Middle High German: Lexis and Language Contact

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MHG word meaning

The meanings of words in MHG often differ from those of NHG

e.g. *âventiure* 'occurrence' > *Abenteuer* 'adventure' (N.B. shift of gender)

This will not be the focus of this lecture, and you are directed to Jones & Jones (2019; 2024) for the thorough discussion of such changes

âventiure (str f). Borrowed from French (OF *aventure*) in the twelfth century (see M§31), *âventiure* ('adventure') signifies a quintessential feature of the chivalric romance. Its basic meaning is 'an incident, something that happens to or befalls a person'. It is a chance occurrence rather than a staged event (cf. Engl 'adventitious'); this is evident when something is said to happen *von âventiure*, i.e. 'by chance'. When the knightly hero of chivalric romance seeks *âventiure*, he does not know what awaits him and may appear to be riding aimlessly, but his quest for adventure is a form of voluntary exposure to whatever forces (God, fortune, fate) govern the course of events. He hopes that he will be confronted with challenges (usually involving combat) that will enable him to establish or regain his reputation as a knight (cf. → *arbeit*). Typically the hero of romance has the good fortune to encounter situations in which he is able not only to demonstrate his prowess, but also to enhance or re-establish his honour (cf. → *êre*) and moral standing. His success in overcoming the dangerous tests that he has to face is often a qualification for him to win the love of a lady and to assume a high-ranking social position. A subsidiary sense of MHG *âventiure*, which is not present in OF *aventure*, is 'story' or 'source'. It arose as the term German poets used to refer to the 'tales of adventure' that they adapted from French. It also found its way into native German works to designate a subdivision of a narrative, as in the *Nibelungenlied*, which is divided into thirty-nine *âventiure*. NHG *Abenteuer* (now neuter, not feminine) retains the sense of challenge and danger of *âventiure*, but otherwise has little in common with this central concept of chivalric literature.

dû, ir (personal pronouns; see M§10). Grammatically *dû* is singular and *ir* is plural, but *ir* is often found in MHG works as a polite form for a single addressee (there is no polite *Sie* in MHG). Within families, parents address children with *dû*, while children may use either *dû* or *ir* in addressing their parents. Among adults in general, *dû* is used for addressees of low social standing and *ir* for those of high social standing; thus *ir* is the typical form of address in courtly literature, even between spouses. However, other considerations may override these conventions. For example, *dû* may be used as a mark of intimacy (e.g. between relatives and friends) even if both are of high social standing; on the other hand, a speaker may use *dû* to a social superior as a mark of disrespect. The choice of *dû* and *ir* is situational in the sense that the same speaker may switch pronoun for the same addressee from one conversation to another (for an example, see T3, line 130, where Brunhild addresses Kriemhild with *ir*, in contrast to her earlier use of *dû*). The choice of pronoun is also fluid in that different manuscripts sometimes show a different choice between *dû* and *ir* at exactly the same point in a single work.

MHG Word formation

Words can be simplex or complex (inflected, derived or compound)

Inflection produces different forms of the 'same word'

Usually indicates morphosyntactic information

e.g. tense, person, number, gender, mood

Think verb conjugation, noun declension and adjective agreement

Present

		INDICATIVE		SUBJUNCTIVE	
		MHG	OHG	MHG	OHG
Sing.	1.	nime	nimu	nëme	nëme
	2.	nimes(t)	nimis(t)	nëmes(t)	nëmēs(t)
	3.	nimet	nimit	nëme	nëme

Present

		INDICATIVE		SUBJUNCTIVE	
		MHG	OHG	MHG	OHG
Plur.	1.	nëmen	nëmamēs, -ēm	nëmen	nëmēm
	2.	nëmet	nëmet	nëmet	nëmēt
	3.	nëment	nëmant	nëmen	nëmēn

MHG Word formation

Words can be simplex or complex (inflected, derived or compound)

Derivation produces 'new words' from a base

Often involves a change in word class, e.g. verb→noun, noun→adjective

Usually involves derivational affixes

    Erz-reaktionär, Weis-heit, Ge-bild-e, Mög-lich-keit

But can involve phonological alternation (productive or unproductive)

    stress alternation: *tórment~tormént*

    vowel alternation: *stink~stench, sing~song, blood~bleed*

research~research
address~address
finance~finance

Or 'zero-conversion': *walk~walk, bottle~bottle, mandate~mandate*

MHG Word formation

Words can be simplex or complex (inflected, derived or compound)

Compounds comprise 2+ lexical elements

At least one must be a free morpheme

They may be more or less lexicalised (how compositional is the meaning?)

cf. *Rot+wein* and *Jung+frau*

Some MHG words are ambiguous: compounds or syntactic units?

e.g. *kindesgrap* and *briutegomen* (*Helmbrecht* 1538) could also be seen as nouns with a preceding dependent genitive

MHG Word formation

Words can be simplex or complex (inflected, derived or compound)

Many historical word-formation processes had become opaque by MHG

→ historically complex words are often interpreted as simplex

e.g. *arbeit* (derived) < PGmc. **arƀējiðiz* 'Mühsal', abstract N derived from lost PGmc. *-en* verb **arƀējō*

e.g. *ôheim* (compound) < PGmc. **awaheima* (< PIE N **au̯os* 'Großvater mütterlicherseits' & PGmc. ADJ **haimaz* 'vertraut')

MHG Word formation

Many old suffixes are no longer felt to be suffixes

kelte 'kälte' < OHG *kalt+ī*

sezzel 'Sessel' < OHG *sessal* < Gmc. **set+(i)la/set+ula*

Some NHG affixes were in a transitional phase in MHG (having begun as compounds and still existing as free morphemes)

e.g. *heit, schaft, tuom, haft, sam, lîch*

Grammaticalisation!

Complex words can be derived from simplex words (of the same or different word class) via derivational affixes or compounding

MHG Compounds

Compounds with 3+ elements are rare, e.g. *kirchendiepstal*

Second element defines word class (e.g. noun/adjective compounds always end with a noun/adjective), but first may vary

  donerslac, siechhûs, koufwîp; niuwewaschen, vartmüede

Verbal compounds are rare in MHG (and NHG)

  hônlachte (1775) and *volsprochen* (652) appear in *Helmbrecht*

Many NHG compounds are formed with a 'Fugenelement'

  e.g. *-en, -er, -e or -es*

These resemble inflectional suffixes but are not analysed as such

Many would be 'ungrammatical', e.g. *Liebesbrief* (< Liebe.FEM) or represent the wrong case relationship

Word formation: Nouns

From adjectives

    e.g. *breite, lenge* (abstract nouns from OHG -*ī*)

From verbs

    e.g. *vart, maht* (Gmc. *ti*-Abstraktum)

    e.g. *begin, gewin* (unstressed prefix, e.g. transitivising *be*-)

Prefixes:

aber-	*erze-*	*un-*
after-	*für-*	*ur-*
ant-	*ge-*	
bei-	*misse-*	

Word formation: Nouns

Suffixes*:*

-chen (CG)

-îe (< OF, NHG *-ei*)

    → *-erîe, -elîe*

-ære (NHG *-er*)

    → *-ler, -ner*

-heit

    → *echeit* (NHG *-igkeit*)

-ehe, -ihe, -ech, -ich (NHG *-icht*)

-unge

-inc

-ilî, -ilîn, -(e)lîn

-nisse

-sel, -sal

-schaft

-tuom (NHG *-tum*)

-in, -în, -inne (NHG *-in*)

Compounds
1st element: noun, adjective, verb, particle
2nd element: noun, e.g. *juncvrouwe*

Word formation: Adjectives

Likewise simplex, derived and compound
Suffixes:
-bære (NHG *-bar*)
-en (< OHG *-īn*, e.g. *guldīn*)
-haft
-eht, -oht (NHG *-icht*)
-ec, -ic (NHG *-ig*)
-isch
-lîch, -lich
-lôs
-sam

Compounds
1st element: noun, adjective, verb, particle
2nd element: adjective
e.g. *steinhart*

Word formation: Verbs

Likewise simplex, derived and compound (e.g. *übergrîfen*)

Verbs may be derived via:

zero-derivation, e.g. *arbeiten < arbeit*

-ieren (< OF)

-egen (NHG *-igen*, originally from adjectives)

-zen (forms intensive verbs, e.g. *echzen, duzen/dutzen*)

[*-zen* CONTROVERSIAL]

Prefixes:

be-	*ge-*	*volle-, vol-*
ent-	*misse-*	*zer-*
er-	*ver-*	

Native vs. Loan

In MT1, we differentiated cognates (shared inherited words) from loans:

foot voet ᚠᚩᛏᚾᛋ

fōt Fuß

PGmc. *fōts πούς

PIE *póds pied

pěšĭ পা

sterben 'die' ~ *starve*   *Kopf* 'head' ~ *cup*   *übel* 'bad, ill' ~ *evil*

Computer ~ *computer*   *Hotel* ~ *hotel*   *Panda* ~ *panda*

The distinction between native and borrowed words is just as relevant within a single language as it is across related languages

Native words

Inherited words will have *structural* similarities

    (which may not be shared by loan words)

Segmental:

e.g. All NHG words with /p/ are borrowed

Papier, Pest, Poker, Palast

Prosodic:

Simplex words are mostly short (one or two syllables)

Main stress is root-initial

Native words

Simplex native words are:

☞ Mostly monosyllabic (with disyllabic inflected forms)

- *wirt, lîp, nôt, got, munt, tac*

- *hant–hende, strît–strîtes, ors–orses, snê–snêwes*

☞ Substantial n° of simplex disyllables (but fewer than monosyllables)

- *ouge, houbet, tohter*

☞ Never more than disyllabic (*only complex are longer*)

- *sünde-haft, ge-leg-en-heit, un-be-scheid-en-heit*

Many disyllables are **complex**:

- *rich-tuom, vrî-heit, bot-schaft, un-maht, ge-schrei*

Loan words

Language contact can result in the borrowing of linguistic material or structures

Syntactic borrowing (or reanalysis due to borrowing) tends to rely on prolonged contact between two language communities and extensive bilingualism
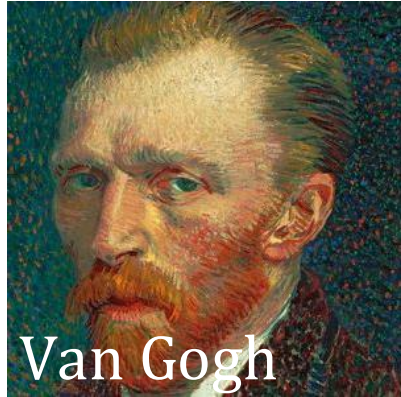
Lexical borrowing is most common

The integration of foreign loans can condition changes of varying significance in phonology and morphology in particular

Borrowing phonemes is extremely rare—*adaptation is preferred*

The way in which loans are borrowed and adapted is constrained and guided by the native grammar

Loans & Adaptations

Van Gogh

English (USA)   [**væn goʊ**]

English (UK)   [**væn gɔf**]

German   [**fan gɔx**]

Dutch *original*   [**fan xox**]

Goethe

English UK   [**gɜːtə**]

English (Chicago *street name*)

[**goʊθ**]

[**goʊθi**]

[**goʊ.iːθi**]

German *original*   [**gøːtə**]

MATHEMATIC(S)

[**mæθmǽtiks**]

German (Hannover)

[**matəmatíːk**]

German (Austrian)

[**matəmáːtik**]

Native words

Consider also the German song:

Kalkutta liegt am Ganges

German ['gaŋəs]

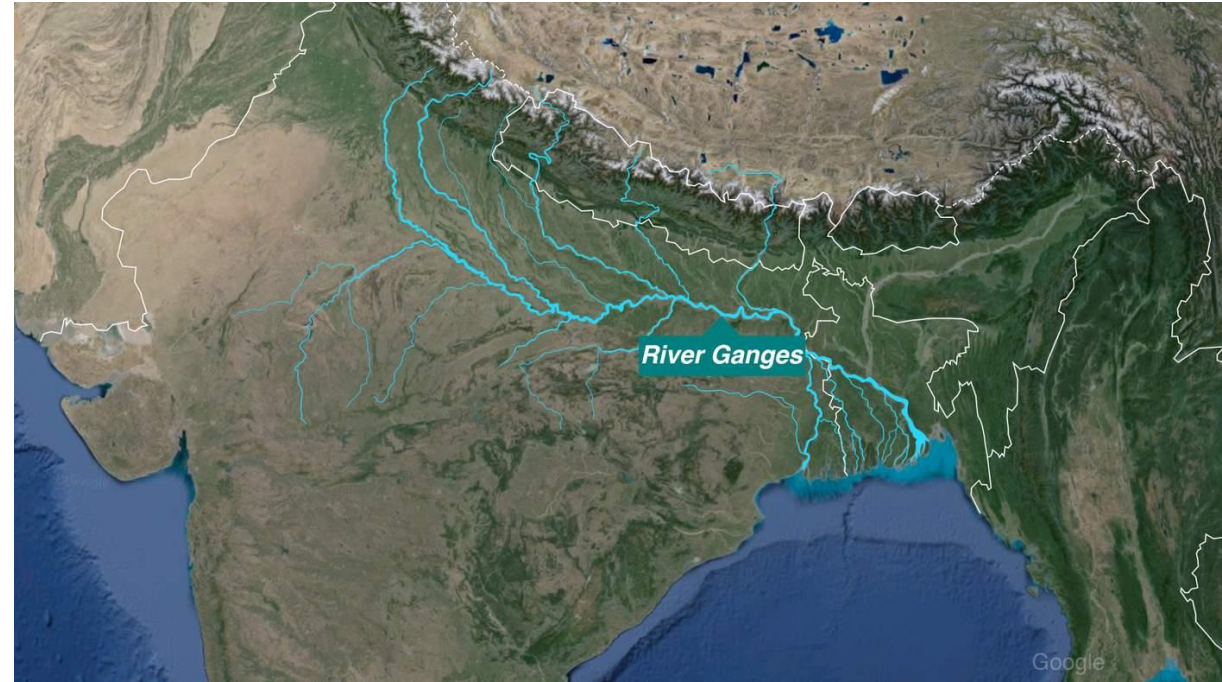Bengali ['gɔŋga] গঙ্গা

English ['gændʒiːz]

Dutch ['xaŋxəs]

Due to the structure, stress is the same, but cf.

Bengali ['himɑlɔe̯] হিমালয়

German [hi'malaja]

English [hɪmə'leɪ̯əz]

An example of phonological adaptation

Lat. *palatium* was borrowed repeatedly into German

Their phonological shape reflects the point at which they were borrowed:

Pfalz

Palast (earlier Palas, with variable stress)

Palais

Can we determine anything about their comparative age?

Once words are integrated into the native system, they undergo the same regular sound changes as native words

Loan words

Content words are most easily borrowed, with verbs borrowed less frequently than nouns, the most 'content-ful' word class

This is what we find in MHG. For instance, we find the following in *Parzival:*

Word class	Total
Noun	261
Verb	45
Adjective	2
Adverb	1
	309

Booth (2023)

Loan words

Content words are most easily borrowed, with verbs borrowed less frequently than nouns, the most 'content-ful' word class

This is what we find in MHG. For instance, we find the following in *Parzival:*

Word class	2 σ	3 σ	4 σ	5 σ
Noun	kvmpan, fasan, lanze, tioste	barbegan, gvg[e]rel, karrascen, hærsenier	aventîure, Antrodrâgma, massenîe, cvmpanîe	astronomîe, Jeometrî[e], Philosopfîen, Sarapandratest
Verb	feiten, prîsen, tanzent	galv̊net, leiscîerte, pvnîeren	bvhvrdieren, kalopîeren, cond[e]wîerte	—
Adjective	kvrtoys, ivuen	—	—	—
Adverb	Trivîers	—	—	—

Booth (2023)

Loan words

Early period: extensive borrowing from Latin

Hundreds of words in Gmc. and OHG (continued into MHG)

Also loans from Germanic into Romance

Sometimes reborrowed: MHG *krîieren* < OF *crier* < Lat. *critare* < WGmc. **krītan*

In the MHG context, contact with Old French was most significant

Also significant exchange with Middle Low German and Old Dutch

More minor contact with Italian (and to much lesser extent Spanish or Arabic for luxury goods, usually via a Romance language)

Inter-dialectal borrowing can also be observed

Routes into German from OF

- Trade

  e.g. *Moselstraße*

  Paris–Reims–Verdun–Metz–Mainz

- Flourishing chivalry & courtly culture

  C11th, C12th & C13th

- Art

  Particularly courtly poetry

- Religion/mysticism

- Soldiers in the 2nd Crusade
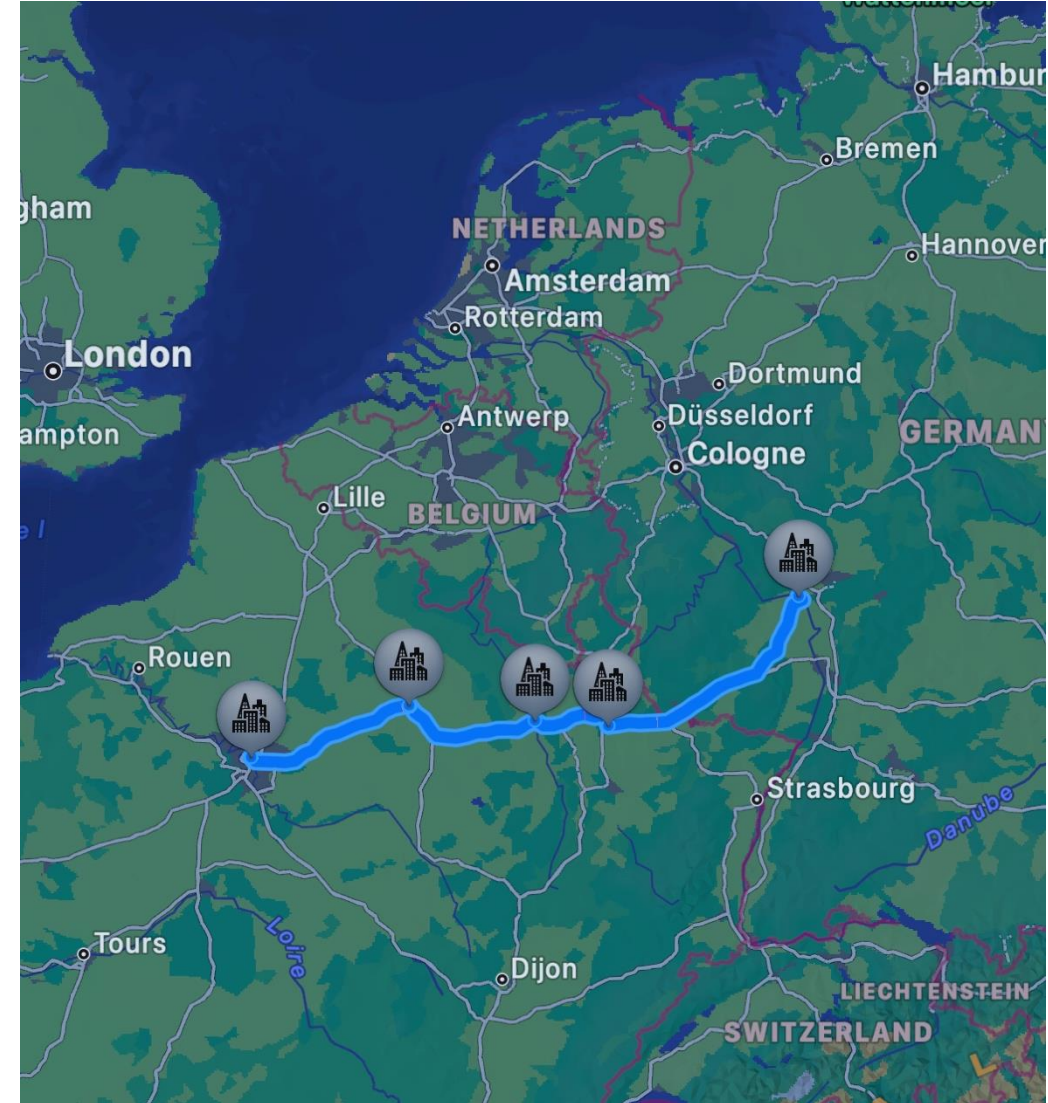
Semantic fields

Borrowing is more common in specialised areas and jargons or the names of new cultural concepts or artefacts

Basic vocabulary is most resistant to change

Semantic fields

In MHG, find large numbers of loans in following areas (mostly Ns or Vs):

☞ Courtly life: battles, games, armour, clothing, food, items of daily life

- *baniere* 'Banner' < OF *baniere*
- *bûhurdieren* 'buhurt' < OF *behorder*
- *garzûn* 'page' < OF *garçon*
- *turnei* 'tourney' < OF *tornoi*
- *tjostieren* 'joust' < OF *joster*

☞ Trade: brings OF names of many exotic goods, coins, sailing terms

- *amatiste* 'amethyst' < OF *amatiste*
- *samît* 'samite' < OF *samit*

Semantic fields

In MHG, find large numbers of loans in following areas (mostly Ns or Vs):

☞Architecture

- *barbigan* 'barbican' < OF *barbecane*

- *palas* 'palace, hall' < OF *palais*

☞ Trades

- *barbier* 'barber' < OF *barbier*

☞Economic/political administration

- *arrestieren* 'arrest' < OF arrester; *prisûn* 'prison' < OF *prisun*

- *assîse* 'assize' < OF *assise*

Semantic fields

In MHG, find large numbers of loans in following areas (mostly Ns or Vs):

☞ A number of adjectives, too

- *prîs* 'praise, worth' < OF *pris*
- *dubbel* 'doubled' < OF *doble*
- *fîn* 'fine' < OF *fin*
- *runt* 'round' < OF *ront*

Other contact-induced change

Lehnprägungen (loan expressions)

- *hövesch, hövescheit ~ cortois, cortosie*

- *ritterschaft tuon ~ faire chevalerie*

- *sich undergrüezen ~ s'entresaluer*

Expansion of meaning under foreign influence

- *himel* 'sky' → 'abode of the gods', 'Christian heaven' under influence of *cælum*

- *suoz* 'sweet' (taste) → 'sweet' (pleasant, lovely)

Otherwise, loans may have an impact on stylistics, phraseology, semantics and word formation

Other contact-induced change

Lehnprägungen (loan expressions)

- *hövesch, hövescheit ~ cortois, cortosie*

- *ritterschaft tuon ~ faire chevalerie*

Eine tiefere Wirkung auf die deutsche Syntax ist nicht festzustellen. Die an das mittelhochdeutsche höfische Milieu gebundenen Prägungen sind meistens später aus der Sprache geschwunden. (Öhmann 1974: 276)

Otherwise, loans may have an impact on stylistics, phraseology, semantics and word formation

Volume of loans

First attestations:

☞ C12th ~ 300 words

☞ C13th ~ 700 words

☞ C14th ~ 300 words

☞ C15th sharp decrease

Many purely literary

However, to this may be added a very large number of complex words (derived and compound) with OF components:

~ 2,000 simplex and complex words

The role of courtly culture

It is often assumed that Romance loans were not of sufficient number to cause any lasting change to the native system before the C15th (and beyond)

Mere 'stylish enhancements', restricted to poetry and a courtly sociolect (Wells 2005, 1403f.)

Romance loans in *Helmbrecht*

birsen — diser birste (pirset A): wirste 964.

brûnât 1345.

buhurdiern (buhurdieren B) 927.

deu s. die Redensarten.

galander — sitiche und g.: einander 1886.

gollier — daz g. (goller A) 185.

ketenwambîs 149.

collier s. g o l l i e r.

compân — einen c. (kumpan B): gewan 1215.

korrûn — von k. (schüch vnd karraun B): zûn 321.

creatûre — alliu c. (creatur A) 550.

kristalle — von k.: gevalle 194.

kroyieren (kroyren A, grogierē B) 1025. nû kroyiert (kroyeret A, grogiert B) man 1027.

kumpân s. c o m p â n.

Narrîe — von Nônarre N. (Nareye A, hylarie B): frîe 220.

prîsen: rîsen 1335.

prüefen — geprüefet 105.

sal s. die Redensarten.

scharlât — mit s. (scharlach B, schatlar A) 1347.

seit — nie seit sô guoter 140.

spargolze — spargolzen: stolzen 224.

tanz — ein t.: glanz 95. bî tanze 98. bî dem tanze: glanze 204. einem t. (tantze B): glanz 514. einen t. 940.

tanzen — ich tanzte (tantzt B) 576. si tanzten 953.

turn — die türne 52.

turnei — die alten t. 1023.

fritschâl (fritschat B) 1345.

wambîs (wammes A) 672. 1449.

warkus — einen w.: sus 157. an sînen w. 189.

F r a n z ö s i s c h e   R e d e n s a r t e n.

deu (deus B) *sal:* zal 726: sal 755. (Deus sal B, Deuol A) 1713.

No lasting effect?

Is this too simplistic?

Many words were purely literary

    Sometimes lifted directly from source

    Also use words not appearing in the source, drawing on a literary lexicon

However, many were part of the living language (even if only for a certain milieu)

Just because they don't necessarily survive, it doesn't mean they didn't have an impact on the language at the time

Phonological adaptation

Many of the loans were phonologically adapted into MHG

- *schent* < OF *gent*

Reflect form at time of borrowing (lose association to foreign item)

- *wastel* [wastɛl] /*gastel* < OF *gastiel* (NF *gâteau*)

Many MHG loans undergo sound changes which demonstrate they were fully integrated into MHG, e.g. diphthongisation:

- *prîs* > *Preis*; *fîn* > *fein*; *kapûn* > *Kapaun*

Early loans (OHG, eMHG) accommodated with native stress:

- *Köln* < Lat. *Colonia*
- cf. C12[th] *kappel* [ˈkapːəl] ~ C13[th] *kapelle* [kaˈpelːə] 'chapel'

MHG loans often initially vary in stress, e.g. *pálas~palás*; *rúbbin/rúbîn~rubî́n*

Impact on morphology

'One lasting impression made by French is in the area of suffixes'

(Young and Gloning 2004[2013], 127)

Complex words are initially borrowed as simplex (Lahiri & Fikkert, 1999)

Often, the simplex and complex words can be borrowed centuries apart (and the complex word is often first!)

Sometimes a relationship is never established, e.g. *apart ~ apartment*

Impact on morphology

'One lasting impression made by French is in the area of suffixes'

(Young and Gloning 2004[2013], 127)

Where does the noun *humidity* come from?

EARLIEST KNOWN USE
Middle English

The earliest known use of the noun *humidity* is in the Middle English period (1150—1500).

OED's earliest evidence for *humidity* is from around 1400, in *Lanfranc's Cirurgie*.

humidity is a borrowing from **French**.

Etymons: French *humidité*.

See etymology >

Where does the adjective *humid* come from?

EARLIEST KNOWN USE
mid 1500s

The earliest known use of the adjective *humid* is in the mid 1500s.

OED's earliest evidence for *humid* is from around 1550, in *Complaynt of Scotland*.

humid is a borrowing from **French**.

Etymons: French *humide*.

See etymology >

Impact on morphology

Derivational relationships are only established later

→ Accounts for messy/confused development of *–ier*

Many verbs are not *-ier* verbs, e.g. *-er* verbs: *tjostieren* < OF *joster*

Appears to have come from multiple sources, including agentive nouns:

-ier + *-en* INF suffix

Certain derivational affixes were soon decomposed in German

(NOT borrowed as suffixes)

i.e. *-ieren* & *-ei* (NHG *-ieren* & *-ei*)

→ Continues into the early C15th with emergence of *-tet* (NHG *-ität*)

Impact on morphology

-*î(e)* [iːə] must have been integrated into the system at an early stage (with stress), having undergone diphtongisation:

> MHG *erzenîe* > NHG *Arznei*

Both appear in loans, ***but also*** with native stems from an early point:

> *zouber+îe* (< *zouber* 'magic'); *hof+ieren* ('enjoy courtly entertainment')

→ They must have been morphologically decomposed by this point

Productivity began in C12th courtly literature, but the suffixes became fully nativised

Impact on morphology

Widespread use outside of the courtly domain as early as C13th, appearing in various contexts and registers, e.g. charters and mystical writing

Berthold von Regensburg uses them in sermons directed at a lay (presumably illiterate) congregation in 1260-70 presumes their familiarity

<div align="right">(cf. Frisch 1979, 195)</div>

-ier occurred most frequently in terminology related to various types of armour, disappearing with courtly culture.

However, in the form *–ierre* (or *-ierære*) enjoyed great productivity across diverse contexts (a combination of OF *-ier* and inherited *-ære* suffixes)

<div align="right">(cf. Rosenqvist 1954, 113)</div>

Prosodic consequences

The shift of stress from the initial syllable (OHG) to the end of the word (NHG) began in MHG

Most notably in OF loans ending in *-ieren* and *-îe*

(NHG *-ieren* [-iːʁən, -iːɐ̯n] & *-ei* [-aɪ̯])

(cf. Vennemann 1995; Booth & Lahiri 2023)

Although the number of loans decreased, the volume (active for some three centuries) and the impact of the stressed suffixes (which did endure) seem to have had a lasting structural effect on the prosodic system