

ON THE STATUS OF FRENCH DERIVATIONAL SUFFIXES
IN EARLY MIDDLE ENGLISH

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1.0. The present article aims to present the occurrence of French derivational suffixes in a representative sample of English texts in the period 1150–1250. The presentation of the data (obtained by the kindness of the Helsinki Corpus of the English Texts team) will be followed by an attempt to establish an early date for the incorporation of some French suffixes into the English word-formation system.

The sample used for analysis consists of the extracts from the following texts: *Hali Meidhad*, *Seinte Iulienne*, *Seinte Katerine*, *Seinte Margarete* (MS c. 1220), *Bodley Homilies* (MS c. 1175), *Lambeth Homilies* (MS c. 1225), *Peri didaxeon* (MS c. 1200), *The Peterborough Chronicle* (1132–1154), *Sawles Warde* (MS c. 1220), *Trinity Homilies* (MS ante 1225), *Vespasian Homilies* (MS ante 1225), *Vices and Virtues* (MS c. 1220), *Layamon's Brut* (MS c. 1220), *The Ormulum* (MS c. 1220) and the entire *Ancrene Wisse* (MS c. 1225). All the suffixes will be listed in the forms attested in the sample; the OED first notation will be given whenever it is pre-dated by the word from the sample.

1.1. –able

chearitable (OED 1340), mearciable (AW); merciabile (SI); cuenabile (KS)

1.2. -ace

contumace, efficaces (AW; OED 1527)

1.3. -aciun

commendaciun (AW; OED 1393)

-atiun

temptatiun, contemplatiun, cogitatiun (AW)

-age

v > n

eritage (AW, HM, SK); heritage (KH); pelrimage (KS)

- 1.5. -ail
cunsail (AW)
- 1.6. -al
canonial, capitale (AW)
- 1.7. -ance¹
acointance (OED 1300), circumstances, desesperance; ignorance, pitance (AW); signefiance (KS)
-aunce
obseruaunces (AW)
-ence
abstinence (OED 1300), obedience, inobedience, penitence (AW); obedience (VV)
- 1.8. -ant
semblant (AW, HM, SW, SM); servant (AW); warrant (SM)
- 1.9. -erie
tricherie, surquiderie, giwerie (AW); lecherie (AW, HM, KS); roberie (KS);
- 1.10. -esce
feblesce (OED 1297), noblesce, largesce (AW); richesce (HM)
- 1.11. -esse
clergesse (AW); cleargesse (SK); cuntesse (P. Ch.)
- 1.12. -ie
glutunie, heresie, villainie, ypocresie, folie, curtesie (AW); meistrice (AW, HM,); mestrie (SK); maladie, compaignie (KS)
- 1.13. -ise
truandise, genterise, angoise (AW); servise (AW, HM, SI, KH, VV, KS); furneise (SI); iustise (P. Ch.); sacrefise (KS); richeise (VV)
- 1.14. -ite
famliarite (OED 1380), adversite, privite (AW); vanite (HM); charite (VV); cherite (Lamb)
-ete²
chastete, feblete (AW); simplete, dignete (HM); swefete? (Bofdl)
-te
purte, cherte, cruelte (AW); pouerte (Lamb)

¹ According to Marchand (1969 : 192), -ance was replacing the original -ence in many Old French words; -aunce is a Middle English spelling variant of -ance.

² In Marchand (1960 : 250) -ete is not recognised as an independent variant.

- 1.15. -iun
champions, devotiun, perfectiun (AW); religiun (AW, KS, VV); opassiun (SI); processiun (PCh, Lamb); circumcisiun (Lamb)
- 1.16. -ment
jugement, sacrement (AW); amonestement, commencement, commandement (KS)
- 1.17. -sun
mustreisun, acheisun, reisun (AW)
- 1.18. -ur
emperour, weorrur (AW; OED 1297); lechur (AW, KS, Trin); harpurs, gigours (KH); confessurs (SW; OED 1300); prechur (KS)
- 1.19. -ure
meosure, peinture, aventure, parlures (AW); mesure (HM); meosure (SW)
- 1.20. -us
dangerus, religiuse, ungraciuse, lepruse (AW); glorius (OED 1300), leprus (KS)

2.0. The presentation of the data in the previous section does not contain any information on the possible analysability and/or productivity of the attested suffixes in English. Yet, it shows that the most essential evidence for posing the linguistic reality of those suffixes in the borrowing language is lacking; in the entire body of samples from the period 1150–1250 no hybrid forms with native stems have been found.

The question that has to be asked at this point is whether the fact that a suffix occurs exclusively in "wholesale borrowings" prevents it from being accessible to the word-formation mechanisms of the borrowing language. Diachronic evidence shows that this is not the case, for otherwise the conditions for the formation of hybrids would never be reached. The history of English demonstrates that such conditions must have developed, as the majority of the suffixes under analysis are found in native coinages on native or Romance bases.

The condition that will from now on be assumed as sufficient for the adoption of a suffix by the word-formation system of the borrowing language is analysability. Analysability has no direct representation in language performance and thus in historical studies its status must remain hypothetical. It is believed, however, that highly plausible results can be achieved with the use of indirect evidence from a maximally uniform language sample. The indirect evidence, or rather prerequisite, for the analysability of a suffix is found in the lexicon (vocabulary when dealing with written texts) and consists in the cooccurrence of "wholesale borrowings" with simplex forms of

the same³ stem or/and other derivatives on the same stem. Such a situation could be presented as the following scheme:

Sf+xf, Sf, Sf+y

where: xf—French suffix under analysis

Sf—French stem

y—suffix

The relevance of the occurrence of Sf+y has been questioned,⁴ but the present author believes that it does contribute (though indirectly) to the analysability of S as stem, and consequently of x as suffix. In fact, in forms where y is a native suffix, Sf+y can provide the strongest type of motivation for the formation of hybrids.

The coexistence of three derivative types — $\frac{Sf+xf}{Sf+yn}$ Sn+yn — places xf in contrastive distribution with a native suffix and creates systemic conditions for the formation of Sn+xf. Whether or not these conditions are ever actualised is a matter of many complex factors; according to Hope (1971: 254) the most important of them is the relative strength of the parallel suffix in the borrowing language (if there is any), i.e. its frequency, formal distinctiveness and productivity. Undoubtedly, the transparency of the possible candidate for adoption will be a major recommendation.

As has been said before, this type of analysis should ideally be carried out on a uniform language sample, which, in a historical context, could be provided by the work of one author or even better by one text. The data presented in section 1 point to AW as the best candidate in the period,⁵ as it is the only text in which most suffixes are attested (even when the analysis is restricted to the proportionally representative sample from the Helsinki Corpus). Thus the following section will be dealing exclusively with examples from AW.

2.1. -able: both occurrences of the suffix have corresponding simplex forms. Consequently, a “motivational rule” can be posited-

chearible[+ADJ]	chearite[+N]
mearciable[+ADJ]	mearci[+N]

³ Cf. Fisiak (1986 : 254), Marchand (1960 : 251), Weinreich (1953 : 31).

⁴ Fisiak (1986 : 254); however, for Jespersen (1967 : 98) a number of Sf+yf forms seems to be a sufficient condition.

⁵ Unlike Dobson (1976 : 168), I believe that the specific, restricted audience of the original text, the three sisters whom the author knew and whose bilingualism he could take for granted, must have contributed to the saturation of the text with the Romance element. Consequently, it could be argued that the analysis describes the language of the bilingual speakers of the period — thus not the entire community but a large section of it (cf. Wilson 1943 : 60).

ABLE; n>adj
[+ADJ]
[N—]

2.2. -ace: no simplex or S+y forms attested.

2.3. Only -atiun has a corresponding simplex form

temptatiun[+N] temptin[+V]

ATIUN; v>n
[+N]
[V—]

2.4., 2.5., 2.6 -age, -ail, -al: no corresponding forms.

2.7. -ance: one simplex form

acointance[+] acointed[+V]

ANCE; v>n
[+N]
[V—]

-ence has a corresponding S+yf form in
obedience[+N] obedi+ent
and thus can be analysed as

ENCE; S>n
[+N]

2.8. -ant: no corresponding forms

2.9. -erie: the suffix appears in several different derivative/simplex pairs, and thus is associated with a set of “motivational rules”

giwerie[+N]	giws[+N]
[+COLL]	[+PERS]

ERIE

[+N]
[+COLL]
[—N—]

surquiderie[+N] surquide[+ADJ]

ERIE; adj>n
[+N]
[ADJ—]

There is one corresponding S+yn form, in

triccherie [+N] trich+unge
ERIE; S>n
[+N]
[+ABS]

2.10. -esce co-occurs with simplex adjectives

feblesce[+N]	feble[+ADJ]
noblesce[+N]	noble[+ADJ]
largesce[+N]	large[+ADJ]

ESCE; adj>n
[+N]
[ADJ--]

2.11. -esse: no corresponding forms.

2.12. -ie: several derivatives have corresponding forms

leccherie[+N] [+ABS]	lechur[+N] [+PERS]
glutunie[+N] [+ABS]	glutun[+N] [+PERS]
meistrie[+N] [+ABS]	meistre[+N] [+PERS]
folie[+N] [+ABS]	fol[+ADJ]

IE; adj>n
[+N]
[+ABS]
[N--]
[ADJ--]

2.13. -ise: one derivative with a corresponding simplex

servise[+N]	servin[+V]
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ISE; v>n
[+N]
[V--]

2.14. -ite, -ete, -te: all forms of the suffix appear in derivatives which have corresponding simplex form

chastete[+N]	chaste[+ADJ]
feblete[+N]	feble[+ADJ]

privite[+N]	prive[+ADJ]
cherte[+N]	chere[+ADJ]

ITE; adj>n
[+N]
[ADJ--]

2.15. -iun: there is one derivative with a corresponding simplex and one with a corresponding S+yf form

devotiun[+N]	devot[+ADJ]
religiun[+N]	religi+use

IUN; adj>n (S>n)
[+N]
[ADJ--]

2.16. -ment: both occurrences have corresponding simplex forms

sacrement[+N]	sacreð[+V]
jugement[+N]	iuggi[+V]

MENT; v>n
[+N]
[V--]

2.17. -sun: no related forms

2.18. -ur: derivatives corresponding to one simplex and one S+yf form.

weorrur[+N] [+AG]	weorrið[+V]
lechur[+N] [+AG]	lecch+erie

UR; v>n
[+N]
[+AG]

2.19. -ure: one related yf+S form

peinture[+N]	depeint[+V]
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URE; v>n
[+N]
[V--]

2.20. -us: each derivative in the text has a corresponding simplex (α s+yf) form

dangerus[+ADJ]	danger[+N]
ungraciuse[+ADJ]	grace[+N]
religiuse[+ADJ]	relig+iun
US; n>adj	
[+ADJ]	
[N--]	

3.0. In conclusion, it should be pointed out again that the results of the analysis constitute hypotheses about the word-formation of Early Middle English and the new options arising therein, rather than a description of mechanisms already available. These hypotheses, it is believed, are corroborated by the subsequent development of the language, i.e. the incorporation of most of the analysed suffixes into the native derivational rules,⁶ substantiated by hybrid forms attested from the late 1200s onwards.

The following table summarises the analysis, elaborating the semantic aspect of the simplex/derivative relationship:

SUFFIX	STEM	SEMANTIC RELATIONSHIP	POTENTIAL RULE OF DERIVATION
-able [+ADJ]	noun	'full of n'	n>adj
-atiun [+N]	verb	'instance of v'	v>n
-ance [+N]	verb	'result of v'	xv>n
-erie [+N]	noun	'ns collectively'	
-erie [+N]	adj	'adj behaviour'	adj>n
-esce [+N]	adj	'quality of being adj'	adj>n
-ie [+N]	noun	'quality of being a n'	
-ie [+N]	adj	'condition of being adj'	adj>n

⁶ Within a model where affixation and derivation are kept apart, the adoption of a suffix often consists in a modification of an already existing affix rewriting rule, rather than the addition of a new derivational rule. Cf. Gussmann (1987: 82).

-ise [+N]	verb	'practice of v'	v>n
-ITE [+N]	adj	'quality of being adj'	adj>n
-iun [+N]	adj	'quality of being adj'	adj>n
-ment [+N]	verb	'result of v'	v>n
-ur [+N]	verb	'one who vs'	v>n
-ure [+N]	verb	'result of v'	v>n
-us	noun	'characterised by n'	n>adj

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