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The language of Middle Welsh religious texts

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Attitudes towards translation

"these texts cannot be regarded as models of Welsh prose, and are infinitely inferior in style to that of original compositions like the Mabinogion" (Jones 1937: 69)

"at their highest level the prose translations in the Book of the Anchorite take their place among the glories of that [Middle Welsh prose] tradition" (Foster 1950: 217)

On subject-verb agreement, as in *anvar6a6l hynt yr engylyonn* 'the angels are immortal' (Ystoria Lucidar, LlA 9r) – normative negative assessment:

"There can be very little doubt that this is due to the rule of Latin Grammar 'that the verb must agree with its subject in number and person.' Our scribe, writing unconsciously his own speech, uses the third person singular, in such cases […]; when consciously translating he writes the plural. […] This vice of making the verb agree with its subject, originally learnt from Latin Grammar, is perpetuated by the influence of English" (Morris-Jones 1894: XXVI–XXVII)

Some linguistic background to our approach:
"translation constitutes a particular type of language contact, where the source language (SL) can have an influence on the recipient language (RL) as norms or structures are taken over in the process of translation" (Kranich et al. 2011: 11)

Data

Llyfr Ancr Llanddewibrefi (Book of the Anchorite of Llanddewibrefi) 1346

Main sources:
Jones, John Morris; Rhŷs, John (1894): The Elucidarium and other tracts in Welsh from Llyvyr agkyr Llandewivrevi A.D. 1346 (Jesus college ms. 119). Oxford: At the Clarendon Press.
Luft, Diana; Thomas, Peter Wynn; Smith, D. Mark (2013): Rhyddiaith Gymraeg 1300–1425. Cardiff University. Available online at http://www.rhyddiaithganoloesol.caerdydd.ac.uk.
Sincere gratitude to Prof. Sioned Davies and Dr. Diana Luft for cooperation!

Texts:

Ystoria Lucidar	The story of Lucidar
Marwolaeth Mair	The way in which Mary went to heaven
Ymborth yr Enaid	Holy living
Buchedd Dewi	The story of the life of St. David
Buchedd Beuno	The story of the life of St Beuno
Ystoria Adrian ac Ipotis	The story of Hadrian and Epictetus
Credo Athanasius	The creed of St Athanasius
Pa adelw y dylai dyn gredu i Dduw	How a man should believe in God
Pwyll y Pader, Hu	The meaning of the Lord's Prayer according to the interpretation of St Hugo
Rhinweddau Gwrando Offeren	The virtues of hearing Mass
Breuddwyd Pawl	The dream of Paul the Apostle
Epistol y Sul	On keeping Sunday
Rhybudd Gabriel	The annunciation of Gabriel to Mary
Efengyl Ieuan	The Gospel of John the Apostle
Y Drindod yn un Duw	The Trinity as One God
Gwlad Ieuan Fendigaid	The story of the realm of John the blessed

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Research questions

How different is the language of translated Welsh religious texts from the language of native texts?
Is the influence of the source language identifiable?
If so, what are features of such interference?
Where can the texts be placed on a scale between target-oriented adaptations and source-oriented translations?

Two types of questions:
1. Source-centred:
   a) identification of possible sources
   b) linguistic comparison with possible sources
2. Language-centred:
   comparison of translated texts to native texts

What are we studying?
1. Syntax
(Cooperation with Dr. Marieke Meelen, Leiden University)
cf. example 1
Welsh-internal questions: on all texts
  • Agreement: Noun-Adjective, Subject-Verb
  • Word order
  • Relative clauses
Latin-Welsh interaction
(data for comparison: *Ystoria Lucidar, Breuddwyd Pawl, Marwolaeth Mair, Pwyll y Pader, Gwlad Ieuan, Buched Dewi*)
  – Latin participle and gerund constructions
  (i.a. adjectives in *-edic* and their plurals, cf. Nurmio 2015: 174–9, Russell 1990: 76–80; 103–8)

2. Lexis: loanwords and loan translations (cf. example 2)

3. Style
  • tense
    – preterite vs. imperfect
    – narrative verbal noun vs. narrative present
    – *gwneuthur*-periphrasis
  • Frequency of native narrative devices (cf. Davies 1995; Poppe, Reck 2008), incl.
    – phrasal *a/ac* 'and'; cataphorical *sef*
    – "(near-)synonymous doublets" (cf. ex. 3)

Example 1
Tagged and chunk-parsed beginning of Credo
(in cooperation with Marieke Meelen, on the tagger and chunkparser see Meelen 2016: 36–46, 325–37)

(S (PP Val/P hynn/DEM) (VP y/PCL diga6nn/VBPI-3SG) (DP y/D (NP tat/N)) ./PUNC Ar/CONJ-D (NP mab/N) ./PUNC Ar/CONJ-D (DP (NP yspryt/N) (ADJP glan/ADJ)) vot/BOD yn/PRED (NUMP vn/ONE (NP du6/N)) ./PUNC nyt/PCL-NEG (ADVP amgen/ADV) noc/P (PREDP yn/PRED (ADJP 6ir/ADJ dipedrus/ADJ)) ./PUNC)
(S PWy/WPRO (QP bynnac/Q) (VP a/PCL vynnho/VBPS-3SG) (VNP iachau/VN) (DP y/PRO-G (NP eneit/N)) a/CONJ (DP e/PRO-G (NP gorff/N)) ./PUNC (NP Reit/N) (VP y6/BEPI-3SG) (PPROP ida6/P-3SGM ef/PRO) (PREDP yn/PRED (ADJP gytaf/ADJS)) (NP peth/N) (VNP kynnal/VN) (DP (DP (NP ffyd/N) (ADJP gyffredin/ADJ) (NP egl66ys/N)) (DP (NP iessu/N) (NP grist/N))))
(S kanys/CONJ p6y/WPRO (QP bynnac/Q) (VP ny/PCL-NEG s/PRO-A kynnhalyo/VBPS-3SG) (PROP hi/PRO) (PREDP yn/PRED (ADJP gyfya6n/ADJ)) ac/CONJ (PREDP yn/PRED (ADJP diuei/ADJ)) ./PUNC (ADJP diogel/ADJ) (VP y6/BEPI-3SG) (PPROP ida6/P-3SGM) (VP y/PCL kyll/VBPI-3SG) (DP y/PRO-G (NP eneit/N)) a/CONJ (DP e/PRO-G (NP gorff/N)) (PREDP yn/PRED (ADJP dragy6yda6l/ADJ)) ./PUNC)
(S (DP (DP (NP ffyd/N) (ADJP gyffredin/ADJ) (NP egl6ys/N)) (DP (NP grist/N) (NP y6/N))) ./PUNC (VNP Credu/VN) (PPROP ohonom/P-1PL ni/PRO) yn/P (NUMDP vn/ONE (NP du6/N) yn/P y/D (NP trinda6t/N)) ./PUNC Ar/CONJ-D (NP trinda6t/N) yn/P (NUMP vn/ONE (NP du6/N)) a/CONJ (VNP e/PRO-G hannrydedv/VN) (PREDP yn/PRED (ADJP vfyd/ADJ)) ac/CONJ (PREDP yn/PRED (ADJP garedic/ADJ)) ./PUNC)

Example 2
Basic Christian vocabulary in *Pwyll y Pader*

Virtues		Vices		Gifts of the Holy Spirit	
humilitas / *ufylltod*	humility	*superbia* / *syberwyt*	pride	*spiritus timoris Domini* / *yspryt ofuyn*	fear of God
mansuetudo, benignitas / *g6ar digynbennus*	mildness	*invidia* / *kyghorueint*	envy	*spiritus pietatis* / *yspryt g6aredogr6yd*	piety
compunctio, dolor / *ediuar6ch* [Pen16: *ediuar6ch a dolur callon*]	compunction	*ira et indignatio* / *errlloned* [Pen 16: *Irlloned a bar*]	anger	*spiritus scientiae* / *yspryt g6ybot*	knowledge
fames iustitiae, desiderium bonum / *ch6ennychv y 6ironed*	thirsting for righteousness	*tristitia, acedia* / *trystit*	sadness	*spiritus fortitudinis* / *yspryt kedernyt*	fortitude
misericordia / *trugared*	mercy	*avaritia* / *ch6ant a chebydyaeth*	avarice	*spiritus consilii* / *rat ac yspryt kynghor*	counsel
cordis munditia / *gleindyt callonn*	cleanliness of heart	*gula* / *ghythni*	gluttony	*spiritus intelligentiae* / *rat yspryt a dyall*	understanding
pax / *tangneued*	peace	*luxuria* / *godineb*	opulence	*spiritus sapientiae* / *yspryt doethi; rat ac yspryt byda6l*	wisdom

Example 3
Doublets in *Breuddwyd Pawl – Visio Sancti Pauli*

(1)
Et exclamaverunt peccatores, qui erant in penis, dicentes: Miserere nobis, Michael arcangele, et tu, Paule, dilectissime dei, intercede pro nobis a dominum! Scimus enim, quia probter vestras oraciones aduc stat terra! (Angers, Bibliothèque publique, Ms. 236 (227 (s. X/XI); Jiroušková 2006: 813)
Ac yna lleuein a oruc y pechaduryeit o'r poenev a dywedut: trugarhaa vrthym vihagel archangel. A thithen wynnuydedic pawl ebostol eiroluch drossom ar duw. kanys ni a wdam y mae truy ych gwediev chwi y kynnhelir y nef a'r dayar. (LlA 131v)
And then the sinners shouted from pain and said: Have mercy on us, Archangel Michael! And you, blessed Paul apostle, pray for us to the God, for we know that through your prayers heaven and earth are sustained.

(2)
Et tunc clamaverunt contra iustam animam et clamor factus est, quasi celum et terra moverentur. (Cambridge, Pembroke College, MS. 258 (s. XIII ex.); Jiroušková 2006: 808)
A gawr o lewenyd a rodassant val pei vot yr heul a'r lloer a'r nef a'r dayar yn kyffroi. (LlA 131v)
And gave a shout of joy, so that the sun and moon and heaven and earth moved.

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