

ENLARGING THE LEXICON: THE FIELD OF TECHNOLOGY AND
ADMINISTRATION FROM 1150 TO 1500

BEGOÑA CRESPO GARCÍA – ISABEL MOSKOWICH-SPIEGEL FANDIÑO

University of Coruña

ABSTRACT

The description of the vocabulary belonging to the field of technology and administration during the Middle English period is thought to ascertain the well-known relationship between language and society through the lexical subsystem. To achieve this descriptive goal, the corpus material contains a selection of samples taken from the *Helsinki Corpus of English Texts* between 1150 and 1500 (all text-types and all dialectal varieties have been included). The study entails the analysis of different variables such as the etymological origin of the terms, particular processes by which they entered the language (mainly borrowing) and the socio-historical context in which the form is used. Thus, the research is framed within a sociolinguistic approach (Baugh 1990; Blount and Sanches 1977; De la Cruz Cabanillas 2001; Hughes 2000; Tejada Caller 2001). In short, this paper is an attempt to explain the enlargement of the lexicon in a particular semantic field, to account for an intra-systemic phenomenon in reference to the external history of English.

0. Introduction

This paper aims to describe the vocabulary relating to the field of technology and administration during the Middle English (henceforth ME) period. We will try to examine the sociolinguistic causes of the use and selection of terms in this field. Section 1 will be devoted to the social background to the ME period, that is to say, to the presentation of those historical events and other external (non-linguistic) factors that may have brought about an expansion in the vocabulary relating to technology in its broadest sense. Though the “big-bang” of technical terms takes place in EModE (Millward 1996; Nevalainen 1999) and the Middle Ages are dominated by Latin as the language of culture and learning, it is our intention in this paper to look into the external causes that may determine the slow emergence of non-Latin terms of a scientific character of some kind. The analysis will be approached within a sociolinguistic frame (Blount and

Sanches 1977; Baugh 1990; Tejada Caller 1999; Hughes 2000; Fennell 2001). In order to explain the enlargement of the lexicon in the semantic field of our interest, this intra-systemic phenomenon will be studied in relation to the social factors of the period, that is to say, with reference to the external history of English. After reviewing the historical background, section 2 will describe our corpus of data. We will basically refer to the samples of ME contained in the *Helsinki Corpus of English Texts, Diachronic Part (HC)*. Our aim in this paper requires the analysis of all text-types as well as all varieties of English in a period characterised by its high dialectal diversity in order to ascertain to what extent these two variables (text-type and dialect) are significant in the semantic field under survey. Once the data have been compiled, the subsequent section (3) will focus on the analysis of the terms selected by means of various computer resources. The above-mentioned analysis revolves around several variables, namely, semantic field, dialect, text-type and etymological origin. Finally, section 4 will deal with the conclusions obtained from our scrutiny of the data. The relationship between all these variables will demonstrate that the history of the vocabulary of a language is inevitably related to the historical heterogeneity of the different peoples inhabiting a particular territory.

1. Socio-historical background

Jinhzi (1992) suggests the necessity of the parallel study of culture, historical events and language changes because there are connections among them. External events provoke internal language changes, especially in certain fields which are more readily influenced by these external factors. The circumstances of the period we are interested in gain special relevance in the development of the English language all through the Middle Ages.¹ Every single historical event may have an effect on the linguistic system.

It is generally accepted that from the 8th up to the beginning of the 11th century very few Scandinavian loans can be traced. Most of them are of a miscellaneous character, though types of ships, references to people, and some social and legal terms can be also included (Moskowich 1995a). The influx of terms of an Old Norse origin increases gradually but it is not until the beginning of the 11th century that the semantic nature of these loans changes. In this sense, Scandinavian terms relating to the sea, social life, law, commonplace objects and trading terms can also be dated to the 11th to the middle of the 12th century.

¹ The circumstances of the period are illustrated by the second migration of the Scandinavians (10th c.), the Norman Conquest (1066), the religious movement of Wycliffe and the Lollards, the Black Death (1346-48), the Peasants' Revolt (1371), the Hundred Years' War (1337-1453), taxation and commercial transactions with other countries.

The Norman Conquest² meant contact with another foreign language. As a result, Anglo-Norman became the official language of the court, for justice and politics, not the language of everyday speech among the conquered. French influence on English is generally recognised by its imprint on the semantic fields of "person-rank", "finance", "buildings", "law", "social relations", "religion", "military affairs", "nature", "clothes", "household objects", "physical action", "appearance", "faculty", "moral and intellectual" and "miscellaneous" (Serjeantson 1935: 216-239). However, we will see that not all the terms in these fields are necessarily of Norman origin.

Studies on the history of the English language have traditionally categorised loans in different semantic fields. Such classifications seemed to match semantic field and etymological origin. These traditional approaches lacked the consideration of the social circumstances behind linguistic facts. However, the categorization in different semantic fields of Scandinavian, French and native terms is not that unbalanced if we look for an explanation in the socioexternal context. As a matter of fact, the final settlement of the Scandinavians in England led to their absorption, provoking an assimilation of linguistic habits probably due to the resemblance between the two languages.³ As a consequence, the native speech community adopted Scandinavian terms without feeling they were foreign (Moskowich 1996). The Scandinavian population intermingled with the natives thus preventing many terms from being considered specialised.

The relationship between the Normans and the English was not established on equal terms. French loans were traditionally regarded as exclusive of certain semantic fields since they were used for specific communicative purposes. These words were not assimilated by the native speakers of English because social differentiation between the two speech communities implied different communicative needs.

2. Our corpus⁴

As we mentioned in the Introduction, the data that we will be using for the present analysis belong to the *Helsinki Corpus of English Texts* (1991). In the diachronic part of the *HC* all periods of the history of the English language are

² The terms Norman and French will be applied here with different purposes since Norman has a Germanic basis whereas French descends from the Italic branch. Norman is understood to refer to the language spoken by the invaders for approximately a century after the Conquest. French is the language of written communication probably spoken by foreigners later than the 12th century (Mourón and Valcárcel 2002).

³ There are contradictory opinions such as those defended by Leith (1983) and Burchfield (1985).

⁴ Though this paper is concerned with "technical" English and the field of medicine belongs to it, medical nouns have been excluded since the analysis and approach here are the same as in a previous work (Crespo, forthcoming).

represented. We will focus on Middle English, the period between 1150 and 1500. All the texts contained in the above-mentioned corpus are classified by means of COCOA headers according to several parameters which offer different pieces of information. In our analysis we will include three of these parameters: date, text-type and dialect. Regarding date, the *HC* makes a distinction within each of the periods of the history of the English language traditionally considered and establishes four subperiods:

M1: 1150-1250

M2: 1250-1350

M3: 1350-1420

M4: 1420-1500

Another decision made by the compilers of the *HC* was to add information about the type of text to which each of the samples recorded belongs. We have selected samples of around 2.500 words of all text-types included in each of the four subperiods. This makes a total of 102.182 words.

To examine the evolution of terms related to the sphere of technology and administration,⁵ we have decided to limit our scope to the analysis of nouns. In his doctoral dissertation about the diachronic semantic classification of religious vocabulary in English, Chase (1988) states that, at least in this field, nouns are the part of speech with the greatest semantic relevance because they are used to embody things and most vocabulary items denote things. Room, in his introduction to the *NTC's Dictionary of changes in meanings* (1991), also seems to assume the semantic primacy of the nominal category as he mainly resorts to it to illustrate changes in the meaning of words.

The total number of nouns recorded in our samples is 17.945, 17.56% of the total number of words. In the following section we will try to describe the sociolinguistic behaviour of these nouns in the field of technology and administration.

3. Analysis of data

Our analysis will be based on the total number of 102.182 words which form our ME samples. From this total only 17.945 can be classified as nouns with different semantic ascription, while the frequency of occurrence of nouns belonging to the field of technology and administration amounts to 870. This represents 4.84% of uses of all the selected nouns. This apparently low representation can be accounted for by three factors: in the first place, semantic categorisation

⁵ Terms related to finance and commerce have been disregarded not because they are not considered “technical” but because they have already been studied elsewhere (Crespo and Moskowich 2003).

has been highly diversified, that is to say, many different fields and sub-fields have been considered, diminishing the number of instances found (Crespo, forthcoming). Secondly, not all nouns that could be considered technical terms have been selected for the present study (see notes 4 and 5). Finally, nouns relating to “law” or denoting “person-rank” have also been disregarded, resulting in a notable decrease in our calculations.

In what follows, the nouns in our corpus will be analysed according to the different variables mentioned above: semantic field, dialectal variety, text type and etymological origin.

3.1. Semantic fields

Though our survey is limited to nouns belonging to what we have labelled “technology and administration”, it is worth mentioning that such a denomination is very general for our purpose here. Therefore, we have decided to establish a further subdivision, taking into account the spheres of life that could be considered to belong to technology and administration in the Middle Ages (certainly different from our standards today). These sub-fields have been formulated as follows: “war and warfare”, “navigation and the sea”, “science and technology” (here including the technical terms not belonging to the area of medicine) and “administration” (not only administrative terms but also technical terms of all types, including political matters).⁶

The number of items corresponding to each sub-field is displayed in Table 1 below. The figures in the right column correspond to the percentage of occurrence of “technical” nouns in the total number of nouns in the corpus (17.945).

Table 1. Semantic sub-fields

Semantic field	No. of instances	%
war and warfare	105	0.58
navigation and the sea	30	0.16
science and technology	194	1.08
administration	541	3.01

As can be inferred most instances are to be found in the field of administration. This is probably a consequence of the contact with the Normans and their highly

⁶ Semantic ascription to fields and sub-fields is certainly subjective in this case as it may be in others. As a matter of fact, such classification depends on the classifiers and their perception not only of linguistic categories but also of extra-linguistic reality.

developed bureaucracy, which can be seen in the use of the term *prouynces*, an administrative label introduced by Norman rulers, as shown in example (1) below:

1)

And betwene Egipt & Nubye it hath wel a .xij. iournees of desert And men of Nubye ben cristen but +tei ben blake as the Mowres for gret hete of the sonne. In Egipt +tere ben .v. *prouynces*, +tat on hight (^Sahyth^) +tat other hight (^Demeseer^) another (^Resich^), +tat is an Ile in (^Nyle^), Another (^Alisandre^) & another the lond of (^Damyete^).

(*Mandeville's travels* <sample 1>)

Science and technology (194 uses) occupies the second position. Though scientific writing was, as a general rule, carried out in Latin, we can perceive the gradual adoption of Romance vocabulary into the vernacular. In our samples borrowing from this classical tongue seems to be an incipient method of enlarging the English lexicon, a method that acquires its highest degree of expansion later in the Renaissance. Example (2) illustrates the use of these classical loans whereas example (3), found in the same text, illustrates the use of a term belonging to a different linguistic stratum (OF):

2)

Loke than how many degrees thy rule is areised fro the litel cros upon thin est lyne, and tak there the *altitude* of thi sonne. And in this same wise maist thow knowe by night the altitude of the mone or of brighte sterres.

(*A treatise on the Astrolabe*. Part II)

3)

For, after the statutes of astrologiens, what celestial body that is 5 degrees above thilke degre that ascendith, or withinne that nombre, that is to seyn near the *degree* that ascendith, yit rekne they thilke planete in the ascendent.

(*A treatise on the Astrolabe*. Part II)

In third place, with 105 instances, nouns belonging to what we have termed “war and warfare” appear in our corpus. This, of course, meets our expectations since the whole ME period is one full of military confrontations (with the Scandinavians, with the Normans, The Hundred Years’ War...) (Moskowich 1995b; Crespo 1996; Millward 1996; Fennell 2001).

4)

Upon his arm he baar a gay bracer,/ And by his syde a *swerd* and a bokeler,/ And on that oother syde a gay *daggere*/ Harneised wel and sharp as point of spere; / A Cristopher on his brest of silver sheene.

(*The General Prologue to the Canterbury Tales* <sample 1>)

Finally, navigation and the sea contains only 30 cases. We cannot forget that the Scandinavians are responsible, at least to a certain extent, for the introduction of many nautical terms. In fact, scholars dealing with the Scandinavian influence on English confirm the lexical traces left by this people in this particular semantic field.

5)

“Esau, life son”, he said,/ “Ga lok +ti *tacle* be puruaid,/ And faand to stalk +te sa nere/ +tat +tou mai drep me sum dere”...

(*Cursor Mundi* <sample 1>, part of <sample 2>)

6)

ah bote y be +te furme day on folde hem byfore,/ ne shal y nout so skere scapan of huere *score*/ so grimly he on me gredes,/ +tat y ne mot me lede +ter wi+t mi lawe,/ on alle maner o+tes +tat heo me wulle+t awe,/ heore boc ase vn-bredes.

(*Satire on the consistory courts*)

The distribution of nouns in each field is, however, chronologically determined. Table 2 represents the growing number of nouns in each field as time goes by. The number of nouns in each sub-period is displayed next to it.

The fact that ME1 and ME2 show comparatively few administrative nouns can be explained by bearing in mind the following factors:

1. By ME3 the Normans had been in England for a century and a half and, as we saw above, they had a great impact on the bureaucratic system of England.
2. We know that not only did the Normans have a highly developed bureaucracy but they also imposed it very early in England (The Domesday Book was commissioned in 1082). Furthermore, they seem to have had a tendency to keep written records of all their legal and administrative affairs.

Under these circumstances we should wonder why, then, this leap takes place only after 1350. On the one hand, as mentioned before, certain terms of French origin that could be thought to belong to the sphere of law and administration are not to be found here because they have been classified in the field of “person-rank”.⁷ Such is the case of *baron*, *duke*, and *citizen*. On the other, as early as 1954 Jespersen had already noticed that the 150 years stretching from 1250 to c. 1400 constituted the period of greatest rate of adoption of French words in the history of English. Despite this observation he did not provide an answer.

⁷ The present study is part of a larger one in which the criteria for classification of lexical items include the parameter “person-rank” which has not been considered for the present research.

Table 2. Distribution of semantic sub-fields per sub-period

Semantic field	ME1: 1847 nouns		ME2: 2645 nouns		ME3: 5338 nouns		ME4: 8115 nouns	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
war and warfare	3	0.162	20	0.75	16	0.3	66	0.813
navigation and the sea	2	0.108	8	0.3	7	0.13	13	0.16
science and technology	2	0.108	0	0	180	3.37	12	0.147
administration	46	2.49	48	1.814	161	3.016	286	3.524
Total	53	2.86	76	2.87	364	6.819	377	4.64

A few years later, under the influence of sociolinguistics, other authors tried to identify the causes for what can be regarded as a gap between actual historical events and their linguistic consequences in writing. Certain circumstances that had not been considered before were found to be responsible for the imbalance between oral and written realities. In line with Labov (1972) and his followers, sociolinguists and historical sociolinguists (Romaine 1982, 1987) contended that language is a permeable structure and that changes take time to unfold and settle. We now know that linguistic variants co-exist for some time before they are definitely accepted and recorded (in fact, some changes never succeed). This may be the reason for the low number of administrative substantives in our samples between 1150 and 1350.

The increase we have observed in the use of technical nouns in ME3 (364 instances) and ME4 (377) corresponds to what several others have termed “the triumph of English” (Foster Jones 1953; Millward 1996; Horobin and Smith 2002). The period between 1350-1420 was significant for the revival of English in all writings. It is the external background (nationalist attitudes as one of the consequences of the Hundred Years’ War and the subsequent adoption of the vernacular as a symbol of cultural identity) that fosters this general use of the English language (Crespo 1996). Between 1420 and 1500 an increasing use of English for administrative purposes implies a higher number of instances in the corresponding sub-field (161 in 1350-1420 vs. 286 in 1420-1500). Furthermore, Latin was used for scholarly and religious purposes as it was in other territories with other vernaculars of prestige. At this time, England is more concerned with the reorganisation of daily life than with cultural affairs. In addition, these terms are even more difficult to internalise than administrative ones because they are less frequently used and belong to a specialised jargon which is not easily incorporated by native speakers into their ordinary speech.

3.2. Dialects

In relation to the degree of internalisation of technical vocabulary, it would be interesting to note how these terms are recorded in texts belonging to different areas since this could be an indicator of how certain words which may enter the language as “specific” are later spread and become part of the common core. Nevertheless, we must bear in mind that, in this particular case, we are not dealing with dialectal forms, that is, forms externally marked as representative for a geographical variety, but with forms found in texts localised in particular dialectal areas. This is why we will restrict the study of this aspect to a mere descriptive presentation of our data because the results do not differ much from what might be expected.

The nouns in our samples have been ascribed to different dialects according to the information provided in the COCOA Headers of the *HC*.⁸ Though all the dialects in the ME part of the *HC* appear in our samples, not all of them are equally represented. Table 3 shows the dialectal distribution of the nouns in our texts.

Table 3. Dialects in our samples

Dialect	No. of instances	%
East Midlands	577	66.32
West Midlands	68	7.81
South	167	19.2
Kentish	13	1.49
Northern	31	3.56
Unknown	14	1.61

The first column shows the dialect, the middle column the number of our nouns in each dialect and the right column the corresponding percentage.

All dialectal areas are represented but, as might be expected, East Midlands is the one with the highest number of instances (66.32%). This may be accounted for by the fact that the political and economic centre of the country was located there, thus turning this local variety into the most prestigious one.

The Southern dialect comes second. A closer look at our data (see Table 4 below) indicates that there is a quantitative leap from ME1 to ME4 and the number of forms has increased to a surprising 129. It is possible that geofigureical proximity to the East Midlands could have caused this expansion of technical nouns found in Southern texts.

At the other end of the scale, not many technical terms have been found in texts produced in Kent. Only 13 instances have been traced for Kentish, just one less than in the case of texts of unknown provenance.

Table 4. Distribution of technical nouns according to dialect and sub-period

	ME1		ME2		ME3		ME4	
	no.	%	no.	%	no.	%	no.	%
EM	0	0	29	3.33	343	39.42	206	23.67
WM	41	4.72	12	1.38	0	0	15	1.72
S	10	1.15	25	2.9	3	0.34	129	14.82
K	2	0.23	10	1.15	0	0	0	0
N	0	0	0	0	18	2.07	13	1.49
Unknown	0	0	0	0	0	0	14	1.61

We can see from the data in Table 4 above that nouns in the fields of technology and administration produced in texts belonging to this East Midlands dialect are not to be found until 1250. It is not only that this particular dialect did not acquire relevance until one century later, but we must also consider an external cause for this linguistic situation since 1150-1250 (ME1) is still a period of political instability.

Apart from what has been mentioned so far, the analysis of our texts according to their dialectal distribution does not seem to provide any new information about the evolution of the vocabulary of technology and administration. It is worth turning now to other aspects of our study because although texts have been written in particular dialectal areas they may or may not contain dialectally marked forms. The fact of finding technical nouns mainly in East Midlands texts does not necessarily imply that those forms are dialectally marked, especially if they already belong to the common core.

3.3. Text type

We have also followed the *HC* for the consideration of the different types of texts found in ME. These are not the same throughout the ME period since texts are clearly more diversified in ME3 and ME4 than earlier. The technical terms in our corpus can be classified according to the textual distribution shown in Table 5 below.

⁸ The compilers of the *HC* make a distinction between dialectal evidence obtained from *A linguistic atlas of Late Middle English* and other sources. Such a distinction is neither necessary nor useful for the purpose of this study.

Table 5. Instances of technical nouns in each text-type per sub-period

	ME1	ME2	ME3	ME4
Law	0	0	0	1
Documents	0	0	0	1
Religious treatises	2	1	0	1
Prefaces/Epilogues	0	0	0	8
Depositions	0	0	0	4
History	2	2	2	15
Biofigurey/Life Saint	0	1	0	2
Fiction	0	1	9	1
Romance	0	6	0	9
Drama Mystery	0	0	0	4
Letters-Private	0	0	0	2
Handbook, Astronomy	0	0	22	5
Letters Non-Private	0	0	1	1
Bible	0	1	2	2
Handbook, Medicine	1	0	2	2
Handbook, others	0	0	0	3
Science, Medicine	0	0	0	1
Philosophy	1	0	0	0
Homily	0	1	3	0
Travelogue	0	0	1	0
X	0	4	0	0

Some aspects of Table 5 require comment: astronomy texts contain the highest number of technical nouns (27). They are not represented in ME1 and ME2, though we could suppose that many of our nouns have been extracted from very specialised texts such as *Peri Didaxeon* or *The proclamation of Henry III*. However, in second place, with 17 technical substantives, we find the text type labelled “history”, as in

- 7) Ande the same yere, on Syn Petrys eve and Poule, the Erle of Huntyngdon whythe o+tyr certayne lordys faughtyn whithe *carakys* of Gene, and dyscomfyte hem, and toke iiij of +t=e= grettyste of them and hyr patronys. And the amerelle of hem was the Duke of Burbone, and he was take whithe hem whythe alle the tresoure that sholde have wagyd hem for halfe a yere.
(*Gregory's Cronicle, the historical collections of a citizen of London*)

In third place we find “Romance” illustrated in example (8):

- 8) Ich wile +gow tellen al to gadre/ Of +tat kni+gt and of is fadre,/ Sire Gii:/ Of Hamtoun he was sire/ And of al +tat ilche *schire*,/ To wardi.
(*The romanceof sir Beues of Hantoun*)

“Fiction” (11 cases) and “Prefaces/Epilogues” (8 cases) are among the text types containing a high number of technical terms as shown in examples (9) and (10) respectively:

- 9) Justice he was ful often in assise,/ By *patente* and by pleyn commissioun./ For his science and for his heigh renoun,/ Of fees and robes hadde he many oon.
(*The General Prologue to the Canterbury Tales*)
- 10) Alas what habundance was somme tymes in the *royames* / & what prosperite / in which was Iustyce. and euery man in his offyce contente / how stood the cytees that tyme in worship & renome. how was renommed the noble royame of englond alle the world dradde hit and spake worshyp of hit.
(*Caxton, Prologues and epilogues*)

Surprisingly enough, those types of text that could be considered specialised such as “Law” or “Documents” exhibit only one case. These results reinforce the idea that technical terms have been by now included in the common core vocabulary of English, and are not restricted to particular areas of the lexicon.

3.4. Etymological origin

The etymological study of nouns in the semantic field under survey will help to determine the influence, by means of language contact, of different linguistic strata upon English. The ethnic diversity of the speech community which is inherent in the interaction of either Romance or Germanic cultures can be traced in the origin of lexical items.

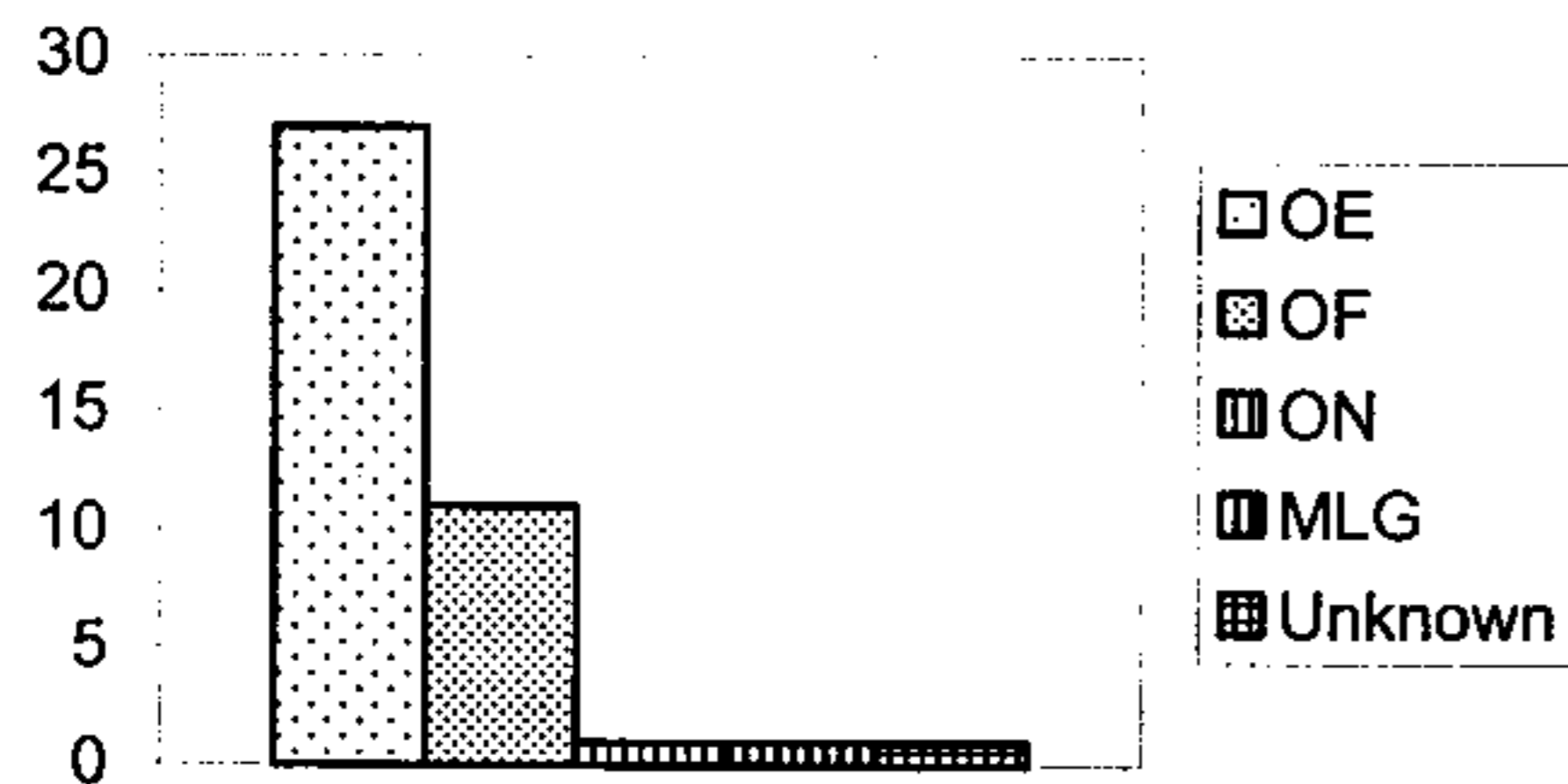
The etymological origins found in our samples include Old English (OE), Old Norse (ON), French (F), Middle Low German (MLG), Latin (L), An-

glo-French (AF), Middle Dutch (MDu), Middle Latin (ML) and “unknown”, and their distribution per periods is as shown in Figures 1 to 3 below (except for the first subperiod, ME1):

From the 27 nouns found in ME1, 26 come from Old English as might be expected. 1150-1250 is a period in which the few existing written records still have an Anglo-Saxon basis inherited from the previous period. The linguistic effects of the Norman Conquest are not immediately felt after the event but some time later. Similarly, the Scandinavian influence of the first migratory movements and the Viking invasions was not visible in the language at first, not only because of the time it took to reflect oral linguistic habits in written records, but also because of the absorption and assimilation of the Scandinavian culture into common, ordinary life. There is just one noun of Latin origin which could be considered as an example of the imprint left by the Romans from their first contacts with the native English population.

Figure 1 below illustrates the etymological variety of the subperiod between 1250 and 1350 (ME2). Once more, the prominence of OE as opposed to OF confirms the time that any language requires to conduct any writing using new vocabulary adopted from other languages (see section 3.1 above).

Figure 1. Etymological origins in ME2

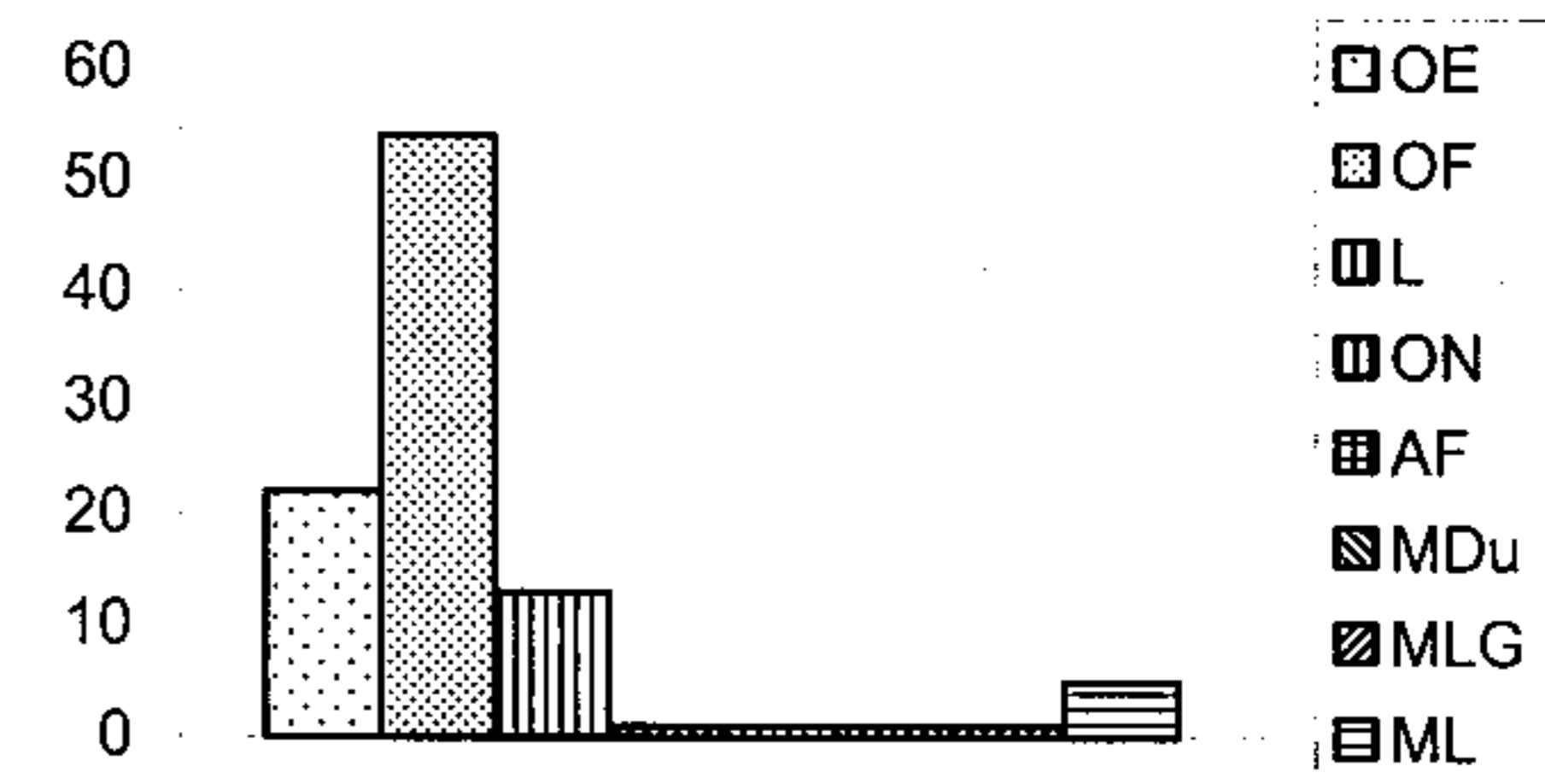


Of 41 technical nouns, 27 correspond to OE and OF occupies a timid second position with just 11 items. ON (*gonnylde*) and MLG (*score*) exhibit one form each and the remaining one is of unknown origin. ON and MLG attest, on the one hand, the still live and pervasive influence of the Scandinavian culture (Moskowich 1995a) and, on the other, the beginning relations, primarily commercial transactions such as wool trade (Turville Petre 1996; Crespo and Moskowich 2003), with continental peoples descending from a common Germanic ancestor.

From 1350 onwards we can trace a radical change in the origin of technical terms. Contrary to what happened earlier, most nouns descend from OF. OE will become the second most common origin.

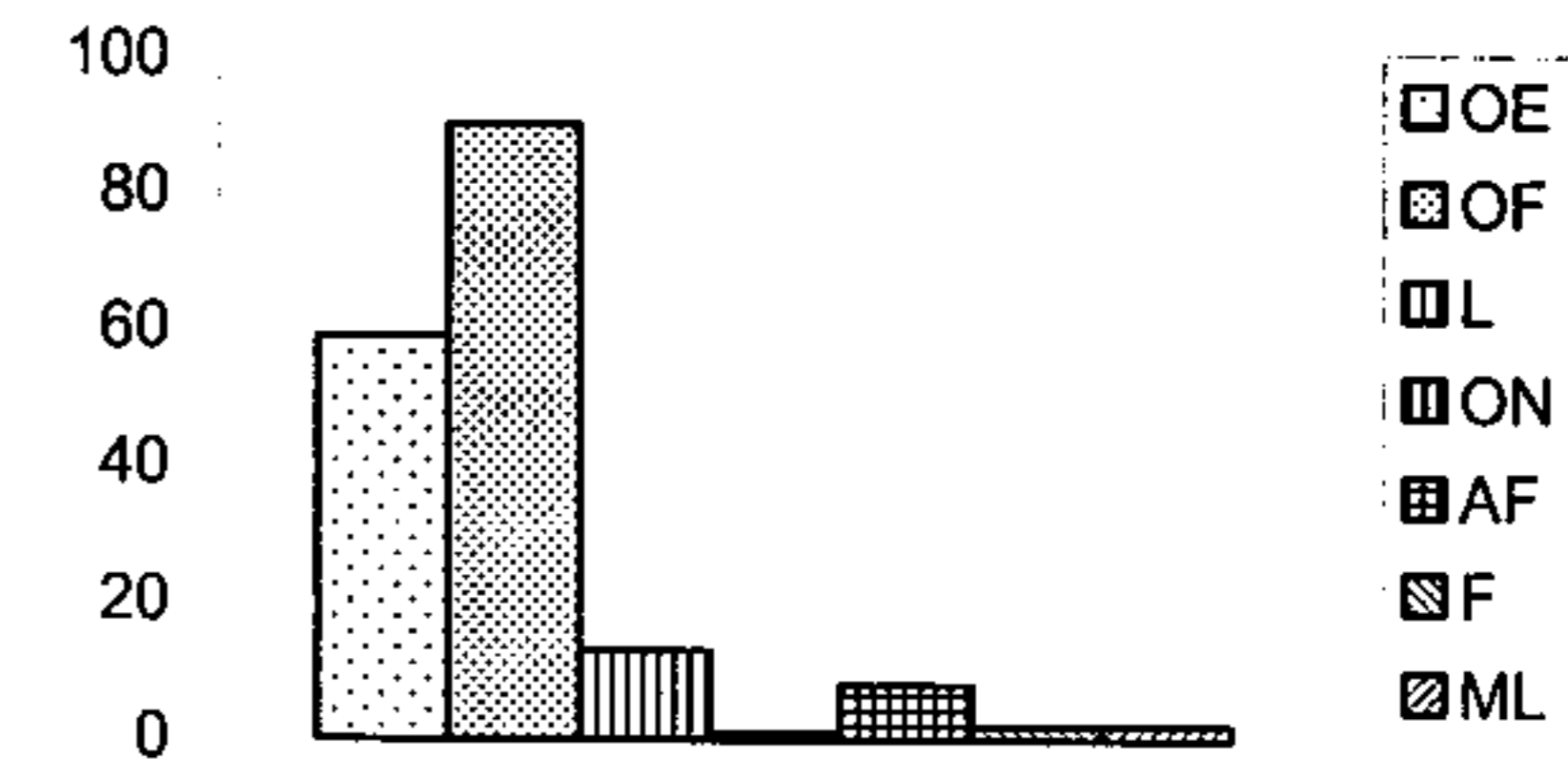
In the period between 1350 and 1420 we have found 101 technical nouns, the etymological distribution of which is as shown in Figure 2 below:

Figure 2. Etymological origins in ME3



The tendency initiated in 1350 continues from 1420 onwards (ME4). The 175 nouns are distributed as follows: 90 come from OF, 59 from OE, 13 from L, 8 from AF, 2 from F, 2 from ML and, 1 from ON. Figure 3 below illustrates the distribution:

Figure 3. Etymological origins in ME4



The wide range of etymological origins present in pre-standardisation times (characterised by regionalism and lack of uniformity in the language) survives

into Standard English. Many technical nouns of non-OE origin were so frequently used that they have survived to today (*country, nation, parliament, law, jurisdiction*). This means that this lexicon is so rooted in the common core that it has transcended the linguistic chaos of standardisation.

4. Concluding remarks

A tentative conclusion can be drawn from the preceding section. There is a clear enlargement of the field of technology and administration between 1150 and 1500. Such an increase is produced not only in the total number of nouns, but also in the frequency of their occurrence. As seen in section 3.1. this change in the lexicon does not affect all sub-fields equally since the one labelled "administration" exhibits a greater number of instances. This asymmetry is also detected in the chronological aspect. In fact, section 3.1. shows that this enlarging is most pervasive between 1350 and 1420. As was already mentioned in section 1, sociohistorical events do have an effect on language, though it is not immediate.

As for dialects, we can draw no conclusion different from what is generally accepted. Our data do not shed any new light on this matter because our technical nouns are not dialectally-marked forms though they are included in texts ascribed to particular dialectal areas.

The analysis of text-types reveals that the use of technical nouns in ME is not restricted to any specific kind of texts. On the contrary, such terms appear to be widespread, probably a sign that they could be well understood by the population in general.

Finally, the evolution of technical terms in English as far as their etymology is regarded, seems to be different for the two first and the two last subperiods. The two first (1150-1350) are characterised by the predominance of OE whereas the two last (1350-1500) exhibit more forms of foreign origin. This is not surprising whatsoever since the language is reflecting the sociohistorical events of a couple of centuries earlier.

In this respect, it is worth mentioning that such events, namely the contact with other speech communities, were consciously or unconsciously assimilated by the native population.

The changes this analysis reveals confirm that ME, as much as any other language, was a living structure.

REFERENCES

- Ammon, Ulrich Dittmar Norbert – Matt Heir, K.J. (eds.)
1987 *Sociolinguistics. An international handbook of the science of language and society, 1452-1469*. Berlin: Walter de Gruyter.

- Baugh, Albert
1990 "Social stratification of language", in: Edgar C. Polomé (ed.), 273-280.
- Blount, Ben G. – Mary Sanches (eds.)
1977 *Sociocultural dimensions of language change*. New York: Academic Press.
- Britton, Derek (ed.)
1996 *English historical linguistics, 1994*. Amsterdam – Philadelphia: John Benjamins.
- Burchfield, Robert
1985 *The English language*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Chase, Thomas J. P.
1988 A diachronic semantic classification of the English religious lexis. [Unpublished dissertation, Glasgow University].
- Crespo, Begoña
1996 "English and French as L₁ and L₂ in Renaissance England: A consequence of medieval nationalism", *SEDERI VII*: 107-114.
2000 "Historical background of multilingualism and its impact on English", in: D. A. Trotter (ed.), 23-35.
2002 "A preliminary approach to the semantic analysis of socio-economic terms in the history of English", *Quaderni di Semantica XXIII/2*: 257-272.
In press El cambio semántico en la historia de la lengua inglesa. Oviedo: Septem ediciones.
- Crespo, Begoña – Isabel Moskowich-Spiegel
2003 "Financial terms in English: A historical approach", in: Antonio De Toro Santos – M. Jesús Lorenzo Modia (eds.), 139-148.
- De Toro Santos, Antonio – M. Jesús Lorenzo Modia (eds.)
2003 *El inglés como vocación. Homenaje al Profesor Miguel Castelo Montero*. Coruña: Universidade da Coruña.
- Fennell, Barbara
2001 *A history of English. A sociolinguistic approach*. Oxford Blackwell Publishers.
- Foster Jones, Richard
1953 *The triumph of the English language. A survey of opinions concerning the vernacular from the introduction of printing to the restoration*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.
- Horobin, Simon – Jeremy, Smith
2002 *An introduction to Middle English*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.
- Hughes, Geoffrey
2000 *A history of English words*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishers.
- Iglesias Rábade, Luis – Susana Doval Suárez (eds.)
2003 *Studies in contrastive linguistics: Proceedings of the Second International Contrastive Linguistics Conference*. Santiago de Compostela: Servicio de Publicacións da Universidade de Santiago de Compostela.
- Jespersen, Otto
1954 *Growth and structure of the English language*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Jhinzi, Su
1992 "Culture and language change: From the perspective of two groups of words", *Journal of Macrolinguistics 2*: 105-109.
- Kytö, Merja (comp.)
1991 *The Helsinki Corpus of English Texts. Diachronic Part*. Helsinki: Helsinki University Press.
- Labov, William
1972 *Sociolinguistic patterns*. Philadelphia: Pennsylvania University Press.
- Lass, Roger (ed.)
1999 *The Cambridge history of the English language. Volume III. 1476-1776*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

- Millward, Celia M.
1996 *A biography of the English language*. Texas: Harcourt Brace College Publishers.
- Moskowich-Spiegel Fandiño, Isabel
1995a “Language contact and language change: The Danes in England”, *Revista Alicantina de Estudios Ingleses* 8: 139-153.
1995b *Los escandinavos en Inglaterra y el cambio léxico en inglés medieval*. Coruña: Universidade da Coruña.
- Moskowich-Spiegel Fandiño, Isabel – Elena Seoane Posse
1996 “Scandinavian loans and processes of word-formation in ME: Some preliminary considerations”, in Derek Britton (ed.), 185-198.
- Mourón Figueroa, Cristina – Carlos Valcárcel Riveiro
2002 “The notation of nasal diphthongization (aun, oun) within the sociolinguistic context of Plantagenet England”, in: Luis Iglesias Rábade (ed.), 705-722.
- Nevalainen, Terttu
1999 “Early Modern English lexis and semantics”, in: Roger Lass (ed.), 332-458.
- Polomé, Edgar C. (ed.)
1990 *Research guide in language change*. Berlin-New York: Mouton de Gruyter.
- Romaine, Suzanne
1982 *Socio-historical linguistics. Its status and methodology*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
1987 “Historical sociolinguistics: Problems & methodology”, in: Norbert Dittmar U. Ammon – Matt Heir, K. J. (eds.), 1452-1469.
- Room, Adrian
1991 *A NTC's Dictionary of changes in meanings. A comprehensive reference to the major changes in meanings in English words*. Illinois: NTC Publishing Group.
- Serjeantson, Mary S.
1935 *A history of foreign words in English*. London: Routledge – Kegan Paul.
- Tejada Caller, Paloma
1999 *El cambio lingüístico. Claves para interpretar la lengua inglesa*. Madrid: Alianza.
- Trotter, D. A. (ed.)
2000 *Multilingualism in Later Medieval Britain*. Cambridge: D. S. Brewer.
- Turville-Petre, Thorlac
1996 *England, the nation: Language, literature and national identity, 1290-1340*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.