

## Whims of the Old English Prefix *ge-* revisited

(To the memory of Prof. Antonín Beer)

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### Abstract

*There is one principal point in which linguists differ from other people: they will marvel at things that other people take for granted. And indeed, who would ever stop to think about the little 'prefixating' syllable *ge-*, which the Germans and the Dutch utter so frequently, while the English are entirely unaware of it? It will be worthy of note what the reasons are like that the prefix is now missing in our tongue. Is it only due to purely phonetic circumstances, as linguists have often claimed? The present article is meant to show that the more plausible explanation lies in certain facts of semantic and syntactic character: the most substantial changes are believed to be the ones that took place in the system of inflection, word order, and so-called phrasal verbs. All this discussion is framed into a larger sociolinguistic context; here the issues of language contact and diglossia seem to have played the most important role.*

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