

**Órsi Tibor. *French Linguistic Influence in the Cotton Version of Mandeville's Travels.***

Budapest: Tinta Kiadó, 2006. 197 pp. [Segédkönyvek a nyelvészet tanulmányozásához 57.]

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Armchair travelling has always been a popular pastime, partly because it is an inexpensive way of visiting far-away places, partly because it is a most challenging activity for the imagination. For the literate medieval person reading Sir John Mandeville's guide book must have given great intellectual pleasure since visiting the Holy Land or the marvels of the Orient was (and perhaps still is?) both a costly and dangerous enterprise. So no wonder Sir John Mandeville's guide book became an international bestseller of its time, which is proven by the three hundred surviving manuscripts and its translations into nine languages (English, Latin, German, Spanish, Italian, Danish, Dutch, Irish and Czech). This is a most fortunate circumstance for a historical linguist because it offers intriguing opportunities for contrastive historical analyses. The book under review is a contrastive study of the lexical characteristics of the Middle English translation surviving in the *Cotton Version* (dated ca. 1400) with those of the Anglo-French original text in the *Insular Version* (dated ante 1375).

Tibor Órsi's monograph has grown out of several years of continuing research and is a testament to his persistent research and devotion to the historical comparative linguistic analysis of Mandeville's peculiar opus and to the problems concerning the historical relations between the English and the French languages. It is also an exemplary and meticulous study in the best tradition of philology.

From the introduction the reader can obtain a short summary of earlier studies on *Mandeville's Travels*. The chapter on Sir John Mandeville provides a short description of the mystery surrounding the identity of the medieval author. Of the numerous theories proposed for identifying who Mandeville was Órsi follows M.C. Seymour's proposition (Seymour 1993), which is quite acceptable a solution because Seymour is certainly the primary authority on this topic. In the light of this proposition the medieval writer was an ecclesiast, a native speaker of French and a fluent reader of Latin, with a vast knowledge of the

Holy Land and the East, which he must have obtained from books and not from travel experience. This second chapter also gives a brief overview of the transmission of the manuscripts. The postulated archetype is the manuscript that emerged around 1356 in Northern France, and the *Cotton Version*, investigated by Órsi, is a conflation in English in the dialect of Hertfordshire (South-East Midlands) that can be dated to around 1400 (before 1425).

The difficulty of distinguishing French-derived and Latin-derived elements in English is discussed in the third chapter. The spelling of words in *-al*, *-elle* in the Cotton Manuscript is examined as a case study leading to the conclusion that the Middle English spelling *-al(le)* “does not automatically indicate direct Latin influence as the corresponding French word that entered Middle English may be a learned borrowing already in French” (p. 26), but the Middle English spelling *-elle* may have an analogical origin induced by the spelling of similar adjectives. To complicate the issue, French-derived words in Middle English can also be refashioned after Latin.

Chapter 4 investigates the intricacies of the paths of borrowing French words into Middle English. Órsi identifies 8 distinct translation procedures applied by the *Cotton*-translator. Of these I find the use of synonymic pairs the most interesting because this stylistic device enriches the English text with a particular flavour. Órsi reports eighty cases of synonymic pairs in which a French word is translated into English with an expression that combines a native word with a synonym of French origin, e.g. French *en nostre parole* is rendered as *in oure langage and speche* ‘in our language and speech’. This is a typical device in Middle English but it should be mentioned that this type of figure of speech is quite archaic in English. It is interesting to note that this linguistic device is quite frequent in Germanic languages, where the general pattern is to create alliterative or rhyming pairs of synonyms, e.g. German *fix und fertig*, English *first and foremost*, *few and far between*, *part and parcel*, *toss and tumble/turn* (as in bed), *wear and tear*, etc. In English some constituents in such phrases have become fossilized, cf. the first element in phrases like:

- *spick and span* meaning ‘very neat’ or ‘brandnew’ (< earlier *spick and span new* that could reflect a Scandinavian (Old Norse) *spánnýr* = *spánn* ‘chip’ + *nýr* ‘new’ (OED → *SPICK* adjective),
- *kith and kin* ‘friends and relations’ (< Old English *cȳth* < Proto-Germanic *\*kunþipō* from the verb *\*kunþ-* ‘know’ (OED → *KITH* noun),
- *lo and behold* (< *look and behold*) (OED → *LO* interjection)

Chapters 5 and 6 contain the results of Órsi’s investigations viewed from the aspects of chronology and frequency of occurrence (respectively). One of the significant findings related to chronology is that the MED “significantly reduces the number of the earliest attestations” of borrowings (p. 37), so sometimes what is indicated by OED as the first occurrence may be listed in MED as

chronologically the third only. Chapter 5 provides the relevant statements concerning the question which loanwords from French (and/or Latin) are actually first attested in the *Cotton Version*. Chapter 6 establishes that the most frequently used loanwords are geographical terms, e.g. *contree*, *cytee*, *place*, *prouynce*, *ryuere* (*riuere*), *mont*(*aigne*)/*mount*(*ayne*), *desert*, etc.

A separate chapter (7) is devoted to the use of the word *isle*. This special attention is justifiable because “the original version of *Mandeville's Travels* is the only text in French where *île* can be found in the sense ‘land, country’” (p. 105) and French etymological dictionaries fail to take this into account. This word is spelt in the English versions as *ile* or *yle* and it was frequently used to mean ‘land, province, region’ in the late 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> centuries, as Órsi's investigation demonstrates. On the basis of this Middle English usage Órsi suggests the possibility of interpreting *Île-de-France* as ‘land of France’.

Unique attestations of French and Latin borrowings mostly related to exoticisms (oriental fauna and flora) are surveyed in chapter 8. The author concludes that these loanwords “illustrate strikingly the symbiotic relationship between French and Latin scientific vocabulary in Middle and (later) English” (p. 120).

In chapter 9 Órsi introduces the term “learned phrases” on the analogy of “learned words”. He uses this technical term to refer to “phrases containing learned adjectives” (p. 123). In the syntactic context a learned phrase is a noun phrase, not an adjective phrase because the adjective seems to be the centre of gravity, or as Órsi formulates it: “the adjective is ‘heavier’ than the noun” that is the head of the whole phrase (*ibid.*). Learned words in the text relate to geographical and scientific terms or to notions concerning church and religion. Their word order in the *Cotton Version* normally corresponds to that of the French original (Noun-Adjective). The translator makes a wider use of such phrases than the French original, and it is interesting to see that in such cases the native order (Adjective-Noun) is applied.

Double and triple scales of synonymy are treated in chapter 10 from a diachronic perspective, i.e. concentrating on the etymological origin of the word pairs/triplets. The English translation has significantly augmented the use of synonyms. In the French original Órsi counted 50 examples of synonymy, while in the English translation 123 cases, although – as the author notes – some of the latter constitute paraphrases or simple enumeration rather than synonyms in the strict sense (p. 138). The dominant type of synonym sets combines a native Germanic element with a French loanword. We can summarise the distribution of the 101 strictly synonymous word pairs on the basis of the etymological breakdown in the following table:

Native Germanic word + borrowing from French	ca. 70%	e.g. <i>wiccheecraft</i> + <i>enchantour</i>
French word pair	ca. 24%	e.g. <i>proclaimed</i> + <i>pronounced</i>
Native English word pair	ca. 6%	e.g. <i>seen</i> + <i>beholden</i>

94 out of the 123 synonymic pairs contain a French element but 22 of these are used in a way that does not correspond to the French original. This circumstance is interpreted by Órsi as proof of the translator's relative independence of the original French text (p. 139).

A rarely considered issue, the phraseological influence of French on English, is examined in chapter 11. This aspect of foreign influence is hardly ever considered by etymological dictionaries, and studies concentrating on this linguistic phenomenon are rare. Órsi's study of phrases follows the pioneering work by A. A. Prins (1952) but complements it by checking sources that have become available in the last fifty years or so. A phrase of French or Latin origin is most frequently rendered in English translation by combining a native verb or preposition with a noun of foreign origin, e.g.: *to do/make homage* – Fr. *faire homage* or *withouten doute* – Fr. *saunz doute*. The number of prepositional phrases significantly increased due to the influence of French but calques (morph-by-morph) translations occur relatively infrequently.

The Cotton translation of *Mandeville's Travels* is rich in examples of lexical disagreement, which is examined in chapter 12. The fact that the translator does not slavishly follow the original French text is interpreted by Órsi as a sign of originality (p. 182.). One of the surprising cases of such disagreement is represented by rendering French *luxurie* as *lechrye* in the English translation, although Middle English also had *luxurie* in the sense 'lust, lasciviousness'. *Luxurie* is first attested in the *Ayenbite if Inwit* (1340), where the seventh deadly sin, lust is named as *lecherie oþer luxurie*, which shows that the two words used to be synonyms.

Working with a typographically complicated text like that in Órsi's book it would be a miracle not to make any mistakes. I have found only minor misprints that require correction: *Latin* should occur with a capital initial (p. 18), article is missing in "[f]rom morphological point of view" and "[f]rom historical point of view" (p. 38), the word *about* occurs twice subsequently (p.101, footnote 13), possible typo (?) *lechry* instead of *lechrye* (p. 172, line 6).

The book reviewed here contains relevant points that can contribute to the further refinement of both French and English etymology. The OED is currently undergoing a process of revision that is expected to be complete by 2010. The new edition could profit from Tibor Órsi's work. Hopefully, this will be included in the discussions with the representative of the etymological editorial

board of the OED at the 16<sup>th</sup> International Conference on English Historical Linguistics to be organised in Pécs in August 2010.

### References

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