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The Borrowing of Latin and French Nouns Denoting Christian Identities and its Impact on Medieval English Lexis and Medieval English Religious Writings

1. Introduction

The Conversion which followed the arrival of St. Augustine in 597 effected a diffusion of Christian ideas in Britain. Since Latin was the language of the Church, Christian concepts were frequently introduced by means of Latin, or Latin-derived, loanwords. Nouns such as *papa* 'Pope', attested from the 9th century, and *cardinal* 'cardinal', attested from the 12th century, were borrowed together with the ideas they represented. However, Christian concepts were also introduced by semantic extensions or mergers in existing native words. The Old English noun *hirde*, for instance, acquired the sense 'pastor' to accommodate the Christian notion of the clergyman as 'shepherd'. Many of those native words, curiously, underwent obsolescence and were eventually replaced by borrowings from the continent. These processes are recognized in works such as Serjeantson (1935), Jespersen (1955), Baugh and Cable (1993), and Fisiak (2000), yet many details concerning the loss of such native words, and the effect of their displacements in the face of Latin and French borrowing in Middle English, remain obscure (cf. MacGillivray 1902).

This paper presents evidence revealing developments in the semantic history of ten native nouns which became associated with Christian identities in Old English times, and yet were superseded by Latin or French loan nouns of comparable reference in Early Middle English times. Moreover, the discussion suggests that those loans, and similar loans, were relatively unfamiliar to the majority of Middle English speakers for several generations, and that the tone of Medieval English religious writings became more ecclesiastical, and more reflective of continental culture, as such Latinate nouns replaced such English nouns.

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2. Attestation evidence

In this section, three types of attestations will be presented: the first type illustrates the original (Old English) meaning of the native noun, the second exemplifies the Christian usage of the native noun, and the third exhibits the parallel, Christian, Middle English usage of the Latin or French loan which supplanted the native noun.

2.1. **ærendraca**. Word-errander, messenger of God. *Ærendraca* was super-seded by *apostle* 'messenger of God'.

Original sense, *ærendraca*:

'Sende he *ærendracan*'. (Bede's Ecclesiastical History of the English People, p. 5)

Christian sense, *ærendraca*:

'Soþlice ic eow secge [...] *ærenddraca* nys mærra þonne se De hyne sende'. (Old English Version of the Gospels, John 13, 16)

Middle English Christian sense, *apostle*:

'ah þet is to understonde þet ure helend saweD his halie word [...] hwile þurh Dere *apostlene* muDe'. (Lambeth Homilies (in Morris 1867), p. 133; c. 1200)

2.2. **æDeling**. Descendent of a king, Christ. *Æþeling* is deposed by *apostle* 'son of God'.

Original sense, *æDeling*:

'On þisum Zeare com Ædward *æDeling* Eadmundes sunu cynges hider to lande'. (Anglo-Saxon Chronicle (MS L, in Earle and Plummer 1892) 1057)

Christian sense, *æDeling*:

'Crist nerZende! wuldres *æDeling*!'. (Exeter Book, Christ, l. 158)

Middle English Christian sense, *apostle*:

'Biholde Ze the *apostle* and bischop of oure confessioun, Jhesu'. (Wycliffe Bible, Hebrews 3, 1; a. 1425)

2.3. **ar**. Legate, messenger of God. *Ar* is superseded by *angel (engel)* 'mes-senger of God'.

Original sense, *ar*:

'StiDlice clypode Wicinga *ar*'. (Battle of Maldon (in Sweet 1967), l. 26)

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Christian sense, *ar*:

> 'Fæder on roderum ælmeahtigne he his *aras* þonan halig of heahDu hider onsendeD'. (Exeter Book, Christ, l. 759)

Middle English Christian sense, *angel (engel)*:

> 'Đo cam on *angel* of heuene to hem'. (Trinity College Homilies, p. 31; a. 1225)

2.4. **ealdor**. Head of a family, superior, head of a religious house or order. *Ealdor* is displaced by *prior* 'superior, head of a religious house or order'.

Original sense, *ealdor*:

> 'Sum hiredes *ealdor* wæs se plantode wingerd'. (Old English Version of the Gospels, Matthew 21, 33)

Christian sense, *ealdor*:

> 'Đa cwæD se hælend [...] to þam witum and þæs temples *ealdrum*'. (Old English Version of the Gospels, Luke 22, 52)

Middle English Christian sense, *prior*:

> 'And þe *prior* with procession to þe Zate comez'. (Early South-English Legendary, p. 219; c. 1300)

2.5. **hælend**. Healer, rescuer. *Hælend* is superseded by *saviour* 'rescuer, Christ'.

Original sense, *hælend*:

> 'And we witon þæt he is soþ middaneardes *hælynd*'. (Old English Version of the Gospels, John 4, 42)

Christian sense, *hælend*:

> 'Đis godspel sed hu þe *helend* nehlechede to-ward ierusalem'. (Lambeth Homilies (in Morris 1867), p. 3)

Middle English Christian sense, *saviour*:

> 'His nam þai chaunged, fra þat our, and cald him "warld sauueour"'. (Cursor Mundi (MS C), l. 4666; a. 1400)

2.6. **halZa**. Holy person, holy intercessor. *HalZa* is replaced by *saint* 'holy intercessor'.

Original sense, *halZa*:

> 'Đæt þam *halZan* [Noah] wæs sar on mode'. (Ælfric's Genesis (in Crawford 1922) 1592)

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Christian sense, *halZa*:

'Swa swa seo *haliZe* [St. Mary] ær foresæde'. (Ælfric's Lives of Saints 2, 52)

Middle English Christian sense, *saint*:

'To godd i merci cri […] and all *seyntes* of heuen sere'. (Cursor Mundi (MS C), l. 28604; a. 1400)

2.7. **heahfæder.** Head of a secular family or group, head of a religious family or group. *Heahfæder* is succeeded by *patriarch* 'head of a religious family or group'.

Original sense, *heahfæder*:

'Ðeodosius se was Ðære hæDenre *hehfæder*'. (Narratiunculae Anglice Conscriptae, p. 40)

Christian sense, *heahfæder*:

'Se halZa heap *hehfædera* and witZena'. (Blickling Homilies, p. 81)

Middle English Christian sense, *patriarch*:

'Of Aungles and of *patriarks* and of apostles al-so'. (The Early South-English Legendary, p. 172; c. 1300)

2.8. **scyppend.** A former, the Originator of all things. *Scyppend* is supplanted by *creator* 'the Originator of all things'.

Original sense, *scyppend*:

'SiþDan him *scyppend* forscrifen hæfde'. (Beowulf, l. 106)

Christian sense, *scyppend*:

'Ðæt is seo soDe lufv, þæt man his *scyppend* lufiZe […] and Da menn þe wel willaD'. (Ælfric's Lives of Saints 16, 254)

Middle English Christian sense, *creator*:

'Ðat he hadde In þouZt for-to serui is *creatour*'. (The Early South-English Legendary, p. 111; c. 1300)

2.9. **teoþungmann.** Headborough, ruler of ten, dean. *Teoþungmann* is deposed by *decanus* 'ruler of ten, dean'.

Original sense, *teoþungmann*:

'CyDe hit man Dam hundredesman, & he syDDan Dam *teoDingmannum*'. (Laws of Edgar (in Thorpe 1840), c. 2)

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Christian sense, _teoþungmann_:

> 'And ic nam wise menn and sette hiZ to [...] _teoDingmannum_'. (Ælfric's Deuteronomy (in Crawford 1922) 1, 15)

Middle English Christian sense, _decanus_:

> 'Se þe wæs _decanus_ æt Cristes cyrcan'. (Anglo-Saxon Chronicle (MS E, in Earle and Plummer 1892) 1020)

2.10. **þrowere.** A sufferer, a sufferer for religion. _Ðrowere_ is superseded by _martyr_ 'sufferer for religion'.

Original sense, _þrowere_:

> 'Gif mann biD akenned on .x. nihta ealdne monan se biD _þrowere_'. (Leechdoms, Wortcunning, and Starcraft of early England, p. 156)

Christian sense, _þrowere_:

> 'Wuldrigo _Drowras_'. (Rituale Ecclesiae Dunelmensis, p. 75)

Middle English Christian sense, _martyr_:

> 'Haly thomas of heoueriche alle apostles eueliche þe _Martyrs_ þe vnderstonde [...] þu ert froure a-mong mon-kunne'. (Anthem of St. Thomas the Martyr (in Morris 1872), p. 90; c. 1275)

3. Conclusions

Such evidence as this indicates that these native nouns were functioning to signify Christian identities in Late Old English and Early Middle English, yet it also shows that they were being displaced or superseded by Latin or French 'equivalents' in Early or Late Middle English. The supplantation of the indigenous nouns was certainly due in part to the prestige associated with the use of Latinate names and other words, or Latinate forms of such, in the minds of both Norman and English clergy and scribes living in post-Conquest England. Regarding the contemporary adoption of scriptural names in place of Germanic names, McKnight (1904: 306) posits that

> "when an author or a scribe had his choice between two forms of a word,
> it would be natural for him to select the one sanctioned by the best authority
> [...] the French form",

and notes particular cases in which Germanic names occur in a French form (i.e. Ailbrus, Ailmar, and others which are attested in the Middle English

romance *King Horn*). It should not be overlooked that certain of the loan nouns considered above frequently occur in names, titles, or soubriquets. Two of those nouns are exhibited in the name *St. Thomas the Martyr*. This sort of usage, when it did not reflect the actual form in which the word was first borrowed, no doubt strengthened the position of loans like these. While we have purposely avoided calques, such as *leorningcniht* 'disciple', since they had no status as nouns before being used to translate respective Christian identities, those which were short-lived, like *leorningcniht*, reveal the tentativeness with which speakers of Medieval English sometimes used native material to signify foreign religious notions.

Regardless of the exact cause, or combination of causes, for the supplantations of individual native nouns like those we have examined, the composite of those substitutions decidedly affected the substance of Medieval English religious writings. Firstly, the message became less plain and less familiar to audiences. This is confirmed occasionally in religious prose of the period, where we find Latin or French borrowings paraphrased by native expressions. Further, unfamiliarity with Latinate loans used to signify Christian identities and other concepts is clearly suggested by the contents of medieval teaching vocabularies as well as by the numbers of such vocabularies. One 11th century vocabulary translates *patriarcha* as 'heahfæder', *creator* as 'scyppend', *propheta* as 'witeZa', and *eremita* as 'westensetla' (Wright and Wülcker 1976: 307, 308, 317), divulging the novelty of these appellations. The number of extant Latin-English or French-English teaching vocabularies which contain sets of words of Christian denotation and which date from the Old English period is significantly smaller than the number of similar vocabularies which date from the Middle English period (cf. Wright and Wülcker 1976). This pattern can be seen as indicative not only of an increased amount of borrowing in the later period, but of an increased need for translation of key religious terms in that period. (Admittedly, the pattern must in some measure bear out the personal intentions of various individual clerics, the pedagogical circumstances of the day, etc.) Secondly, the tone, or implication, of English religious writings became honorifically more expressive of the Church and of continental culture. To the extent that the Latinate nouns were associated with religious authorities, administrative leaders, and cultural superiors, the substitution of the ecclesiastical synonym for the existing Christian term, the foreign noun for the native noun, the learned word for the homely word, the imperial for the tribal, may be considered an important reflection of the expanding power and prestige of the Christian Church and the prevailing influence of French culture, and a disclosure that principal religious entities,

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the subjects and objects of much Medieval English prose and poetry, were no longer expressively English in character.

Although the semantically related native nouns *God* and *Lord* survived the medieval period, once *saviour* had supplanted *hælend*, *saint* had replaced *halZa*, and *patriarch* had deposed *heahfæder*, the import of medieval Christian lexis was complete, and the *mod* of Medieval English religious writings was changed.

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Summary

Researching language of any group or social environment, one is in a dilemma whether to treat it as a *sociolect* or a *subculture phenomenon*. The author shares the point made by Janusz Anusiewicz and Bogdan Siciński in the introduction to the volume *Języki subkultur // Languages of subcultures* (1994), that sociolinguistics as a research method, though allows us to describe language and its functions in a specific social group, is not capable of recognition and description of cultural phenomena that are to taken only in the perspective of language description related to social group as subculture. The postulate to treat language of each subculture individually (unlike throwing it to the big file of concepts suggested by the very concept *languages of sub-*

cultures) is justified by the fact that all subcultures create their distinguishing lexical strata that make the basic communication code of the specified subculture. The given examples excerpted from the vocabulary of *rockmen, hiphoppers, schoolchildren, football fans (hooligans), skaters* and *graffiti artists (writers)* show linguistic distinction between subcultures even if the same persons take part in several subcultures. Each one uses its own vocabulary despite some common elements, each has got its own repertoire of professionalisms and keywords. The author is convinced that a detailed analysis of vocabulary and phraseology of specified subculture will let recognize the shape of its language. That's the way of thinking that guarantees the scientific credibility of research of subcultures.