

Olha BILYNSKA

ROMANCE SUFFIX RIVALRY OF ACTION NOUNS FROM MIDDLE ENGLISH VERBS IN THE *OED* TEXTUAL PROTOTYPES

Introduction

The aim of the present paper lies in revealing the diachronic productivity of rival suffixal models of deverbal nouns and common-root suffix variance in the etymological layers of ME verbs. We shall proceed on the assumption that the issue of reconstructing onomasiological resources over time is possible from the earliest quotations in the *Oxford English Dictionary* (henceforth: *OED*) that are also known as diachronic textual prototypes. To meet the aims of this study, the running selection of textual prototypes for ME verbs and their action nouns with Romance suffixes was compiled. The entire 2nd CD-Rom edition, version 3 was used (Weiner 1999). A somewhat comparable approach can be found in Zbierska-Sawala (1989) and Culperer and Phoebe (1996). The issue of the rivalry between borrowed suffixes is brought up in Kastovsky (2006:165). The heuristic potential of the evidence from the *OED* textual prototypes can be realized only with the development of specific software capable to meet the set tasks.

Etymological classes of Middle English verbs

French penetrations into the Middle English verbal system amount to 2,099 lexemes (only subsequently productive verbs are considered). They all have separate lemmata in the *OED*. There are also 114 stems of verbs that are found in the deverbal coinages of various categorial affiliation dated before 1500. However, their diachronic textual prototypes are dated after 1500.

All in all, to determine the streams of French influence on ME use is made of the notion of the **contacteme**. The contacteme is a cognate, otherwise referred to as etymon, from the source language deemed to have been the bridge in the

process of inter-language interaction recoverable from the etymological sources (see Skeat 1909; Onions, Friedrichsen and Burchfield 1966; Klein 1971; Stone and Rothwell 1977–1990). The first stream of French influence on the Middle English lexicon came from Anglo-Norman. A proportion of such penetrations reveal Anglo-Norman etymons only, otherwise labelled as Anglo-French or Norman French: *allay** 1377, *avent** 1375... [71 verbs].

For reasons of space the results of the enquiries into the developed electronic framework of analysis will be limited to initial representation of the downloadable alphabetical lists with the indication of the total number of cases in the square brackets following the illustration. The lexemes that have become archaic are marked with asterisks. Such lists are diachronic lexicological objects whose constituents were entered into the aggregate database manually. The objects are construable upon the application of the developed software and may constitute a protocol to the queries in the form of an appendix.

Most of the verbs with Anglo-Norman cognates, however, also show up in a concomitant etymon in Old French: *abash* 1325, *accloy* 1325, *affeer* 1440 ... [201 verbs]. These two groups of verbs constitute the first and earliest layer of French lineage into ME verbs. The verbs that penetrated into ME revealing Anglo-Norman etymons were juxtaposed with the penetrations of the second etymological layer of French lineage that originate from Old French etymons having no attested Anglo-Norman parallels: *abandon* 1375, *abase* 1393, *abatayl** 1380... [1446 verbs].

Some of the verbs in each of the two etymological layers that have been singled out have Middle French or – alternatively – contemporary French etymons. In such cases the role of the contacteme which is focal to our research is allotted to an older, i.e. Old French or Anglo-Norman cognate, respectively. At the same time, there are verbs with the *OED* textual prototypes dated in ME the etymological derivation of which is confined to Middle French etymons: *accept* 1360, *adverse** 1393, *advert* 1423 ... [122 verbs]. There are also verbs whose etymological derivation stops at the contemporary French cognates: *abolish* 1490, *absent* 1400, *abuse* 1413 ... [259 verbs]. The latter two sets of verbs make up a third etymological layer of French penetrations into Middle English.

The prerequisite of referring verbs to the third layer of French lineage is negative: their respective cognates attested in the etymological dictionaries are lacking documented Old French and/or Anglo-Norman contactemes. Unless they were neologisms of a later period in the source language itself, the adduced etymons of this layer of penetrations into the English lexicon have earlier forms of their own in Middle or Old French. The fact that these source language forms were not recognized as contactemes in the etymological derivation of the respective penetrations into the ME lexicon seems controversial in view of the arising chronological discrepancy: Old French is recognized to be chronologically homogeneous with Middle English but the verbs that have *OED*

registered textual prototypes in Middle English are attributed post-Old French parallels by the etymological dictionaries.

The easiest way to deal with this controversy is to claim that the etymological dictionaries are inconsistent. Obviously, this is not the best solution. Another possibility is to hypothesize that the contacteme in the verbs belonging to the third etymological layer of French influence on English was probably in the Latin cognate which some of these verbs indeed had. Yet, most of the verbs with the said parameters of etymological derivation to post-Old French cognates had no Latin parallels that could be recognized as probable contactemes in the process of language interaction.

In the first two etymological layers of French penetrations into the ME verbs, about a quarter of lexemes had their *OED* textual prototypes attested before 1300. In the third etymological layer verbs typically show their earliest quotations attested after the year 1300 although there are some counter-examples: *arm* 1205, *depaint** 1225, *dure* 1275 ... [7 verbs].

The verbs that penetrated into Middle English via Anglo-Norman or Old French occasionally reveal Latin cognates. However, of the two parallel cognates the French one is taken for a contacteme. At the same time, there are a number of verbs of non-native origin in ME that show Latin cognates only: *abbreviate* 1450, *abhor* 1449, *abject** 1475 ... [358 verbs]. In contrast to the quota revealed for verbs of French lineage, among the penetrations from Latin there was a much higher proportion of constituents (over 250 verbs) attested in the *OED* textual prototypes after 1500 whose common-root coinages were found in the *OED* first citations dated before 1500. According to the earliest *OED* quotations, the penetration of verbs into ME from the three layers of French lineage exceeded the number of verbal neologisms of native etymology registered in that period: *abraid** 1430, *accurse* 1175, *acknowledge* 1481... [1,539 verbs].

Making sense of productivity data

Let us now consider the earliest quotations of deverbal coinages originating from verbs of French origin dated in the *OED* before 1500. Four suffixal models of Romance origin responsible for the creation of action nouns from these verbs, namely *-age*, *-ance*, *-(t/s)ion* and *-ment*, are taken into account. The homonymy of one-word action nouns and factitive nouns is resolved by taking into account the older counterpart. In this study the dating of the *OED* textual prototypes of the verb and those of its common-root single or multiple (when there are two or more than two coinages) action nouns were entered into an electronic database. Then software was developed to assess the number of coinages with a given suffix at a specific moment of time for the respective etymological layer(s) by building their distribution curves.

Throughout EME (1150–1300) the suffix *-ance* was found in the textual prototypes of action nouns more often than other Romance suffixes: *acquaintance* 1300, *allegiance** 1297, *coverance** 1300 ... [16 coinages]. Following it in the gradually descending scale are the suffixes *-ment* and *-ion*: *acouplement** 1300, *admonishment* 1300, *advancement* 1297 ... [14 coinages] and *assumption* 1297, *citation* 1297, *circumcision* 1175 ... [10 coinages]. There is a single *OED* attested derivative with the suffix *-age*: *passage* 1290. We will preserve the succession of suffixes originating from their EME productivity for all the electronic queries.

The evidence for LME is based on the *OED* textual prototypes dated after 1300. Suffixal models of Romance etymology for the creation of action nouns in LME (1301–1500) reveal a gradually descending scale of diachronic productivity (see *Figure 1*), which does, however, vary from one etymological layer to another. In the first etymological layer of French penetrations into ME the suffixes *-ment* and *-ance* are almost equally attested: cf. *abashment* 1410, *amercement* 1386 *anornament** 1325... [22 coinages] and *abashance** 1430, *affeerance** 1432, *allegiance** 1400 ... [19 coinages]. The derivatives with the other two suffixes *-ion* and *-age* are quite individual: cf. *exception* 1385, *occupation* 1340 ... [4 coinages] and *stoppage* 1465, *testimonage** 1483 [2 coinages].

In the stems of the second layer of French influence throughout LME the suffix *-age* remains the least productive: *arrearage* 1315, *arrivage** 1384, *coinage* 1380 ... [12 coinages]. The suffix *-ance* (*accordance* 1303, *acquittance* 1330, *allowance* 1377 ... [61 coinages]) was less productive than the other two suffixes: *-ment* (*accordment* 1330, *accusament* 1374, *advisement* 1330 ... [82 coinages]) and *-ion* (*administration* 1315, *admonition* 1374, *alienation* 1388 ... [73 coinages]). Of the latter two suffixes, the suffix *-ion* had never been more productive than the suffix *-ment* in contrast to the mean ratio shown on curves 2 and 3 for the aggregate productivity of these suffixes in LME (see *Figure 1*). However, for a short while between 1440 and 1460 the actual number of coinages with these suffixes in the second etymological layer of verbs was identical.

In the third etymological layer of French lineage into the ME verbs the suffix *-ment*, which was the most active one in the previous two layers is less than only half as active as the suffix *-ion*: cf. *advertisement* 1460, *arbitrament* 1400, *arrousement** 1483 ... [27 coinages] and *abusion** 1374, *acception* 1382 *adversation** 1470 ... [68 coinages]. This difference is responsible for the period of the highest diachronic productivity of the suffix *-ion* in curve 3 of *Figure 1*. The productivity of the suffix *-age* is unsurprisingly negligible: *pickage* 1364, *repassage* 1413, *taxage** 1483 [3 coinages]. In contrast to ME textual prototypes of coinages from the first two etymological layers of French lineage the productivity of the suffix *-ance* in LME for the third etymological layer appears to be quite humble: *assistance* 1398, *convenance* 1483, *discontinuance* 1398... [13 coinages].

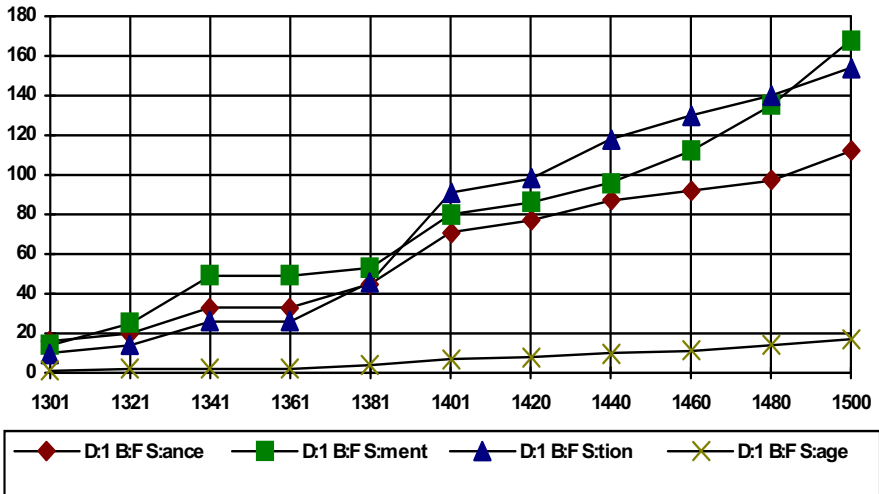


Figure 1. Suffix productivity for the stems of French lineage in LME.

Post-ME *OED* textual prototypes of the studied suffixal coinages had just one descending productivity scale throughout the period that can be seen from the vertical succession of the numeric values on the respective curves for ‘moments in history’ put on the horizontal axis (see *Figure 1* and *Figure 2*). The gap between the productivity of the suffixes *-ment* and *-ion* tended to increase. The other two suffixes remained peripheral but the productivity difference between them was smaller than in the ME textual prototypes. However, the *OED* textual prototypes dated after 1500 reveal a layer-bound relatedness of the productivity of the suffixes *-ment* and *-ion* different from that established for the *OED* textual prototypes dated before 1500.

In the first etymological layer of French lineage for one derivative in *-ion* there were about five coinages in *-ment*: cf. *deforciation* 1864, *disclamation* 1592, *disportation** 1622 ... [10 coinages] and *affrayment** 1731, *allegement** 1516, *appropriament** 1633 ... [46 coinages]. A similar ratio was found for verbs which show only Old French contactemes: cf. *abjuration* 1514, *absorption* 1597, *abstention* 1521 ... [78 coinages] and *abandonment* 1611, *abasement* 1561, *abatement* 1513 ... [246 coinages].

In the third etymological layer of French lineage the ultimate productivity of the latter two suffixes is quite close although diachronically the suffix *-ion* tended to be predominant (see *Figure 3*). However, in the corpus of *OED* textual prototypes from post-ME sources the suffix *-ment* revealed a higher growth rate than the suffix *-ion*: cf. *abolishment* 1542, *absentment** 1600, *abusement** 1819 ... [75 coinages] and *absentation* 1800, *alimentation* 1590, *annexion* 1600 ... [39 coinages].

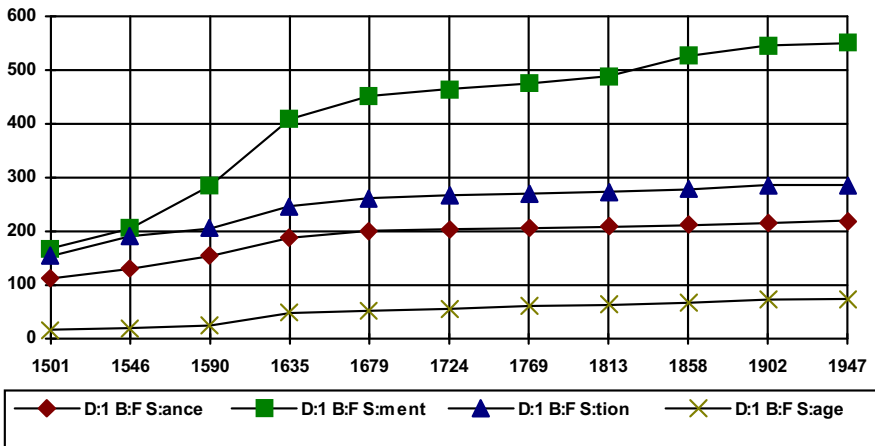


Figure 2. Suffix productivity for the stems of French lineage after ME.

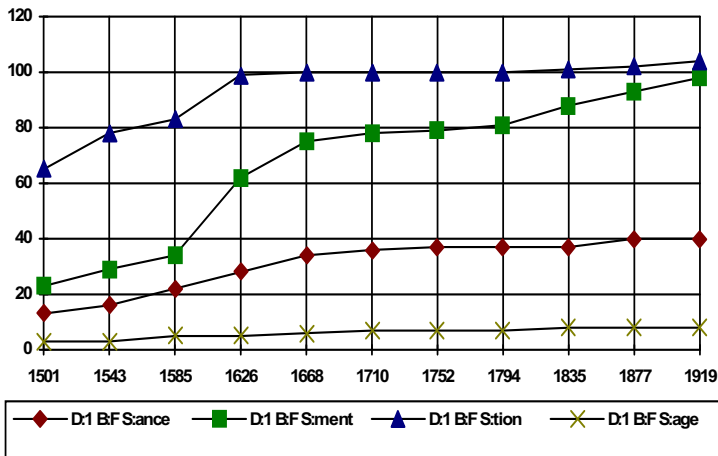


Figure 3. Suffix productivity after 1500 for the stems of the third layer of French lineage into ME.

The highest occurrence of the suffix *-ion* in the third layer of French lineage into the ME verbs coincides with the dominant status of the same suffix in the descending productivity scale for action nouns originating from ME stems with Latin contactemes (see Figure 4): *abbreviation* 1485, *abjection* 1410, *abomination* 1366 ... [434 coinages]; *abhorment** 1576, *adjectament** 1630, *adjurement* 1382 ... [61 coinages]; *accedence* 1597, *ascendance* 1742, *committance** 1650 ... [41 coinages]; *distillage* 1877, *narratage* 1948, *plantage** 1606 [3 coinages].

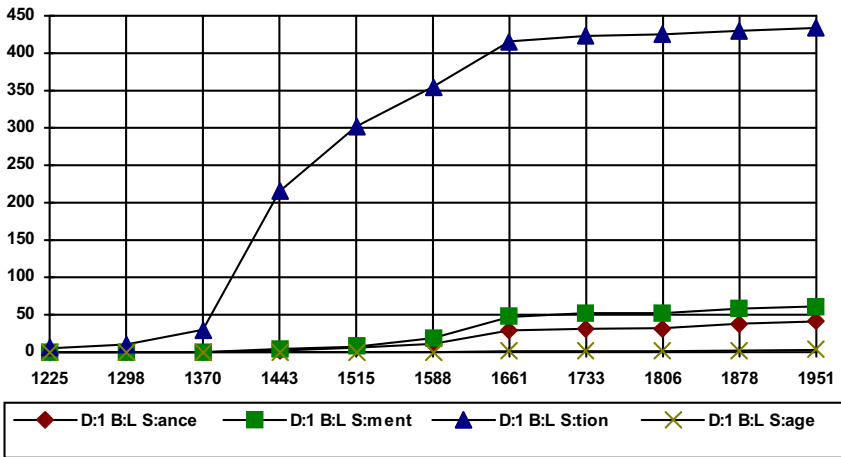


Figure 4. Suffix productivity from the stems that penetrated into ME from Latin.

The Romance suffixes were assimilated and attached to native stems attested in the *OED* before 1500 with a gradually descending productivity scale of their own (see Figure 5). Notice that in contrast to all the non-native etymological layers of ME verbs, the suffix *-age* is several fold more productive than the suffixes *-ion* and *-ance* (see curves 2, 3 and 4 on Figure 5): *acknowledgment* 1594, *affordment** 1633, *agastment** 1594 ... [102 coinages]; *answerage** 1642, *bestowage** 1656, *borrowage** 1440 ... [91 coinages]; *abearance* 1568, *abidance* 1647, *bearance* 1725... [27 coinages], *blubberation* 1812, *blusteration* 1803, *chattation* 1799 ... [16 coinages].

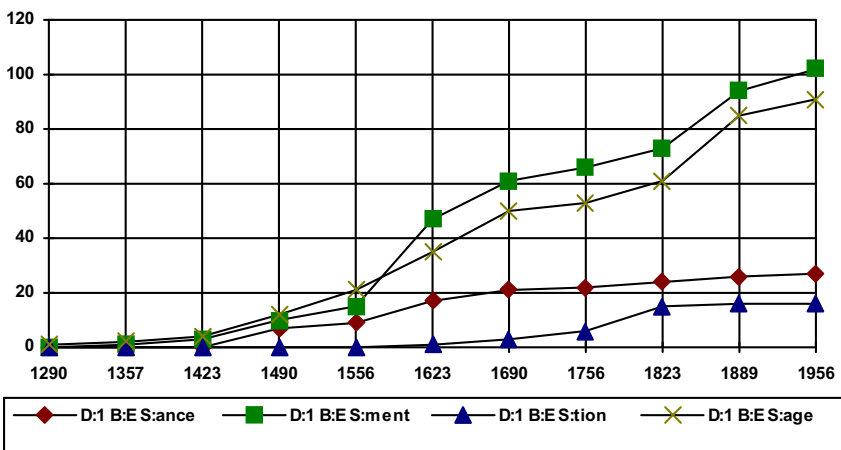


Figure 5. Romance suffix productivity from native stems attested up till 1500.

Conclusions

It is fairly obvious that any study of suffixal productivity is inseparable from the requirements of completeness and accuracy in respect to the drawn evidence. At the same time, it seems to surpass mere mechanical calculations. The established proportions between the obtained lists of coinages with specific suffixes demonstrate the onomasiological potential available in sections of the lexicon over time.

The historical distribution of coinages with Romance suffixes in the etymological classes of ME verbs proves to be uneven. The fluctuation of this unevenness with the affiliation of the intermediate productivity points to the layers of the etymologically mixed ME lexicon is recoverable from the *OED* textual prototypes with the help of adequate strategies of corpus-based queries. The framework developed here is believed to be applicable to the study of other manifestations of suffix rivalry in the historical deverbal word-formation of English.

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