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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 aphetic *scoyne, (a)scuye, (a)squint* and *(a)skeye*. 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* <u, ui> English *eschew* *v.* for F *eschuer* *v.* ~ consonantal: Old French *eschivre* *v.*, EME *eschif* (< stem *eschiv-*), see also *askew adj.* (and aphetic *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 *scēoh* and survives as ModE *shy*. Some early Modern grammarians record /eskju:/ as a variant pronunciation for *eschew*, co-occurring with regular /estʃu:/ (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 *escuter*, *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*²) – ModF *échec* ‘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 /-tʃ-/ (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 *eschaufer*, *eschauffer*; *eschafer*, etc.; *escafer*, *escaufer*; etc. ‘to heat, make hot; etc.’ (AND²: *eschaufer*) – ModF *échauffer* (DEHF: 145a, s.v. *chauffer* 1120). There are spellings such as AF *escur(e)*, co-occurring with *esch-* as AF *escheur(e)*; *eschuer(e)*, *eschuir(e)*, *eschur(e)*, etc. 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*). See also Diensberg (1985: 115), Pope (1934: § 192).

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

During the Early Modern English period *eschew* is occasionally pronounced /es'kju:/, co-occurring with regular /is'tʃu:/ (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 /ʃedju:l/), may at best be secondary (Horn/Lehnert 1954: 815). For the above development in the French source language, see Fouché (1966: 697): voyelle + *sk^{o,u}* and (1966: 699): voyelle + *sk^a* and (1966: 701): voyelle + *sk^{e,i}*. 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(ju)-* ~ *-tf(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. [ɪs'tʃu:] avoid as bad or harmful, shun (c1350, BDE)

ME *echuen*, later *eschewen* (1375?), adapted from *eschiu-*, *eschu-*, strong (i.e. stressed) stem of *eschiwer*, *eschiwere*, *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 *scheuen* '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.; *eschiwer*; *eschiwere*; *eschiwir*; *eschever*; *eschevir*, etc.; *escheure*, etc.; *escur*; *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 Riwe, MS Corpus, a1200?/c1230) continues AF *eschif* obl. sing., beside *eschieu*, *escheu*, *eschiu*, *eschiew*; *eschu*, etc. '(horses) timid, shy' (AND²: *eschif*), ultimately from Germanic **skiuh*; cf. German *scheu* 'shy' & *schiech* (?), from West Germanic **skeuha-* (Kluge²⁵; s.v. *scheu*; cf. EWD: 1511b–1512a); see also BDE: 342b, s.v. *eschew*. MS Nero of the *Ancrene Riwe* (a1250), however, has *scheouh* 'shy' 108/8 (Zettersten 1965: 199), while MS Cleopatra (c1225–30) features related *scheunchinde* 'shying away' at the same passage. For the origin of *eschew* v., see also Jordan³ (1968: § 240/p. 213).

NB 2: AF *eschivre*, *eschiveir*, *eschiver*, *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*, *siwre*; *sewer*, *seiwer*; *suir*, *suire*; *suwer*, *suwir*; *seuer*, *sure*, *seure*, *sewer*, *sewir*; *souer*, *suer*, *suere*, *suir*, *suier*, *suiuir*, *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’ (EWFS²: 344b).

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

skew adj., adv. (1607, OED²)

Aphetic variant, derived from *askew*, cf. Diensberg (1985: 113–115).

OED²: *skew*, *adj.* and *adv.*

Pronunciation: /skjuː/

Forms: Also 16 *skue*, *scue*.

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. xxx. xi. 397: *He had with his gray eyes a skew cast at all times, and looked sterne.*

skew v. slant, twist (c1470, BDE) (c1440/a1400?, MED)

ME *skewe(n)* ‘to turn aside, move sideways, twist’, adapted from AF *escheur*, *escheure*; *escur*, *escure*; *eschuer*, *eschuere*, *eschuir*, *eschuire*, *eschur*, *eschure*, *eschurer*, root-stressed 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*). (BDE: 1012a, s.v. *skew v.*; KDEE: 1288a, s.v. *skew*¹ 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’skjuː/ *adv., adj.* ‘obliquely, crosswise’ (1573, OED²)

Most probably derived from the root *skew-* /skju-/ , 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 /skju-/ , is much earlier attested in AF *eschieu*, *escheu*, *eschiu*, *eschiew*, *eschu*, *escu*, *esquis* ‘timid, shy’ (AND²: *eschif*), 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*,

eschivoir; etc. ‘to avoid, keep away from, shun; to ignore, reject; to escape from, avoid; etc.’ (AND²: *eschivre*), ultimately from Germanic **skiuh*; cf. German *scheu* ‘shy’ & *schiech* (?), from West Germanic **skeuha-* (Kluge²⁵, 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, OED²), *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 Riwe* (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*)*scoyn(e)*, (*a*)*skoyne(e)* /-skoin, -skuin/ from the Anglo-French phrase *as cuins* ‘across the angles/corners’ (see AND²: *coign*², *cuing* ‘angle, wedge’) and following the model of *join* – *joint* changed to **asquoint* /-skoint, -skuint/ by adding *-t*. So-called excrescent 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 /-skwīnt/, hence *asquint*, late ME *ofskwyn* (1450), and secondary *asqueint* (Diensberg 1985: 113–115); see also ASKOIN *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)

Derived from an aphetic variant of ME *asquynt* ‘(to look) askance’; see ASQUINT *adv.* (BDE: 1055a; KDEE: 1337a; ODEE: 859b). Reference: Diensberg 1985: (113–115).

Part II

askoye *askoine* **escoint*, also aphetic *scoyne* ‘squinting’
ascuye **ascuin* *ascuint*
askye **asquin* (*a*)*squint* (due to shift of stress: *ui* > *ī*),
 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 unprefixes *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 unprefixes forms such as *skew* and *squint*; the prefix may be rendered as either *a-* (see *ascoye*, etc.) or *e-* (see *escoint*). Though of different origin (see above), *askew* *adv.* and unprefixes *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*²), 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 adducing 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*, *coingn*, *coingne*, *coignie*; *cohin*, *coin*, *coine*, *coinie*; *coinne*; *cuin*, *cuing*, *cune*; etc. ‘wedge; (mil.) wedge, serried body of troops; angle, corner; point, top (of helmet); (wedge-shaped) pin, fastening, etc.; coin; cash, money; coinage, currency, etc.’ (AND²: *coign*²), 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 *asquin(t)*, provided that *as* is seen as a contraction of *a les* and *quint* as obl. sing. of attested *quins* rectus sing., derived from *quinnes*; *qunus*, variants of AF *coign*, *coigne*, *coing*, etc. (AND²: *coign*²).

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 *askuye*, *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 *biholdeð 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* ‘fünfteln’) (see *asquint* (*adv.*) also (late) *asqueint*). 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 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 *équinier* ‘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’oeil, surveiller à la dérobee, 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 unprefixed *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/ <oi, oy> ~ /wi/ <ui> in Middle English loanwords from French. Our assumption will be supported by /iu/ <eu, ew, etc.> ~ /oi, ui/ in *monieu/mongiu* ~ *mountjoy* ‘the Alps’ (Dienberg 1985: 187–99), *bleu/bliu* ~ *bloi(e)* ‘blue’ (Dienberg 1985: 177), *destrewe(n)* ~ *destroie(n)* ‘to destroy’ (Dienberg 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 unprefixed *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.*

Obs. ‘sidewise, askew, with sidelong glance, askance. (Always with look.)’

Reference: Dienberg (1985: 113–115).

aslant, adv. and prep. (1398, OED²)

Pronunciation: /ə'slɑːnt/ /-æ-/

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

Etymology: < *on* n.² (see a prep.¹) + *slant* n.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.*

a1400 (1325): Cursor Mundi (Vesp.) l. 6200: *O-slant* [Gött. *on-slent*, Trin. Cambr. *on slont*] *fra þar þai ware.*

slant, adv., adj. (1495, OED²)

Pronunciation: /slɑːnt/ /-æ-/

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.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. *aslonte*].

OED²: **asquint**, adv., adj. (a1250, OED²)

Pronunciation: /ə'skwɪnt/

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

Etymology: Of uncertain origin; apparently < a prep.¹ and a word corresponding to Dutch *schuinte* '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.² ppl. *skeuing*, *squeuing* [ONF *eskieu*, *eskiu(w)er*, vars. of OF *eschiver*; cp. ME *escheuen* v.]

(a) 'to escape'; c1440 (?a1400) *Morte Arth.* (1) (Thrn) 1562: *Is none so skathlye 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: *From the other length of iij xxx fote by þe said wey from London wall aforsaid square southward. and also skewing oute of þe said square estward by the seid*

London wall. a1500 Lyell SSecr. (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: /skju:/

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

Etymology: < Old Northern French *eskiu(w)er*, *eskuer*, *escuer*, 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 furtively’. See W. v. Wartburg, FEW, under *exquintare*.]

1. beholden or loken ~:

(a) ‘to squint; be cross-eyed’ (a1398);

(b) ‘to look sidelong or furtively’ (a1250).

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

Pronunciation: /'skwɪnt/

OED²: **squint**, v. (a1599, OED²)

Pronunciation: /skwɪnt/

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 ***askance***¹ ‘as if’ (c1395, MED) and the adverb ***askance***² ‘aside’ have been recorded in English. It is rather probable that ***askance***² is an extension of ***askance***¹.” 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 *askance*² '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*² '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):

<i>li kanz</i> /kants/ rect. sing. 'the corner'	<i>li kant</i> rectus pl. 'the corners'
<i>le kant</i> /kant/ obl. sing. 'the corner'	<i>les kanz</i> obl. pl. 'the corners'

Thus, OF *a(d) les kanz* obl. pl., used as an adverbial phrase, would yield OF *askanz/ascanz*, *askans/ascanz*, *ascaunz/ascauns*, meaning 'along the corner/angle > obliquely, sideways' and ultimately crop up in Early Modern English as *askance*² '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 unprefixated 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 *askance*¹ ‘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)/ascaunce(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: /ə’skænt/

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

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

1. = *askance* *adv.*² (1695); **2.** = *askance* *adv.*² 2. (1633); **3.** = *askance* *adv.*² 3. (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 scanche*, 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/chance* ‘by chance’ (AND²: *chance*). See also the doublet ASKANT *adv./prep.*; see also ASKEW *adj./adv.* and **Nota 2** under ASKEW *adv.*; ASCOYNE/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 *ascaunces*. There is Modern English *needs*, of native origin, from ME *nēdes adv.* [From *nēd(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 (Lieberman 2014).

askance, *adv.*² (1530, OED²)

Pronunciation: /ə'skæns/

Forms: 15 *a scanche*, *ascaunce*, 16 *a scance*, 15–16 *asconce*, 15–17 *ascance*, *askaunce*, 16 *askauns*, *ascaunse*, *ascanse*, 15– *askance*.

Etymology: Etymology unknown. Wedgwood suggests Italian a *schiancio* ‘bias, slanting, sloping or slopingly, 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 sconce, or a skew, to go sidelin’. Koch suggests a formation on Old Norse *á ská*: see *askew adv.*, *adj.*, *n.* Diefenbach compares Jutlandish *ad-skands*, West Frisian *skân*, *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.*, *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 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: *ascaunce adv.*, *conj.* Also *ase quances*, *aska(u)ns* (c1350/a1333)

[Cp. OF *quanses (que)* & *quainse(s)*; ME *ascaunce* 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 **cantus* ‘corner’, ultimately from LL *canthus* ‘rim of a wheel’, probably of Galloromance origin. See cognate CANT² ‘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 **cantus/canthus*, probably of Gaulish origin (Kluge²⁵, s.v. *Kante*).

VL **cantus* survives as OF *chant* ‘side’ (T/L II: 226; Godefroy IX: 39c), cf. ModF *chant* ‘angle’ (Schmalseite, Winkel) (EWFS²: 210a, s.v. 2. *chant*, from L *cantus*, 12th c.); cf. ModF *chant* ‘angle’ (DEHF: 141a, s.v. 2. *chant*, 12th 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 1966²: § 68/p. 50). Cf. ModF *canton* ‘edge of a country’; also dial. ‘street corner’ (DEHF: 121a, 1243, later ‘territorial division’ in Switzerland, 16th c.); (EWFS²: 184b, OF *canton* 13th 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 (17th 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).

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