Abstract

The article first groups the clearly etymologized Germanic names for Wednesday according to their motive (their iconym) and tries to describe the origin, or motivation, of the names’ motive. The motives are “Woden’s day” (a calque from Mercurii dies), “mid-week (day)” (from Ecclesiastical Latin and/or Ecclesiastical Greek—with a polycausal explanation concerning its origin), “[day] after Tuesday” (which reflects the attempt to avoid the name of the heathen God Woden). In addition, light is shed on a few unclear cases as well: (1) Old Frisian Wêrendei seems to include the tribal name Wernas; (2) dialectal Dutch wonseldach may have been influenced by other day-names including the morph -el-; (3) Modern Low German dialectal and Dutch dialectal forms with initial g- may be founded on a Latinized scribal habit; (4) the interpretation of Southern German guontag as “good Wednesday” is rejected on phonetic and prosodic grounds; (5) the Modern English forms, all of which show -e-, and dialectal Dutch waansdei seem to encompass the verbal stem wêd- ‘to be mad, to rage’ (some English forms may also have been influenced by the verb wenden ‘to turn’), and the same seems true for Du.dial. weunsdag. From a theoretical viewpoint, the article underlines the importance of regarding secondary, which are the product of a new iconym, as a true type of onomasiological change, as these may reflect human thinking and cultural conditions and are not only the result of phonetic aberrations. On the other hand, it also shows that a number of etymological problems still remains to be unsolved.

1. Introduction

Whereas the year, the month and the day are objective measurements based on astronomic phenomena, the week is an arbitrary unit. It is therefore possible to carry out cross-linguistic studies only to a limited extent —especially if we investigate more ancient times. The Romans knew a nine-day week before they adopted the seven-day system from Jewish culture (the ecclesiastical system), which was combined with a planetary system. The precise origin of the seven-day week is still not entirely clear; a recent discussion is offered by Zerubavel (1985).

The weekday system and its Latin-Greek names were adopted by the Germanic tribes in the third to fifth centuries, at the southern border of the limes (by Alemannic tribes) and at the lower Rhine regions and were later brought further to the north up to the Scandinavian areas, too (Moser 1957: 678; Hermodsson 1969/1970: 184ff.).1 The two paths of borrowing are reflected particularly in two names: Saturday, with northern forms going back to Latin Saturnī dies and southern forms going back to Greek, and Wednesday with northern forms originating in the Germanic Wōdanes-dag and southern forms originating in the Ecclesiastical Latin media hebdomas or the respective Greek equivalent.

A series of articles has discussed the names for the different days in the Indo-European and neighboring cultures, e.g. Greek (Thumb 1901), Roman (Gundermann 1901), Romance

1 Kranzmayer (1929: 85) even thinks that it is possible that the first borrowings could already have happened on the Rhine in the second century.
(Meyer-Lübke 1901, Bruppacher 1948), German (Kluge 1895, Gundel 1938), Bavarian (Kranzmayer 1929, Wiesinger 1999), Celtic (Thurneysen 1901, Ó Cróinín 1981), Babylonic (Jensen 1901), Semitic (Nöldeke 1901), and other languages around the world, which adopted the seven-day system from the European culture (Brown 1989). Normally the weekdays are all treated together. This article, however, will exclusively be dedicated to Wednesday and its names in the Germanic language group. The reason for this is that some of its names, as was already shown in the preceding paragraph, show some interesting problems—linguistic-wise and extralinguistic-wise.

2. The various expressions for “Wednesday”

The standard expressions for Wednesday and the other week-day names in Germanic and other Indo-European languages are listed and commented on in Buck (1949: 1006ff.). The following sections will deal in more detail with both the standard and some dialect terms and the underlying motives of their formation. The Germanic forms will be grouped according to their iconym, as Alinei (e.g. 1997) calls it, i.e. their motive or their original semantic components. The notion of iconym must not be mixed up with the notion of etymon. The former groups OE Wōð(e)nesdæg and ON Óðinsdagr together, whereas the latter would not, since Wōdan and Óðin are different etymons. This does not mean, though, that the phonetic history will be neglected here. Just the contrary: the study of the phonetic developments will give a more profound insight in iconicmic changes. In a second step, it will be asked what the cognitive basis for the selection of certain iconyms is, in other words: what the motivation for these motives is. This method does not only content itself to explaining the phonetic affiliation, but pays respect, more or less, to what the Austrian linguist Hugo Schuchardt called “la dame sémantique” at the beginning of the twentieth century. This will especially be crucial when the name of the new cultural gain (here: the seven days) is not simply adopted from the cultural community that serves as a model. The first four sections of this second chapter will deal with such questions. The last chapter will then go beyond the usual etymological and iconomastic studies. It concerns concrete forms that can be traced back to a certain etymon, but have not undergone the usual phonetic changes. As will be shown, some of these cannot be regarded simply as the result of mere irregular, deviant phonetic changes, but which reveal another, secondary iconym. In other words: they will have to be placed into the realm of what linguists call folk-etymology and (secondary) blends. Folk-etymological changes are normally not considered as onomasiological changes, since the etymon is said to stay the same. In my view, however, it is important to note that folk-etymology or the (secondary) crossing/blending of words shows that the iconym, which is essential in cross-linguistic onomasiological studies, changes. And these are processes which also need explanation.

2.1. Iconym: “Woden, name of the highest God” + “day”

MLG Wōdensdach
Du. Woensdag
OFRis. wōnsdei
OE Wōð(e)nesdæg

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2 De Vries 1971: 844; Falk/Torp 1960: 793.
5 Holthausen 1934: 403

A number of forms cannot be the results of the regular sound processes. Nevertheless, they cannot be said to include other, new iconyms, but must be traced back to merely occasional sound changes or assimilation processes. The Old Frisian form *Wornisdei*, for instance, is the result of a frequently observed irregular change of *d > r* in intervocalic position (cf. Hermodsson 1969/1970: 181, Miedema 1971: 43). The Dutch dialect form *Moensdag* (in the regions of Alphen, Dreumel, and Hedel) is special because of its initial. Klooke (1936: 150) only gives the description “overgang van w > m,” but no explanation. It may be possible that the nasal character of the /n/ was transferred to the initial, which however kept the place of articulation. Or is it due to a paradigmatic assimilation process of the initials: *M - D - W - D > M - D - M - D* (*maandag - dingsdag - moensdag - dondersdag*)? Another case of assimilation (triggered off by the term for Monday, again) can be suspected behind Fris.dial. *woansdei*, where the vocalism reminds one of *moandei* (cf. Miedema 1971: 44, 47f.).

As to *Woenserdag* and *Wõngsdag* Klooke’s interpretations can be shared. The first, attested in Kuinre, seems to be a hypercorrect spelling, since postvocalic *r* is dropped in this dialect, as it is, for instance in *Zaterdag* (a good parallel!): “de r lijkt niet onverklaarbaar voor hen, die weten, hoe de r van *Zaterdag* in de mond der bewoners klinkt, of liever: niet klinkt” (Klooke 1936: 150). For the latter Klooke (1936: 151) asks, “analogie naar *Dingesdag*?” If we think of daynames being said in a row then assimilation processes like the one suggested occur in many languages, for instance in numerals: whilst for Indo-European we can postulate *kʷetʰōRES* ‘four’ and *penkʷe* ‘five,’ the Germanic languages show retrogressive assimilation (E. *four* - *five*, MHG *vier* - *vīn*), Latin progressive assimilation (*quattuor* - *quinque*); for IE *nēwn* and *dekm* we have Russ. *девять* and *десять*, both with /d-/.

2.2. Iconym: “mid-week”

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9 Jóhannesson 1956: 1101.
11 Holthausen 1934: 403.
12 Klooke 1936: 150.
13 Klooke 1936: 150.
14 Klooke 1936: 151.
(a) primary formations
ModHG Mittwoch, (Late)OHG mittawahha, MHG mittewoche15
MLG middeweke16
Du.dial. Midswick, Mitswik (only Schiermonnikoog)17
Fris. [metswik], [mœzvik]18
Engl.dial. (Quaker English) Mid-week19

(b) secondary formations
MHG miteche, ModHG dial. Mitag, Micktag, Mirichen20
Norw.dial. mækedag21

Before talking about the motivation of the coinage, I would briefly like to shed light on the items under (b). The form MHG miteche is the result of a slurred/weakened pronunciation of the original -wehha that is likely to have happened in other Germanic varieties as well. ModHG dial. Mittag, Micktag, Norw.dial. mækedag are thus only folk-etymological motivations with a secondary attachment of the respective word for ‘day’ to the first syllable. The compound was originally a feminine noun, but in standard German as well as in most dialects the word has turned into a masculine in analogy to the other days of the week—except for a few dialects particularly in Switzerland (cf. Ott 1994: 404ff.). The development of -tX- (in mitche(n)) > -kt- (Micken, Micktag) is not regular, but paralleled by other High German instances (e.g. MHG dehein < ModHG kein ‘not one’, cf. Kranzmayer 1929: 42, 48). Mirichen shows the frequent change of -d- > -r- in Bavarian dialects (cf. Kranzmayer 1929: 21f., 42).

Motivation of formation: Kluge/Seebold lacks an explanation in the case of the ModHG form and its cognates and merely describes that the expression “Woden’s day” was not borrowed the same way that most other names for the days were; the originally Jewish-Christian expression “middle of the week,” first attested as mittewehha in Notker (1022), was favored instead—according to Kluge/Seebold a loan translation from Greek to Mediaeval Latin to German:


What might be the explanation for this state, why does the name for Wednesday show a name that obviously belongs to a numeral naming system, but not the other day-names? And why should we depart from a mediaeval Latin or Greek form although such forms are not recorded in Latin nor Greek texts (cf. Bruppacher 1948: 131f.)? But some corrections and specifications are to be inserted here. First of all, other signs of a numeral system can be found in Germanic dialects too, though sometimes only rudimentary. In Modern Icelandic Tuesday and Thursday are prîðjudagur, the “third day,” and fîmtudagur, the “fifth day,”

17 Kloeke 1936: 150.
18 Miedema 1971: 40.
19 Schröper 1979ff.: 470, 478.
respectively. (The names for Sunday and Monday clearly go back to the planetary system. Friday is jóstudagur, the “fastday,” and Saturday is laugardagur, “washday,” and the same iconym is born in the Old Icelandic synonym þváttdagur). As to German, the vast spread of a numeral term—Mittwoch—is unique; yet it should be underlined that some Bavarian dialects widely use the lexical type Pfíntag for ‘Thursday,’ surely a calque from Mediaeval Greek meaning ‘fifth day.’ A look across the borders of the Germanic dialects shows us that, albeit not recorded in Latin, a compound media hebdomas has to be reconstructed for some Rhaeto-Romance, Central Ladin, Corsican, Tuscan, Vegliotic, and Sardic dialects (cf. Bruppacher 1948: 128, 133f.). For Greek, too, a name encompassing the morpheme for ‘mid, middle’ can be assumed from the fact that the Slavic languages as well as Hungarian have the lexical type srěda (originally ‘middle’), OCSI srěda. That this is a calque, and not an original formation, can be seen from the fact that the Slavic week starts on Monday, not on Sunday (cf. OCSI vūtorinikū ‘the second = Tuesday [!],’ četvrútikū ‘the fourth = Thursday [!],’ pentikū ‘the fifth = Friday [!]’). In such a 7-day-system not Wednesday, but only Thursday can be imagined as the middle day of a week (cf. Kranzmayer 1929: 76ff., Bruppacher 1948: 131).

As the existence of a coinage “mid-week” can thus be postulated in Cisalpine and Appeninic Romance dialects as well as in Ecclesiastical Greek, Bruppacher (1948: 132f.) rightly asks why such a compound was coined at all, since the common folk had Mercurii dies and the church feria quarta. Bruppacher proposes the hypothesis that a strong ecclesiastical personality feeling the unpopularity of feria quarta might have sought an alternative anti-heathen lexeme for the day of the capture of Christ; since the folk fancied the word hebdomas (which once had a much larger distribution, cf. Old Portuguese doma ‘week,’ Old Catalan domeser ‘weekly,’ Old French domas ‘weekly’), the construction media hebdomas seemed a good choice. Moreover, the reader shall be reminded again that the term might also have been incited by a Greek term. The problem of Bruppacher’s hypothesis, however, is that it lacks historical evidence. The peculiar distribution of media hebdomas may also suggest that media hebdomas even belongs to a very old layer.

Although the initial motivation for a coinage of the type “mid-week” remains beyond our knowledge, we now have to deal with the question why and how this formation was adopted in the neighboring Germanic dialects. Several hypotheses have been published on this matter:

1. Frings/Nießen (1927: 302) view the upcoming of Mittwoch together with the formation of Samstag ‘Saturday,’ according to them the areas of conquest and colonization at the Upper Rhine and south of the Danube altered the names of the days at the turning points of the week, viz. at the middle and at the end. adopting some form of Ecclesiastical Latin media hebdomas ‘mid-week’ and Ecclesiastical Greek sámباتον (σάμβατον). But why this should be he does not explain. Nor does he prove that there really ever was an alteration. Even today there has been brought no evidence that the southern regions ever knew a type Wodenstag (or Saterstag).

2. Of course, it can easily be guessed that the name of the Germanic supreme god was avoided in the course of Christianization (e.g. Hermodsson 1969/1970: 185f.). This hypothesis is maybe the oldest explanation and has lately also been promoted by Bammesberger (1999: 5), who briefly comments that the Christian missionaries “took every means to push back the main god of the heathen pantheon.”
3. This view is not shared by Kluge though. Kluge (1895: 94) does not believe in the substitution of Woden because of its position in the Germanic pantheon, since in the Old High German baptismal pledge people had to renounce Woden, Tyr and Donar, and nevertheless Tuesday and Thursday have kept their heathen names, the Saxons have even kept the heathen name for Wednesday:

“Kaum dürfen wir glauben, daß die Missionare unsern alten Hauptgott Wödan beseitigen wollten [...] Im altsächs. Taufgelöbnis mußten unsere Altvordern dem Thuner endi Wöden endi Saxnôt abschöören, aber trotzdem hat der Donnerstag seinen heidnischen Namen bewahrt, und so wird die Vermutung wohl nicht statthaft sein, daß man mit der Benennung mittwoch der Erinnerung an Wödan hat vorbeugen wollen [...] das Christentum hat an dem Namen auf großen Gebiet keinen Anstoß genommen: obwohl der alte Sachse mit und in der Taufe dem Wödan abschöören mußte, hielt sich der Name Wödanstag.”

Bammesberger does not really delve into a discussion on the motivation for Mittwoch, but Kluge’s thoughts do not seem to be a good counter-argument to me. The Saxon situation only shows that the “replacement” was not necessary, the Southern situation rather confirms Bammesberger’s view: only Woden could not be dedicated a day because he was the highest German god.

4. Another hypothesis was established by Betz (1962: 1571f.). He cites an extract by Tacitus in which he describes a struggle between devotees of Woden and devotees of Tyr, who agreed on making sacrifices for the respective god of the counterparty. The latter, the Hermundurs, won. This seems a quite plausible explanation.

5. Strutynski (1975: 379f.) suggests some sort of polycausal development:

“First, an attested ‘mid-week day’ in Greek and Roman tradition could have been part of the hebdomadary transmission to Central and Northern Europe. Second, evidence suggests that in these areas Tyr and Wodan were, as far as their followers were concerned, rivals for supreme power rather than just sovereigns. [...] Finally, there is again the possibility of Catholic influence effecting the change from a hypothetical *Wodanesday to ‘Mittwoch’, for the new religion could tolerate no competition from another sovereign god who had also survived, in a manner of speaking, the oldest of sacrifice off, and to, himself by hanging from a tree!”

6. To Strutynski’s points I would like to add that the “mid-week” formation was approaching the High German tribes from two sides: (1) from the Alps and (2) from the Gothic-Greek east. Actually, Kranzmaier (1929: 79f.) thinks that Mittwoch must be due to Greek rather than Romance influence, since all the other prototypical Bavarian names are also of Gothic-Greek origin: *Ergetag ‘Tuesday’ < Go.-Gk. *arjō- ‘[day of] the Greek god Ares;’ *Pfinztag ‘Thursday’ < Go. *pinta- < Gk. πέμπτη ‘five;’ *pheri(n)tag < Go. *pareinsdags/paraskaiwē < Gk. παρασκευή ‘day of preparation.’ Two objections may be raised against Kranzmaier’s argumentation though: (1) *Ergetag, Pfinztag and Pherintag differ from Mittwoch in so far as the former are loan-words, whereas the latter is only calqued; (2) the vast supraregional victory of Mittwoch can only have been possible due to the influx of the construction from two sides.

7. Last but not least, I would like to point an interesting observation that Brown made in his study of day-names in 148 languages around the world. Based on an argumentation of more salient and less salient days, Brown (1989: 542) has found out that “m}oving through the week from Sunday to Saturday the number of loanwords steadily drops until Wednesday, following which it steadily increases again. [...] Wednesday shows the most innovated terms, Saturday the fewest.” Brown (1989: 543) further comments on the five weekdays:
“terms innovated during an initial phase of contact are subsequently replaced by loanwords in an order whereby a native term for Monday will be the first innovated weekday label to be replaced by a loan, a native term for Friday will be the second, and so on, with a native term for Wednesday being last to be replaced by a loan. This interpretation accords with evidence discussed above suggesting that in early contact situations languages typically innovate terms for introduced items and only later, when bilingualism develops, replace such labels with loanwords.”

In sum: since not one prominent cause for the formation seems to suggest itself, a polycausal hypothesis of the aforementioned aspects is most likely to be favored.

2.3. Iconym: “mid-week day”

ModIcel.,midvigudagur

Motivation: cf. 2.2.

2.4. Iconym: “[day] after Tuesday”

(a) ModHG dial. Afterdienstag (after + Dienstag, which shows the god-name Thursus). (b) ModHG dial. (Bavaria) Afterertag (after + Ertag, a Bavarian synonym for ‘Tuesday’)

Motivation: The formation is paralleled by the German dialectal word-types Aftermontag for ‘Tuesday’ and Aftermittwoch for ‘Thursday’ (Kranzmayr 1929: 40). A reason why exactly these week-day names show these “evasive forms” is not offered by Kranzmayr, but I would like to suggest the following. Whilst Sonntag “sun-day” and Montag “moon-day” were not really associated with gods, but rather with planets, this does not hold true for the three days following them. Therefore, the need to find non-heathen terms was only given in these. As to Freitag (OHG frīhtag, MHG vrītag) the need was not as great either, since we may imagine an early folk-etymological association with the adjective frei ‘free’ (OHG frī, weak feminine form frītha, MHG vrī)

2.5. Unclear cases and cases worth discussing

2.5.1. OFris. Wērnisdei, Wērende

Wērende seems to comprehend the tribal morpheme Wēren- which also occurs in Germanic proper names (cf. G. Wern(h)er) and is, according to Holthausen (1934: 389, 381), related to the Germanic tribal name of the Wernas or Wiermas. In addition, this type may have been promoted by the Old Frisian verb wēra ‘to defend, to fight against.’ Wernas could then also be the cause for Wērnisdei, if this form is not just due to an umlaut (cf. 2.1.).
2.5.2. Du.dial. wonseldach

The insertion of -el- is not purely phonetic either, but what could have triggered off this form? I will attempt to establish one hypothesis. If we ask ourselves which Wednesday is the most salient one in the annual circle, a good candidate will be Ash Wednesday. In Modern Dutch this day is called aschwoensdach. Interestingly, the Middelnederlandsch Woordenboek also lists the variant aschelwoensdach (MNW IX: 2745). In addition, the MNW (IX: 2735) also lists the items Woedelmaendach ‘Monday after Epiphany’ and werkelday ‘workday’. These forms may have motivated a morphonetic variant woenseldach.

2.5.3. ModLG dial. Gudensdag, Du.dial. goensdag

The type gudensdag is worth discussing because of its initial. The eastern and southern borderline of LowG.dial. Gudensdag is constituted by a line running from the southern rim of the Rotheaar mountains against the southern rim of the Teutoburg Forest and then down the River Weser, i.e. the old ecclesiastical province of Cologne, with a few records outside this area, which can be interpreted as borrowings. There are also variants with <J> and <G>. Furthermore, two other forms can be detected: chöndsdach (rarely), husdach (rarely), which may considered folk-etymological remotivations. Du.dial. goensdag is found in East Flemish, Limburgish, Gelderlandish. Frings/Nießen (1927: 304) regard the initial g- as learned/Romanized, which shall later become the popular variant. This view is adopted by De Vries (1962: 416). Frings/Nießen point at the attested forms gvalterus (Trier 1172) and galterus (Mosel 1183) for the name Walter, the Langobard form gwodan and allude to the transmission of Paulus Diaconus, where g-, gw- and w-exist side by side. The center of expansion, according to them, was Cologne. The w/g-isogloss runs from the southwest to the northeast, parallel to the coast, crossover the Netherlands (cf. Frings/Nießen 1927: 304 for a detailed description). Sturmfels/Bischof (1961: 93) illustrate the historical alternation between <G> and <W> or <V> in three Middle and Low German toponyms: Godesberg, Guthmannshausen, and Gutenswegen. To my knowledge, no better explanation has been found so far. Frings/Nießen (1927: 304 ann. 1) also state that an influence from the respective words for “good” is possible. This seems less convincing. The Dutch form goensdag also reminds one of the Dutch family-name van Goens, which seems to go back to a toponym as well (cf. Ebeling 1993: 115). But the further connection is obscure.

2.5.4. ModHG dial. (Switzerland, Swabia) guotentag, guentag

Hermodsson (1969/1970: 183) claims that this form does not exist as a referent for Wednesday, only for Monday, but available records for both meanings are listed by Kluge (1895: 95). Kluge (1895: 91, 95) compares guotentag ‘Wednesday’ to guotentag ‘Monday’ in South(west) German regions, first recorded in Swiss catechisms from the sixteenth century. Kluge dervies it from the idiomatic expression (der) guote montag ‘the good Monday,’ attested in the works of Hans Sachs (1496-1576) and documents of the
same time. Kluge (1895: 91) interprets the term as a coinage by people who wanted to prolong the weekend on Monday and compares the expression to the jocular expression *blaue Munday*, literally ‘blue [i.e. free] Monday.’ Kluge (1895: 95) proposes a similar explanation for the Alemanic guotentag, *guotentag*. From this we can assume that Kluge postulated the following developments: (1) *guotemontag > *guotementag > guotentag; (2) *guote mittwéhha ‘good Wednesday (“mid-week”)’ > *guote mittich(e) > *guote mittag (folk-etymological assimilation toward -tag ‘day’) > *guote m(it)tag > guotentag. However, as Kluge himself admits, the collocation *guote mitt(a)wéhha* is not attested (it may be suggested that the phrase, if it really existed, originally may have referred to Ash Wednesday—cf. supra). But, moreover, phonetic doubts may be raised against both hypotheses, too. It is hardly understandable why the unstressed -e in *quote* should have survived, but not -on- or -it-, which would most probably have kept a secondary stress in the further development. Although from a theoretical viewpoint a phonetic development *guotemontag > *guotementag > *guotmuntag > *guotmentag > *guotmentag (metathesis) > guotentag (simplification) is possible, this would not fit with the unique supralocal and supraregional distribution and the chronological nearness or simultaneity with the supposed long form. Consequently, the explanation for *guotentag* ‘Wednesday’ does not convince either so far. In addition, as already mentioned above, many Swiss dialects mostly still show feminine successors of an OHG *mitt(a)wéhha* (cf. Ott 1994: 404ff.). I cannot offer an alternative hypothesis, though.

2.5.5. ModE. Wednesday [‘wenzd(e)j]37, dial.38 [‘wednzdi], [‘wenzdj], [‘wednzi], [‘wendj], [‘wanzdj]

Traditionally the particularity of the vocalism in the modern standard form Wednesday from OE Wðenenes deag is either not taken note of or explained as going back to an Old English variant with umlaut. In the latter case, such a postulated form is then occasionally viewed together with Dutch forms showing umlaut and termed an Ingvaeonism (cf., e.g., Kloek 1936 and Miedema 1971). The problem is that there have been found no instances of a form Wðenenes deag in Old English texts. Bamnesberger has now been the first to revisit the phonetic problem and offer a completely new view.

According to Bamnesberger (1999: 3), Wednesday cannot go back to a variant of Wðen, since “OE Wðen always exhibits the vowel ð. [....] nominal formations in -en of the type of Wðen either show i-umlaut or lack it.” It may be added that Old Norse, too, only has Oðinn, never Øðinn.39 Bamnesberger therefore suggests influence from the Old English verb wédan ‘to be mad, to rage,’ or, more precisely, the already very early attested present participle wéndende:

“it is suggested that at a stage in the transition of Old English to Middle English the divine name Wðnes deag was replaced by wéndes. Originally wéndende may have been used attributively together with the name Wðen [....] Present participle stems in -nd- were substantivized to a certain extent; the most obvious examples of this process are the nouns friend and fiend [....] It is particularly worth noting that a form wéndesday is attested for the thirteenth century. [....] the starting-point is posited as wéndes (deag), then we can assume that syncop led to wéndes; the further stages in the development were wéndes > wendes > wendez > wendz > wenz”

37 OED s.v. Wednesday.
38 SED No. VII.4.2. (to be found in the third part of the respective volumes)
39 The OHG and the OS form do not help us here since umlaut of o is not yet reflected in spelling (cf. Krahe 1969: L60).
This interpretation is also fully convincing for most dialectal forms listed above. Bammesberger’s interpretation is supported by the spelling as well, as the <d> from wēdan is still visible to the present day.

The interpretation does not fit equally well, however, for [wednzdī] and [wednztī] (maybe also [wenzdi]?)? These dialectal forms, which still show -dn-, as well as the modern spelling allow us to postulate a phonetic filiation that slightly differs from the one given by Bammesberger, namely: *wēndnes- > *wednes- > wednz- > wenz-.

In addition, the verb wendan ‘to turn’ may have had its share in the evolution of some of the forms, too, if we assume that the English like other speech communities saw Wednesday as the middle-day of the week, where the week coming from Sunday turns toward Sunday again. This seems true for the dialectal form [wēndī] and it seems especially true for the form wendesdei, attested in c. 1275. Bammesberger sees wendesdei in the line of the development assumed by him. According to the OED (XX: 75), this is the oldest e-form attested. But seeing that the next record of a form without the first d does not occur before c. 1425, it may be discussed whether it can really already have reached the second phonetic stage by that time or whether another word, namely wenden, had some impact on the shape.

Although the etymologies now seem clear, two decisive onomasiological problem still remain. (1) The lists of dialect forms in the SED show us the astonishing situation that not one single instance seems to go back to an Old English form with -ơ- (save, perhaps, the form [wanzdī]); on the other hand, the list of dialect forms in the OED show us the equally astonishing situation that there seems to be no single instance of -ơ- in Old English. (2) If the “Christian missionaries [...] took every means to push back the main god of the heathen pantheon,” as Bammesberger (1999: 5) suggests, why did they not eliminate the name at all and use a totally different construction (as in G. Mittwoch), since, after all, it may really be wondered whether the replacement of Woden by wēdend, which was a possible epithet of the god, really would have erased all memory of the heathen god? One suggestion for these two problems may be offered here: The omnipresence of -e- in the modern dialects seem only explainable if we assume that -e- occurred (much) earlier in spoken language than in written language. This, however, also means that the process was started among the common folk and not initiated by the literate missionaries. The motivation for this reformation may have lain in a taboo of referring to the highest Germanic god by its real name. A “euphemistic” term may therefore have been created. Since this results at first sight basically in a different vocalization of the original word, the process reminds us a bit of the well-known example Jehovah in lieu of Yahweh, which was a revocalized coinage for the same taboo reasons.

2.5.6. Du.dial. waansdi

The Dutch dialect form waansdi, which is recorded for Tjummarum only, can to my knowledge not be accounted for on purely phonetic reasons. A folk-etymological reinterpretation or conscious reformation on the basis of waan ‘delusion, madness’ seems possible and would thus be similar to the evolution of Wednesday described above.

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40 Kloeke 1936: 150.
2.5.7. Du.dial. weunsdag

The umlaut in the Dutch form Weunsdag is historically hard to explain. Long vowels do not normally undergo *i*-mutation in Dutch (cf. Goossens 1974: 36, Vekeman/Ecke 1992: 34), unless for Eastern and Limburg regions (cf. Vekeman/Ecke 1992: 80). Kloek (1936) is basically only interested in the geographical distribution of this type and views it, together with Wednesday, as the example of an Ingvaionism. That Wednesday and Weunsdag cannot be dealt with together has already been illustrated under 2.5.5. As to the umlaut, Kloek only says that phonetic variation is just natural in words that may go back to the fifth century at least, possibly to the third century. But it is hard to follow his thought when he says that the umlaut forms seemed to have protested against the rule that long vowels exhibit *i*-mutation in order to survive: ‘Juist vóór hun dood schijnen de Hollandse eu-vormen nog even te willen protesteren tegen de regel, da ‘in het Nederlandsch [...] lange klinkers nooit *i*-wijziging ondergaan hebben’” (Kloek 1936: 148f.). Moreover, this does not explain their formation in the beginning. The second thought, namely to see Weunsdag in the same light as veugel, weunen, zeumer and others, where eu may possibly be ascribed to *i*-umlaut, does not convince either.

The regular development of pre-Dutch Wödanesdag or *Wödinesdag can only yield ODu. wuodensdag, MDu. woedensdag, ModDu. weensdag (cf. Goossens 1974: 37, 47, 96). In the Modern Dutch form weunsdag the *eu- can, from a phonetic viewpoint, only be explained in the following ways:

1. ModDu. ơ < MDu. ơ < ODu. üf (i.e. stressed ǜ in free syllable; cf. Goossens 1974: 42f., 47) (we would have to look for a pre-Dutch root *wudin- then);
2. ModDu. ơ < MDu. ơ < ODu. ü before r + dental (cf. Goossens 1974: 42, Vekeman/Ecke 1992: 66f.) (we would have to look for a pre-Dutch root wurd-, wurt-, or wurn- plus i-umlaut, but then the loss of the consonant cluster would have to be explained);
3. ModDu. ơ < MDu. ơ < ODu. ơ (cf. Goossens 1974: 51) (we would have to look for a pre-Dutch root *we{d- or *we{n}-).

As far as I see, however, no West-Germanic or Indo-European root seems to match with any of these three explanations. Therefore another hypothesis has to be searched for. Maybe one possible view is postulating an influence from MDu. wouden ‘to rage’ (MNW IX: 2735). It should be noted that in Middle Dutch ơ is graphically represented as <o>, <oe>, <ue>, and, occasionally, <eu> (which later becomes the standard spelling for ơ); MDu. ơ, on the other hand, is graphically represented by <oo>, <oe>, or <oi> (cf. Vekeman/Ecke 1992: 85, Goossens 1974: 48). This means that the spelling <oe> was phonetically ambivalent. MDu. <woeden> could be read either as wöden (which would be the historically regular development) or as wöden. The MNW also lists the graphic variant <wueden>, which clearly indicates that the pronunciation wöden must have been current at least to some degree. The influence of the Middle Dutch verb woeden with Ơ on Woedensdag with Ơ can then be explained in the same way as OE wēdan ‘to rage’ influenced OE Wōdenesdæg (cf. 2.5.5.). It should be noted, however, that these influences took place independently and not in an Ingvaionic Sprachbund.

3. Final remarks

Not all problems presented here could be solved. However, it seems important to have

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mentioned them in connection with some theoretical implications for diachronic onomasiology. Many of the unclear cases show secondary iconyms in their biography, sometimes by way of a process commonly called folk-etymology, i.e. remotivation based on the sounds, not on the concept. Other reformations need not have developed subconsciously, due to the lack of motivation of a form, but can also have been triggered off consciously by some sort of taboo (shown by the cases in 2.5.5. through 2.5.7.). The type of lexical replacement is then motivated by the phonetic similarity of the lexical items participating in the etymological play. At any rate, it is necessary to underline that folk-etymological processes as well as processes of the second type should be regarded as true cases of onomasiological change, since they may give insights in cultural motives and motivations.

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