

MORPHONOLOGICAL CHANGES IN THE MIDDLE ENGLISH PERSONAL NAMES

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Abstract

Alongside the formation of the English national language in the Middle English period the formation of the anthroponymical system of the English language continued. The information presented below gives an analysis of some morphonological changes in the structure of the Middle English anthroponyms caused by the adaptation of the name stock brought after the Norman Conquest to the Middle English language.

Keywords: anthroponyms, morphonological structure, phoneme, elision, reduction, syllable, borrowings, Old English names, Norman - French names, hypocoristics, name stock, compound name

Introduction

The Middle English period (XI – XV century) (Reznik, 2001) is considered to be the time of the paramount importance for the further development of the English language. This is due to the fact that the basis of the officially accepted form of the language was rooted in this period, which gave rise to setting up the national English language. Until the end of the 15th century the English language as a unifying means for various dialects of the British Isles had not existed. The Norman Conquest of the year 1066 brought as a part of the French culture the French language which was very quickly borrowed by the noble, political and poetic milieu. Nevertheless, throughout the following five centuries nonlinguistic situations (basically in politics and literature) restricted the London dialect as a leading one that had been taken as a foundation for the future English language. One of the most important events for the development of the English language became the Provisions of Oxford accepted by Henry the III and written not only in Latin and French, but, significantly, in English as well. They were the first government documents published in English since the Norman Conquest. Beginning with 1326 the English was recognized officially in the Parliament and courts. King Henry IV (1399-1413) became the first king who used English instead of French in making public speeches. The turn of the 15th century put an end to a series of dynastic civil wars to the throne of England between the Houses of Lancaster and York which meant the end of feudal feuds, the establishment of the

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absolute monarchy, political and consequently linguistic centralization having resulted in the surpass of the London dialect over the others. Moreover, during the Middle English period, in the late 14th century, the first translation of the Bible into English was done by John Wycliff. Among other factors that provided the establishment of English the following are worth mentioning: the development of the printing press with first editions made in English and the works of Geoffrey Chaucer. The latter one introduced a great conformity in English spelling.

Morphonological Changes in Old English Names

The Middle English name stock is clearly divided into the following basic groups:

- Old English names;
- Norman-French names;
- Biblical names and names of Catholic saints;
- Germanic names.

Due to extralinguistic changes, and, namely, to the appearance of a new, Norman - French culture having been brought to the British Isles by William the Conqueror, the system of the existing names of the Old English period had undergone crucial changes. Thus, not more that in 400 years' time, not a long period in terms of history, the amount of the Old English names had lessened almost four times. It reduced from 95 % to 20 % respectively (Chursina, 2002).

This small number of Old English names that had survived became a subject to morphonological changes generated both by the modification of the phonetic system of the language and the impact of the Norman French language. As a prominent Russian linguist Smirnitsky A.I. mentions "...the French language, having penetrated to the upper class society was taken as a model. It grounded the influence of the French spelling, more stable and standardized on the English one" (Smirnitsky, 1998:37).

Among the most typical changes in the morphonological structure of the Old English anthroponyms in the Middle English period we refer the following:

- monophthongization of a long diphthong ēa, which was a frequent component of many compound Old English names: Ēadweard > Edward, Ēadmund > Edmund, Ēadrīc > Edric*;
- monophthongization of Old English short diphthongs ea и eo: Ēadweard > Edward, Hereweard > Hereward, Cuþbeorht > Cuthbert;
- the elision of \h\ before the consonants \l\, \n\, \r\ in the beginning of a name: Hrōðbeorht > Rōðbert, Hringār > Ringer;
- the reduction of the final \e\ in the unstressed position which was graphically inconsistent: Ecgwin, but Baundewine, Godwine.

* here and forth the examples are borrowed from the following references: Diskins, 1951, Funke, 1944

The impact of the Norman - French language on the English name stock caused the so-called francization of the Old English names. Primarily the changes took place with the names containing the interdental sound [ð], frequent in the Old English but not used in French. This sound was either omitted: Aðelwine > Alwin, Aðelbeorht > Albert, or replaced by dental [d]: Aðelheard > Adelard, Roðbert > Ro(d)bert, or, preserving the pronunciation was graphically latinized: Aðelwulf > Ethelwulf. Then, the cluster of consonants in the middle of the names, the phonetic phenomenon rare for the French language, was a subject to elision. The Old English names the second component of which began with \h\ were the first to undergo changes: Ealdhelm > Eldelm, Eāstorhild > Estrild, Aðelheard > Adelard. Omission of the consonant phoneme /h/ in the anthroponymic adjectival compound '-berht' had not been found in Old English names as well until the Norman Conquest which can imply that the name element '-bert' was imported to the English name stock by the French and caused the spread of the etymologically closed but French formed names like Gilbert, Hubert and others. Moreover, the elision in case of three and more consonants in the middle of the name is observed in names having '-wulf' and '-weard' as their second components. In both cases the labial [w] was omitted or replaced by the labial-dental [v]: Randwulf > Randolph, Hereward > Harvard.

Morphological Changes in the Names of the Norman-French Origin

In the Middle English name stock the influx of the Norman - French names compiled approximately 15%. During this period such anthroponyms as Bernard, Bētram, Gerland, Gileberd, Henri, Hubert, Lodewik, Matilda, Richard, Wilfrid, William were imported.

Among the borrowings the preference is given to two categories. Firstly, two-composite names were easier to assimilate. Secondly, the names with more or less understandable meaning of their components were favoured. The both factors indicate that selection was mainly preconditioned by the morphological structure of a name. Antroponyms more similar to Old English names in terms of rhythmical and structural organization were more easily adopted.

Two composite Norman names being akin in their structure to Anglo-Saxon names were frequently borrowed. The resemblance and difference in structure between Anglo-Saxon names and francized German names is, for instance, observed in the consequence of their components. Thus, one of the most frequent names in the Middle English period became the name Richard [ˈriːtʃɑːd]. If reconstructed, the name acquires the form Rīchart, in which it might have existed in Old High German. Both components of this name were differently combined in Old English. The initial composite '- rīc' is one of the most frequent in the Old English name making (Æberīc, Brihtrīc, Wulfīc, etc.). Nevertheless, the composite '-rīc' is hardly found in the initial position among Old English names. The positional

variation in a similar Germanic compound name can be a result of the influence of different ethnolinguistic area on the traditions of name creation. The second name component ‘-hart’ is also one of the most frequent among Germanic name composites. In the Old English anthroponymicon it was realized in the form «heard» (the Germanic a > ea: the breaking of a front vowel [a] followed by consonant clusters rr, r+vowel, ll, l+consonant and before -h (Brunner, 1955:181)

The morphonology of a personal name in the Middle English period is the reflection of general linguistic laws, observed, in our case, at the level of phonetics and morphology. In accordance with these laws the Middle English name ‘Richard’ may be considered as the result of the development of the truly Old English name Rīchēard, the structure of which experienced changes typical of the Middle English phonetics: rīc > ric – quality change of the Old English vowel ī in the closed unstressed syllable, [kʰ] > [ʃ] – affricate [ʃ] as a result of the palatalization of the Old English sound [kʰ], which was spelt according to the French norms as a digraph “ch”; heard > hard – monophthongization of ēa.

The inflow and circulation of the names like Hubert, Gilebert (d), Bertram, Bernard, Richard in the Middle English period indicates the preferences in borrowing names with the composites –‘beorht (-beorhtō)’ and ‘-heard’. The both components are found among Old English names and their transformation was discussed above.

During the Middle English period the Biblical names and the names of the Catholic saints became also widely spread. These names, (Peirs, Perres, modern Peter, Annais, modern Agnes) chiefly borrowed into English through French, were insignificantly changed in the Middle English language.

Alongside the general instability in spelling, which was a typical phenomenon in the Middle English language, the imported names with the unusual (unfamiliar) sound and letter combinations were very often spelt in two variants. Thus, the majority of anthroponyms with the affricate [dʒ], appeared in that period, coexisted, as many other borrowings in two variants: Joan – Ioan, Julian – Iulian, etc.

The imported Norman - French names also brought into the Middle English the French hypocoristic suffixes – -et, -on, -(l)in. The data of our research is not abundant in the examples of this kind and is presented by singular names: Alison, Juliet, Elizabet, Maryon. However, the antroponymic dictionaries are more prolific in illustrations. The fact that the English hypocoristics ‘-kin’ and ‘-cock’ appear as a part of a name about the end of the 13th century and in the Old English period the evidence of the hypocoristic names is not found makes us suggest that the idea of a hypocoristic name was probably introduced to the English naming system by the Norman - French culture.

Conclusions

During the Middle English period alongside the establishment of the national English language the main groups of anthroponyms that have been used up till now were formed. They include Old English names, Norman - French names, the Biblical names and names of the Catholic saints.

The interference and integration of French and Anglo-Saxon dialects brought about changes in pronunciation and spelling of names. The absence of norms for writing resulted in numerous variations of one and the same borrowed name.

The changes in the morphological structure of personal names in the Middle English period touches upon, on the one hand, Normanization of the Old English anthroponyms and, on the other hand, the assimilation of the borrowed Norman names by the Middle English language. The former includes omission or substitution of the phoneme /ð/, which was difficult for the Normans to pronounce, elision of the middle phonemes in consonant clusters in the compound names, fusion of the morphemes and modification of the semantics of the name, when the anthroponym was perceived as a whole unlike as a two part word as in the Old English period. The latter is reflected in the assimilation processes relevant in general to the language of that period. These are quality modifications of the stressed vowels dependent on the type of a syllable and rhythmical organization of a name, monophthongization of diphthongs, the introduction of affricates, reduction of vowels in unstressed syllables.

Among the new phenomena in the naming practice of that period one can refer to the usage of the Biblical names and the names of the Catholic saints morphologically adapted as they were from Norman - French and the introduction of the system of hypocoristic suffixes which gave rise to the development of the English hypocoristics.

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