the Anglo-Saxons.

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