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ADIEU, BYE-BYE, CHEERIO:
THE ABC OF LEAVE-TAKING TERMS IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE HISTORY

Abstract

The article gives a chronological overview of the leave-taking terms in English language history. In a second approach the leave-taking terms are classified according to the motivation that is the basis for a specific coinage. Expressive expressions, wishes for God's protection and wishes for a good time or health are shown to be especially prominent. Furthermore, there are a few loan expressions. The article also tries to explain words and phrases whose origin is unclear: *73* is shown to be an unmotivated, accidental Morse expression; *So long* is considered a Norwegian loan translation; evidence is given to see the origin *Good-bye* in the phrase *God buy you*. It also shows that many phrases become phonetically reduced (and opaque) and/or functionally "deprived", which forces the speech community (or particular groups) to invent new phrases.

1. Preliminary Remarks

In the past 30 years, historical linguists have discovered their growing interest in pragmatic questions—first in German, then in Romance linguistics. It is especially thanks to Andreas Jucker that this fascinating field has also been attracting more and more colleagues from English linguistics over the past ten years (cf. especially Jucker 1995 and Jucker/Fritz/Lebsanft 1999a and the *Journal of Historical Pragmatics*, which Jucker edits together with Irma Taavitsainen). Andreas Jucker has also compiled an internet bibliography on historical pragmatics, which contains about 450 entries (<http://www.es.unizh.ch/ahjucker/HistPrag.htm>). This article shall be a small contribution to the field of Historical English Pragmatics, or, to be more blunt, Historical English Discourse Analysis. The two most salient parts of a conversation are its opening and its closing section. While I discuss opening phrases elsewhere (cf. Grzega [in print]), this paper shall shed light on leave-taking terms.

How do we find out about the ways people said good-bye in medieval Anglo-Saxon times? The difficulty of finding out about about spoken language in medieval times has been discussed several times; for Old English there are virtually no records of or on spoken language, and most studies on historical pragmatics refrain from dwelling on Old English times (cf., e.g. the overview in Jucker et al. 1999b, Jucker 2000).

My sources are, as with the study of opening phrases, the OED, the OEC (where I looked especially for glosses), the TOE (which, however, included no relevant entry), the MEC (I inserted relevant definitions in the search engine), DigiBib59, the SED and the EDD, the study by Stroebe (1911) and an additional study by Arnovick (1999: 95-118). The TOE doesn't offer any relevant information. Records are only accepted here if they represent a clear parting phrase.

We cannot really judge the prominence of medieval phrases, but we can give a qualitative account with some indications of which phrases might have been more frequent and which less.

2. Chronology of Leave-Taking Terms

While it was already difficult to find out about closing phrases in Old English, it turned out to be even more difficult for leave-taking terms. The TOE has no relevant entry. Terasawa (s.v. *good-bye*) gives *welgā* as a leave-taking term (which the TOE gives as a greeting), but the two records of *welga* in the OEC doesn't support any of these interpretations. In CorpGl2 we find *welga* as a gloss for Lat. *heia* (an expression of astonishment and an expression of request); in PsGIB we find *welga welga* as a gloss for Lat. *euge euge* (some sort of commendation): *welga* must therefore be excluded from the study. An OEC search with the Latin glosses 'vale/uale' led to no matches. The search for 'valete/ualete' yielded one entry, viz. *wesap hale* (1x ClG1). In Stroebe (1911: 14ff.) we find that in Old English there were practically only *wesap hale* and *wilcuma(n)* as a greeting term and the first also served as a leave-taking term.

The results were slightly more for the periods afterwards.

- *Habbeoð alle gode niht* 'lit.: Have all good night', (*Have you (all) good night*, first attested a1200 (MED, OED); later also the reduced type *good night* (since 1374), but the deletion of *have* occurs much later than with the greeting phrases *good morn(ing)* and *good even* (all quotes in the MED still contain *have* if the phrase is used in direct speech)
- (*Have*) (*well*) *good day*, first attested as a parting term 1205 (MED, OED)
- (*To*) *Christ/God I þe biteche* 'lit.: To Christ/God I commend you', first attested as a parting term c1314, for the last time c1440 (MED, OED)
- *Gode (give) you good day*, first attested as a parting term 1374 (MED, OED)
- *God (thee) speed ~ God speed (you)*, first attested in 1375, last record of *God speed* in 1851 (Melville's *Moby Dick*) and of *God speed you* in 1918 (Harte's *M'Liss*) (MED, OED, DigiBib59)
- *Farewell, Fare (thou/thee/ye/you) well*, first attested in 1377, now poetic (MED, OED)
- *God save (you)*, first attested as a leave-taking formula in 1385, only a sporadic phrase, after the classical ME attested for 1485 (*Le Morte d'Arthur*), 1595/96 ("God save your life", in *Love's Labor's Lost*), 1796/97 (Wordsworth's *The Borderers*) and 1907 (Synge's *The Playboy of the Western World*) (MED, OED, DigiBib59)
- *Adieu*, of French origin, first attested as a leave-taking formula in 1393 (MED, OED)
- (*His*) *pes be wit yow ~ Peace be with you*, first attested as a non-biblical leave-taking formula in a1400 (MED)
- *Wel ze be* 'lit.: Well you be', first attested as a clear leave-taking formula in a1475 (MED)
- *St. John to borgh* 'St. John be your protector/sponsor', c1482 (a1420) until c1500, but rare (still rarer *Venus to borgh*, a1425/c1385 (MED))
- *Good-bye*, as far as I see the first attestation as a clear leave-taking formula is in 1591 (Shk, *Henry VI*, III,2): "God b'uy my Lord". Later colloquial reductions are the forms *By* (first record 1709) and *By-by* (first record 1736). There is also the form *godbwyes* standing in opposition to *how-dyes* (1573-80, OED)
- *Vale*, Latin formula attested as a real leave-taking formula from 1550 till 1656 (cf. OED)
- *Hallo*, as a leave-taking term used in several of Dickens' works (cf. DigiBib59)
- *So long*, first attested in 1865 (OED)
- *Ciao*, first attested as a leave-taking formula in 1961 in I.T. Ross's *Requiem for*

Schoolgirl. (cf. above as a form of greeting); this seems have especially popular in New York, since Birdwell writes in his *Amazons*: “When did New Yorkers stop saying ciao?” (OED)

- *Cheerie-bye*, first attested as Scottish English 1934 (OED)
- *Da-da*, only 1681 and 1733 (OED)
- *God bless you*, first attested in 1964 according to the OED, but actually already used in Richardson’s *Pamela* (1740), as *God bless* first in Sterne’s *Tristram Shandy* (1759) as slang (DigiBib59)
- *Ta-ta*, first attested in 1823, and *tar-tar*, first attested in 1837 (OED, DigiBib59)
- *See you*, first attested in 1891 (OED)
- *Hooray*, first attested in 1898 (OED), Australian English
- *Cheero*, first attested in 1910, and *cheerio*, first attested in 1914 (OED)
- *T.T.F.N.* , attested in the 1940’s on a BBC program (OED)
- *Ta-ra*, first attested in 1958 (OED)
- *Tatty-bye*, first attested in 1971 (OED)
- *Aroo ~ huroo*, 1945 or earlier (OED s.v. *hooray*)
- *Pip-pip!*, as a greeting phrase first attested in 1920 (OED)
- *Seventy-three(s)*, first attested in 1941 (OED)
- *Good sale (to you)*, attested in the EDD (s.v. *good*, section 3) for northern Yorkshire

3. Iconemes and Etymologies of Leave-Taking Terms

By *iconeme* I refer the motivation behind a term, its image (cf. Grzega 2004a: 29). I will list the various iconemes and discuss the etyma of the respective forms. In the final subsection I will discuss unclear and debatable cases.

(1) expressive phrases

A number of phrases are of expressive origin (some would also say onomatopoeic¹):

- *Da-da*, *Ta(r)-ta(r)* – According to the OED, *da-da* is “the earlier form of *ta-ta*”.
- *Ta-ra* – OED: “Colloq. (mainly North.) alteration of *ta-ta*”.
- *Hooray* – OED explains the term as “var. of *hurrah*” and gives the following citation: “1898 *Bulletin* (Sydney) 4 June (*red page*), In many places the salutation ‘good-day’ or ‘good-night’ is simply ‘Hooray!’”. Based on the citations the phrase seems basically Australian.
- *Aroo ~ huroo*
- *Pip-pip!*

(2) wish for a good time of the day or a good time in general

- *((Have) a) good day/morning/afternoon/evening/night/time*.
- *Good sale (to you)* – The word *sale* must be understood as ‘time’ here—cf. EDD (s.v. *seal* sb₂), where we also find the phrase *The seal of the day (to you)* ‘a friendly salutation’ in Norfolk and Suffolk.

(3) wish for health or peace

- *Wesap hale*
- *Wel ye be*

¹ For the distinction between *onomatopoeic* and *expressive* cf. Grzega (2004: 153).

- *Farewell*
- *Peace to thee/you*

(4) wish for or leaving to God's or some other higher being's protection

- *God speed you* – ME *speed* is used in the sense of 'protect' (there is still the family name *Goodspeed*)
- *St. John to borgh* – ME *borgh* means 'pledge; sponsor, guarantor'.
- *Venus to borgh*
- *To Christ/God ich þe biteche*
- *God bless (you)*
- *God save you*

(5) predicting seeing each other again

- *See you* – The OED says: "colloq. formula of farewell, often in weakened sense without reference to an anticipated meeting (in full *I'll see you*). Also with advbs. and other extensions, as *around, soon*, etc. Also, (*I'll be seeing you*. Cf. F. *au revoir*, G. *auf Wiedersehen*".

(6) puns

- *T.T.F.N.* -- According to the OED this is the abbreviation of *ta-ta for now* and is "a catch-phrase popularized by the 1940s BBC radio programme *Itma*"

(7) blends

- *Cheerie-bye*
- *Tatty-bye*

(8) loan expressions

- *Adieu* – French
- *Vale* – Latin
- *Ciao* – Italian

(9) unclear and debatable origins

- *Seventy-three(s)* – The OED says: "(U.S. slang), best wishes, **good-bye**; also written 73" -- OED citations: "1941 *Traffic World* LXVIII. 198/1 Morse code operators..used many arbitrary numbers to shorten their work..4 meaning 'where'...73 'best regards' and 22 'kisses'." and "1976 *S9* (N.Y.) May/June 31/2 Seventy-threes, and 'bye." Zook (2001: 4) quotes from the *Bulletin from the Navy Department Office of the Chief of Naval Operations* December 1934: "It appears from a research of telegraph histories that in 1859 the telegraph people held a convention, and one of its features was a discussion as to the saving of 'line time'. A committee was appointed to devise a code to reduce standard expressions to symbols or figures. This committee worked out a figure code, from figure 1 to 92. Most of these figure symbols became obsolescent, but a few remain to this date, such as 4, which means: 'Where shall I go ahead?' Figure 9 means 'wire', the wire chief being on the wire and that everyone should close their keys. Symbol 13 means 'I don't understand'; 22 is 'love and a kiss'; 30 means 'good

night' or 'the end'. The symbol most often used now is 73, which means 'my compliments' and 92 is for the word 'deliver'. The other figures in between the forgoing have fallen into almost complete disuse." Zook (2001: 4) further summarizes: "One of the chief telegraphers of the Navy Department of Communications, a J.L. Bishop, quoted from memory the signals that were in effect in 1905: [...] 73 My compliments, or Best Regards". It seems that there is no logical link between the American Morse symbols and the concepts, so that the number choices are really arbitrary.

- *Cheer(i)o* – According to the OED the verb *cheer* was suffixed with the interjection *o* and later influenced by *cheery*. An influence of *Hello* instead of *O* also seems possible.
- *So long* – The OED (s.v. *long*) vaguely writes in brackets: "Cf. G. *so lange*." Mencken's information (1919/1963: 192 & 258) is a little contradictory: at first he categorizes *So long* as a Germanism, later in the book he classifies it as "of English origin" (or does he want to say that the term is of German descent, but that it came to America via England?). According to Terasawa (s.v. *long*) we would have to postulate an imagined starting-form **(it will seem) so long (until we meet again)*. Under the entry *so long* itself this hypothesis is preceded by a question mark, and the hypotheses of a German origin (*So lange* 'so long') and an Arabic origin (*salâm* 'peace') are also given. Also in Weekley (s.v. *so long*) we find the hypothesis: "? Corrupt. of *salaam*." The German origin is also offered as one possible explanation for the expression with "origin unknown" by Chapman (s.v. *so long*); in addition, Chapman writes: "perhaps fr [om] Hebrew *shalom* and related Arabic *salaam*, both greetings meaning 'peace'; perhaps fr Irish *slan* 'health,' used as a toast and a salutation". Walt Whitman is among the first to use *So long* in written language, particularly several times in his parting song *So long!* in his collection of poems *Leaves of Grass* (version of before 1868). (The only earlier citation in the OED [s.v. *long*] stems from 1865, from F.H. Nixon—the source is given as "*P. Perfume* 8", which, unfortunately, is not decoded in the bibliography, though). Kennedy, a friend of Whitman's and connoisseur of his work, writes (1926: 110):

"The salutation of parting—'So long!'—was, I believe, until recent years, unintelligible to the majority of persons in America, especially in the interior, and to members of the middle and professional classes. I had never heard of it until I read it in *Leaves of Grass*, but since then have quite often heard it used by the laboring class and other classes in New England cities. Walt wrote to me, defining 'so long' thus [also quoted in Whitman 1984: 1137] : 'A salutation of departure, greatly used among sailors, sports, & prostitutes—the sense of it is 'Till we meet again,'—conveying an inference that somehow they will doubtless so meet, sooner or later.'" This is interesting as comment on his use of the phrase in his *Songs of Parting*, conveying an intimation of his belief in personal immortality. The phrase is said by the etymologists to be probably a corruption by sailors of the Oriental 'Salaam' ('saluting,' 'wishing you peace'). It is evidently about equivalent to our 'See you later.' The phrase is reported as used by farm laborers near Banff, Scotland. In Canada it is frequently heard; 'and its use is not entirely confined to the vulgar.' It is in common use among the working classes of Liverpool and among sailors at Newcastle-upon-Tyne, and in Dorsetshire. [...]. The *London Globe* suggests that the expression is derived from the Norwegian 'Saa laenge,' a common form of 'farewell,' *au revoir*. If so, the phrase was picked up from the Norwegians in America, where 'So long' first was heard. The expression is now (1923) often used by the literary and artistic classes."

I first consulted Fraser and Gibbon's dictionary on sailor slang (1925); but the phrase wasn't listed there. But if it is true that the term originates in sailor slang (and from there was first spread among other social groups in contact with them, e.g. soldiers and prostitutes), then we can give the following comments on the various suggestions.

- (1) Although the German hypothesis is formally possible, it must be underscored that there is no hint that a German leave-taking expression *So lange* ever existed (cf.,

e.g., DW).

- (2) A Hebrew (or Yiddish) origin seems unlikely for a sailor term.
- (3) The Arabic hypothesis seems possible for a sailor term. However, it has to be underlined that *Salaam* is used both as a greeting and a leave-taking term, while *So long* is only used as a leave-taking term.
- (4) The Norwegian hypothesis seems also possible for a sailor term. And indeed, in Norwegian leave-taking phrases such *Adjø så lenge! Farvel så lenge! Mor'n så lenge!*, literally ‘Bye so long! Farewell so long! Morning so long!’, the iconeme being something like “farewell for the (long) time being until we meet again”. The first part was clipped and the second represents a loan translation.

So in conclusion, the Norwegian origin, though not included in the modern etymological dictionaries, can be regarded as the most probable etymology.

- *Good-bye* – For Arnovick (1999: 95) “the derivation of *Good-bye* from *God be with you* is well documented formally and semantically”. The first attestation of *God be with you* as part of a leave-taking formula is in Chaucer’s Pardoner’s Tale: “And god be with yow wher ye go or ryde”. However, the phrase is not listed in the MED as an isolated leave-taking term. In the OED we read (similarly also cf. ODEE, Klein, Terasawa, Weekley, Mayer [1962: 194]): “A contraction of the phrase *God be with you* (or *ye*); see GOD *n.* 8. The substitution of *good-* for *God* may have been due to association with such formulas of leave-taking as *good day*, *good night*, etc. It has been suggested that the phrase may have originated in *God buy you* = ‘God redeem you’, and that association with *God be with you* is of later date. This is not supported by the earliest forms, which as a rule show that the expression was known to be a clipped one [i.e. 1591 in Shakespeare’s *Henry VI*].” The change of *God* to *good* can be traced back to the late 17th century. However, the change from *be with* to *buy* seem much less clear, as the following points should be taken into account:
 - (a) It should be underlined that already in the last quarter of the 17th century we find non-apostrophed forms, e.g. *God buoye all* (Heywood, *2 Edw IV*), *God bwy ye*, *God bwy* (cf. Arnovick 1999: 99). Therefore, it is not for sure that the interpretation as clipped forms is prior. It might that this interpretation is later and maybe a form of “eye dialect”.
 - (b) The late 16th-century forms *bwy*, *bwy* can easily be connected with the early 17th-century forms *God buy ye/you/thee*; for <bwy>, <bwy(e)> and <buy> could well be seen as graphic variants. (It must be admitted, though, that the MED lists no graphic variant <bwy> for *buy*.)
 - (c) It can be shown that an utmost abbreviated form *Bye(-Bye)* already occurs in 1643 (or earlier) in Cartwright’s works in the form of *B’w’y*’ (all forms given in the OED). Are half a century enough for a corruption from *God be with you* to *Bye*?
 - (d) What none of the “chronologies” try to explain is the ModE vowel [ai]. Why should the part *be with (you)* get weaker and weaker and all of a sudden be strengthened by diphthongization again—without any gain in motivation? What sounds do etymologists see behind this phrase type?

If *God be with you* is at the start of *Go(o)d-bye*, then we would have to postulate the following intermediate stages:

- (1) [ˈɡɔd ˈbe: wið ˈju:] >
- (2) [ˈɡɔd be wi ˈju:] (loss of stress and weakening of verb plus weakening of preposition, attested as *God be wy you* in Shakespeare’s *Love Labor’s Lost*, 1588)
>
- (3) (a) *[ˈɡɔd b wi ˈju:] (but strange, uncommon consonant cluster *dbw*!) or (b) *[ˈɡɔd be i ˈju:] (further reduction due to unstressed position and “reduced original

meaning”) >

- (4) (a) *['god b wi je] (but strange, uncommon consonant cluster *dbw!*) or (b) *['god be i je] (loss of stress on pronoun) >
- (5) (a) *['god bwij(ə)] (but strange, uncommon consonant cluster *dbw!*) or (b) *['god beiə] (further reduction due to unstressed position) >
- (6) (a) *['god 'bwij(ə)] (but strange, uncommon consonant cluster *dbw!*) or (b) *['god 'beiə] (new stress on second syllable—but why?) >
- (7) ['god 'baɪ] (reinterpretation as *God buy* ‘may God redeem’?) >
- (8) ['god 'baɪ (ˈ)ju:]

As can be seen, many of the forms have to be constructed, for some there is a lack of explanation, for some strange consonant clusters have to be postulated—and according to the records all this must have happened within less than half a century. Even if stages 5 and 6 do not necessarily have to be postulated for a folk-etymological reinterpretation, there are still some postulations that would need more justification. My problem is also one of document chronology. The first “short” forms are *bwy* (*ye*) and *bwe* in the last quarter of the 16th century (results from the Chadwyck-Healey electronic corpus, cf. Arnovick [1999: 99])—if these really are short forms.... Apostrophized forms such as *b'uy*, *b'wee*, *b'wy*, *b'w'you*, *b'wi'you* don't occur earlier, rather up to a quarter-century later. The first instance—as indicated above—seems to be *God b'uy my Lord* in Shakespeare's *Henry VI*, Act III.2, from 1591. Furthermore, we have the form *buy ye/you/thee* in the first quarter of the 17th century. It is also possible that the forms *bwy* and *bwe* also represent *buy*, not a short form of *be with* and that the interpretation as clipped form is later. These observations show that an etymon *God buy you* is possible from a phonetic and graphic point of view.

But if we want to discuss whether the theory of a *God buy you* is really possible, we also need to check the usage history of the lexeme *buy*. As a matter of fact, the MED lists quotations since Ormm where ME *bīen* is used in the sense of ‘redeem, save, free’ (s.v. *bīen* section 6). What I therefore propose is two separate origins: an older *God be with you* and a maybe younger, but still independent *God buy (you)* (as there is also *God save (you)*) with few phonetic reductions. Again, in the last quarter of the 17th century we find the first folk-etymological forms with *Good*.

No matter if *buy* or *be* is the original verb, this does not change Arnovick's general description that we once had an explicit blessing that then also functioned as an implicit greeting. Finally only its clipped, or slurred, form served as a (secular) greeting. However, I disagree with Arnovick's (1999: 112f.) explanation—again no matter what the original verb was—that the advent of the (secular) greeting *Good-bye* is connected with the epoch of Enlightenment. He says, “the derivation of *Good-bye* from *God be with you* [or: *God buy you*] with the attendant de-institutionalization of the common close should be correlated with secularization” (Arnovick 1999: 113). I doubt this explanation as no parallel cases can be found in other European languages. We still have Fr. *adieu* ‘to God’, It. *addio* ‘dito’, Sp. *adios* ‘dito’, G.dial. *Grüß Gott* ‘may God greet [you]’. Moreover, even in English we have kept the phrase *God bless*, in 1809 we still find the quotation “profusion of farewells and God-be-with-you's” [Malkin quoted in the OED s.v. *God*], and the EDD records several instances where *God* and *good* are mixed up in phrases in **both** directions (s.v. *good*, *God*).

4. Formal, Stylistic and Functional Developments

(1) formal changes

Over time phrases may become morphosyntactically reduced (e.g. *Have a good night/day* > *Good night/day* > *Night/Day*, *God bless/save/speed you* > *God bless/save/speed*, *Good-bye* > *Bye*). unless *Good-bye* goes back to *God be with you*, a morphonetic reduction does not seem to occur. It is interesting, though, that phrases are sometimes blended (e.g. *Cheerie-bye*, *Tatty-bye*).

(2) stylistic changes


Formal reductions or alterations are sometimes accompanied by stylistic or sociolectal changes (e.g. *Bye*, *Night*, *Tatty-bye*). But there might also be stylistic changes without formal changes (e.g. *Adieu*, *Farwell*).

(3) functional changes

Already Arnovick (1999: 95) has observed a development of phrases that represent explicit wishes and blessings and implicit partings into pure partings. This functional deprivation, or “discursive inflation”, as Arnovick (1999: 2) puts it, can be confirmed by our analysis of the data. An original wish may especially become opaque when there are formal reductions.

5. Final Remarks

Greeting and leave-taking phrases have to cope with (interrelated) polar forces. These can be illustrated as follows:

<p>simple conversational marker slurred/reduced phonetic form opaque form avoiding excessive length common conversational signs</p>		<p>explicit wish complete phrase or sentence transparent form desire for plastic expressions specific in-group markers</p>
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Apart from this, we can say that conversational openings and endings are anthropologically, or naturally, salient concepts, which continually trigger off lexical innovations. Moreover, due to social reasons and prestige reasons such salutation terms may also easily be borrowed from other languages.²

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² For a complete catalog of forces triggering off lexemic change cf. Grzega (2004a, 2004b).

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