Bernhard DIENSBERG (Bonn)

Eschew AND askew, askance AND askant

Abstract. Under the entry askance, adv.² (1530, OED²), the editors add the following nota: There is a whole group of words of more or less obscure origin in ask-, containing askance, askant, askew, askie, askile, askoye, askoyne, (with which compare asklent adv., aslant adv., asquint adv.) which are more or less closely connected in sense, and seem to have influenced one another in form. They appear mostly in the 16th or end of the 15th c., and none of them can be certainly traced up to Old English; though they can nearly all be paralleled by words in various languages, evidence is wanting as to their actual origin and their relations to one another.

Keywords: etymology, French loanwords, historical morphology

Introduction

Our study will focus on four items of the above group and try to find out more about their origin. Under Part I the relation and common origin of the verb eschew and the adverb askew will be examined. Part II will deal with: askoye, askoine, also a phetic scoyne, (a)scuye, (a)squint and (a)ske. The article ends with an excursus concerning the origin of askance(s) and askant.

Part I: The eschew and askew group

ALTERNATION: Weak (pretonic, consonantal) stem v- ~ strong (root-stressed, vocalic) iu- (< OF y).

Vocalic stem Middle English iu (eu/ew) for French y ou, u ib English eschew v. for F eschuer v. ~ consonantal: Old French eschivre v., EME eschif (< stem es-chiv-), see also askew adj. (and a phetic skew adj.), adapted from AF eschieu(s) rectus (obl.) sing., see EME eschif, adapted from AF eschif obl. sing.; see also the discussion below.

We assume a common origin for both (a)skew and eschew (see Diensberg 1985: 115), since both the loanverb ME skewe(n) (and related forms) and its doublet
ME eschewe(n) reflect the strong (root-stressed) stem /eský-/ ⟨eschu-, eschiu-, eschiw-, etc.⟩ of AF eschivre, eschiveir, eschiver, eschiver(e), etc. ‘to avoid, keep away from, shun; etc.’ (AND²: eschivre).

Frankish *skiuhan, ultimately derived from West Germanic *skeuha ‘prudent, shy’ (Kluge25; s.v. scheu; Heidermanns 1993: 40). West Germanic *skeuha yields OE scêoh and survives as ModE shy. Some early Modern grammarians record /eskju:/ as a variant pronunciation for eschew, co-occurring with regular /esťu:/ (Horn/Lehnert 1954: 815, 1125). See below the etymological discussion under askew adj./adv. We postulate an unpalatalized cluster /-sk-/ ⟨sch⟩ which is usually preserved before a following velar vowel, e.g. AF eschter, escutier, escutir; escoter, etc. ‘to hearken, listen to’ (AND²: escuter) – ModF écouter. (DEHF: 243a, escolter end 9th c.), while palatalized /-stʃ-/ occurs before a following palatal vowel, e.g. AF eschec, eschek; eskek; echek, etc. ‘chess’ (AND²: eschec) – ModF écèc ‘chess’ (DEHF: 241a, eschac 1080). In both cases the s-element of both clusters disappears by way of assimilation so that both clusters are reduced to /-k-/ and /-tf-/ (ModF /-ʃ-/) respectively. As far as the velar stop k in /-sk/- is concerned, the derivation from a Germanic root *skiuh- seems to support our hypothesis. Spellings such as eskek, co-occurring with eschec seem to point to variation and levelling, see also AF eschafer, eschauffer; eschafer, etc.; escafer, escauer; etc. ‘to heat, make hot; etc.’ (AND²: eschauffer) – ModF écfauffer (DEHF: 145a, s.v. chauffer 1120). There are spellings such as AF escur(e), co-occurring with esch- as AF escher(e); escher(e), eschur(e), eschur(e), etc. variants of AF eschivre, eschiver, eschivere, eschivir, eschivoir; etc. ‘to avoid, keep away from, shun; to ignore, reject; to escape from, avoid; etc.’ (AND²: eschivre). See also Diensberg (1985: 115), Pope (1934: § 192).

See MED: skeuen (v.²) plp. skeuing, squeuing. [ONF eskieuer, eskiu(w)er, variants of OF eschiver; cf. ME escheuen v.] and OED²: skew, v.² (a1400?, OED²), pronunciation: /skjuː/; forms: Also ME skewe (15th c.), scweu, scue (16th c.), skue (16th–17th cc.), skew (18th c.). Etymology: < Old Northern French eskiu(w)er, esker, esquier, variant of Old French eschuer, escheuer, etc. See eschew v.¹.

During the Early Modern English period eschew is occasionally pronounced /es'kjuː/; co-occurring with regular /es'tʃuː/ (Horn/Lehnert 1954: 815, 1125). Any influence from words of Greek/Latin origin beginning with ⟨sch⟩ and pronounced /sk/-, e.g. schedule (which is also pronounced /ʃedjuːl/) may at best be secondary (Horn/Lehnert 1954: 815). For the above development in the French source language, see Fouché (1966: 697): voyelle + skʰ, "and (1966: 699): voyelle + skʰ and (1966: 701): voyelle + skʰ. The CEDEL editor rightly states that eschew v. ‘to shun, avoid’ and skew v. ‘to take an oblique direction’ are doublets (CEDEL: 541b, s.v. eschew v.); this fact has, so far, been overlooked by the editors of the other historical reference works.
**DISCUSSION**: if our assumption is correct, the alternation \(-k(\text{j}u:)\)- \(~-tf(\text{u})\) as exemplified in the loanverb *eschew* and its doublet *skew* (see below) may be interpreted as and supported by a subgroup of the alternation \(-k\)- \(~-tf\)- as in Romance loans of the type *attack* \(~attach, detach, poke, pocket*, as compared to ModF *poche*; ModE *trickery* \(~trichery\*; etc.

**DOCUMENTATION**

*eschew* v. [is'tju:] avoid as bad or harmful, shun (c1350, BDE)

ME *echuen*, later *eschewen* (1375?), adapted from *eschiw*, *eschu-*, strong (i.e. stressed) stem of *eschiver, eschivere, eschiwir; eschuer, eschuere, eschuir, eschuire, eschur, eschure, eschurer*; variants of AF *eschivre, eschiveir, eschiver, eschivere, eschivir, eschivoir*; etc. ‘to avoid, keep away from, shun; to ignore, reject; to escape from, avoid; etc.’ (AND²: *eschivre*), ultimately from Germanic/Frankish *skiuhjan*; cf. German *scheuhen* ‘to shun, become frightened’. Apart from EME *eschif* ‘easily frightened, shy’, the weak (i.e. pretonic) stem *eschiv- as in AF *eschivre*, etc., has not survived beyond Early Middle English. Cf. AF *eschivre, eschiveir, eschiver*, etc.; *eschifer; eschivere; eschiver; eschever; eschevir, etc.; escheure, etc.; escour; escure; eschuer, etc.; eschuir, etc.; chiver; chiwer, etc.*; v.a. ‘to avoid, keep away from, shun, etc.’ (AND²: *eschivre*); T/L III/1: 901, s.v. *eschiver, eschüer* ‘ausweichen / to shun’. (BDE: 342b; KDEE: 448a/b; ODEE: 326a).

NB 1: EME *eschif* ‘easily frightened, shy’ (Ancrene Riwle, MS Corpus, a1200?/c1230) continues AF *eschif* obl. sing., beside *eschief, escheu, eschiu, eschiew; eschu*, etc. ‘(horses) timid, shy’(AND²: *eschif*), ultimately from Germanic *skiuh*; cf. German *scheu* ‘shy’ & *schiech* (?), from West Germanic *skeuha-*(Klug²; s.v. *scheu*; cf. EWD: 1511b–1512a); see also BDE: 342b, s.v. *eschew*. MS Nero of the Ancrene Riwle (a1250), however, has *scheouh* ‘shy’ 108/8 (Zettersten 1965: 199), while MS Cleopatra (c1225–30) features related *scheuchinde* ‘shying away’ at the same passage. For the origin of *eschew* v., see also Jordan³ (1968: § 240/p. 213).

NB 2: AF *eschivre, eschiveir, eschivere, eschivir, eschivoir*; etc. ‘to avoid, keep away from, shun; to ignore, reject; to escape from, avoid; etc.’ (AND²: *eschivre*) closely follows the model of AF *sivre, siver, sievre, siouvre; siwer, siwere, siwir, siwire, sivre; sewer, seiver; suir, suire; suwer, suwir; seuer, sure, seure, sewer, sewir; souer, suer, suere, suir, suier, suuir, sur, sure, suuer* ‘to follow; to follow, serve (as leader); to follow, be a hanger-on at (court); to follow (upon), come after; to follow, be a consequence (of); to follow, come next; to follow, look after; etc.’ (AND¹: *sivre*), from VL *sequere* for CL *sequi*; see *sue* v.
NB 3: Apart from isolated EME eschif adj., the weak stem of eschiv- does not seem to have been adapted into English; cf. ModF esquiver (DEHF: 269a, OF eschiver 1080), which, however, reflects Italian schivare to avoid. Cf. ModF échif ‘wild, voracious’ (EWFS: 344b).

NB 4: Regarding eschew v. and EME eschif adj. see Diensberg (2011: 133 & Note 1).

skew adj., adv. (1607, OED²)
OED²: skew, adj. and adv.
  Pronunciation: /skju:/
  Forms: Also 16 skue, seue.
  Etymology: Compare skew v.² and askew adv. A. adj.
  1. a. ‘Having an oblique direction or position; turned to one side, slanting, squint.’
  1609 P. Holland tr. A. Marcellinus Rom. Hist. xxxi. xi. 397: He had with his gray eyes a skew cast at all times, and looked stern.

skew v. slant, twist (c1470, BDE) (c1440/a1400?, MED)
ME skew(n) ‘to turn aside, move sideways, twist’, adapted from AF escheur, escheure; escur, escure; eschuer, eschuere, eschuir, eschuire, escur, eschure, eschurer, root-stressed variants of AF eschivre, eschivre, eschiver, eschiver, eschivre, eschivoir; etc. ‘to avoid, keep away from, shun; to ignore, reject; to escape from, avoid; etc.’ (AND²: eschivre).
(BDE: 1012a, s.v. skew v.; KDEE: 1288a, s.v. skew¹ v.; ODEE: 831a).

NB 1: The assumption of an aphetic variant, derived from askew, appears to be a less convincing alternative (Diensberg 1985: 113–115) since both skew adj., adv. (1607, OED²) and askew /ə'skjuː/ adv. and adj. (1573, OED²) are much later attested than the verb skew v. (c1470, BDE). For both skew adj., adv. and askew adv. (< on skew) we assume a deverbal derivation.

NB 2: The CEDEL editor rightly states that eschew v. ‘to shun, avoid’ and skew v. ‘to take an oblique direction’ are doublets (CEDEL: 541b, s.v. eschew v.; this fact has, so far, been overlooked by the editors of the other historical reference works.

askew /ə ˈskjuː/ adv., adj. ‘obliquely, crosswise’ (1573, OED²)
Most probably derived from the root skew- /skjuː-, as attested in the verb skew (discussed above), from a contraction of a-, weakly-stressed variant of ME on, + skew adj. ‘obliquely, crosswise’. The root /skjuː-, is much earlier attested in AF eschieu, escieu, eschiu, eschiw, escu, esquis ‘timid, shy’ (AND²: eschijf), which, however, must be excluded for chronological and semantic reasons. The root skew- is to be derived from the verb skew ‘to escape, avoid’ which in turn goes back to the strong (i.e. stressed) stem of AF eschivre, eschiveir, eschiver, eschivere, eschivir,
Eschew AND askew, askance AND askant

eschivoir; etc. ‘to avoid, keep away from, shun; to ignore, reject; to escape from, avoid; etc.’ (AND: eschivre), ultimately from Germanic *skiuh; cf. German scheu ‘shy’ & schiech (?), from West Germanic *skeuha- (Kluge, s.v. scheu; (BDE: 342b, s.v. eschew). EME eschif continues the weak (i.e. pretonic) stem eschiv- as in AF eschiv-re, etc.; see Eschew v.; see also skew adj., adv. & skew v. Reference: Diensberg (1985: 113–1150).

Nota 1: We postulate a semantic development from ‘timid, shy, holding back; embarrassed, at loss, etc.; remote, unapproachable, aloof, hostile, etc.’ to ‘twisted, wrong, awry’; see OED², s.v. askew adv. and adj.

Nota 2: Both askew adv. and skew adj., n., v., as well as ascoyne/ascoye adv. (1430, OED³), asquint adv. and squint v., and ultimately askance adv., aslant adv., are very close in meaning and – except for askance and aslant – also somehow related (see OED, s.v. askance adv.).

Nota 3: MS Nero of the Ancrene Riwle (a1250), however, has scheouh ‘shy’ 108/8 (Zettersten 1965: 199) for Corpus eschif, while MS Cleopatra (c1225–30) shows related scheunchinde ‘shying away’ at the same passage.

Nota 4: English skew, askew, eschew, from French, ultimately from Germanic, even though these are the kin of E. shy < OE scēoh, G. scheu ‘shy’, etc.; the anonymous reviewer points to the possibility of another West Germanic etymon *skewwa- ‘widerwillig, scheu’ for English shy and ModG scheu (Heidermanns 1993: 498).

asquint adv. obliquely, askance (a1250, MED; a1200?, KDEE)

EME asquint (AR, MS Nero) and loke a squint ‘(to look) askance’ (a1398), also asqueint (a1500), originally ME/EModE (a)scoyne(e), (a)skoyne(e) /-skoin, -skuin/ from the Anglo-French phrase as cuins ‘across the angles/corners’ (see AND: coign², cuing ‘angle, wedge’) and following the model of join – joint changed to *asquoint /-skoint, -skuint/ by adding -t. So-called excrecent or unetymological -t is anything but rare with lexemes ending in a nasal consonant (see Diensberg 2008: 42–47). Due to shift of stress /-skuint/ became /-skwint/, hence asquint, late ME of skwyn (1450), and secondary asqueint (Diensberg 1985: 113–115); see also Askin adv. and unrelated askew adv. which, however, belongs to the same semantic field of ‘looking askance’. (BDE: /; KDEE: 73a; ODEE: 55b).

Nota: An influence of Dutch schuin ‘askance, slanting’ may not be excluded on principle; yet the editors of the reference works in question will have to account for final -t in asquint and asqueint; see Nota 2 under askew adv. (above); see Diensberg (1985: 113–115).

squint v. (1599, BDE)

Part II

askoye  askoine  *escoint, also aphetic scoyne ‘squinting’
ascuye  *ascuin  ascuin
askye  *asquin  (a)squint (due to shift of stress: ui > ï),

See also asquinte ‘squinting, cross-eyed’.

On semantic grounds, the adjective/adverb askew belongs to this subgroup of adverbs which, although of different origin, have a common meaning. Therefore we postulate that both escoint/ascuint, asquint and unprefixed squint not only have a common meaning, namely ‘slanting, squinting; crosswise, obliquely, etc.’, but also go back to the same etymon, i.e. VL *ex-cuneus, yielding OF escoin(g) which means that their ultimate root is found in ModE coin ‘wedge, etc.’ (< VL cuneus ‘wedge’); see the entry coin n. below. As regards the development of excrescent or spurious -t in the phrase escoin(s), ascoin(s) ‘across the corner’, it is anything but rare with lexemes ending in a nasal consonant (see Diensberg 2008: 42–47). There are unprefixed forms such as skew and squint; the prefix may be rendered as either a- (seeascoye, etc.) or e- (see escoint). Though of different origin (see above), askew adv. and unprefixed skew adv./v. do join the above subgroup of escoint/ascuint, (a)squint.

coin n. a wedge (1304, BDE), piece of money (c1380, BDE)

ME coin, adapted from AF coign, coigne, coing, coingn, coingne, coignie; cohin, coin, coine, coinie; coinne; cuin, cuing, cune; koin, koing ‘wedge; (mil.) wedge, serried body of troops, angle, corner, etc.; to die, stamp (for coins); coining; coin; cash, money; coinage, currency, etc.’ (AND2: coign*), derived from L cuneus ‘wedge’; cf. Diensberg (1985: 92f); see also coin v. and related quoin n.; cf. ModF coin ‘corner’ (DEHF: 164a, coin ‘corner & coin’, 12th c.). (BDE: 188a; KDEE: 248a; ODEE: 189b).

As will become obvious from the ensuing discussion, we clearly argue in favour of a Romance origin of the above subgroup and relegate any possible Germanic influence to a lower and less convincing role.

The occurrence of unetymological -t as in escoint, escuint, asquint is anything but rare in Middle and Early Modern English and has been researched in some detail by the present writer (Diensberg 2008: 42–47).

Concerning our main line of argument, we follow the principal lines of an earlier study written in German by the present writer (Diensberg 1985: 113–115), though with some necessary changes and emendations.

As regards askew adj., adv. and aphetic skew adj., adv, any possible influence from the verb eschew ‘to avoid, shun, etc.’, may be assumed. Under Part I, we have demonstrated that both eschew v. and skew v. share a common origin.
DISCUSSION: The lexeme *askoin* adv./v. ‘on a slant’, in the context to *loke askoin* ‘to look askance’ (1420, MED), undoubtedly belongs to the subgroup of lexemes ending in -oin (see Diensberg 1985: § 2.0/90ff.). The variant of *skwyn* (a1450, MED) stands for a pronunciation /-skwīn/ and thus indirectly points to /skuin/ (see attested *scoyne*) as a base for shift of stress to the second element of the *ui*-diphthong. The MED editors rightly assume that ME *askoin* may be related with EME *asquint* which, however, is attested about 200 years earlier, without adding further evidence in favour of their assertion. They convincingly refer to OF *coign* ‘wedge, corner’ (T/L II: 540), see also AF *coign*, *coigne*, *coing*, *coingne*, *coignie; cohin, coin, coine, coinie; coinne; cuin, cuing, cune*; etc. ‘wedge; (mil.) wedge, surer body of troops; angle, corner; point, top (of helmet); (wedge-shaped) pin, fastening, etc.; coin; cash, money; coinage, currency, etc.’ (AND: *coign*), derived from VL *cuneus* ‘wedge’ (Diensberg 1985: 92f.). This would support an interpretation of *askoin* as ‘obliquely, across the corner’. See also OF *ferir a quins*, tentatively rendered as ‘to strike obliquely’ (quoted from T/L II: 540, s.v. *coing*), may build the bridge to ME *asquint(i)*), provided that *as* is seen as a contraction of *a les* and *quint* as obl. sing. of attested *quins* rectus sing., derived from *quinnes; quinus*, variants of AF *coign*, *coigne*, *coing*, etc. (AND: *coign*).

Apart from *askoyne* ‘obliquely, crosswise’ (see below), see also aphetic *scoyne*, the unrevised OED section records two further occurrences, namely (lokinge) *ascoye* (1550) and (loke) *ascoye* (1552). The loss of final *n* may be due to group analogy, modelled on lexemes such as *coy* and supported by variants such as *askye, askye, askew*, equally ending in a final vowel or diphthong. As indicated above, we argue in favour of a Romance origin of ME *askoin* adv. and its alleged doublet *asquint*. The adverb *asquint* is attested again only about 150 years later, after its first attestation *biholdeō oluft & asquint* ‘(they) look to the left & obliquely’ (a1250), i.e. (loke) *asquint* ‘to be squint-eyed’ (a1398, MED).

As to the origin of *asquint*, I am not going to follow the hypothesis put forward by the MED editors who tentatively propose “‘? Cp. F *équinter* cut to a point; F dial. (e)*squintar* cast a glance, look furtively.” on the authority of W. v. Wartburg, FEW (III: 316b, s.v. *exquintare* ‘füntfeln’) (see *asquint* (adv.) also (late) *asquoint*). Old Provençal *esquintar* ‘to tear’ (Modern Provençal *esquintà*) has made its way into Modern French as *esquinter* ‘to ruin’ (DEHF: 268b, 1800 ‘to hurt’), going ultimately back to VL *exquintāre* (FEW III: 317).

However, all the other continuations of of postulated VL *exquintāre* ‘to cut up into fifths’ blatantly contradict the semantic content of EME *asquint* and ModE *squint* so that a reference to them must be discarded. The above hypothesis was first put forward by Spitzer (1945). Consequently, a derivation from AF/OF *as cuin(s)* ‘obliquely, across the corner’ should be given preference.

Discussing the origin of EME *asquint* ‘(to look) askance’, Zettersten (1965), following Ekwall (1906: 100–103), excludes a Dutch origin and strongly argues in
favour of a Scandinavian etymon (1965: 105), i.e. he postulates unattested *skwinta, based on Norwegian skvetta ‘oblique’. Any connection of ME skoin/skwyn with Modern Dutch schuin ‘oblique, slanting’, which moreover is attested rather late (1642, NEW), will meet up with phonological problems. Jan de Vries, the NEW (NEW: 635a, s.v. schuin), editor, points to New-Norwegian dialectal skøyna ‘oblique, slanting’, which he cautiously tries to place near English asquint and askoyne.

Spitzer (1945: 23) proposes to connect asquint ‘to look askance’ with ModF équinter ‘tailler en pointe (une lanière)’, a hypothesis which has to overcome serious semantic difficulties.

A reference to von Wartburg’s postulated etymon *exquintāre ‘to divide into 5 parts’ and to French dialectal continuations of the type ‘donner un coup d’œil, surveiller à la dérobée, etc.’ does not solve any problem.

Though of different origin, English ascoye, askoye (< ascoine, askoine) are undoubtedly modelled on askew adj., adv., the meaning of which they share; see etymological note, s.v. askance, adv.² (1530, OED²).

Regarding askew, skew on the one hand, ascoye, askoye (< ascoine, askoine), asquint and unprefix ed squint on the other hand, as one subgroup held together by a common meaning, we find more convincing evidence of a triple alternation /iu/ <eu, ew, etc.> ~ /oi, ui/ <o, oy> ~ /wi/ <ui> in Middle English loanwords from French. Our assumption will be supported by /iu/ <eu, ew, etc.> ~ /oi, ui/ in moniev/mongiu ~ mountjoy ‘the Alps’ (Diensberg 1985: 187–99), bleu/blu ~ bloi(e) ‘blue’ (Diensberg 1985: 177), destrewe(n) ~ destroie(n) ‘to destroy’ (Diensberg 1985: 192–95).

CONCLUSION: We have been able to show that the verb eschew (c1350) on the one hand, and its counterpart skew (c1440/a1400?) on the other go back to the same Romance root. Closely related to eschew is Early ME eschif ‘shy, restive’, while skew n., adj., adv. and prefixed askew are attested much later (16th/17th centuries). The loanwords ascoye, askoye (< ascoine, askoine), asquint and unprefix ed squint go back to ME coing ‘corner, wedge’, as has been demonstrated above.

DOCUMENTATION (continued)

ascoye † askoy’e | a skoyne, adv. (1430, OED²)

Forms: Also 15 ascoye.

Etymology: Actual origin uncertain: skoyne seems to be identical with Dutch schuin sidewise, oblique; compare schuinte ‘slope’. But see asquint adv., adj. and askew adv., adj., and n., with which in sense this word is closely allied, and note to askance v.

aslan\textsubscript{t}, adv. and prep. (1398, OED\textsuperscript{2})

Pronunciation: /ɔˈslaːnt/ /əˈæ-/

Forms: ME o-slant (e, ME on-slent, on-slont, aslante, ME a-slent, 17 aslaunt, 15– aslant.

Etymology: < on n.\textsuperscript{2} (see a prep.\textsuperscript{1}) + slant n.\textsuperscript{1}
A. adv.
1. ‘on the slant, in a slanting or sloping direction, obliquely’.

1398: J. Trevisa tr. Bartholomew de Glanville De Proprietatibus Rerum (1495) xvii. clxxvii. 718: In vynes the kyttynge shall be aslante.


slant, adv., adj. (1495, OED\textsuperscript{2})

Pronunciation: /slaːnt/ /əˈæ-/

Forms: Also ME slonte, 16 slaunt.

Etymology: Aphetic for Middle English a-slonte, o-slante, etc.: see aslant adv.

It is not clear in what way these forms are related to the early n. slent v.\textsuperscript{1}
A. adv. ‘in a slanting, sloping, or oblique manner or direction; slantingly, aslant’.

1495: Trevisa’s Barth. De P.R. viii. ix. 306: Zodiacus is a cercle that passith slonte [Bodl. MS. aslante].

OED\textsuperscript{2}: asquint, adv., adj. (a1250, OED\textsuperscript{2})

Pronunciation: /əˈskwɪnt/

Forms: ME – asquint, ME a squynte, ME asquynt, 16 a squint.

Etymology: Of uncertain origin; apparently < a prep.\textsuperscript{1} and a word corresponding to Dutch schuiente ‘slope, slant’, of the independent use of which no instances survive; the later squint adv., adj. being an aphetic form of asquint, and squint vb., n. still later derivatives of this. Evidence is wanting to determine whether the original word was actually adopted < Dutch, or was a cognate word, unrecorded in Old English; the total absence of any related words in Old English (or Old Norse) makes the latter improbable.

A. adv. (with look or a synonymous verb of voluntary turning of the eyes) ‘to look to one side instead of straight forward; obliquely, out at the corners of the eyes’.

MED: skeuen v.\textsuperscript{2} ppl. skeuing, squeuing [ONF eskieuer, eskiu(w)er, vars. of OF eschier; cp. ME escheuen v.]

(a) ‘to escape’; c1440 (?a1400) Morte Arth. (1) (Thrn) 1562: Is none so skathyle may skape, ne skewe fro his handez.

(b) ‘to run obliquely or at an angle; skeuing to,?’ slanting across (the forehead)’(1457–8) *Plea & Mem.R.Lond.Gildh A 81.7: \textit{From the other length of iiij xxx fote by þe said wey from London wall aforesaid square southward. and also skewing oute of þe said square estward by the seid
London wall. a1500 Lyell SSsecr. (Lyell 36) 92/27: Squewyng [L iminentes; Ashmole: Heres depressed, to moch shewyng to þe forhede, it sheweth hym to be declyned to a ferse or bestiall witte].

OED²: skew, v.² (a1400?, OED²)

Pronunciation: /ˈskjuː/

Forms: Also ME–15 skewe, 16 scew; scue, 16–17 skue, 18 ‘skew.

Etymology: < Old Northern French eskiu(w)er, eskuer, es cuer, variant of Old French eschuer, eschever, etc.: see eschew v.¹. The later development of sense is curious, as well as the apparent use of the verb-stem in the adv. askew adv. and the adj. skew n.¹

†1. intr. ‘to escape, to slip away’. Obs.

?a1400 Morte Arth. 1562: Skilfulle skomfyture he skiftez as hym lykez, Is none so skathlye may skape, ne skewe fro his handez.

2. (a) ‘to take an oblique course or direction; to turn aside, move sideways’.

MED: asquint adv. Also (late) asqueint.

[? Cp. F équinter cut to a point; F dial. (e)squintar ‘cast a glance, look furiously’. See W. v. Wartburg, FEW, under exquintare.]

l. behelden or loken ~:
   (a) ‘to squint; be cross-eyed’ (a1398);
   (b) ‘to look sidelong or furtively’ (a1250).

OED²: squint, adv., adj. (a1250, OED²)

Pronunciation: /ˈskwɪnt/

OED²: squint, v. (a1599, OED²)

Pronunciation: /ˈskwɪnt/

Etymology: Aphetically < asquint adv. Compare squint adj. and squint adj. a. intr. ‘to have the axes of the eyes not coincident, so that one or both habitually look obliquely; to be affected with strabismus’.

EXCURSUS CONCERNING askance(s) AND askant

There is a comprehensive overview by Professor Liberman (2014) which critically examines the numerous etymologies proposed by various etymologists in the past. At the outset, Liberman states “The now obsolete conjunction askance¹ ‘as if’ (c1395, MED) and the adverb askance² ‘aside’ have been recorded in English. It is rather probable that askance² is an extension of askance¹,” In the following Liberman provides arguments in support of his hypothesis which certainly has its own merits.

However, I would prefer to start from two different Romance roots, the ultimate developments of which led to the two homonyms under scrutiny. Before I begin with my discussion, I wish to point out that the etyma which I am going
to postulate (namely the /lexical roots’ *cant and *cance) have already been proposed by earlier etymologists, although I differ from their conclusions in some important aspects. In this regard, attention is drawn to Liberman’s thoroughgoing overview.

Regarding the ultimate origin of askance and askant, I disagree with the solutions proposed by the editors of the current standard etymological and historical dictionaries: OED/ODEE, BDE, KDEE and MED. Instead, I am going to focus on the origin of the adverb askance ‘aside, sideways, obliquely’, although this concrete meaning is attested more than a century later than the transferred/figurative meaning ‘with affectation, insincerely, factitiously’ (c1422, MED). Normally one would expect a derivation the other way round. For the time being, I will disregard the now obsolete conjunction askance ‘in such a way that’ (c1350/a1333, MED); ‘as if, pretending that’ (c1395, MED).

What is more, I would like to include askant (1633, OED2) in the discussion of the origin of askance2 ‘aside’ (1530, OED2), although the former is attested nearly a century later. To begin with askant, I would like to explain the Old French ‘semi-prefix’ as- (which occurs in quite a few adjectives/adverbs of this group: askew, asquint, aslant, etc., see Nota under OED2: askance, adv.2) as a contraction of OF a (< prep. a(d)-) + + les definite article/pl). I start from the root *cant ‘corner, angle, bevel’, as found in ModE cant ‘‘slope’ which goes back to OF cant, chant ‘corner, edge’, from VL *cantus, cant(h)us ‘iron tyre of a wheel’ of Gaulish origin (Delamarre 2003: 104–105). ModG Kante ‘edge’ (17th c., Kluge25) which was borrowed from Low German/Modern Dutch kant(e), obviously goes back to the same root.

According to the Old French 2-case system (masculina), we have the following paradigm (see Bork 20048: 33):

\[
\begin{align*}
li ~ kanz /kants/ & \text{ rect. sing. ‘the corner’} & li ~ kant & \text{ rectus pl. ‘the corners’} \\
le ~ kant /kant/ & \text{ obl. sing. ‘the corner’} & les ~ kanz & \text{ obl. pl. ‘the corners’}
\end{align*}
\]

Thus, OF a(d) les kanz obl. pl., used as an adverbial phrase, would yield OF askanz/ascanz, askans/ascans, ascaunz/ascauns, meaning ‘along the corner/angle > obliquely, sideways’ and ultimately crop up in Early Modern English as askance2 ‘aside’ (1530, OED2), about a century earlier than the variant askant ‘aside’ (1633, OED2), which was obviously derived from cant n.2 ‘slant, slope’, alternatively prefixed on the model of the askance group.

The Romance root is undoubtedly found in AF eschanteler, escanteler, encanteler to shatter (the edge frame of a shield) (AND2: eschanteler) and in the unprefixed AF cantel, cantell, cantelle; cauntel; chantel, chauntel; kantel, kantelle; qantel, quantel segment, wedge, slice; edge, rim (of shield); etc. (AND2: cantel), which yields ModE cantle (Liberman 2014). There is the Anglo-French phrase en cantel askew, to one side, attested twice (see AND2: cantel).
Old French combinations such as de chant / en chant ‘sideways’ (T/L II: 226) are not infrequent and will have provided a model for a(d) les cant obl. pl. ‘sideways’, which ended up in the contracted lexemes ascant/askant and ultimately yielded adverbial ascance(s).

Eventually, ModE cantle n. ‘part, piece set off, rim’ (see below) and cognate cant n.² ‘slant, slope, angle, bevel’ (see below) provide a solid lexical basis for the derivation of askant ‘aside’ and cognate askance adv. ‘sideways, obliquely, askew’.

As regards askance¹ ‘as if, pretending that’, I would connect this conjunction with the noun chance which goes back to the neutral plural form of the present participle of L cadere ‘to fall (referring to the fall of the dice)’, namely L cadentia which in Old French yielded chance/chaunce ~ *cance, *caunce and I would begin with the adverbial phrase a les cances > ascance(s)/ascaunces(s) ‘as if, incidentally, pretending that’, etc.

askant adv. ‘aside, sideways’

Obviously derived from cant n.² ‘slant, slope’; prefixed on the model of the askance group (see Nota under OED²: askance, adv.²)

OED²: askant adv.

Pronunciation: /əˈskænt/

Forms: 16 ascant, a-skaunt, 16–18 askaunt, 17– askant.

Etymology: apparently a later variant of askance v. q.v., with termination assimilated to askant adv., adj. or aslant adv., prep.

1. = askance adv.² (1695); 2. = askance adv.² (1633); 3. = askance adv.² (1791); 4. In the following passage from Shakespeare, in which it appears as a prep., the Folios read aslant. 1604: Shakespeare Hamlet iv. vii. 138: There is a Willow growes ascaunt the Brooke.

askance adv. sideways, obliquely, askew (1530, BDE)

Developed from the now obsolete conjunction ME ascaunce ‘pretending that’ (c1395), Chaucer, C.T. and ascaunces ‘as if to say; with affectation, factitiously’ (a1425/c1385) Chaucer, T. & C., also a scance, a scanch, according to BDE, s.v. alteration of earlier as quances ‘in such a way that’ (a1333, MED), from OF quanses ‘as though’ (< L quamsi, variant of quasi); or probably from the phrase as chaunce/chaunce ‘by chance’ (AND²: chance). See also the doublet askant adv./prep.; see also askew adj./adv. and Nota 2 under askew adv.; ascione/ascoye adv.; asquint adv.; also aslant adv. ‘at an angle’ (a1398, MED). (BDE: 55b; KDEE: 71b; ODEE: 54a). Reference: Diensberg (1985: 113–115).

Nota 1: The variant ascaunces with final -s points to its adverbial function (not infrequent in Middle English). Such spellings with unetymological -s are not infrequently found with Old French adverbs of the type arere ~ arieres ‘backwards, owing’, or derere ~ deriers ‘behind one’s back’
which would account for Middle English ascances. There is Modern English needs, of native origin, from ME nèdes adv. [From nède(e) adv.] ‘of necessity, necessarily; inevitably, unavoidably’ (1131, MED).

Nota 2: The variant ascanche (1530, OED²) has no bearing on the origin of askance, the alternation -ans/-ance -antʃ/ -anche being typical of Romance loan words. Since Palsgrave spelt the word a scanche an editor of an etymological dictionary misunderstood it for an Old French prepositional phrase (Liberman 2014).

askance, adv: (1530, OED²)

Pronunciation: /əˈskæns/

Forms: 15 a scanche, ascance, 16 a scance, 15–16 ascance, askance, 16 askauns, ascumse, ascanse, 15– askance.

Etymology: Etymology unknown. Wedgwood suggests Italian a schiancio ‘bias, slanting, sloping or sloppingly, aslope, across, overthwart’ (Baretti), where schiancio is = Old French esclanc, esclenc ‘gauche, left hand’. Skeat compares Italian scanso < scansare, expl. by Florio, among other meanings, as ‘to go a slope, or a cpone, or a skew, to go sidelin’. Koch suggests a formation on Old Norse á ská: see askew adv., adj., n. Diefénbach compares Jutlandish ad-skands, West Frisian skán, schean, which he connects with Dutch schuin, schuins: see askoye adv.

(There is a whole group of words of more or less obscure origin in ask-, containing askance, askant, askew, askie, askile, askoye, askoyne, (with which compare asklent adv., askant adj., asquint adv.) which are more or less closely connected in sense, and seem to have influenced one another in form. They appear mostly in the 16th or end of the 15th cent., and none of them can be certainly traced up to Old English; though they can nearly all be paralleled by words in various languages, evidence is wanting as to their actual origin and their relations to one another.)

(a) ‘sidewise, obliquely, askew, asquint; with a side glance, etc.’

MED: ascance adv., conj. Also ase quances, aska(u)ns (c1350/a1333)

[Cp. OF quanses (que) & quainse(s); ME ascance prob. from phr. as(e quances, for which see quot. 1333. For the history of OF forms see L. Spitzer (1945).]

(a) Conj. ‘in such a way that; even as, as’; (b) ‘as if, pretending that; – also ~ that’.

cantle n. ‘part of the saddle that sticks up in the back’ (1592, BDE), earlier meaning ‘support, brace’ (1426–27), ‘part, piece set off, rim’ (c1300); ME cantel, adapted from AF cantel, cantell, cantelle; cauntel; chantel, chauntel; kantel, kantelle; qantel, quantel ‘segment, wedge, slice; cantle (measure of capacity)’ (AND²:
cantel), from *cantellus, diminutive of VL *canthus ‘corner’, ultimately from LL canthus ‘rim of a wheel’, probably of Galloromance origin. See cогnate Cant^2 ‘slant’; see also askant adv.; (BDE: 141a; KDEE: 192b; ODEE: 142a).

cant n.2 slant, slope, bevel (c1375 Scottish, BDE)

Probably adapted from Middle Dutch or Middle Low German cant ‘border, edge, side’, or directly from ONF cant, from VL *canthus/canthus, probably of Gaulish origin (Kluge25, s.v. Kante).

VL *canthus survives as OF chant ‘side’ (T/L II: 226; Godefroy IX: 39c), cf. ModF chant ‘angle’ (Schmalseite, Winkel) (EWFS^2: 210a, s.v. 2. chant, from L canthus, 12^th c.); cf. ModF chant ‘angle’ (DEHF: 141a, s.v. 2. chant, 12^th c., from L canthus): See also ModF chant^2 ‘corner, angle’, as attested in de chant ‘sideways’ (1155–60) (TLF 5: 511a). In addition, we will refer to OF cant-on ‘edge’, derived from the root *kant- (showing unpalatalized initial velar consonant) by adding the suffix -on- (< L -ōnem obl. sing.) (Meyer-Lübke/Piel 1966^2: § 68/p. 50). Cf. ModF canton ‘edge of a country’; also dial. ‘street corner’ (DEHF: 121a, 1243, later ‘territorial division’ in Switzerland, 16^th c.); (EWFS^2: 184b, OF canton 13^th c. ‘corner, angle’, 1467 ‘territorial division’ in Switzerland).

See also related ModG Kante ‘rim, border’, adapted from Low German/Dutch kant(e), adapted from OF cant, probably of Galloromance origin (17^th c., Kluge25). (BDE: 140b, s.v. cant^2; KDEE: 192a, s.v. cant^2; ODEE: 141b, s.v. cant^1).

Nota: (rightly added by the anonymous reviewer): Gaulish *cantos ‘edge, cartwheel’ is accounted for by Szemerényi (1980, 23–68) and more recently by Delamarre (2003: 104–105).

References

1. Dictionaries

AND see Stone et al. (1977–1992)
BDE see Barnhart et al. (1988)
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OED\(^2-3\) see Simpson et al. (1989)
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Stone, Louise W., Rothwell, William, T.B.W. Reid. 1977–1992. *Anglo-Norman Dictionary* (**AND1**), London: Publications of the Modern Humanities Research Association. (**AND1**), (**AND2**). [A second edition of the AND by William Rothwell et al. is now underway. So far letters A–M have been revised which will be quoted as AND\(^2\), while the unrevised letters N–Z will be quoted as AND\(^1\).]

TLF see Imbs et al. (1971–1994)


2. Monographs Manuals


3. Articles and Review Articles


