On Synonymous Relations among Nouns
in Old English

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Abstract

Leading words signifying "trees" in Old English are investigated in
the paper. The three words of trœow "tree", wudu "wood", and bœam
"beam" are given as the most common words denoting a "tree" by
A Thesaurus of Old English in Two Volumes by J. Roberts et al. OE
timber "timber" which is closely connected with these three is also
the subject of the investigations in this study.

In the first section, the definitions and semantic characteristics of
the four words are considered individually based on the definitions of
the Oxford English Dictionary. The meanings observed in Old En-
glish are mainly discussed here.

In the second section, semantic relations among the words are dis-
cussed comparatively and contextually.

In the third section, as the conclusion, a diagram of the distribution
of tree and its connected words in Old English based on the definitions
given in the OED is provided. According to the data, remarkable ten-
dencies of the meaning and usage of the four words in Old English are
pointed out.

Through the investigations, the connection between the core mean-
ing of each individual word with its derivative meanings is considered.
It is obvious that, in the process of changing and producing meanings,
our cognitive knowledge can be strongly reflected. The ways in which
we recognize things surrounding us and how we link one thing to oth-
ers resembling it in shape or character are closely related. We could observe those facts through the study.

0. Introduction

The aim of this study is to investigate the synonymous relations among words signifying “trees”\(^1\) mainly in Old English. The leading words which signified “tree” or “wood” were *trēow* “tree”, *wudu* “wood”, and *bēam* “beam”\(^2\). *Timber* which is a word having a close relation to them is also discussed here.

1. Semantic range of each word

1.1. Trēow

The primary meaning of OE *trēow* is the same meaning as that of PE *tree*, *i.e.* “a large plant with a woody trunk” [OE−](cf. OED, B.1.a). *Trēow* also signifies the meaning of “the substance of the trunk and boughs of a tree”, *i.e.* “wood” as a material of which things are made or “timber” [OE−]. This meaning is now obsolete or archaic (cf. OED, B.2). It is natural that *trēow* acquired the second meaning by signifying the substance of elements of trees, such as the *roots*, *trunks*, and *branches* (= xylem). It has also signified “a piece of wood” (OED, B.3), such as a pole, a stake, etc.; “one forming part of some structure, as a vehicle, plough, ship, etc.” [OE−] (OED, B.3.a); and “a stick” especially used as a weapon [OE−18C] (*Obsolete* except Scotch, cf. OED, B.3.b).

*Tree* signifies the “holy rood”, that is “the cross on which Christ was crucified (now archaic and poetic)” [OE−] (OED, B.4.a). The occurrence of the meaning from “tree” to “the Cross” was quite natural in Anglo-Saxon England as a Christian country.

During Middle English, *trēow* had developed the following meanings containing the sense of “wood”: “the wooden shaft of a spear (Now dialect)”; hence “a spear” [14C−](OED, B.5.a); “a wooden structure; applied poetic or
in *rhetoric* to a ship (Now *obsolete*)" [14C–16C] (OED, B.5.b); “a wooden vessel, barrel, cask (Now *Scotch*)” [16C–] (OED, B.5.c); “the framework of a saddle” [16C–] (OED, B.5.d); and “= boot-tree” [16C–] (OED, B.5.e).

It will be worth taking up as a subject for discussion that a figurative meaning of “a diagram or table of a family” (OED, B.6.a) emerged in the thirteenth century. In the process of assigning the figurative meaning to *tréow*, cognitive knowledge of the people would be applied. They would mentally observe a similarity between trees and their relations. They, namely, recognize their original ancestor as the roots of a tree, and their descendants as the branches of a tree. This way of thinking is still utilized in various fields. A tree diagram used in linguistics is a means of illustration.

Lastly, let us consider how one meaning develops into others in a sense group. The original meaning of *tréow* is adopted as an example: “A perennial plant having a self-supporting woody main stem or *trunk* (which usually develops woody branches at some distance from the ground), and growing to a considerable height and size” (OED, B.1.a). According to the records of the OED, the first semantic extending from the sense of [TREE] (OED, B.1.a) to the one of being equivalent to [SHRUB] or [HERBACEOUS PLANTS] (OED, B.1.b) occurred in the fourteenth century. The definition for the new derivative sense of *tréow* is described as follows in the NSOD (s.v. tree, *n.* 1.b), which is equivalent to that of B.1.b. in the OED: “More widely, any bush or shrub of erect growth with a single stem. Also, any of certain herbaceous plants, such as the banana, with a very tall but not woody stem”. To draw semantic features of *tree* and *shrub*, it is useful to add the definition of *shrub* to the object of the survey. According to the OED, a definition of shrub is given as follows: “A woody plant smaller than a tree; specifically in Botany a perennial plant having several woody stems growing from the same root” (OED, *n*¹ 1.a).

The semantic features can be drawn from the definitions of *tree* and *shrub* as follows:
Tree: [+perennial plant][+woody stem][+height][+large in size][–several stems]
Shrub: [+perennial plant][+woody stem][–height][–large in size][+several stems]

Cf. Banana as a Herbaceous plant:

[+perennial plant][–woody stem][+height][+large in size][–several stems]

Tree and shrub are mainly distinguished by the three distinctive features of (1) height, (2) size, and (3) number of stems. However, there is only one significant difference between tree and banana as a herbaceous plant, i.e. woody stem. It is obvious that [SHRUB] has a few distinguished features from [TREE]. However, the people considered both of them as the same biological group and consequently began to indicate them by means of trēow in the middle of the fourteenth century. It seems to be natural that herbaceous plants like the banana, which has a small number of distinguishing features from trees, were indicated by the word tree, since we often make decisions not on a scientific basis but based on our experiences and senses in daily life.

The meaning of tree had further developed and been applied figuratively to a person but the examples are small in number. The first example appears in the Richard III written by Shakespeare in 1594 as follows: The Royall Tree hath left vs Royall Fruit. (III. vii. 167) [italics mine]. The semantic derivation was probably brought from images of the tree of, for example, the power of producing fruit, stability, and durability.

The sense of a "Christmas-tree" arose in the nineteenth century. The direct motive power of making a tree signify a Christian-tree would not be biological, but the social customs of Christian countries. The tree had been symbolic of Christmas at that time. The major definitions of trēow in the OED are summed up as Figure 1:
1. a tree (B.1a)[OE-] → bushes/shrubs (B.1b)[13...–]
   → applied fig. to a person (B.1c)[1594-] → Christmas tree (B.1d)
   [1838–]
2. wood/timber (B.2)[OE–]
3. a piece of wood (B.3)[OE–] → a ship, a plough (B.3a)[OE–]
   → a stick (B.3b)[OE–]
\[Trēow\]–
4. cross (B.4a)[OE–] → a gallows (B4.b) [1425–]
5. wooden shaft of a spear (B.5a)[a1366–]; hence spear/lance (B.5a)
   → wooden structure: ship (†B.5b)[1382–1597] → a wooden vessel
   (B.5c) [1513–] → the framework of a saddle (B.5d)[1535–]
   → a block upon which a boot is shaped = boot-tree (B.5e)[1541–]
6. something resembling a tree with its branches (B.6a)[1297–] →
   any structure or figure of branch form (B.6b)[1706–]⁴

Figure 1: The definitions of trēow in the OED

1.2. Wudu

Wudu⁵ had been used as a word signifying a “tree” from Old English to the
sixteenth century. It also signified “objects made from trees or their branches”
(OED) until the nineteenth century and its use is now obsolete. Meanings, such
as “a ship”, “a spear”, and “the Cross”, were expressed by wudu, especially
the meaning of “a ship” was frequently indicated in Old English (cf. OED, s.v.
tree, n. 3–6).

From the beginning of the English language, wudu had as one of its principal
meanings, i.e. “the substance of which the roots, trunks, and branches of trees
or shrubs consist, trunks or other parts of trees collectively” (OED) including
wood “as used for fuel (=firewood”).

The meaning of “a collection of trees growing more or less thickly together”
(=forest)⁶ is one more important core meaning signified by wood. We can find
it in the Old English stage too. This meaning would develop from the usage
that wudu signified “a tree” as mentioned above. Each individual tree, i.e. “a
forest tree” is signified by means of wudubēam and wudutrēow. The head is
normally the item on the right hand of the compound semantically as well as
syntactically in both Old English and present-day English (cf. Katamba 2005, pp.67–8). We should mention an etymological fact of *wood* here. According to Ayto (1990, s.v. wood), it is as follows:

The word goes back to prehistoric Germanic *widuz, . . . Its ultimate source is not known for certain,” “although it has suggested that it may go back to the Indo-European base *weidh- ‘separate’ (source also of English divide and widow). According to this theory, it would originally have denoted a ‘separated’ or ‘remote’ piece of territory, near the outer edge or borders of known land; and since such remote, uninhabited areas were usually wooded, it came to denote ‘forest’ (*forest* itself may mean etymologically ‘outside area,’ and the Old Norse word for ‘forest,’ *mork*, originally signified ‘border area’).

The theory tells us that the way *wood* occupied the meaning of “forest” is based on the geographical ground and social environment at the Indo-European stage. In addition to this, it may be possible to consider the process of producing this meaning from the point of our recognition, when people look at woods, they probably recognize them both a group of trees which consists of each individual tree and a large block of trees without being conscious of kinds or numbers of the constituent members.

1. a tree ([I.1][OE–16C] → objects made from trees/branches ([I.b][OE–19C]
2. a collection of trees (grove | wood | forest)(I.2.a) [OE–]
3. wood land, etc. (I.3)[OE–; now rare]
4. a collection or crowd of spears (I.4)[16C–; now rare or obsolete]
5. the substance of parts of tree (II.6.a)[OE–] → prepared for/used in arts and crafts (II.6.b)[a1300–] → used for fuel (II.6.c)[OE–] → substance forming the head of a tree (II.6.d)[16C–] → material of an idol or image (II.6.e)[16C–] . . .
6. something made of wood: esp. the wooden part of something (II.7.a)[17C–] . . .

**Figure 2: The definitions of wudu in the OED**
By the way, the meaning of “a collection or crowd of spears or like (suggesting the trees of a wood)” (OED, 4), which is now rare or obsolete, had occurred as a transferred or figurative sense from the late sixteenth century (OED: 1584–) to the late eighteenth century. The process of generating the sense is carried out based on our recognition that relates the shape of bristling with trees or a sharp top of trees to “a collection of spears”. The major definitions of wudu in the OED are summed up as Figure 2.

1.3. Beam

The original of beam is uncertain (Barnhart 2000). Since all meaning of its cognate, such as Old Frisian bām, Old High German boun (> German Baum), Old Icelandic badhmr, and Gothic bagms, are “tree”, the original meaning of it is probably “tree”. OE beam had the meaning of a “tree” but the use is only in Old English (OED, 1). It had the meaning of “a square-off log or a large oblong piece of timber” (AHCD), which is a core meaning of PE beam, in Old English. The beam was used mainly in house- or ship-building as forming important parts of the structure (OED, 3a). It was used as “the great timber of the plough” which was one of the most important farming instruments in the world. Beam had “the rood-tree or cross” (OED, 2) as trēo did as mentioned above.

According to the OED, beam meant “a ship, a bark: perhaps, originally one made of a hollowed trunk” (OED, 14) as a poetic use, but it is now obsolete. In addition to the OED comment, the reason why beam itself had indicated a ship would be related to the fact that it meant the material for structuring ships. This semantic extension is a natural process. The main material is substituted for the products in a figurative sense. This technique is found everywhere in the lines of Old English poetry.

“Ray of light” is one more important sense of beam not only in present-day English, but also in Old English. According to the OED, “this sense arose
in Old English through literal translation from the Latin . . . of columna lucis a ‘pillar’ or ‘column’ of light.” (OED, I9.a), found in Bede’s writing in Old English. Under the influence of the senses, people at that time found a similarity between a beam as a timber and a ray of light. Both are similar in certain respects: they stretch straight. The major definitions of beam in the OED are summed up as Figure 3:

<p>| | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>a tree (†I.1) [only in OE]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>the rood-tree or cross (†I.2) [OE–18C]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>a large piece of squared timber (I.3a) [OE–] → with special shape</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>or purpose indicated (I.3b) [18C–] → allusion to the figure of the</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>mote and the beam (I.3c) [14C–]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>the wooden roller or cylinder in a loom (I.4)[OE–]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>the great timber of the plough (I.5) [OE–]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>the transverse bar from the ends of which the scales of a balance are suspended (I.6a)[15C–] . . .</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>a large bar of metal (†I.9) [OE–17C]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>the main trunk of a stag’s horn, antlers (I.12) [16C–]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>poetic a ship (†II.14)[OE, 16C]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>one of the horizontal transverse timbers, stretching from side to side of a ship (II.15)[17C–]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>the greatest breadth of a ship (II.16.a)[17C–]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>a ray (III.19)[OE–]</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 3: The definitions of beam in the OED

1.4. Timber

Timber (<OE timber)\textsuperscript{10} is one of other words belonging to a tree family. It denoted a “building”, “structure”, and “house” in Old English, and it obtained the meaning of “building material” and “trees suitable for building” later in Old English. It was derived from the Indo-European *dόmos “root” and *dem- “building” via the Ploto-Germanic *temran. It is cognate with many Germanic languages, such as Old Frisian timber “building”, Middle Dutch timmer “building, wood”, Old High German zimbar “dwelling, room, wood” (>modern German Zimmer “room”), and Old Icelandic timbr “timber” (Barnhart 2000).
These cognates denote the sense of [BUILDING / WOOD] in common. Cognates are also found, outside Germanic, in the Latin domus, Greek dómos, and Sanskrit dáma-s. The meaning of all of them is a "house" (Barnhart 2000). OE timber succeeded the meaning which these cognates originally had. Timber means "wood that has been cut and prepared for use as building ships" in the following passage from the Old English Orosius.

ærfter sixtegum daga þæs þe ðæt timber acorfen wæs, þær wæron xxx & c [scipa] gearora ge mid mæste ge mid segle. (Bately, IV.vi.92/18-20)\(^{11}\)

(after sixty days after the timber was cut down, there were a hundred and thirty (ships) ready both with mast and with sail.)

A shifting sense of timber occurred from a "building" to "the process of building" in late Old English, however, the meaning is limited in Old English and only one citation is given in the OED.

Like beam, timber denoted "material for the construction of houses, ships, etc." (OED, 2). From this sense, according to the OED, the meaning "wood used for the building of houses, ships, etc." and "wood in general as a material, especially after it has been suitably trimmed and squared into logs, or further adapted to constructive uses" are derived in the latest period of Old English (cf. a1100–) as a restricted use (OED, 3). This sense is common with trēow (cf. OED, s.v. trēow, 3). Furthermore, at the end of the fourteenth or the beginning of the fifteenth century, it came to be applied to "any object composed wholly or chiefly of wood", as a "ship", a "spear-shaft", etc. (OED, 5)

Timber was also applied to "the wood of growing trees capable of being used for structural purposes" in early Old English. It is obvious that timber has kept the fundamental, historical sense of "building materials". It was further expanded to apply collectively to "the trees themselves", i.e. "trees" or "woods" in Old English (OED, 4a). This process of semantic widening is something similar to the one of wudu (cf. OED, 2a). The major definitions of timber in the OED are summed up as Figure 4:
1. a building, structure, house (†1.a)[OE–14C] → the process of building (†1.b)[only in OE]
2. material for the construction of house, ships (†2)[OE–19C]
3. wood used for the building of houses, ships (3)[12C–] → the material or small utensils or parts of them (3.b)[16C–]
4. the wood of growing trees capable of being used for structural purposes / collectively to the trees themselves (4.a)[OE–]
5. †a spear-shaft, †a bowl, a ship (5)[15C–] . . .

Figure 4: The definitions of timber in the OED

2. Semantic relations among the words

We mentioned above the four words individually that hold common senses connected with [TREE]. The words not only firmly keep their own specific semantic field, but also share some kinds of sense with the others. There is a tendency that things which hold some common characteristics or appearances are recognized as one thing or the same by our cognitive ability. Each word is assigned a peculiar sense, and, therefore, even when a word is used showing the same semantic field shared with other words, the nuance which each word denotes is not always exactly the same. We recognize things broadly, disregarding the slight differences in our daily life. Owing to this, for some reason a word is substituted for others and then it will obtain that semantic use. On the other hand, we tend to use words that can be considered the most familiar or a superordinate word representatively.

2.1. The semantic distributions of TREE synonyms

According to the definitions of Bosworth-Toller (1972), trēow, wudu, and beam are synonymous words, because they have the meanings of “a tree—the substance of growing trees” and “wood—the hard material that the trunk and branches of a tree are made of” (OALD) in common. Both of tēow and wudu12) have the meaning of “forest” in a generic or collective sense. The same meaning
is also given to *timber* by Hall-Meritt (1970).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>tree</th>
<th>wood as substance</th>
<th>building material</th>
<th>forest/trees</th>
<th>something made of wood</th>
<th>beam of wood</th>
<th>cross</th>
<th>building</th>
<th>others</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em>tréow</em></td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>wudu</em></td>
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<td>+</td>
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<td>+</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
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<td>–</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>bēam</em></td>
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<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>–</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>timber</em></td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>(–)*</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Cf. * = Defined by Hall-Meritt (1970)*

**Figure 5: Sense distributions**

Semantic relations among *tréow*, *wudu*, *bēam*, and *timber* are discussed in this section. Figure 5 indicates the following tendencies of sense distributions.

1. The sense elements of “a tree” and “wood as substance” relate to the tree words of *tréow*, *wudu*, and *bēam* one another.
2. The sense elements of “material” and “something made of wood” relate to the two words of *wudu* and *bēam* except *tréow*.
3. The common elements between *tréow* and *bēam* are “beam of wood” and “the cross”.
4. The sense elements of “material” and “something made of wood” relate to the *wudu* and *bēam*.
5. There is nothing in common between *tréow* and *timber* in the sense element.

There are some points in common between *bēam* and *wudu*, and *timber*. This could be explained by the fact that *timber* possesses the sense of “building” in it. Building and constructing are closely related to materials. Hall-Meritt (1970) gives *timber* the sense of “trees or woods”. According to the facts, it can be concluded that *wudu*, *bēam*, and *timber* denote chiefly [WOOD] as “material” of building.

2.2. Meaning in the Context

The relation between words, as a symbol, and things, as a referent, is not
necessarily stable. Recognition of the relation and the use differ according to the individual. Such differences are probably found much more in texts written far from the present time. The judgment of what meaning a given word denotes should be inferred from the context which the word occurs. Let us consider the following passages illustrated from the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle:

Dis wæs gedon on Eoferwic þær he ær het getimbrian cyrican of treowe,
seo wæs gehalgod on Sancte Petres naman; . . . (MS.E, 626)
(This was done in York, where earlier he had ordered a church to be build of wood; it was consecrated in the name of St Peter. (Swanton 2000))

_Trēow_ denotes the meaning of “wood” as a material of the building, _i.e._ *getimbrian cyrican of treowe* means “to build a church of wood”.

A plural use of _trēow_ in Old English, just as in present-day English, indicated “more than one tree”.

. . . wæs swa swiðe ungemttlice mycel wind þet nan man þe þa lifode nænne maran ne gemunde, & þet wæs æghwer geseone, ægðer ge on husan & eac on _treowan_. (MS.E, 1118)
(. . . there was so very immense a great wind that no-one then alive remembered one greater; and it was evident everywhere both in houses and also in trees. (Swanton 2000))

_Trēowan_ (dative plural) in the passage represents more than one tree were blown down with houses by the strong wind. A _forest_ is generally understood to be a large area covered chiefly with trees and undergrowth which is remote from any village and inhabited by wild beasts. It is contrastive to _wood(s)_ , which is an area of land covered with trees and close to villages and small animals (cf. Takebayashi et al. 1995). It is highly probable that the _trēowan_ means number of standing trees, not “forest” because _trēowan_ stands with _husan_ “houses” in the passage.
In the following passage, the same referent is represented by the two words, *i.e.* *wudu* and *weald*. To *weald* Bosworth-Toller (1972) gives the meaning of “high land covered with wood, wood, forest”. It was one of the most common words signifying “forest” in Old English\(^{13}\). The forest mentioned in the following passage is a very large one which is *eastlang & westlang hund twelftiges mila lang oppe lengra & pritiges mila brad* “a hundred-and-twenty miles long or longer from east to west, and thirty miles broad”\(^{14}\).

Se muþa is on easteweardre Cent æt þæs miclam *wuda* eastende þe we Andred hatað. Se *wudu* is eastlang & westlang hund twelftiges mila lang oppe lengra & pritiges mila brad; seo ea þe we ær ymbe spræcon lið ut of þæm wealda. On þa ea hi tungon up hiora scipu of þone weald . . . (That river-mouth is in eastern Kent, at east end of the great wood which we call Andred. That wood is a hundred-and-twenty miles long or longer from east to west, and thirty miles broad. The river about which we spoke earlier flows out from that forest; They pulled their ships up on the river as far as the forest, . . . (MS.A, 892)

*Wudu* and *feld* sometimes co-occurred as in the following passage:

†Dis wæs swiðe god gear & swiðe wistfull on wudan & on feldan, ac . . . (MS.E, 1112)\(^{15}\)

(This year was a very good year and very productive in woods and fields, but . . . )

*Feld*, which comes to preent-day English *field*, denotes “a field, plain, open country, etc.” (Bosworth-Toller 1972). *Wudu* and *feld* provide a contrast, *i.e.* *wudu* is for an uncultivated land and *feld* for a cultivated land\(^{16}\).

The next passage presents an example of *wudu* being used in the genitive singular in the sense of “timber” (cf. Earle-Plummer 1972, p.418).

& he scolde gife ilca gear into þe minstre sixtiga foðra *wuda* . . . (MS.E,
852)
(. . . and he should give every year to the minster sixty wagon-loads of wood . . . (Swanton 2000))

3. Conclusion

The semantic distribution of trēow, wudu, bēam, and timber in Old English based on the definitions in the OED can be roughly dawn as in Figure 6. It is found that there are several meanings in common among trēow, wudu, and bēam. On one hand, they share the same or similar meanings—the tree words denote “a tree” and “wood or timber”, for example, but, on the other hand, they are in charge of different meanings individually—beam and wudu signify “a ship” but trēow does not. Trēow and wudu signify “trees/forest”, but beam does not, for example. However, the meaning of “forest” is defined to trēow in Bosworth-Toller’s dictionary (1972), but not in the OED. Wudu has developed from “woods” into “wooded country” or “woodland”.

In the case of timber, it has fewer meanings than trēow, wudu, and bēam in Old English, but its fundamental meaning is comparatively common to that of wudu. The chief meaning of timber was “a structure” or “a building” and then it obtained the meaning of “the process of building”, although it was only in Old English.

Trēow, bēam, and timber denote “material for the construction” in common. Some of them developed the meaning to “the objects made from the material”, for example, timer and beam mean both “material for the construction of ship” and “a ship”; timber means “material for the construction of houses” and “a house”; wudu means “a spear”; beam, trēow, and wudu mean “the Cross”.
Figure 6: Diagram of the distribution of tree and its connected words in Old English.

- Woodland
- Trees/Forest
- Tree
- Wood/timber
- The wood
- Process of building
- A structure
- House
- Bar of metal
- Spear
- Yarn beam
- Beam of light/energy
- The great timber of the plough
- Plough
- Material for construction
- Beam
Notes

1) The word tree is sometimes treated as a superordinate of tree family in this paper on the grounds that tree is regarded as the representative in present-day English. It would not necessarily give the representative status to trēow in Old English.

2) Roberts et al. (1995, Vol. I. 99) gives only the three words, i.e. trēow, wudu, and bēam, the meaning “a tree”.

3) The treelike herbaceous plant bearing this fruit, which has a stem of overlapping leaf sheaths. (NOSD, s.v. banana, 2)

4) Numerals and alphabet in parentheses mean classification of senses in the OED. Numbers in square brackets mean the dates or period of first or last) recorded uses. A dagger (†) means that the sense concerned is obsolete.

5) Wudu is an u-declension noun and the forms are as follows: nom. and acc. sg. —wudu, gen. and dat. sg. — wuda, nom. and acc. pl. — wuda, gen. pl. — wuda, dat. pl. — wudum. The word form wudu was generated by back mutation: widu > wiodu > later wudu. (Wardale 1967, §§35, 98).

6) Wood is usually understood to denote an area of land, larger than a grove or copse (but including these), and smaller than a forest (cf. OED). Semantic sharing of the four synonyms probably made in the late of Middle English or early Modern English period, considering the dates of borrowing of forest, grove, or coppice from Old French. Cf. forest <ME (before 1300)—in the sense of “wooded area kept for hunting”, also denoting any uncultivated land < OF forest <late & medieval Lat forestem silvam “the outside woods”< Lat foris “outside”; grove <OE grāfrel. to grēfa “grose, thicket” <Gmc.; copse <syncopated from coppice (1578–), coppice <late ME kop-pis <OF coupeïz, copeïz “a cut-over forest” <Gallo-Romance *colpātium, <Vulgar Lat *colpäre “to cut, strike” clate Lat colpus “a blow”; thicket <OE piccet “thick bushes”. Cf. NODE, Hall-Meritt (1970), Barnhart & Barnhart (1990).

7) Beam indicated “a large bar of metal”, not of timber. The development of this sense arises naturally. We usually use some words which have similar shape or functions instead.

8) Close connections between beam and a ship can also be observed. From the first half of the seventeenth century (OED 1627–), beam began to have the meaning of “a transverse structural member of a ship’s frame”(cf. OED, 15); and hence “the greatest breadth of a ship” (OED, 16a).

9) Some other words denoting “a beam of light” are given: bēam, ēarendel, and lēoma (Roberts et al. 1995)

10) Some other words denoting “timber for building” are given: bōtimber, boldgetim-
ber/bolttimber, and wudu (Roberts et al.).

11) Bosworth-Toller (1972) adds scipa between xxx & c and gearora.

12) The following words denote "forest" and meanings related to "a collection of trees growing more or less thickly together", in Old English—"a wood, trees": harap, holt, timber, trēow, wudu, wudubearo, wuduholt; "a small wood, coppice, copse": bearu, græfe, græf, græfa, hyrst, rippel, sceaga (Roberts et al.). Bearo/bearu: a grove, wood (cf. According to Bosworth-Toller (1972), Heyne says a bearing or a fruit-bearing tree, hence trees in general, a wood: O.Nrs. börr, m. arbor (Bosworth-Toller 1972)). Holt: a holt, wood, grove, copse (Bosworth-Toller 1972); forest, wood, grove, thicket, timber (Hall-Meritt 1970); O.Frs. holt wood, stick: Icel. holt wood, coppice", O.H.Ger. holz nemus, sylva, saltus, arbor, lignum" (cf. Bosworth-Toller 1972).

13) Weald is a word assigned a wide semantic range for a huge mass of trees. In Hall-Meritt's dictionary (1970), it is defined as "weald, forest, wood, grove, bushes, foliage". Cf. Weald (West Saxon: >PE weald) is a variant spelling of wald (Anglian: > PE wold). It derived from Germanic and it is cognate with PE wild, and Old Frisian, Old Saxon, Old High German wald "forest", and Old Norse vollr "untilled field, plain" (NODE).

14) Wudu is used as a singular form.

15) Cf. Another example is found in MS.E, 1071.

16) Cf. The word [i.e. field] is not from felled (<fell "to cut down") as if land cleared of trees (cf. Room 2000).

17) The words in bold italicized capital letters and enclosed by a square are head words of the object of the study. The fundamental sense is enclosed by the square. The fundamental senses which are defined in the OED for each head word are linked by thick lines. The thin solid lines mean the routes of sense development. A head word and its implication, and the objects made from trees illustrated as examples in the OED are linked by a dotted line. The broken lines mean that the sense is not given in the OED, but in Bosworth-Toller (1972) or Hall-Meritt (1970).

18) Beam means "a ship" as a poetic use.

19) Cf. Beam has the former meaning but not the latter one, i.e. beam itself does not mean a house.

References


