1. The aim of this article is to examine the English words *gear* "a toothed wheel; equipment," *garb* "clothes; fashion," and *yare* "ready, prepared; quick, nimble" from a diachronic viewpoint and then to recognize a facet of word histories; according to the *OED* the first has been recorded since the thirteenth century, the second since the end of the sixteenth century, and the last since the Old English period.

2.1. Though archaic and dialectal now, *yare* is the oldest of the three and so is worth treating first in order to know the earliest uses and meanings of the word group. The word *yare*, which can be traced back to *gearo*¹, *gearu* in Old English, was widely used not only as a free form but also as an element of compounds. The following are the examples from *Beowulf*:²

Wiht unhælo, / grim ond grædī, *gearo* sōna wæs, / rēoc, ond rēpe, ond on ræste genam / prētig bygna;  
(ll. 120~23)

Hræp wæs æt holme hyðweard *geara*, / sē þæær læge tīd Gethr manna / fūs æt farðe fœor wīlōde;  
(ll. 1914~16)

Him on fyrste gelomp, / ædre mid yldum, þæt hit wær ðæl*gearo*, / healxarna mæst;  
(ll. 76~8)

According to *Bosworth and Toller*, OE *gearo* (adj.) means "ready, prepared, equipped, or complete" corresponding in meaning to Lat. *promptus, paratus, instructus* or *perfectus*, e.g. *gearo ic com* "paratus sum" and *gearo is min heorte* "pararum est cor meum". *Toller*, a supplement to *Bosworth and

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¹ It is well known that the initial Germanic *g*- became *j*- in Old English (spelled *y*- in Modern English) before front vowels.

² The examples are cited from Klaeber (1950).
Toller, adds detailed information about the word, subdividing its sense and usage; there the basic meaning is shown at the beginning as “in a state of preparation, so as to be capable of immediately performing (or becoming the object of) such action as implied or expressed by the context”, and this meaning seems to hold true in the citations from Beowulf above. The subdivided senses (nineteen in all) are “dressed, armed”, “(of food) dressed, cooked”, and “(of ships) equipped for service”, to mention a few.

Besides the adjective gearo, Old English had a number of connected words, the adverb gearwe, gearo “readily, entirely” (> Mod. E yare, which is now obsolete or archaic), the adverb gearwice, “readily, clearly” (> Mod. E yarely (arch.)), the verb gearwian “to make ready, prepare, put on, clothe” (> ME saren(n) > Mod. E yare), which derived from the adjective gearo and is now obsolete, the verb gearcian “to prepare, make ready” (> ME sarke(n) > Mod. E yare), which was formed as the adjective gearo + factitive suffix -cian and is now obsolete, and the noun gearwe (used only in pl.) “clothing, gear, arms (< things which were equipped, things made ready)”, which was completely replaced by gere, of Norse origin, during the Middle English period. The number of related words will increase considerably, if we add compounds such as gearo-gongende “going quickly”, gearo-cyndig “ready in words”, etc.

OE gearo became jare (and later yare) in Middle English. However, ME jare was not used so commonly as gearo, and was being gradually replaced by redi, redy (> Mod. E ready), which began to be used in the twelfth century; Dickens and Wilson (1951: 22), citing Lasamon’s Brut, show “(per com Arbur him ȝ3ein), jaru mid fehte.” (the British Museum Cotton Caligula A IX (c. 1225)), along with the textual variation “redi to fihte” (the British Museum Cotton Otho C XIII (c. 1250)). In the stage of transition yare and redy seemed to be sometimes used tautologically side by side, e.g. redy and yare, or yare and redy.¹ In Modern English, though yare

¹) In his Dialect Dictionary (s.v. gare), Wright cites a Yorkshire dialect illustration, which runs as follows, “I’m gare and ready. I’ll say ‘gar gar’ for it [i.e. ready, ready! expressive of anxiety for its obtainment].” This shows that the Scottish or Yorkshire dialect gere, of Norse origin and with the same etymology as the native yare, is not so familiar and needs to be explained tautologically. Therefore, it may be that the expression “yare and ready” was redundant but necessary after yare had not been commonly used any longer.

2.2. ME gere (> Mod E gear) is known to be a Scandinavian loanword, which meant “equipment of any kind, such as clothes, armor, harness, tools, etc.; behavior, doings” and was used very frequently throughout the Middle English period. As stated above, Old English had the word gearwe with similar meanings, but ME gere was not a direct descendant of OE gearwe, the initial sound of which had already gone through the phonetic change g > j, whereas the initial consonant of gere is considered to be a guttural plosive retaining a Scandinavian phonetic value; therefore it is very probable that the word was introduced into English after the process of palatalization had already ended. The fact that a great number of illustrations of this word are cited in the MED (s.v. gere) shows its considerably frequent use in Middle English. The following are examples:

Whyle oure luflych lede lys in his bedde, / Gawayn graykely at home, in gere (= bedclothes) ful ryche / of heue;
(Sir Gawain and the Green Knight, ll. 1469~71)¹
An hundred lوردes hadde he with hym there, / Al armed, save hir heddes, in al hir gere (= fighting equipment), / Ful richely in alle maner thynges.
(The Canterbury Tales; The Knight’s Tale, ll. 2179~81)²

Moreover, Mod. E gear is used as a verb, though its older meanings “to adorn, array, dress; to equip” are obsolete or archaic (cf. OED, s.v. gear v.). This verb, related to the Old English verb gearwian, was also borrowed from Old Norse as geren in the thirteenth century. What is to be noticed is that ME geren “to prepare, equip; to dress; to adorn; to make, cause” had much more frequency and importance than Mod. E gear. The following are examples:

Wel gay wat3 his gone gere (= clothed) in grene, / & pe here of his
hed of his hors swete;

(Sir Gawain and the Green Knight, ll. 179~80)

Hi last a lace lyȝly þat leke wȝbe hir sydeȝ, / Knit vpôn hir kyrTEL,
vande þe clere mantyle, / Gered (= adorned) hit wÅtȝ with grene
sylke, & with golde schaped,

(ðb. ll. 1830~32)

Further, ME geren had a variant garen 1) (> Mod. E gar), which has lost
almost all its senses in Modern English except for the one “to cause (some-
one) to do something”, though dialectal, e.g.:

Gregorie the grete clerk gart (= caused) write in his bokes / The ruele
of alle religious ryghtful and obedient.

(Piers The Plowman, C-Text, Passus VI, ll. 147~48) 2)

2.3. Since garb was introduced into English in the sixteenth century, its
eytymology is fairly clear; according to the OED, it was borrowed from It.
garbo “grace, elegance” through F garbe (now galbe). The word, however,
is a cognate of gear (n.), and therefore of Germanic origin, and it seems to
have gone through the semantic change “something done, made, or pre-
pared → (a) equipment, dress → fashion of dress, elegance; → (b) be-
havior obs. → manner of doing obs.”

3.1. As we have seen thus far, gear and its related words are of Norse
origin; to put it in another way, they were borrowed from Old Norse in the
Middle English period. 3) The Norse word from which Mod. E gear (v.)
and gar derived was ON gorva “to make, do”, an important word in that it
differentiates North Germanic from East and West Germanic.

3.2. In Germanic languages the words meaning “to do, make” 4) have a
peculiar distribution, that is to say, taujan in Gothic, gorva in Old Norse,
and dön, macian in Old English, and the phenomenon is generally regarded
as one of the characteristics which lexically distinguish between East,
North, and West Germanic. Etymologically, it is generally accepted that
OE dön, with its cognates OS dōan and OHG tuon, came from Gmc *dôn,
and ultimately from IE *dhē-, *dhē- “to put, place”, that OE macian, OS
makôn, and OHG makôn derived from Gmc *makôn, and ultimately from
IE *mag-, *mak- “to knead”, and that Goth. taujan is a Germanic word
from Gmc *taw- “to make, manufacture”.

At the earliest stage of Old Norse, tawido “made (the past tense)” is
found in inscriptions, such as the famous one on the Golden Horn at
Gallehus: “Ek HlewagastiR HoltijaR horna tawīðō (I, HlewagastiR,
Holti’s son, made the horn)” and Old English had tawian “to prepare,
make ready, make” ( > Mod. E taw “to dress (skins)”), but neither of them
became common in these languages. Further, a number of words related to
OE dön (namely, deriving from IE *dhē-) were used in Old Norse though
gorva had already been used instead of dön without a trace of the latter; e.g.
dāð (cf. OE dēð, Mod. E deed < that which is done), dōmr “judgement” (cf.
OE dōm, Mod. E doom; < that which is put), deuma “to give judgement” (cf.
OE deman, Mod. E deem), etc.

3.3. The historical background of ON gorva is not so simple; though it is
agreed that the word derived from Gmc *garwian, its form was complex,
that is, there were a number of different forms recorded in Old Norse,
such as gera, gorva, gor, gija, gjarva, etc. besides gorva. Gmc *garwian is
thought to have become *gorva by i-mutation, from which gerva (> gera)
developed, and then *gorva by w-mutation, from which gorva (> gor) 
developed, or Gmc *garwian may have become *gorva by w-mutation
(through *garoa without i-mutation), from which gjora (> gjora) was
formed by r-breaking. In passing, this wide variety of forms has brought
about a number of disputes on how the stem vowel of the verb was deter-
mined in Danish and Swedish. 5) Then ON gorva had a causative meaning

1) cf. Andersen (1945~48) and Andersen (1965).
like Mod. E *make*, and was also used periphrastically as an auxiliary in poetry, as *ef hón gorði koma* “if she did come”, though not used as a vicarious verb. In this connection, though this periphrastic use has not become prevalent in modern Norse languages, vicarious uses, similar to those of the auxiliary *do* in Modern English, have developed in Swedish, Danish and Norwegian. Further, ON *gorva* had an intransitive function, as *pat mun ekki gorva* “that won’t do”, and *Onions* (s.v. *do*) attributes the intransitive use of Mod. E *do* “to help, avail, suffice” partly to this Old Norse verb; this meaning was first recorded in Shakespeare’s works, but it is “probably much older than the date of our present evidence”.

3.4. Gmc *garwian* was probably formed as *garwa-* “ready, prepared” + factitive suffix –*ian* (hence “to make ready, equip”, then “to make, do”), and since *garwa-* became *gorr* by *w*-mutation and the loss of –*w*—in Old Norse, ON *gorva* can be regarded as a derivative of *gorr*, a cognate of the above-mentioned OE *gearo*, from which OE *gearwian* was similarly formed. Therefore, in order to know the etymology of *gorva*, we have to know how the etymology of *gearo*, from which OE *gearwian* was similarly formed. According to the OED (s.v. *yare*) *gearo*, *gorr* and other cognate words such as OS *garu*, OHG *garo* (Mod. G *gar*), etc. were compounded as Gmc *ga-* (> OE *ge*) + *arw-* (> OE *earu* “quick, active, ready”, ON *orr* “ready”). The NWD, the RHD and Partridge also accept this etymological derivation and A. Jönhannesson (1956: 420) refers to it, but Vries (1962: s.v. *gorr*) states that the derivation is not plausible (“Wenig einleuchtend ist die herleitung . . . .”) and *Onions* (s.v. *yare*), one of the Oxford dictionaries, does not adopt the OED’s idea but simply says that it is from Gmc *garwio-*. Since the OED’s etymological description was not revised in the second edition, it may be a matter of concern and interest what the etymology of *yare* will be like when a further revision is made in the future.

1) The *SOD* (1955) followed the example of the *OED*, but the *SOD* (1973) discarded the policy and adopted *Onions’* interpretation; the etymology of the *SOD* has become more concise and does not show reconstructed forms.

Falk u. Torp (1910–11), A. Jönhannesson (1956: 418–420), Pokorny (1959: 493–94), Nielsen (1966: 143), Web 3rd (without referring to a reconstructed form; s.v. *yare*), etc. traced the etymology back to IE *gʷher-* “hot, warm”, from which Gmc *warma-*, then ON *varmr*, OE *wearm*, OS/ OHG *war* etc. derived, comparing them with other Indo-European cognate words. According to their hypothesis, IE *gʷher-* became Gmc *garwio-* meaning “ready, prepared” (< “heated, fermented enough to eat”) < “hot, warm”), and in this respect Mod. G *gar* “cooked through, done” well represents the meaning in relation to cooking. But many etymological and historical dictionaries, such as *Barnhart*, *Bloch et Warburg*, *Klein*, *Kluge*, *Le grand Robert*, the ODS, *Pfeifer*, *Shea*, *Weekley*, etc., do not accept this speculation but regard OE *gearo*, ON *gorr*, etc. as ultimately of Germanic origin, and prudently Watkins shows only the Germanic derivation without touching upon Indo-European roots in his *American Heritage Dictionary of Indo-European Roots* (s.v. *garwian*).

3.5. As has been seen, the etymology of ON *gorr* is controversial, but in any case the word and its derivatives were widely used in Old Norse; e.g. *gorð*, *gorð*, *goring* “making, building; doing, act, deed” (< *garwa*<*gorr*) side by side with a similar form *gerð* “gear, harness, armor”, *garvi, gervi* “gear, apparel”, *garning, gending* “doing, deed”, etc. The sense development of *gorr* and its related words seems to be like this:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>“ready”</th>
<th>“to equip,”</th>
<th>“to do,”</th>
<th>“doing, making”</th>
<th>“deed, act”</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>“make ready”</td>
<td>“make”</td>
<td>“that which is done, made”</td>
<td>“gear, apparel”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Out of the Old Norse words cited above, *garr* “ready” was borrowed into English as the Scottish dialect *gare* “ready; eager”, *gorva* as ME *geren* “to prepare, equip; to cause” (Mod. E *gear* (v.)) and also as ME *garen* “to do, make; cause” (Mod. E *gar*), and *garvi* as ME *gere* “gear, apparel, armor” (Mod. E *gear* (n.)).

4.1. The etymology of *gear, garb, yare, etc.* is complicated in that the native words, *yare* (v.), *yare* (a.), *yark*, the Scandinavian loanwords, *gare*, *gear* (v.), *gear* (n.), *gar*, and the French loanword *garb* have coexisted, affecting one another. Provided that they have derived from IE *g*•*her-* “hot, warm”, their derivation can be shown as below:

IE *g*•*her-*

- Gmc *warma*— OE *warm*— ME *warm*— warm
- Gmc *garva*— ON *garr*— ME *garen*— gear (v.)
- ON *gorva*— ME *gere*— gear (n.)
- OE *gage*— ME *gare*— yare (a.)
- OE *government*— ME *gare*— yare (v.)
- OE *gear*— ME *gare*— yark

4.2. We have thus far seen the historical backgrounds of the word group of *gear, garb, yare, etc.*, but most of them are now obsolete, archaic, or dialectal; accordingly, *gar, gare, yare* and *yark* are no longer entered in such a synchronic dictionary as the COD. Moreover, since *garb* only appears in a formal or literary context, the only one word of the word group that is used in an ordinary context is *gear*. This word, however, is limited in use, because the most familiar meaning of *gear* (n.) today is “a toothed wheel”, which is a later development and dates from as late as the sixteenth century, though there remains a meaning “equipment, clothing”; furthermore, *gear* (v.) seems to have virtually lost its meaning in connection with a machine or tool, i.e. “to put (machinery) into gear”, in ordinary speech and is commonly used figuratively with a sense “to adapt (something) to suit a particular need”.¹

ABBREVIATIONS


¹) Concerning the loss of -w-, we have seen that *v* (< *v*-b- < *w*-w-) already dropped in Old Norse, as gorva > gera, but the OED (s.v. gear n.), after describing the phenomenon in Old Norse, also points out “a disposition to reduce rw to r after a stressed palatal vowel” in Middle English.
Some Historical Notes on gear, garb and yore


REFERENCES


