

The French Influence on Middle English Morphology



Topics in English Linguistics

20

Editor

Herman Wekker

Mouton de Gruyter
Berlin · New York

The French Influence on Middle English Morphology

A Corpus-Based Study of Derivation

Christiane Dalton-Puffer

Mouton de Gruyter
Berlin · New York 1996

Mouton de Gruyter (formerly Mouton, The Hague)
is a Division of Walter de Gruyter & Co., Berlin.

⊗ Printed on acid-free paper which falls within the guidelines of the
ANSI to ensure permanence and durability.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Dalton-Puffer, Christiane, 1961–

The French influence on Middle English morphology : a
corpus-based study of derivation / Christiane Dalton-Puffer.

p. cm. – (Topics in English linguistics ; 20)

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 3-11-014990-7 (cloth : acid-free paper)

1. English language—Middle English, 1100–1500—For-
eign elements—French. 2. English language—Middle English,
1100–1500—Morphology. 3. French language—To 1500—In-
fluence on English. I. Title. II. Series.

PE664.F7D35 1996

427'.02—dc20

96-15692

CIP

Die Deutsche Bibliothek – Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Dalton-Puffer, Christiane:

The French influence on middle English morphology : a corpus
based study of derivation / Christiane Dalton-Puffer. – Berlin ;

New York : Mouton de Gruyter, 1996

(Topics in English linguistics ; 20)

96.05.00 Mai/Juni 1996

ISBN 3-11-014990-7

NE: GT

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Printing: Gerike GmbH, Berlin. Binding: Lüderitz & Bauer, Berlin.

Printed in Germany.

Contents

Preface	ix
Abbreviations and list of text samples	xi
1. Introduction	1
2. A survey of previous research	5
2.1. The role of French in Medieval England	5
2.2. Studies of the Middle English lexicon	7
2.3. Middle English morphology	13
3. The data-material and method	19
3.1. Material: the Helsinki Corpus of English Texts	19
3.2. Method: data collection	22
4. Aspects of a taxonomy of Middle English derivational suffixes	29
4.1. A definition of some basic terms	29
4.2. Drawing the line between inflection and derivation	31
4.2.1. General considerations	31
4.2.2. Data-related decisions	34
4.3. On lexical entries for derivational suffixes	39
5. Systematic aspects of Middle English derivation: in search of a descriptive-explanatory framework	45
5.1. Rationale	45
5.2. Considering the possibilities of a creolist approach	46
5.3. Natural Morphology	53
5.3.1. Introducing some basic concepts	53
5.3.2. Descriptive categories in Natural Morphology	55
5.3.3. A first application of the descriptive categories	60
5.3.4. Methodological problems	62
5.4. Derivational semantics	66
6. Abstract noun suffixes	73
6.1. Abstract noun suffixes and their frequencies in the Corpus	73
6.2. The abstract noun suffixes of Middle English	75
6.2.1. DOM	75
6.2.2. HEDE	77
6.2.3. LAC	80
6.2.4. NESS	81
6.2.5. REDEN	85
6.2.6. SHIP	85
6.2.7. TH	87

6.2.8.	UNG	90
6.2.9.	ACIOUN	93
6.2.10.	ACY	97
6.2.11.	AGE	98
6.2.12.	AL	101
6.2.13.	AUNCE	102
6.2.14.	ERIE	104
6.2.15.	ITE	106
6.2.16.	MENT	108
6.3.	Naturalness ratings of abstract noun suffixes in Middle English	110
6.3.1.	Morphotactic transparency scales (MTT)	110
6.3.2.	Evaluation of MTT-scales	118
6.4.	Semantic aspects of abstract noun suffixes	120
6.5.	Parallel derivatives with different suffixes	126
7.	Concrete (agent) noun suffixes	131
7.1.	Concrete noun suffixes and their frequencies in the corpus	131
7.2.	The concrete noun suffixes of Middle English	132
7.2.1.	EL	132
7.2.2.	END	135
7.2.3.	ERE	136
7.2.4.	ESTRE	139
7.2.5.	ILD	140
7.2.6.	LING	141
7.2.7.	ANT	143
7.2.8.	ARD	144
7.2.9.	ARY	145
7.2.10.	EREL	146
7.2.11.	ESSE	147
7.2.12.	OUR	148
7.3.	Naturalness ratings of concrete (agent) noun suffixes	149
7.3.1.	Morphotactic transparency scales (MTT)	150
7.3.2.	Evaluation of MTT-scales	153
7.4.	Semantic aspects of concrete (agent) nouns	154
8.	Adjectival suffixes	163
8.1.	Adjectival suffixes and their frequencies in the corpus	163
8.2.	The adjectival suffixes of Middle English	165
8.2.1.	ED	165
8.2.2.	EN	166
8.2.3.	FOLD	168
8.2.4.	FUL	168
8.2.5.	IG	170

8.2.6.	ISH	172
8.2.7.	LESS	173
8.2.8.	LY	174
8.2.9.	SOM	180
8.2.10.	WARD	181
8.2.11.	ABLE	183
8.2.12.	AL	185
8.2.13.	IVE	186
8.2.14.	OUS	187
8.3.	Semantic aspects of adjectival suffixes	189
8.3.1.	Developing a descriptive model	189
8.3.2.	Applying the semantic framework	193
9.	Verbal suffixes	201
9.1.	Verbal suffixes and their frequencies in the corpus	201
9.2.	The verbal suffixes of Middle English	202
9.2.1.	ATE	202
9.2.2.	IFY	202
9.2.3.	IZE	203
9.2.4.	NEN	204
9.2.5.	SIAN	206
9.3.	Semantic aspects of verbal suffixes	206
10.	Evaluating the influence of French on the morphology of Middle English	209
10.1.	When do loans count as complex? - A chronology	209
10.2.	Hybrid formations in the corpus	211
10.3.	Productive or not productive? The status of Romance suffixes	215
10.3.1.	Defining productivity	215
10.3.2.	Productivity factors and the Middle English data	217
10.4.	If Romance suffixes were unproductive, how do we account for the hybrid formations that do exist?	221
10.5.	On explanations	222
11.	Conclusion	227
	Notes	229
	Appendix 1 Lexical entries for the derivational suffixes of Middle English	239
	Appendix 2 Semantic functions mappings	257
	References	263
	Index	281

Preface

This book is based on my doctoral dissertation accepted by the University of Vienna in 1992. Although writing as such tends to be a lonely occupation, many people have a part in the making of a book. The ones I owe thanks are too many to mention them all by name but I would like to record explicitly my gratitude to some.

There are my two thesis supervisors Dieter Kastovsky and Wolfgang U. Dressler both whose ideas have left unmistakable marks in this study and whose comments helped me to further develop my own thinking on the matter. On repeated occasions Roger Lass has probed my understanding of historical linguistics and managed at the same time to give me inspiration and confidence.

Several people at the University of Helsinki extended me a warm welcome and showed interest in my work. These are Matti Rissanen, Terttu Nevalainen, and Helena Raumolin-Brunberg. Merja Kytö's support went far beyond what a visiting scholar might have hoped for. I would like to thank the Austrian Ministry of Science and Research (BMWF) for funding the research carried out in Helsinki before the Helsinki Corpus became widely available on CD-rom.

Thanks are also due to an anonymous reviewer for his (?) detailed comments on an earlier version, and to the series editor Herman Wekker. Elke Mettinger-Schartmann's critical eye detected a good many inconsistencies in the manuscript and I thank her for her generous gift of time.

I would also like to mention the comments from Jacek Fisiak, Laura Wright, Niki Ritt and Arthur Mettinger and I would like to thank them and other colleagues, Iris Schaller-Schwaner, Barbara Seidlhofer, Ute Smit, Harald Mittermann (all at Vienna University) and Ardith J. Meier (at the University of Northern Iowa) for their advice, moral support and encouragement. Earlier versions of some parts of this study were presented at a number of conferences and workshop meetings and I am grateful to the people attending those presentations for their comments and feedback. All remaining errors and inconsistencies are entirely my own responsibility.

During all this my family kept me firmly anchored on a different level of reality, providing a steady supply of "extra-linguistic" concerns. There were times when this threatened to drive me crazy but it certainly also helped me to keep things in perspective.

Vienna, February 1996

Abbreviations and list of text samples

This is a full listing of the texts covered by the Helsinki Corpus for the Middle English subperiods one to three. The abbreviations of the text names in the rightmost column appear in many examples throughout the book.

ME1 (1150-1250)

Handbooks, medicine

PERI DIDAXEON (PERIDI)

Philosophy

VESPASIAN HOMILIES, NO.III (cf. **Homilies**) (VESHOM)

Homilies

ORM, THE ORMULUM (ORM)

TRINITY HOMILIES (TRINT)

VESPASIAN HOMILIES (cf. **Philosophy**) (VESHOM)

BODLEY HOMILIES (BODLEY)

LAMBETH HOMILIES (LAMBET)

SAWLES WARDE (SAWLES)

Religious treatises

HISTORY OF THE HOLY ROOD-TREE (ROOD)

ANCRENE WISSE (ANCRE)

HALI MEIDHAD (HALI)

VICES AND VIRTUES (VICES1)

History

THE PETERBOROUGH CHRONICLE (PETERB)

LAYAMON (BRUT1)

Biography, lives

KATHERINE (KATHE)

MARGARETE (MARGA)

JULIANE (JULIA)

ME2 (1250-1350)

Documents

THE PROCLAMATION OF HENRY III (DOCU2)

Homilies

KENTISH SERMONS (KENTSE)

Religious treatises

DAN MICHEL, AYENBITE OF INWYT (AYENBI)

A BESTIARY (BESTIA)

History

ROBERT OF GLOUCESTER

HISTORICAL POEMS (in MS Harley 2253) (POEMH)

Biography, lives

THE LIFE OF ST. EDMUND (THE EARLY SOUTH-ENGLISH LEGENDARY) (SELEG)

Fiction

MAN IN THE MOON (MOON)
 DAME SIRITH; INTERLUDE (SIRITH)
 THE FOX AND THE WOLF IN THE WELL (FOXWO)
 THE THRUSH AND THE NIGHTINGALE (THRUSH)

Romances

THE ROMANCE OF SIR BEUES OF HAMTOUN (BEVIS)
 KYNG ALISAUNDER (ALISAU)
 HAVELOK (HAVELO)
 KING HORN (HORN)

Bible

THE EARLIEST COMPLETE ENGLISH PROSE PSALTER (EARLPS)

Text type undefined (ME verse)

SONG OF THE HUSBANDMAN; SATIRE ON THE CONSISTORY OF COURTS; SATIRE ON THE RETINUES (in MS Harley 2253) (POEMS)

ME3 (1350-1420)**Documents**

USK, APPEAL(S); PETITIONS (M3); RETURNS; JUDGEMENTS; TESTAMENTS AND WILLS; PROCLAMATIONS (DOCU3)

Handbooks, astronomy

CHAUCER, A TREATISE ON THE ASTROLABE (ASTRO)
 THE EQUATORIE OF PLANETS (EQUATO)

Handbooks, medicine

A LATE MIDDLE ENGLISH TREATISE ON HORSES (HORSES)

Science, medicine

A LATIN TECHNICAL PHLEBOTOMY (PHLEBO)

Philosophy

CHAUCER, BOETHIUS (BOETH)
 Idem, THE TALE OF MELIBEE (cf. Fiction) (CTPROS)

Homilies

THE NORTHERN HOMILY CYCLE (THE EXPANDED VERSION) (NORHOM)

Sermons

ENGLISH WYCLIFFITE SERMONS (WYCSER)

Rules

THE BENEDICTINE RULE (BENRUL)
 AELRED OF RIELVAUX'S DE INSTITUTIONE INCLUSARUM (MS VERNON) (AELR3)

Religious treatises

PURVEY, THE PROLOGUE TO THE BIBLE	(PURVEY)
THE CLOUD OF UNKNOWING	(CLOUD)
MANNYNG, ROBERT OF BRUNNE'S "HANDLYNG SYNNE"	(HANSYN)
THE PRICKE OF CONSCIENCE	(PRICK)
CHAUCER, THE PARSON'S TALE	(CTPROS)

History

CURSOR MUNDI	(CMCURSOR)
THE BRUT OR THE CHRONICLES OF ENGLAND	(CMBRUT3)
TREVISA, POLYCHRONICON	(POLYCH)

Travelogue

MANDEVILLE'S TRAVELS	(MANDEV)
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Fiction

CHAUCER, THE GENERAL PROLOGUE TO THE CANTERBURY TALES; THE WIFE OF BATH'S PROLOGUE; THE SUMMONER'S TALE; THE MERCHANT'S TALE	(CMCTVERS)
CHAUCER, THE TALE OF MELIBEE (cf. Philosophy)	(CMCTPROS)
GOWER, CONFESSIO AMANTIS	(CMGOWER)

Letters, non-private

HENRY V, LETTERS (AN ANTHOLOGY; A BOOK OF LONDON ENGLISH); LETTER(S), LONDON	(CMOFFIC3)
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Bible

THE OLD TESTAMENT (WYCLIFFE)	(CMOTEST)
THE NEW TESTAMENT (WYCLIFFE)	(CMNTEST)

(Kytö 1991:10-12)

1. Introduction

The traditions of historical philological studies and historical linguistics have meant that a great deal of scholarly attention has been paid to sound developments. Among the runners up the pecking order has changed over the last decades: the prominence of studies of the lexicon has diminished while syntax and inflectional morphology have moved more to the forefront. Whatever the pecking order, derivational morphology has always occupied a precarious in-between position, a kind of Cinderella status as it were. For those interested in the lexicon it is a part of morphology, for those interested in morphology it is part of the lexicon. The present study focuses on this "in-between" area that is derivational morphology.

Like any other human activity, the pursuit of scholarly questions tends to have a history which it is often useful to know about in order to get things into perspective. Let me therefore shortly sketch those aspects in the genesis of this book that are relevant to its present design.

The original plan for this study was to trace the borrowing of French word-formation patterns in Early Middle English up to approximately 1250/1300. My main interest lay in fleshing out the changes in the initial stage of the language contact between English and French. It soon became obvious that there were two basic obstacles in pursuing this question.

Firstly, the texts from the period envisaged did not show the anticipated amount of borrowing from French into English. There certainly wasn't enough new lexical material to warrant the assumption that the morphologically complex loans were analysable and that word-formation patterns could be abstracted from them on an Early Middle English basis. If the data-base was to stay the same, the study would have to be one of lexical rather than derivational borrowing. Anyone with a smattering of knowledge about the extant scholarship in the field knows that this path has been trodden too many times to be of much interest.¹ The alternative was therefore to extend the time-scale in order to include those parts of the Middle English period where the influx of Romance lexical material was stronger than at the very early stage. This was done and the material from which the data for the present study were collected now dates from 1150-1420.

The second obstacle also had a bearing on the methodological principles of my work: if I was to transcend, as it were, an exclusively chronological account of the influx of French derivational patterns into Middle English and wanted to be able to give a quasi synchronic cross section of the derivational system, I also needed to know something about the derivational patterns that were already there before French and English came into contact. For anybody who is only generally familiar with writings on Middle English morphology and lexicon it

will be clear that this kind of information is extremely patchy and scattered if it is available at all.

This meant that a considerable amount of “groundwork” in the shape of a description of Middle English derivation as a whole had to be done before I could attempt to make any claims about the far-reaching effects (or lack of them) of English-French language contact on derivation. This considerable widening in scope had to be paid for by limitations in other places and so the present study deals only with derivational suffixes, leaving prefixation and conversion unaccounted for. The final design of this book therefore looks as follows:

Chapter 2 sets the present study in a wider context by reviewing previous research pertinent to the study of Middle English derivational morphology. The upshot of this survey is that the area is surprisingly under-researched.

Chapter 3 introduces the book’s empirical basis and presents the corpus which went into the assembly of the data. There is no doubt that this study would be of much narrower scope if it had not been for the availability of the Helsinki Corpus of English Texts. A short outline of the structure of the corpus is followed by a discussion of some implications of computerised research in a historical text-corpus. Chapter 3 also contains a general numeric overview of the data and a list of the derivational suffixes covered. Full lexical entries for the suffixes can be found in alphabetical order in Appendix 1.

Chapters 4 and 5 are dedicated to the establishment of a theoretical framework for the description of the data. Chapter 4 is the more straightforward of the two, devoted to an exact definition of what is being described. After defining the most important terms I have tried to come to a principled decision about how to draw the line between inflectional and derivational morphology for the purposes of the present study. This had to be done in the interest of obtaining a closed list of Middle English derivational suffixes. The discussion in this chapter pulls together ideas from several rather different theoretical angles, banking on the remarkable overlaps between them. On the basis of this discussion, then, section 4.3. sketches a mildly formalised matrix for the lexical entries of the ME suffixes which is then carried out in Appendix 1.

Chapter 5 is the more ambitious of the two theoretical chapters. If derivational morphology is to be regarded as a grammatical sub-system and if Romance derivational suffixes did indeed infiltrate into Middle English grammar, then we have to assume that a restructuring of that sub-system took place. Chapter 5, then, examines in turn several theoretical approaches that seem to offer possibilities for grasping this concept of system-change. The creolist approach, which had seemed attractive at first, turned out to lack a principled descriptive component necessary for this data-based study. The semiotically based framework of Natural Morphology provided a viable alternative. It offers a workable conceptual grid for evaluating the different morphological behaviour of different derivational elements in Middle English and thus gave me a systematic descriptive handle on the data. Finally, chapter 5 also presents a discussion of more

meaning-oriented frameworks with a view to their usefulness in the task of describing the data.

Chapters 6 to 9 are the descriptive part of the study. The suffixes and their “products” have been split up into four groups along obvious morphosemantic principles: abstract nouns, concrete nouns, verbs, adjectives. Each of these four chapters is structured along the same lines. The first section gives an overview of the forms and their frequency in the corpus. Section 2 discusses the suffixes one by one. Each of these articles is again structured in the same way: I first present the overall numerical distribution of the suffix in the corpus material and then discuss morphological aspects of the suffix involved, notably the type(s) of derivational base it can attach to and any morphonological processes that may be involved. The third section in each chapter provides semantic interpretations of the derivatives found in the corpus material. At this stage, I have used paraphrases to convey the meaning(s) of the word-formation processes in question. The problem with paraphrases is, of course, that they are vague, which makes them difficult to generalise and compare.² No systematic effort at standardising these paraphrases has been made so as to keep these sections relatively untechnical.

At this point the two chapters about nominal suffixes (chapters 6 and 7) continue with the “measurement” of morphological naturalness, whose theoretical foundations were discussed in 5.2. Parameters of morphological naturalness turn out to be of some import in the competition between native and foreign derivational elements, but do not furnish an exhaustive explanation. Therefore, the last part of each of chapters 6-9 tries to establish a framework for the semantic description of each particular group of derivations and to apply that framework to the material from the corpus.

In chapter 10 we are finally in a position to pull together the information gained in the descriptive part and to focus on the interaction of the Germanic and Romance lexico-derivational sub-systems. Mixed formations are discussed and the conclusion is suggested that essentially the productivity of Romance elements in English was a post-Middle English phenomenon. In the last section I summarise my findings by reviewing the types of explanations which have been suggested throughout the present study and conclude by expressing my opinion that finding a unified explanatory theory for the present data either lies miles ahead or might even be impossible.

2. A survey of previous research

Surveying the previous research on a particular topic is, of course, a set piece of conventional scholarship. But if it is done well, such a survey can achieve more than “simply going through the motions”. It can relate the present work to existing treatments of the same, or closely related, topic(s) in order to show its indebtedness and its new departures. In the present instance I have adopted a rather generous interpretation of “closely related topic” as Middle English derivational morphology as such is a surprisingly under-researched area. So, in order for this survey to fulfil its purpose and to set the present study into a context, I will in turn take up different strands such as the importance of French for Middle English, the Middle English lexicon, and Middle English morphology. The discussion will proceed in roughly concentric circles towards the central question of this study.

2.1. The role of French in Medieval England

Generally speaking, the contact of the two languages English and French and the nature of the French influence on English during the Middle English period seem to be the main interest in a considerable number, if not the majority of the writings on Middle English.

There is a long tradition of scholarly writing on the roles of the different languages in Medieval England from the Conquest to about 1400. The conclusions arrived at in different publications are often diametrically opposed. One group of scholars, including Vising (1923), Legge (1950), and Galbraith (1941), believes that French all but completely ousted English for the majority of the population over considerable periods of time. The opposing opinion, namely that French remained extremely restricted even at an early period, can also be found, though perhaps voiced with a little more caution. See, for instance, Woodbine (1943).

It is of course puzzling how serious scholars could arrive at such contradictory conclusions. Looking more closely at the methods by which the conclusions are arrived at one cannot help noticing that very different source materials are used. A study, for instance, which is based exclusively on literary textual material must look very closely at the role of literature in medieval English society, or it will probably arrive at a picture that gives French an overly prominent place.

A full account of the relevant literature is given in Berndt (1965, 1976) and Richter (1979) and to some extent also in Short (1980) and there would be little use in reproducing it here. A key problem in many treatments of the question seems to be that the matter has been approached with a good amount of naivety by both historians and linguists: historians tend to concentrate on the facts and events contained in their source texts, treating language as a neutral vehicle for

transporting information and not as potential historical information per se. Philologists, on the other hand, have a tendency to be too uncritical of their sources from the point of view of their political implications, forgetting that myth-making is very often a contemporary rather than a posthumous activity. Questions which are self-evident to the historian, - such as who composed a text, at what point in time, and to what purpose - are often not asked at all. The answer to this problem would be an interdisciplinary approach. Such an approach has been successfully attempted by Berndt and, more recently, by Richter.

In a series of articles based on the findings of his 1962 habilitation, Berndt characterises the socio-political situation of England in the three centuries following the Norman Conquest, connecting this information with a new evaluation of the linguistic situation during the period of roughly 1066-1400. Richter, a historian, cleverly distinguishes between myth and fact about the impact of the Norman Conquest on England (1979: 35-46). He then goes on to present direct and indirect evidence on the use of English, French and Latin in the England of the period, always maintaining a critical attitude towards his sources. Richter's account appears to me to be more convincing as it is more explicit about its methodology and also offers a wealth of first-hand material which is discussed in its implications with clarity and precision. Even so, the conclusions reached by the two scholars coincide in all but some details. The following summary is an extremely short account of their findings.

English never ceased to be the native language of the majority of the population of England. Within at most three generations after the Conquest, English was the mother tongue of all social classes except the very upper echelons of the feudal aristocracy.³ In spite of that, French (and Latin) continued to play an important role in the intellectual life of that society, giving these two languages great social prestige. It is important to stress, though, that the cultural role of French within English society is not necessarily uniquely connected with the Norman Conquest as a politico-military event. Other political climates have been known to produce similar socio-cultural and sociolinguistic situations as is witnessed by the use of French by the continental European aristocracy in later centuries.

That French has had a great impact upon the English language is undeniable. The findings of Berndt and Richter would suggest that this can hardly have happened through mass bilingualism. (An opposing view is discussed in the chapter on creolistics (5.1.)). The linguistic situation in England after the Conquest is probably best described in terms of diglossia. It was a diglossic situation where H kept losing ground to L.

2.2. Studies of the Middle English lexicon

So far this tour d'horizon has been concerned with extralinguistic considerations. From a language-internal point of view the effect of French (and Latin) on the English lexicon and lexicology has been an important preoccupation of Middle English scholars for decades.

A form of study which has remained popular throughout the 20th century is to look at the language of a specific group of texts or of one author. The earliest one known to me is Remus' (1906) study of the Romance loans among Chaucer's ecclesiastical and scientific terms. Similar studies were done by Faltenbacher (1907) on Caxton's language and by Reismüller (1911) on Lydgate. Methodologically, these studies tend to be collections of loan-words first attested in the works of the author under investigation, which very often leads to pre-datings of the standard dictionaries, mostly the *Oxford English Dictionary* (*OED*). The material is either ordered simply alphabetically as in Reismüller or by *Sachfelder* (associative fields) as in Remus and Faltenbacher. Both ordering principles are, of course, extralinguistic. The concept of the *Sachfeld* is at the centre of another series of studies which will be discussed below (associative fields and word-fields). A mixture of literary and linguistic orientation (which if it observes a high standard can be called truly philological) can be found as late as Clough (1985). Clough's article on the French element in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* makes observations on lexical and even derivational issues but is also interested in the French influence on its literary conception.⁴

From the beginning of this century there is also a continuous flow of studies about the French influence on Middle English in general rather than just on single authors or texts. The prevailing interest is lexicological in nature (what was borrowed at what point in time?) but the textual basis is broader than in the studies discussed above. Still, scholars have to work on the tacit assumption that in one way or another their selection of material is representative as there is no way of taking into account all extant texts. While it may well be that a carefully selected corpus of a smaller set of complete texts is just as representative as, say, a wide selection of extracts like the Helsinki Corpus (cf. chapter 3), the question is practically never discussed explicitly.

A smallish sub-group of studies on the Middle English lexicon are the ones dealing with *Wortschwund*, i.e. the loss of old Germanic words and their replacement by Romance loans during the Middle English period. Holthausen (1915) is a summary of the work of four of his graduate students (Hemken (1906), Offe (1908), Oberdörffer (1908) and Teichert (1912)). Based on the Clark-Hall dictionary, which had by then reached the letter "S", these studies trace the fate of Old English simplex nouns, verbs and adjectives excluding the names of plants and animals. Jaeschke (1931) replicates this work on the basis of the now finished Anglo-Saxon Dictionary. Jaeschke classifies his explanations into language-internal ones (including physiological-phonetic, sound-symbolic,

etymological and semasiological) and language-external ones (cultural-historical). The main body of his study consists in ordering the material in these two respects. In a short introduction Jaeschke expounds his view that the loss of words in a language is to be explained in functional terms

daß also Wörter nur untergehen, sofern sie dem menschlichen Ausdrucks- und Zweckbedürfnis nicht mehr genügen (Jaeschke 1931: 7)

We shall see that our attempts at explanation based on the neo-functionalism of Natural Morphology as well as the descriptions working with semantic notions are not as different from Jaeschke's approach as they might look on the surface. Prins (1942) provides an English publication on the same topic.

The larger part of studies on the vocabulary of Middle English, however, look at the "French/Latin question" from the opposing angle, namely at the influx of French loans into English, the main preoccupation being their first attestation in English.

One of the very earliest is certainly Sykes (1899). Heck (1904) promises to give a general outline of non-Germanic elements in English but turns out to be a study on the accented vowels of non-Germanic loans in English. Dellit (1906) argues the case for regarding more loans as borrowings from Latin rather than French, though not very convincingly. The bulk of his study also arranges the material according to cultural/associative fields. The section on "Die Wortformen" (pp. 69-90) gives exactly what is promised in the heading, namely an enumeration of the forms which the endings of Latin loans can take in English.

Mettig (1910) tries to assess the influx of French words into English up to 1258 by collecting first occurrences of loans in literary texts, a much wider textual basis than that used by Bödtker (1909). Mettig then adds etymological considerations on all the words in alphabetical order. In his short summary Mettig comes to the conclusion that in the period 1066-1258 "der frz. einfluss im grossen und ganzen nur schwach fühlbar ist" (Mettig 1910: 245) and places the peak phase for the influx of French words into English in the years between 1258 - 1400. He also attempts a quantitative survey of the material according to the spheres of life to which the new words belong and finds high percentages in church, and also in art and science. Equally clearly, the number of borrowed nouns is almost four times as high as that of verbs. The number of adjectives is minute (Mettig 1910: 247). The same observations have been made by others, but Mettig's conclusion is truly original and stunning:

Ein fünftel des herübergenommenen lehniguts besteht aus vb., und das bürgerliche leben hat 10% der fremden bestandteile aufgenommen; dies rechtfertigt die annahme, dass im verlaufe des nächsten zeitabschnittes (1258-1400) das Französische auch in die mittleren und schliesslich die niederen volksschichten eindringt.(Mettig 1910: 247)

Bödtker (1909) is the first one to criticise Jespersen's quasi-statistical method employed in *Growth and Structure* (1905: 93-4),⁵ and then proceeds to set up his own collection of French loans. The author never makes this explicit but in the course of the article it becomes clear that what he seems to be doing is checking parts of some Early Middle English texts, mainly the Peterborough Chronicle. His result, namely that there are more loan-words in later texts than in earlier ones, is hardly surprising.

Certainly from today's point of view Funke (1921) is a cut above all the earlier and many of the later works in a similar vein. He discusses the problems created by an approach that relies on wordlists or dictionaries, i.e. a long-time study of the vocabulary making statistical claims. Funke suggests counterbalancing these by cross-section studies of single texts which should "das Wortgut in lebendiger Bewegung zeigen" (1921: 3) and points out the importance of methodological considerations which have to precede such studies, taking into account parameters such as text-tradition, source, dialect, sociolect etc. Unfortunately his methodological considerations were not taken up until 40 years later by Käsmann (1961). Feist (1934) is no more than an interesting exercise in *Begriffsgeschichte*. The organisation of the material remains completely within the traditions of the Sachfeld-studies but adds interesting cultural-historical information on different aspects of medieval life and I would regard it as a study about extralinguistic reference rather than one about language. The main interest for the present-day reader is certainly historical rather than philological or linguistic.

The well-known chapter "The French element" in Serjeantson (1935) is structured chronologically into centuries but within these the principle of organisation observed is the one of extralinguistic domains or *Sachfelder*.

Bush (1922) discusses the question of the provenance of French loans from either Old Northern French (early loans) or Old Central French by comparing two classes of ME words which can be differentiated by a phonological criterion. (Cf also Burnley 1992:430-431). Words borrowed from Old Northern French appear as *ca-*, *ce- /k/* (*carpenter*, *canon*, *kennel* etc.) whereas words borrowed from Old Central French appear as *cha-*, *che-* or *chi- /tʃ/* (*chaitiff*, *chalice* etc.). The main line of Bush's argument is that the importance of literary Old Central French as a source of French loans in ME has commonly been overestimated. This happened because the popular character of the early loans from Old Northern French gave them less chance of appearing in written texts so that they are often first attested relatively late. Bush's argument has a bearing on this study in so far as the Old Northern French loans are overwhelmingly simplex words, whereas among the *ch-* words from Old Central French there are many learned, complex ones. With the Old Central French loans representing a later tranche of borrowing, this falls in with our observation of a true boom of French derivational suffixes in the period between 1350-1420.

Rather recently another lexicological study has been added. This time not on Romance but on Scandinavian loans in Middle English, namely Hug (1987). Though much more explicit about the composition of her corpus and her methodology, Hug's basic conception of her study runs along the lines of the old lexicographic studies operating with extralinguistic domains as categorisation principles.⁶

There are also some doctoral theses dating from the 1930s each dealing with one specific *Sachfeld*: Källner (1934) studies Middle English expressions referring to money, coins etc., which of course include many loans from various sources. The study contains information about the referents of the words as well as their etymology. Kalb (1937) studies the names of mammals. It is a study of word-history using as its ordering principle the categorisation of the animal world in *Brehm's Tierleben* (Kalb 1937: 6).

In the course of time the concept of the *Sachfeld* was modified and superseded by the more properly linguistic one of the *Wortfeld* (wordfield). The concept of the lexical field as such was introduced by Trier and was later incorporated into the framework of lexical semantics especially by Coseriu. Once this had been accomplished lexical fields served as another crystallisation point for the study of the vocabulary of Middle English. The earliest is probably Wyler (1944) on adjectives denoting BEAUTIFUL. Käsmann (1951) worked on VIRTUE and VICE. There is Kjellmer's account of PEOPLE (1971, 1973) in which the semantic aspects of the field almost disappear behind a huge apparatus of numeric and statistical evaluations of the different words in combination with different pre-modifiers and co-ordinatives. Barnickel (1975) deals with terms of COLOUR and BRIGHTNESS in Middle English. Peters (1983) is on the lexical field BAD. The latest study so far is Aertsen (1987) on PLAY. Naturally, in this approach, the question of a word's origin is secondary to the semantic structure of the lexical field itself. Nevertheless, the approach promises a meaningful way of dealing with the integration (or lack thereof) of new words into the vocabulary of a language from the point of view of their meaning (cf., for instance, Peters 1983: 257).

Outside the study of lexical fields, however, the main preoccupation of lexicological studies of Middle English tends to be the extent and quality of the influence of French on the vocabulary. As we have seen, the majority of lexicological studies are either collections of data and/or fairly limited in scope. Only two of the authors make an attempt at quantifying their results. These are Mettig (1910: 245-247) and Bödtker (1909: 217), which are, however, anything but satisfactory. Parallel to the different types of lexicological studies we have now surveyed at some length, there has always existed an interest in getting a more general, or, as it were, statistical grasp of the impact of French on the vocabulary of English during the Middle English period.

Before we get into a closer discussion of this kind of research a word of caution is in order: not everything that is called "statistics" is statistics in the mod-

ern, technical sense of the word. In many cases the statistics had better be called “figures”, as they tend to consist of tabulations and calculations of absolute frequencies. The greater refinement of later publications in this respect is certainly due to the fact that the current availability of ready-made computerised tools has turned statistics into more of a household term also for linguists.⁷

The first quantitative approach to French loans in English can be found in Jespersen (1905 [1978]: 85-87). Jespersen’s count is based on the first hundred words of each of the letters in the *Oxford English Dictionary* which then ran up to letter L. In 1935 Baugh was able to do the same with the entire alphabet. It is not surprising that their results are comparable, as they were arrived at in much the same way. Both Jespersen and Baugh diagnose a peak in the rate of borrowing between 1250-1400, with Baugh’s figures showing a more marked peak in the fifty years between 1350-1400. Both studies are based on absolute frequencies so that the figures can be regarded as representative in only the most general terms. If we consider that the number of surviving texts increases after 1250, with a peak in literary production between 1350-1400, it is only natural that a greater number of loans should be first attested during this period: a larger amount of text simply contains more words, and thus also more loan-words.

Mossé (1943) was interested in the same question, the rate of borrowing from French at different periods of Middle English, but tried a slightly different methodology. His is a pilot study covering all of the letter A in the OED. Contrary to his predecessors Mossé is very explicit about the criteria applied in defining what will make up his set of data. He decides to exclude words borrowed from Latin and argues that

a French loan-word is a word which whatever may be its etymology or ultimate origin has been immediately borrowed from the French. (1943: 35)

This is a sensible decision if one’s interest lies in locating the historical sources of new lexical material: in its last consequence, following up all etymologies would leave us with “loans from Indo-European” and not much else. If, however, one were to look at Middle English vocabulary and from “within”, from a quasi-synchronic point of view, Latin and French loans should be treated indistinctly precisely because specific etymology is of no avail on this sort of level. Note that the term “etymological” here refers to the detailed history of single words, and not to groups of words as bearers of certain prosodic, phonological, or morphological characteristics.

The latest of this series of quantitative studies is Dekeyser (1986). He says that he was motivated by the idea that it might be interesting to replicate earlier studies on the basis of material now available from the *Middle English Dictionary*. The principle of data collection is very similar to that of the earlier studies, with one important difference: Dekeyser does not simply count words of French origin but takes into account *all* words regardless of their origin, simply putting them into different categories. This allows him to calculate relative frequencies as well as absolute ones. In actual fact this modified methodology takes into account the reservations both Baugh and Jespersen voiced about their own calculations. The effect on the results is remarkable: Baugh's and Jespersen's calculations showed a marked peak in the number of French loans between 1350-1400 followed by a sharp drop. Dekeyser's calculation of relative frequencies does not turn this on its head but levels out all the towering peaks and sharp drops.⁸



Figure 2.1. Rate of borrowing from French into Middle English (cf. Dekeyser 1986: 259)

The growth of the Romance part of the Middle English vocabulary has often been considered as exceptional. The fact that Dekeyser also visualises the native part of the vocabulary allows one to put that into the right perspective: the native vocabulary is characterised by a similar expansion throughout the Middle English period. Just how much of this is the simple consequence of the fact that, as more texts survive, more words are attested, is impossible to tell. It should, in any case, remind us that things are not necessarily what they seem on the surface so that conclusions about "developments" should be drawn with great caution. Dekeyser (1986: 260) summarises his results as follows:

...apart from a trough in the middle of the 15th century, the overall Romance component in Middle English exhibited a regular and steadily growing development.

2.3. Middle English morphology

We are now in a position to carry our stock-taking process into the field of Middle English morphology proper and I would like to start this part of the literature overview with a short discussion of what the *Middle English Dictionary* (MED) has to offer in this respect.

The MED, under compilation since 1930 and currently approaching the end of the letter "S", is a monumental work. And there is no doubt that it has to struggle with monumental difficulties. These include the vast number of textual sources to be taken into account, the difficulties with their dating and localisation, great dialectal variation, to name a few. Additional complications have no doubt arisen from the fact that a great number of scholars have been involved in the work over these many years.

The specific aspect I am interested in here is the treatment of derivational suffixes in the MED, which is not at all satisfactory. The most serious criticism to be levelled against the MED in this respect is probably that it has no coherent policy as to the type and amount of information given in the entries concerning bound morphemes.⁹ Invariably, the dictionary gives the origin of a certain suffix plus the type of word it produces. One example would be "-e)n- (4) derivational suffix in *verbs*...inherited from OE". Most of the time an entry also includes the syntactic category of possible bases together with examples. These examples sometimes come with glosses and sometimes without and it is from these that the reader has to derive the meaning of the suffix.

The scantness of the information given in the dictionary entries is, however, only a symptom of a deeper problem. Namely that the treatment of bound morphemes in the MED is afflicted by the lack of principled decisions on how to delimit inflection against derivation. In the following I would like to illustrate this shortcoming by taking a look at the entries under **-en**. The MED has seven sub-entries under this heading, the first two are clearly derivational but the reader gets no indication of how productive or even transparent they are in Middle English: **-en** (1) is the old feminine suffix that appears in *vix-en* and perhaps in a handful of other words inherited from Old English. **-en** (2) is the adjectival suffix as in *gold-en*. From sub-entry three onwards matters become potentially confusing. If **-en** (3) is a "derivational suffix in *verbs*" forming 1. the *infinitive* and 2. *past participles* of strong verbs, why is it a separate entry to **-en-** (4) which is also a "derivational suffix in *verbs*" (e.g. **fast-en-en**)? Well, clearly because they are different things. Implicitly, by arranging them as point 1 and 2

of one entry, the MED takes into account that *-en* (3) infinitive and *-en* (3) past participle have more in common with each other than either has with *-en-* (4) or, for that matter *-en* (2) (e.g. *gold-en*) but all of them are referred to by the identical term "derivational suffix". On the other hand *-en* (5) the noun plural suffix, which also has a few things in common with *-en* (3) (inf., p.p.) is described as "inflectional suffix" parallel to *-en* (6) and *-en* (7) which are the dative endings of adjectives and past plural of verbs respectively. In vindication of the MED one might argue that the arrangement of the entries represents a cline from more derivational to more inflectional. Unfortunately this is hardly tenable without a rearrangement of at least items (3) and (4).

At the derivational end of the cline, at the borders with the lexicon, we meet with a similar problem: it is not at all clear why some things are allowed to count as a derivational suffix. Apparently, qualification for suffixhood is reached by purely formal criteria. That is to say, if a string recurs in more than one word in a place where derivational morphemes typically occur, it is assigned the status of a derivational suffix regardless of any semantic considerations. This is the only way to explain how the element *-acle* (*tabernacle*, *receptacle*) comes to be treated as a derivational suffix. From a Middle English point of view, the above-mentioned *vix-en* is a similar case.

In short, what is lacking in the MED's representation of suffixes is a) a principled way of dealing with inflection and derivation and b) a delimitation of derivation proper versus etymologically based segmentation. My ideas about the matter are discussed in chapter 4.2.

Let me now turn to treatments of Middle English morphology outside the MED. Summarising the literature in rather a bold brushstroke, we could say that it has been mainly about inflection.¹⁰ This holds good for the introductions to text-editions as well as for the handbooks. More recent monographs on Middle English morphology have been interested mainly in the gerund (Tajima 1985, Donner 1986).

Among the handbooks, I shall mention here only the ones which are *not* exclusively concerned with phonology: Wright (1928), Mossé (1952), Mustanoja (1960), Brunner (1967), Fisiak (1968), Jones (1972), Dürrmüller/Utz (1974), Markus (1990). Of these, only three, namely Fisiak (1968), Dürrmüller/Utz (1974) and Markus (1990) mention morphological issues outside the immediate confines of morphosyntax.

Fisiak (1968: 113-119) lists "the most frequently used" (p. 116) prefixes and suffixes, though his enumeration with a few examples in each case does not reflect in any way the actual frequency, transparency or meaning of the different patterns. *-al*, for instance, has a separate entry as a suffix deriving nouns from verbs (e.g. *dismissal*), but can hardly be said to have had that function before Early Modern English.

Dürrmüller/Utz (1974) in their textbook on Middle English spend a cursory four and a half pages on the topic, much of which is taken up by a clarification

of terms as is appropriate for an introductory book. Their treatment is much too general to be taken serious issue with but I would still like to contend their statement that

In der me. Zeit werden die Möglichkeiten der Ableitung unter dem Einfluß der romanischen Sprachen vermehrt (Dürnmüller/Utz 1974: 79)

as it seems to me to reflect a widely held opinion. One of the results of the present study is certainly that the Middle English period did not only witness enrichment but also loss of derivational means.

Markus (1990) includes a chapter on "Wortschatz und Wortbildung," which is mainly about lexicology, thus duly reflecting the orientation of the existing literature. He also notes

Leider liegen genaue quantifizierende Untersuchungen zur Rolle dieser Suffixe im ME wie überhaupt zur me. Wortbildung kaum vor. (Markus 1990: 100).

Since then, Burnley's "Lexis and semantics" chapter in the second volume of the *Cambridge History of the English Language* (1992) has filled this gap to some extent. In my view the particular strength of Burnley's compact treatment of Middle English derivational morphology lies in the importance he accords to stylistic differentiation not only within the lexicon but also within derivation, a question that has, on the whole, not been granted sufficient attention in the discussion of derivational morphology (and which also remains under-represented in this book). Given the handbook-character of this article, Burnley does not, however, provide a detailed, quantitative study of Middle English derivation. This circumstance may, in part, explain that his views are not always supported by the conclusions reached in this study. This concerns in particular questions of when an affix "has become part of the general derivational system of the language" (p.446), which in turn influences judgements on the productivity of Romance word-formation processes.

It would, however, be a gross distortion of fact to pretend that there are no detailed studies on Middle English derivation at all. The most recent one is Zbierska-Sawala (1993), dealing with derivation in the language of the Catherine Group, that is Early Middle English. The interest of Zbierska-Sawala's perceptive study is entirely semantic, trying to make operative a cognitive approach towards the analysis of historical material. Another relatively recent study, Franklin (1983) on blending, however, treats an area merely bordering on derivation but certainly not derivation proper. In the 1970s there seems to have been a bout of interest in Middle English nominalisation: Garcia (1970) on inflectional endings as a derivational device, Emonds (1973) on derived nominals, and Wegner (1977) on infinitival nominalisation. This trend already indicates what will become even more obvious when we look at the older literature on the sub-

ject: nominal derivation is everybody's favourite subject. Derived verbs and adjectives are committed to a wallflower existence almost without exception.

Let us return to a straight chronology though. A first stock-taking of Middle English derivation was undertaken by a series of German doctoral dissertations in the first decade of this century.

There are two complementary studies from the university of Strasbourg: Güte (1908) dealing with concrete personal noun suffixes, and Martin (1906) dealing with abstract noun suffixes. The methodology is the same as in the two parallel studies on the same topics in Old English (Best 1905, Both 1909), i.e. with the material arranged according to suffix. The suffixes are further subdivided into native and foreign, with Scandinavian ones in the same category as the French ones. For each suffix the collection of examples (always with their source and a gloss) is organised in the following way: words inherited from Old English, words coined in Middle English. Each section is further subdivided according to the provenance and wordclass of the derivational base. On the whole the examples include an indication on whether the base was an independent Middle English word or not. However, not all formations derived on a purely Old French basis have been included. For instance *coward*, *robard* are excluded (Güte 1908: 87) whereas *mobard*, *haskard* are among the examples. On what grounds such decisions are taken, remains totally unclear. A short section of "Bemerkungen" (remarks) commenting on the number of new formations and giving a general evaluation concludes each section. A certain impression of quantitative matters can be gained through the amount of examples given for each suffix.

Höge (1906), on diminutives, struggles with the fact that there are no real diminutive suffixes in Middle English. This, in combination with the strong etymological tradition of the time, leads Höge to discuss various elements which may or may not have been suffixes at one time but can, in my opinion, by no stretch of the imagination be considered as suffixes in Middle English, let alone diminutive ones. Among others Höge mentions k-suffixes (*yolke*, *larke* etc.), l-suffixes (*bundel*, *thimbel*, *crummel* etc.) or the French suffix *-el*, *-elle* (*rouelle*, *squirrel*, *bokel*, etc.) The following quotation is symptomatic:

In den meisten Deminutivbildungen auf *-el* ist der deminutive Sinn nicht mehr lebendig. Meist war er schon im Altfranzösischen aufgegeben. (Höge 1906: 23)

Adolphi (1909) covers an enormous timespan from the 14th to the 19th century treating "Doppelsuffixe" and "Suffixwechsel". The first term seems to cover two totally different things: on the one hand so-called double-suffixes can arise from the fact that a complex form has become opaque so that speakers feel the need to mark the word properly (again). This seems to have happened in the case of *brac-el-et*, for instance. *Bracel* was not felt to be diminutive any more and