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The Lambeth Homilies Text And Related Matters

Abstract

This is not a real abstract just a quick sentence or two to tell you my name is Susan Walker (registration number 10091011a) and I come from Coniston in Cumbria. I am studying English Language and History. My hobbies are reading, camping, climbing and sailing.

Introduction

This study is based on a set of homilies compiled in the 12thC. The first, forming the bulk of the material and the core of the study, is a collection known as the Lambeth Homilies (LH) (Lambeth Palace 487). The LH are of a mixed nature. First, they were compiled towards the end of the 12thC, but contain material of earlier origin, some going back to Ælfric. This means we have a selection of material from a period when English was changing from Old English (OE) to early Middle English (eME), an important period for study because many OE features - such as a much fuller morphology, and a freer element order (but with specific features still noticable, such as inversion of S-V order in Independent Clauses and SOV order frequent in Dependent Clauses) - were apparent while the language was beginning to show these developments which would lead eventually to Present Day English (PDE).

- i. Old English
- ii. Early Middle English
- iii. Middle English
- iv. Early Modern English

Although English had shown signs of weakening morphology for a some time before this, it is in this period we are able to see the language finally developing from one linguistic type into a new one. As homilies (sermons) were meant to be delivered to an illiterate audience, the language used is less likely to show extremes of stylistic usage than many other forms of written material of the period. However we cannot altogether rule out the possibility of a traditional oral style which may have been familiar to the sermon's audience.

Earlier Analysis

Sisam¹ (1951) has shown that the homilies were copied c.1200 from two earlier 12th Century texts which were themselves copied as collections of religious material (with the exception of two verse pieces all prose sermons). She calls these texts 'X' and 'Y', which relate to divisions of the material in the homilies which she names 'A' and 'B'.

It is fairly clear from her arguments, based mainly on orthography, that, overall, the 'A' section represents an earlier production than the 'B', and she believes some of it may represent the language at a stage many decades earlier than the 'B' section. I should emphasise here that I am mainly concerned with element order evidence: there is of course in the 'B' section a surface coating of later language - e.g. in the use of Norman-French lexis. However, element order will change at a slower rate since it is a syntactic element, part of the basic structure of a language, and will not change as easily as lexis, which changes easily and continually.

¹ See Sisam, Celia, 'The Scribal Tradition of the Lambeth Homilies', *Review of English Studies*, NS 2 (1951)

Changes could include replacing unfamiliar lexis with familiar (e.g. *lage* - 'law' - for *ae*), unfamiliar morphology with familiar (perhaps even expanding for clarity by means of prepositions, *diexis*) . It would surely not have been changed to any great degree unless the intention was to produce what was virtually a new sermon, with a completely different structure. In fact I tested this idea by analysing the element order of several pages of one of the two sermons which are directly from Ælfric. I matched this with an earlier (Old English) version and found that although some lexis had been replaced and some phrases expanded 4, the actual element order was almost the same.

Sisam suggests that 'A' represents a text less developed from OE than 'B': this is due -apart from its being an earlier production- to its containing traceable insertions from OE, including 2 complete sermons from Ælfric which are very close to the originals. What Sisam suggests is that - excluding Ælfric's sermons IX and X (which I did not use) - LH could be treated as two sections - one representing early 12th language (with possibly even earlier text either inserted directly or adapted), the other the language of the end of the century. This suggested the possibility of using the data extracted to do an internal comparison between these sections as well as an external one, against data from other studies. If the differences suggested were genuine, then the LH would provide useful information about the change in the language through the 12th century. If not, then the reasons for the apparent differences could provide valuable insight into the problems of such a study, as could a comparison with other texts of the period.

Computer Analysis

Computer analysis of text first requires that the text be reproduced in machine readable form. The scanner available at Glasgow University's Computer Services Department when I began my research required good quality text: the only copy of LH available was that edited by Morris in the 19th Century, and the quality of the print, although perfectly adequate for reading, contained too many flaws to be used by the scanner. So my first task, after deciding which homilies were to be analysed (namely, all but VI, IX and X), was to type this onto file, proof-read it and correct it. Only once a good computer-file copy was obtained could the real work begin.

This leads one to mention the greatly increased facility with which such a study could be performed now, only 4 years later. Throughout the world corpora have been and are being produced in machine-readable form (disk and CD) and one can envisage a situation in the future when all suitable corpora will be instantly available for analysis of varying kinds.ⁱ

Today we are in the fortunate position of being able to use one of several existing programs which have been developed for the analysis of text. My own choice was that of the OCP (Oxford Concordancing Program) which is widely used. OCP was chosen because it allowed users to insert their own 'tagging' into a text, so that it can be 'marked up' in a manner best suited for the particular analysis to be made. These tags are necessary as the analysis programs available cannot do grammatical analysis of raw text (their main use is for lexical indexing and concordancing), particularly with early English texts. Each 'tag' contains some of the grammatical information needed in abbreviated form. It also has a very basic set of commands which can be organised into miniature 'programs' - allowing users to adapt the program to suit the task.

These commands are basically to allow the user to select tagged areas of text (which can be chapters, pages, paragraphs, etc.) to be examined. Other commands allow one to specify words or phrases or word 'frames' (such as 'm*ss' which can pick out examples such as 'miss, mass, moss' from a text.) This could also be used to pick out certain grammatical forms, for instance '*ed' to pick out past tenses. It is also possible to collocate - that is pick out particular words

that occur in close proximity to each other. Combining these commands allows the user to select text where a specified set of conditions prevail.

Some Sample Findings

Note that in the discussion that follows, the Lambeth Homilies (LH) were divided into groups A and B, for reasons explained above.

The data did not give the hoped-for indications of clear diachronic difference within the text (which would have been due partly to incorporation/adaption of earlier text or the result of a continuing tradition of language style in such works originating in the OE period, or perhaps both). However, there were enough differences to suggest some inclusion of material from earlier texts, or due to a 'traditional' style which was weakening over time. Firstly, there is 3% to 4% more SOV order in 'A' than in 'B' Dep. Cls., which taken with the ICI data (+5% in A) might suggest a more 'archaic' style for A. However, more importantly, there is completely contradictory evidence in the CjCl columns, which show a very strong (+13%) slant towards SOV order in B. The number of clauses this column's data is based on is, admittedly, low enough (32) to feel that this difference is being artificially exaggerated, however it still seems suggestive.

To try to discover what was going on here, I collocated element order and Object type in selections (c. 40%) of text from A and B. This was not a true random sample, but it was not possible to use OCP's random sampling feature and retain data for individual (whole) clauses. The data obtained was organised in various tables to aid comparisons: an example of one such table follows.

Table showing ratios of pronoun (Pn) object to noun (N) object in the selection (ignoring small number of NClS).

Table 1

	A	B
ICls	Pn/N = 11/54	Pn/N = 3/42
CjCls	Pn/N = 9/15	Pn/N = 4/17
SCLs	Pn/N = 26/40	Pn/N = 8/27
Total	Pn/N = 46/109	Pn/N = 15/86

It was noticeable that A had $46/109 = 42\%$ Pn (vs N), and B had $15/86 = 17\%$ Pn. These figures exclude Relative Clause data which is unsuitable because of the position of relative pronouns is often due solely to the chance of the semantics of a particular sentence. The percentages just quoted suggest that A will have more SOV order than B since in early English SOV was especially common when O = Pn and the over-all totals seem to verify this - except in the case of CjCls. On the other hand the B pattern is important since the CjCls have the highest percentage of SOV order in the Homilies. In early OE, the highest by far percentage of SOV order is in SCLs, a lower percentage in CjCls and the lowest in ICls. The figure here is probably somewhat exaggerated due to the low figures it is based on (9/32 clauses) but it is unlikely it is completely accidental, especially when one considers the fact that B has proportionately more O = N than A in general, and in SOV order clauses in particular.

Examining the phrase-level data from the sample text we find:

A has 26 Pns to 1 N in SOV order.

B has 4 Pns to 9 Ns in SOV order.

Now it has been noted in many studies of the development of English that although SOV order survived into late ME, it became more and more commonly seen where O = Pn and less where O = N. The figures above seem to be evidence enough to consider that B (with its much greater use of full Ns as O), and not A has been most influenced by OE, and here may be an explanation of the contradictory CjCl data for B. This is because in early OE CjCls seemed to have been regarded as forms of SCIs, with more SOV order; later when CjCls began to be used more as in modern English, that is, as semi-independent clauses, they began to show more features in common with ICls.

This impression is strengthened by the data related to other element orders. Again this is inconsistent, and is partly a result of the variations between other elements, which is difficult to even out. However if we consider it along with its O = Pn/N data some points are clear.

SVO order has the following associated O-type data.

Table 2

	A	B
ICl	2/36 Pn/N	1/20 Pn/N
CjCl	4/11 Pn/N	1/14 Pn/N
SCl	8/37 Pn/N	1/19 Pn/N
Total	14/84 Pn/N	3/53 Pn/N

Many argue that the development of SVO order in OE was strongly influenced by weight, and Kohonen's data 6 shows Sawles Warde having far more Pn O in SVO than the Catholic Homilies(CH). This seems to be strong evidence that the language began to use SVO order as a grammatical signal during this period rather than as one of various ways of ordering due to influence of theme, weight, etc. The above (LH) data shows that A has more Pn O in SVO than B: another piece of evidence that B is, if not 'older', then the work of a scribe not bothering to adapt his OE Homily style to the same extent as the A scribe. Data from Shores' analysis of the Peterborough Chronicle, shows a figure of 27/77 for Pn/N (all clauses, including RCls) - i.e. a ratio of 35% Pn which is closer to A than B. Since this is a text of which we have a pretty clear (mid-12thC) dating, this tends to confirm the conclusion.

Conclusions

My own opinion regarding the dating of the LH sections is that B represents a collection of older material that had previously been transmitted (by various copies) over a long period in a fairly intact form, close to the original. Either some more contemporary lexis (particularly Norman French) gradually crept in, or was added in a final, late 12th Century version, while retaining the basic syntactic structure. This, combined with the later orthography, led to Sisam's conclusion that it was the later text linguistically.

In the A section however, there is more of a mixture of material - whereas B is more consistent. We find, in A, as well as some genuinely OE material (which shows signs of expansion of the elements - a sign that the case system was no longer adequate to express the original ideas 8), material which shows distinctly different styles, and also some use of more contemporary language. When the known OE material is excluded from the analysis, we see what the 'surface' hides: that the remainder of the A section is based on a text or texts which are structurally (i.e. in syntax/element order) more recent than the B section.

Some worthwhile points about this kind of study have been highlighted by this article. The first is that in examining the diachronic development of a language it is not enough just to note that one particular feature changes. In the above example, differences in element order alone - despite some contradictory evidence - suggested the A section to be earlier. But an examination of other features showed that this could be explained, and gave strong evidence that it was the B section which was in fact the earlier. This shows that it is necessary to take into account a variety of evidence and determine whether or not it all (or mostly) agrees with a particular theory. It is especially important in the field of element order study where at some stages of linguistic development the word order seen may vary greatly for reasons of style, tradition and other reasons. Two contemporary OE texts might vary quite extensively in their element order, yet be very close in their time of composition. Only by examining as wide a range of other evidence (and using known certainties about the development as a guide) can we be sure that any particular piece of evidence is a sign of real linguistic change and not merely a unusual but contemporary stylistic variation.

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ⁱ Of course now, some years later many corpora of various types are available in electronic form via the web, viz Gutenberg project, etc.

Appendix

Library Resources

Library keyword search:

AUTHOR Koch, Peter O., 1953-

TITLE The Aztecs, the Conquistadors, and the making of Mexican culture / Peter O. Koch.

PUBL. INFO. Jefferson, N.C. : McFarland & Co., c2006.

AUTHOR Elliott, John Huxtable.

TITLE Empires of the Atlantic world : Britain and Spain in America, 1492-1830 / J.H. Elliott.

PUBL. INFO. New Haven, Conn. ; London : Yale University Press, c2006.

AUTHOR Truxillo, Charles A., 1953-

TITLE By the sword and the cross : the historical evolution of the Catholic world monarchy in Spain and the New World, 1492-1825 /

Charles A. Truxillo.

PUBL. INFO. Westport, Conn. ; London : Greenwood Press, 2001.

AUTHOR Hill, Ruth.

TITLE Sceptres and sciences in the Spains : four humanists and the new philosophy (ca. 1680-1740) / Ruth Hill.

PUBL. INFO. Liverpool : Liverpool University Press, c2000.

AUTHOR Rabasa, José, 1948-

TITLE Writing violence on the northern frontier : the historiography of sixteenth century New Mexico and Florida and the legacy of conquest / José Rabasa.

PUBL. INFO. Durham, N.C. ; London : Duke University Press, c2000.

Web Page text

TOE Online is an electronic version of the second impression of A Thesaurus of Old English, first published by King's College London in 1995. Printed copies of the second impression (2000) are available from Rodopi of Amsterdam. A full account of the genesis and rationale of the project is contained in the introduction to these volumes.

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A growing dark, darkening (ge)sweorcan [View this section](#)

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[PDF] PRIMARY SOURCES AT ST MATTHIAS LIBRARY

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