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HEAVEN AND EARTH, GOOD AND BAD, ANSWERED AND SAID: A SURVEY OF ENGLISH BINOMIALS AND MULTINOMIALS (PART II)

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Abstract

Binomials in general and English binomials in particular are a frequent, complex and important linguistic as well as stylistic phenomenon.¹ Compared to other linguistic phenomena, however, they are a relatively under-researched field. Therefore our aim is to provide a concise survey of English binomials, sketching their structure, function, history and the current state of scholarship, and pointing out possibilities for further research.²

The first part of this article was published in the previous issue of the journal. In Part II we move on to the etymological (9.) and the semantic structure of English binomials (10.). Very broadly speaking, we thus move from aspects that concern mainly the surface to features that lie a little deeper down. The etymological structure has to do with the use and distribution of native words and of loan-words; the semantic structure comprises synonyms, antonyms, and complementary pairs, as well as factual, stylistic, and cultural binomials. We also deal briefly with the semantic features of multinomials (11.), with the relation of translated binomials to their (especially Latin or French) source (12.), with differences between authors and texts (13.), with the sequence of elements and the factors

¹ Stylistics is, of course, an interdisciplinary field: it is part of linguistics as well as of literary studies.

² Of course we cannot claim completeness – the history of English binomials still remains to be written, and we have only sketched some aspects that can certainly be dealt with in greater detail.

that influence the sequence (14.), and with the question how far binomials are formulaic and how far they are flexible and can be coined on the spur of the moment (15.). A brief conclusion (16.) and references complete the article.

9. The etymological structure of binomials and the so-called translation theory

As regards the etymological structure of binomials, there are, especially for Middle English and Modern English, four basic possibilities, namely “native word + native word”, “loan-word + loan-word”, “native word + loan-word”, “loan-word + native word”.³ Broadly speaking native words are words going back to Old English (and ultimately often to Germanic and Indo-European), whereas loan-words are mainly words borrowed from Latin or from French. In order to keep the classification relatively simple and not too complicated, we have included Scandinavian loan-words among the native words, because they belong to the Germanic layer, and among the loan-words we have not distinguished between words borrowed from Latin and word borrowed from French.⁴ We give just a few examples for each of the four groups:

- a) “native word + native word”: (i) nouns: *body and mind; father and mother; god and king; leader and teacher; births and deaths; of a manne and of a woman*; (ii) adjectives: *good or yuell* ‘good or evil’; *hote & drie* ‘hot and dry’; (iii) verbs: *answered and said; come and find; to hear and understand; know and understand; singe and pleyen*; we have also included participles: *seeing and hearing*.
- b) “loan-word + loan-word”: (i) nouns: *adultery and fornication; causes and conditions; rancour and ire; grace and victory; fine robes and superior garments; flowers and fruit; chambres and stables* (Chaucer); *protector and defender*; (ii) adjectives: *clear and pure; hardy and lecherous; prudent and sage; sovereign and celestial*; (iii) verbs: *divided and departed; be expulsed and exiled; report and remember*.
- c) “native word + loan-word”: (i) nouns: *dread and despair; kings and princes; might and power; sin and iniquity*; (ii) adjectives: *soft and gentle; heavenly and human*; (iii) verbs: *grow and multiply; deem and judge*.
- d) “loan-word + native word”: (i) nouns: *battle and fighting; cogitation and thought; consideration and mind; faith and understanding; meditation and wisdom; poetry and versemaking; power and might*; (ii) adjectives: *yvell and vngracious* ‘evil and ungracious’; (iii) verbs: *contrived and made; finished and ended; perished and drowned; revert and come again*.

Especially in Middle English and Early Modern English, there was a large influx of loan-words from French and from Latin, and the so-called translation theory claims

³ Malkiel (1959) apparently does not deal with the etymological aspect of binomials.

⁴ The distinction between loan-words from Latin and from French is sometimes easy and sometimes difficult, and in some cases words were apparently borrowed from both languages more or less simultaneously, or borrowed from one but re-inforced from the other.

that a recent loan-word was explained by a native word or by an older and established loan-word.⁵ In our experience so far, such cases do exist, but they are not really frequent and they are not easy to prove. Thus, in *revert and come again, come again* seems to be an explanation of *revert*. Similarly, in *far away putting and banishing* (Pecock, *Donet*), *far away putting* seems to be a kind of paraphrase of *banishing*, which was borrowed into English in the late 14th century. Similarly, in *comprehension and full taking* (Pecock, *Donet*), *full taking* is apparently Pecock's translation of *comprehension*; the latter is apparently first attested in Pecock's *Donet*. In some cases, the native word actually precedes the loan-word (see the examples given under (c) above); thus in some cases a binomial may have been used to introduce a new word (loan-word). In other cases, the native word is not really a synonym of the loan-word, e.g. *superfluous and not praiseworthy* (from *On Famous Women*) – *superfluous* is more specific than *not praiseworthy*, which is just generally negative. But *superfluous* was only borrowed around 1450, i.e. *On Famous Women* has one of the earliest attestations of *superfluous*.

And it is often difficult to prove that the loan-word was hard to understand and needed to be explained with a native word, and probably a distinction should be made between author and audience. Many authors and translators (such as Chaucer, Gower, Caxton) had a good command of English and of French (or Anglo-Norman) and of Latin, so for them probably few loan-words needed an explanation, but perhaps in some cases they felt an explanation in the form of a translation to be necessary or at least useful for their intended audience. Thus Pecock may have felt that a translation of the word *comprehension*, which he apparently first introduced into English, was necessary. Similarly, the versifier of *On Famous Women* may have felt that some sort of explanation (if only a very vague one) of *superfluous*, which was a new loan-word in his time, was necessary.

10. The semantics of binomials

Whereas aspects such as word-classes and etymology are mostly relatively easy to classify (but see Part I, section 8.2., and section 9. above), meaning and semantic relations are often more difficult to analyze and to categorize. Three basic semantic categories of binomials are fairly clear, however, namely synonymy, antonymy, and complementarity.⁶ Especially the latter has many subgroups. All three groups contain pairs of words that could be regarded as co-hyponyms in a semantic field, e.g.

⁵ When referring to the translation theory, reference is often made to Jespersen (1972 [1905], § 98), but Jespersen does not call it translation theory, and he also does not distinguish between binomials in our sense and words that are explicitly explained (e.g. with the help of a relative clause), such as *cherité that is luvē*, or *pacience, þat is polemodnesse*. Words that are followed by an explicit explanation are here not regarded as binomials; see also Part I, section 8.6.

⁶ In contrast to some scholars (such as Leisi 1947 and Koskenniemi 1968) who only take synonymous (or, in their terminology, tautologous) pairs into account, we also deal with antonymous binomials. For an early attempt at classification, see, e.g. Hecht (1907: 88). Hecht also mentions that in some Old English binomials a general word was combined with a dialectally restricted word.

custom and usage; hot and cold; malice and envy. Names pose a particular problem: *Adam and Eve*, for example, should probably be classified among the complementary pairs (see further below, section 10.3.(k)).

10.1. Synonyms

Synonyms are usually defined as words that have a similar meaning (or the same basic meaning) and that can be exchanged at least in some contexts. Often however, the basic meaning (the denotation) is the same, but the connotation, e.g. the stylistic level, is different. Loan-words, for example, are often used more rarely and on a higher stylistic level than the corresponding native words; for example *combustion*, a loan-word taken over in the late 14th century, has probably always been rarer than *burning* (*brenning*); similarly, in *contruyyd and made* ‘contrived and made’, the loan-word *contrived* has always been much rarer than the native word *made*.⁷ Many words are polysemous, and they are synonymous in one or some of their meanings, but not in all of their meanings.

If we want to distinguish synonymy from tautology, then tautology strictly speaking refers to words that have exactly the same meaning (the same denotation and the same connotation) and that can be exchanged in all contexts, but true tautology is apparently very rare. An example from Modern English is perhaps *to baptize* and *to christen*: *She was baptized Dorothy* equals *She was christened Dorothy*. But it is often difficult to distinguish synonymy from tautology, especially in Old and Middle English texts, where we have no native speakers that we could ask, nor any tests that we could apply. Moreover there seems to be some terminological confusion: We have the impression that when authors such as Leisi (1947) speak of tautology (see the title of his book), they actually refer to what is here called synonymy.⁸ Other scholars use the term ‘near-synonymy’, e.g. Malkiel (1959: 125ff). Due to these difficulties we do not differentiate between synonymy and tautology here, but list all relevant instances under the heading of synonymy.⁹ Some examples are:

- a) Nouns: *banners and flags; beauty and fairness; cogitation and thought*;¹⁰ *combustion and burning* (*combustion and brenning* – see above); *custom and usage; withoute defaulte or lackke* ‘without default or lack’; *domynacioun & masterie*

⁷ Cf. the quotations given in the MED and in the OED. Of course there are exceptions; thus the loan-word *to judge* is now used more frequently (and in more senses) than the native word *to deem*, and the loan-word *people* has replaced most of the semantically corresponding native words. On the question which loan-words remained rare and which ones more or less replaced the originally synonymous native words see, e.g. Lutz (2013).

⁸ The same is true of Hecht (1907: 88): When he speaks of tautology (“Tautologien”), he apparently refers to what is here called synonymy.

⁹ This has also to do with the question whether a word was used in technical sense or in a looser sense; thus *adultery and fornication* in looser application are tautologous, but strictly speaking adultery is committed by married people and fornication by unmarried people; in the latter sense they are not even synonymous.

¹⁰ *Cogitation and thought* are probably tautologous, but *thought* is the native word and *cogitation* is the loan-word, and *thought* is also used much more frequently than *cogitation*.

‘domination and mastery’; *force and might*; *jewels and gems*; *joy and delight*; *lauds and praising*; *laziness and sloth*;¹¹ *robes – garments* (in: *fine robes and superior garments*); *sorrow and distress*; *lord and sire*.

- b) Adjectives: *clean and spotless*; *deceitful and fraudulent*; *prudent and sage*; *pure and unadulterated*; *still and unmoving*.
- c) Verbs: *cristenyd and baptisid* ‘christened and baptized’; *deem and judge*; *eject and cast out*; *finished and ended*; *lead and conduct*; *to more and magnify*; *quaked and trembled*; *trembled and shook*; *rent and torn*; *chaunten and singe* ‘chant and sing’.

Clear instances of tautology are apparently repetitions of the same word, as in *days and days*, or *years and years* among the nouns, and *little and little*, or *more and more* among the adjectives and adverbs. But even here the tautology is formal and not semantic, because the repetition probably makes the binomial more emphatic, i.e. even in cases of repetition of a word the resulting binomial is semantically and pragmatically more than the sum of its elements; *days and days* and *years and years* probably stand for ‘a very long time’.¹²

10.2. Antonyms

Antonyms are words with an opposite meaning. Often several subgroups of antonymy are distinguished:

- a) strict antonymy, where one concept, state or relation normally excludes the other, and where adjectives normally cannot be graded, e.g. *friend – enemy*; *alive – dead*; *black – white*;
- b) gradable antonymy, where adjectives can be graded, e.g. *hot – cold* (also: *hotter – colder*, etc.), and where more terms can be added, e.g. *freezing*, *lukewarm*, *warm*, *burning*, etc., so that a semantic field emerges;
- c) converseness, where one concept presupposes the other, as in *father – son* (or *daughter*) or *sell – buy* or *above – below*: someone can only be a father if he has a son or a daughter,¹³ and one can only sell something if somebody else buys it, etc.

But as we do not distinguish between synonymy and tautology here, we shall also not distinguish between various kinds of antonymy.

¹¹ In medieval theology this was one of the seven (or eight) deadly sins, and in this context it is usually called sloth.

¹² Cf. the Bavarian motto of the soccer club Bayern München, *Mia san mia* ~ in Standard German ‘Wir sind wir’, i.e. ‘We are we’. Formally this is a tautology, but semantically it carries a wealth of connotations, e.g. ‘We are strong and independent and not afraid of anyone and we do what we like and we don’t care what others might think’. On the other hand, it has often been pointed out that “Brexit means Brexit”, the phrase used repeatedly by Theresa May, the present British prime minister, is not only formally tautologic, but also semantically empty, because apparently she had no idea what Brexit actually entails.

¹³ In religious contexts, *father* can also be applied metaphorically, e.g. to a priest, who is like a father to his flock of believers.

What is in any case more important in the context of binomials, is that the antonymous pairs frequently express a higher unity, the parts of a whole, and that the higher unity is often more abstract, whereas the antonymous pair is often more concrete, e.g. *body and mind* (~ human being); *births and deaths* (~ beginning and end of life); *father and mother* (~ parents); *men and women* (~ people, mankind); *sons and daughters* (~ children).¹⁴ Further examples are:¹⁵

- a) Nouns: *day and night* (the entire day); *prose and verse* (modes of literature); *hate or love* (two basic emotions); *werre or pees* ‘war or peace’.
- b) Adjectives:¹⁶ *The artificall and þe natural* ‘the artificial and the natural’; *bound and free*; *good and bad*; *good and evil*; *low or high*; *hot and cold*; *youngest and least of age*.¹⁷
- c) Verbs: *flower or fade*; *going and coming*; *shut and opened*.
- d) Adverbs: *up and down*; *far and near*.

10.3. Complementary pairs

We have classified as complementary pairs all binomials that are neither clearly synonymous nor clearly antonymous.¹⁸ This group has many subgroups, and the following list does not claim to be exhaustive. Moreover, some binomials are not easy to classify and can be cross-classified, i.e. can be assigned to two (or even more) groups.

- a) “more general – more specific”, i.e. a more general concept followed by a more specific concept, e.g.: (i) nouns: *abuse and blows*; *acts and triumphs*; *errors and idolatry*; *years and days* (larger unit followed by a smaller unit); *his good leuyng and prayers* ‘his good living and prayers’; *a wicked man and a traitor*; (ii) adjectives: *yvell and vngracious* ‘evil and ungracious’; (iii) verbs: *perished and drowned* (drowning as a specific form of perishing);
- b) “more specific – more general”, i.e. a more specific concept followed by a more general concept, e.g.: (i) nouns: *treasure and riches*; *any crystal or precious stone*; (ii) adjectives: *superfluous and not praiseworthy*; (iii) verbs: *shot and slew* (shooting as a specific form of slaying);
- c) “generally positive concepts or attributes”, i.e. a combination of two generally positive terms (persons, things, attributes, actions), e.g.: (i) nouns: *adornment and purity*; *dukes and princes*; *emptiness and stillness* (see further section 10.6. below); *faith and understanding*; *kingdoms and empires*; *laud and glory*; *leader and teacher*; *treasure and riches*; (ii) adjectives: *clear and pure*; *expert and strong*; *gracious and merciful*; *rich and loving*; *sharp and cutting* (also: ‘cause and effect’, and perhaps also: ‘sequence of states and actions’); *soft and gentle*.

¹⁴ Malkiel (1959) also has *Adam and Eve* for ‘the first humans’.

¹⁵ See also e.g. Malkiel (1959: 128).

¹⁶ In some instances, adjectives are used as nouns.

¹⁷ In this as well as in other examples, synonymy is achieved by negating a term; see Part I, section 8.5.

¹⁸ See also e.g. Malkiel (1959: 127).

In the translations of the *Lotus Sutra*, *wonderful* (or *wondrous*) is sometimes used as a generally positive attribute, e.g. *profound and wonderful*; *supreme and wonderful*;

- d) “generally negative concepts or attributes”, i.e. a combination of two generally negative terms (persons, things, attributes, actions), e.g.: (i) nouns: *doubts and regrets*; *malice and envy*; *sorrow and distress*; *sorrow and wailing*; *the world and the flesh* (see further section 10.6. below); *a wicked man and a traitor*; (ii) adjectives: *concerned and fearful*; *lascivious and wanton*; *poor and feeble*; *superfluous and not praiseworthy* (this looks at first sight like a synonymous pair, but *not praiseworthy* is not really a synonym of *superfluous*; possibly the pair could also be classified under (b) above, “more specific – more general”);
- e) “sequence of actions” (‘B follows A’, or ‘B is the consequence of A’):¹⁹ since actions are primarily expressed by verbs, there are mainly verbal binomials in this group, e.g. *be negligent and lose his things* ‘be negligent and lose one’s things’ (losing one’s things as a consequence of being negligent); *hear and understand*; *receive and retain*; *studied and memorized*; but substantival binomials also occur, e.g. *meditation and wisdom* (i.e. wisdom following from meditation); *thunder and lightning* (we have been told that thunder follows lightning, but in Caxton and his French source thunder precedes lightning);
- f) “cause and effect”, which normally also entails a sequence of actions or states, e.g.: (i) nouns: *darkness and dread* (dread resulting from darkness); *victories and triumphs* (triumphs following victories); (ii) adjectives: *mortal and dead*; *sharp and cutting*;
- g) “gradation” or “climax”, i.e. the second word expresses a higher (or lower) degree than the first, e.g.: (i) nouns: *error or heresy*; *error or heretic* (a heretic could be condemned to death); (ii) adjectives: *few or none*; *good and excellent*; *little or nothing*;
- h) “co-hyponyms in a semantic field”; with verbs, alternative actions, e.g.: (i) nouns: *astronomy and philosophy*; *causes and conditions*; *fish and fowl*; *flowers and fruit*; *hair and beard*; *herbs and trees*; *seeing and hearing* (two of the five senses); *sight and feeling* (also two of the five senses); *sword and shield*; (ii) adjectives: *hot and dry*, *hot and moist* (as attributes of the elements);²⁰ (iii) verbs: *eat and drink*. In *slain and taken prisoners* the conjunction *and* is somewhat odd, because slain warriors cannot be taken prisoners, so one would rather expect *or* as the conjunction, and the binomial **slain or taken prisoners* would express two alternative actions (and not a sequence of actions);
- i) “larger unit and smaller unit” (or vice versa),²¹ e.g. *genus and species*; *months and years*;

¹⁹ According to Malkiel (1959: 129), such binomials (also, e.g. *the rise and fall*) are quite exceptional – but statements like this are based on Malkiel’s impression and not on the analysis of a corpus.

²⁰ *hot and dry* as the attributes of fire; *hot and moist* as the attributes of air; *cold and moist* as the attributes of water, and *cold and dry* as the attributes of earth.

²¹ See e.g. Malkiel (1959: 128–129).

- j) of course some binomials are difficult to classify, e.g. *pe influence and multitude*;
- k) names: Some binomials consisting of names also form a sort of semantic unit and refer to a coherent concept, e.g. *Jesus and Mary* ‘the son of God and his mother’; *Peter and Paul* ‘the two most important apostles’; *Alexander and Caesar* ‘two famous rulers and conquerors’. This is also true of some trinomials, e.g. *Tom, Dick and Harry* ‘everybody’ (pejorative).

10.4. Generalizing statement

Sometimes a generalizing statement is added at the end of a binomial or a multinomial, in order to include all possible instances, e.g. by Pecock in his *Donet: bi enye vnauisidnes, hastynes, or ignoraunce, or bi eny opire maner*.²²

10.5. Factual and stylistic binomials (and multinomials)

A distinction can also be made between factual and stylistic binomials. Factual binomials mirror the reality (or what was believed to be the reality). Apparently they occur mainly among the antonyms (e.g. *births and deaths*; *good and bad*) and the complementary pairs (e.g. *seeing and hearing*). There are also factual multinomials, e.g. quadrinomials expressing the four elements, namely *The fyr, the eyr, the water, and the lond* ‘the fire, the air, the water, and the land’ (Chaucer, *Canterbury Tales*, Fragment I, 2992), or quadrinomials expressing the attributes of the four elements and the four bodily humours, i.e. *hoot or coold or moiste or drye* ‘hot or cold or moist or dry’ (Chaucer, *Canterbury Tales*, Fragment I, 420). The stylistic binomials occur mainly among the synonymous pairs, e.g.

- a) nouns: *fine robes and superior garments*;
- b) adjectives: *clean and spotless*;
- c) verbs: *trembled and shook*.

But both factual and stylistic binomials show that thinking in pairs seems to be a common human trait, which also finds its linguistic expression in the form of binomials.

10.6. Cultural binomials (and multinomials)

Many binomials refer to things and concepts that are universal, e.g. *men and women*, *father and mother*, but others are apparently culture-specific or have different connotations in different cultures,²³ for example *monks and nuns* (which makes only

²² It seems ironic that Pecock, although he tried very hard to be as unambiguous as possible and to include every possible instance, was accused and condemned as a heretic. Luckily he was not burned, but some of his books were.

²³ Cf. also e.g. Malkiel (1959: 145–155), who even claims that the sequence of *fish and chips* is determined by a cultural ranking (1959: 146); see further section 14.1.(b) below.

sense in Christian and Buddhist societies),²⁴ or *emptiness and stillness*: The latter concept is probably negative in capitalist societies and also among many contemporary politicians and university managers, where making money and concepts such as competition, innovation, excellency, leadership, etc. have top priority and everybody has to be very active and on the move all the time, whereas emptiness and stillness are equated with backwardness and even retrogression; but *emptiness and stillness* is a positive concept in Buddhism as well as in Christian mysticism, because only the exclusion of all worldly activities and thoughts ultimately leads to enlightenment or to the mystic union with God. Similarly *extinction* (as in *emptiness and extinction*) probably has a negative connotation for many people, but to become extinct and enter the nirvana is the highest aim for Buddhists. A specifically Buddhist concept is also encoded in the quadrinomial *birth, old age, sickness, and death*, which expresses the four evils everybody has to suffer (or at least the first and the last). *The world and the flesh* are negative concepts for (especially medieval) Christianity, because they are opposed to heaven and to the soul, and they detract from the attempt to get to heaven, which should be the goal of every Christian. The elements (water, fire, earth and air) as well as the human body (and a little later, the temperaments) were thought to consist of varying combinations of four attributes (hot, cold, moist, dry), but this is no longer assumed today.

10.7. Lexicalized or obscured binomials (and multinomials)

Mostly the elements of binomials have their literal meaning (or one of their literal meanings), but there are also binomials that have a lexicalized or obscured meaning, i.e. the meaning can no longer be inferred from the constituents. This can be due to various factors, e.g. a word may have changed its meaning, but preserves the earlier meaning in a binomial, or two words are homonymous or have become homonymous, etc. Thus in *meat and drink*, *meat* retains its older meaning 'food in general', whereas as an independent word it now normally means 'edible flesh'. Other examples of lexicalized binomials or trinomials are *by hook or by crook* 'by any means', i.e. 'by legal or illegal means', or *hook, line, and sinker* 'completely' (especially when believing a lie or untruth), or *lock, stock and barrel* 'including everything' (but whether this meaning is still synchronically apparent from the words *lock*, *stock*, and *barrel*, is at least doubtful). In the German binomial *Kind und Kegel*, the contemporary association of *Kegel* is with a geometrical figure, with ninepins and bowling, but originally the reference was to legitimate children (*Kind*) and illegitimate children (*Kegel*), i.e. to the entire family or household.²⁵ In *He climbed up and down the ladder*, *up* and *down* have their literal meaning (referring to a vertical movement), but in *He walked up and down the street*, the reference is to a horizontal movement.

²⁴ But even there are different implications.

²⁵ See also e.g. Malkiel (1959: 139).

10.8. Analysis of an example: excerpt from *On Famous Women*

The excerpt from *On Famous Women*, quoted as example (4) in Part I, contains six binomials in sequence; five consist of nouns, and one consists of adjectives (*famous and great*); they are here given in a slightly modernized spelling. One contains synonyms (*laud and praise*), one contains antonyms (*cold and heat*), and four contain complementary pairs: *famous and great* and *wits and lives* can perhaps be classified as “more specific – more general” (and also as “generally positive concepts”); *virtue and prowess* can also be classified as “generally positive concepts”. *Cause and intent* can perhaps be analysed as “sequence of actions or states”. In one case, one is also tempted to give a literary evaluation: that they laboured in *cold and heat* seems a bit like a line-filler that does not really contribute to the description of the lives of famous women.

11. The semantics of multinomials

Apparently there are fewer semantic groups into which multinomials (see Part I, section 3.) can be classified; moreover the longer multinomials sometimes combine several semantic groups. The following groups are relatively frequent:

- a) “generally positive elements”, e.g. the trinomials: (i) nouns: *with incense, flowers, and music* (as accompaniments of a feast); (ii) adjectives: *subtle, wonderful and foremost*;
- b) “generally negative elements”, e.g. the substantival quadrinomial *birth, old age, sickness, and death* (cf. section 10.6. above), which also mirrors a sequence of events, and it also appears in a shortened form as the trinomial *old age, sickness and death*;
- c) “factual elements”, e.g. the trinomial *flesh, hands and feet* (parts of the body), or the quadrinomial *heads, eyes, bodies and limbs* (also the body and some of its parts);
- d) multinomials where at least some of the elements belong to a specific semantic field are the examples quoted in Part I, section 3. under (1) and (2) (both by Chaucer): In example (1) part of the list refers to weapons and armour, and example (2) presents personifications (allegorical figures) of emotions (“Hope”, “Desire”, “Jealousy”, etc.) as well as of bodily states (“Beauty”, “Youth”) and of activities (“Flattery”, “Business”).

12. Relation to the source in translated binomials

In translated texts (and quotations taken from sources) the question is, of course, how far the binomials existed in the source text and were simply taken over or translated by the translator, and how far they were newly introduced by the translator.²⁶ There are at least four possibilities:

- a) The translator has taken over (or translates) a binomial from his source.
- b) The translator has expanded a single word from his source into a binomial.
- c) The translator has newly introduced a binomial without any correspondence in his source.
- d) The translator has simplified a binomial of his source text to a single word.

A further question, especially where (a) is concerned, is how far the translator takes over the words of his source as loan-words, and how far he replaces them with native words. To give just a few examples for these four possibilities:

- a) *grow ye and multiply* is modelled on the biblical (in the Latin of the Vulgata) *crescite et multiplicamini*; Caxton's *souuerayne and celestyall god* 'sovereign and celestial god' is modelled on the French *souuerain et roy celeste*.
- b) Caxton's *gyrle or wench* 'girl or wench' is expanded from French *garche*; see further the following sections (and footnote 29).
- c) Many examples of binomials without any correspondence in the source occur in Milton's *Samson Agonistes*, e.g. *bound and blind*, *captive and blind*, *repose and rest*, *sorrow and heart-grief*.
- d) Simplification of binomials seems to have been comparatively rare, but there is a striking case in the *Old English Dialogues of Gregory* (Hecht 1907): The original translator (Waerferth of Worcester) introduced many new binomials that were not in his Latin source. A later reviser of the Old English text, however, obviously went back to the Latin text, and where the Old English translation had a binomial which was not in the Latin text, he usually simplified it back to a single word; his version is (partly) transmitted in a manuscript usually called H.

13. Differences between authors and texts

Of course there are also differences between authors (known or anonymous) and texts in their use of binomials and multinomials; here we can only give a very brief sketch:²⁷

13.1. *The Historye of Patriarks*

In *The Historye of Patriarks* (by an anonymous translator and compiler), the anonymous binomials were usually taken over from the Latin source, i.e. mainly the Bible (in its Latin Vulgate version), e.g. *hevene and erth* 'heaven and earth' (Gen. 1.1 *caelum et terram*), or *the male and the female* (Gen. 6.19 *masculini sexus et feminini*), whereas most of the synonymous and complementary binomials were introduced by

²⁶ Leisi (1947) decided to ignore this question, but we think that it is an important aspect of the analysis of binomials. After all it is not trivial whether an author or translator simply translated the binomials that he found in his source-text, or whether he introduced new ones.

²⁷ A history of English binomials remains to be written, but it requires a lot of further research.

the translator, e.g. *Gret derth and hunger regnyth and oppressith the londis* (Vulgate 12.10f., *Facta es autem fames in terra*).²⁸ But sometimes synonyms were also taken over from the source; see the example given under section 12. above: *crescite et multiplicamini* translated as *grow ye and multiply*.

13.2. Caxton

Caxton in his *Ovid* took over many binomials from his French source or translated them into his Late Middle English, e.g. *souuerayne and celestyall god* 'sovereign and celestial god' (after French *souerain et roy celeste*), but he also newly introduced many binomials, i.e. he expanded a single word from his source into a binomial, e.g. *gyrle or wench* 'girl or wench' (expanded from French *garche*).²⁹ It is often (and correctly) said that Caxton usually translated fairly literally, but the habit of using binomials seems to have been so deeply engrained in him that he introduced many new binomials that have no direct model in his (often French) sources.

13.3. Pecock

Pecock was not only fond of binomials, but also of multinomials. Whereas Caxton apparently employed many binomials, but few multinomials, Pecock often created strings of multinomials, see example (6):

- (6) to **w**rite or **o**ffer or **p**urpose or **h**olde, **d**efende, or **f**auour, bi enye **v**nauisidnes, **h**astynes, or **i**gnoraunce, or bi eny **o**pire maner, y schal be redi it to **l**eeue, **f**or-sake and **r**etrete, **m**eekly and **d**euoutli ...

Here we have a multinomial consisting of a string of fifteen elements, where four nouns are represented ('unadvisedness, hastiness, ignorance, any other manner', i.e. generally negative elements), two adverbs ('meekly, devoutly') as well as nine verbs ('to write, offer, purpose, hold, defend, favour, leave, forsake, retreat').

13.4. The Middle English and Early Modern English Boccaccio versions

Boccaccio has some Latin binomials in his *De claris mulieribus*, but not very many. The English versions, i.e. the anonymous Late Middle English *On Famous Women* and Lord Morley's Early Modern English translation have many more binomials, i.e. they have few binomials that were more or less literally taken over from their

²⁸ Actually the situation as regards sources is a bit more complex, because the translator used not only the Bible (Vulgate), but also additional sources such as Petrus Comestor.

²⁹ *Girl* is one of the words which are common in Modern English, the etymology of which is, however, uncertain (cf. *boy* and *die*). They are not attested in Old English (at least not in the modern meaning) and only appear in the course of Middle English, but it is also not certain whether they are loan-words; for details see the etymological dictionaries. Possibly Caxton still felt the need to explain the meaning of *girl*. A recent study of the origin and the semantic development of *girl* is Lenker (1999).

Latin source, but many that were newly introduced. An example of a binomial that was translated or at least imitated is: Boccaccio: *labores anxios et miseram mortem* – *On Famous Women: labours and sekenes corporal* (but ‘miserable death’ has been replaced by ‘corporal sickness’) – Morley: *labour and miserable death* (a literal translation). An example of a newly introduced binomial, more precisely of an expansion of a simple word in the Latin source, is: Boccaccio: *deflens* – *On Famous Women: wepe and [wale]*; Morley: *cryinge and bewaylynge*. Others are additions without a corresponding word in the Latin source.³⁰

13.5. Milton’s *Samson Agonistes*

In his *Samson Agonistes* Milton apparently used few traditional and formulaic binomials, and created most of his binomials newly.³¹ Moreover, binomials are just one of the many stylistic and rhetorical ornaments (tropes) that Milton used. The main topic of *Samson Agonistes* is Samson’s blindness, which could be called the megatropé of this poem.³² And although one should be very careful about drawing parallels between a work of poetry and the biography of the poet who created it, it is nevertheless striking that Milton was blind when he published his poem about the blind Samson – and just as Samson overcame his enemies in the end (albeit at the price of killing himself), Milton perhaps also hoped to overcome his enemies.

14. Sequence of the elements

14.1. Reasons for the sequence

There has been a lot of research and debate about the sequence of the elements and the factors that govern or influence this sequence [e.g. Malkiel (1959: 142–154); Mollin (2014)]. Several factors play a role; these can overlap and reinforce each other, but they can also contradict each other. Here we distinguish between three main groups, namely phonological (and morphological) factors, semantic factors and translational factors. Especially within the semantic factors there are several subgroups.

a) Phonological and morphological factors

As a rule, the shorter element precedes the longer element,³³ e.g. (i) nouns: *God and holy seyntis; joy and delight; battle and fighting*; (ii) adjectives: *clean and spotless; good and evil; hardy and lecherous; pure and unadulterated; rich and loving*.

³⁰ For details see Sauer (forthcoming a). *Wepe and [wale]* is actually an emendation, which the editor based on the fact that *weep and wale* was a common (formulaic) binomial in Middle English.

³¹ For details see Sauer (forthcoming b).

³² A term apparently introduced by Chrzanowska-Kluczevska (2013).

³³ Cf. e.g. Malkiel (1959: 149–151).

But there are also relatively many exceptions, i.e. binomials where the longer word precedes the shorter word, e.g. nouns: *cogitation and thought*; *consideration and mind*; *lapis lazuli and crystal*; *perseverance and zeal*.³⁴

b) Semantic factors

The more important word or concept comes before the less important word or concept; this can be subdivided into several subgroups, e.g.,

- i) God before man: (a) nouns: *God and holy seyntis* ‘God and holy saints’; *the Buddha and his monks*; (b) adjectives: *heavenly and human* (with alliteration; but *human and heavenly* also occurs).
- ii) Men before women, e.g. *men and women*; *monks and nuns*; *Adam and Eve*. This mirrors the older patriarchal structure of society.
- iii) Older before younger (adult before child), and stronger before weaker, e.g. *father and son*; *cow and calf*; *rich and poor*.
- iv) Good before bad, i.e. a word with a positive meaning precedes a word with a negative meaning, e.g. (a) nouns: *his bownecheff and his myscheff* ‘his good luck and his bad luck’ (*The Wise Book*); (b) adjectives (also used as nouns): *good and bad*, *good and evil*; *right or wrong*; (c) verbs: *praise and dispraise* (also: the longer element follows the shorter element). The last example furthermore shows that originally positive terms that have been changed to negative terms (or the other way round) also usually come second – this is supported by the tendency that the longer word follows the shorter word, cf. *pure and unadulterated*.
- v) Sun before moon, i.e. *þe sunne and þe mone*.
- vi) The temporal sequence is mirrored, e.g. (a) nouns: *births and deaths*; (b) adjectives: apparently no examples; (c) verbs: *to hear and understand*; *receive and retain*. In the formula *answered and said* (OE *answarode and cwæð*), the sequence is apparently always *answered and said*, and not the other way round.

c) Translational factors

In translated texts, the sequence of binomials is often the same as in the source, see the examples given above, especially under section 12., and cf. also e.g.: *ad imaginem et similitudinem nostram* (Gen 1.26) – *aftir his owne schappe and liknesse*.

14.2. Changing order

Historically, the order of the elements can change. To give just two examples for a changing order and their possible explanation:

- a) During the Old and Middle English period, the sequence *soul and body* (in Old English the wording was rather *sawol and lichama*) was apparently preferred,

³⁴ For Middle English one question is, of course, whether the final <-e> was still pronounced or not, but this does not affect the examples given under section 14.1.

whereas in Modern English the sequence *body and soul* seems to be preferred. The reason for this change might be that the order *soul and body* reflects the Christian belief that the soul is more important than the body, whereas the order *body and soul* reflects the fact that the body is visible, and the soul is invisible.

- b) The binomial *men and women* occurs also as *women and men*. The order *men and women* probably reflects the older assumption that men are more important than women, which is no longer valid (but it also conforms to the tendency that the shorter element precedes the longer element, see above), whereas the order *women and men* perhaps reflects the idea that it is more polite to mention the women first (cf. *ladies and gentlemen*, or in German *meine Damen und Herren*, and not the other way round).

14.3. Synchronic variation of the order

In pairs with synchronic variants, e.g. a variant order (e.g. *men and women*, but also *women and men*) or their use in the singular and in the plural (*man and woman*, but also, and more frequently, *men and women*), or with different connectors (*men and women*; *men or women*), the question arises whether they should be counted as different binomials or as variants of the same binomial; this affects, of course, the overall numbers and the statistics. Whereas some linguists apparently regard combinations such as those just mentioned as different binomials,³⁵ we regard them as variants of basically the same binomial.

15. Formulaic and flexible use of binomials

There are (at least) two criteria for the formulaicity of binomials, namely the (historical) criterion that they have been used continuously for a long time, often since Old English or Middle English, and the (synchronic) criterion of frequency. But even in formulaic binomials the sequence of the elements (or their number: singular vs. plural, or their connector) can vary (cf. section 14. above), e.g. *heaven and earth*, but also *earth and heaven*, or *light and darkness*, but also *darkness and light*, etc. We still regard pairs with varying sequence of the elements as variants of the same binomial and not as different binomials. According to the statistics given by Tyrkkö, the following are the most frequent binomials in Modern English (or at least in the material analyzed by Tyrkkö); here we have included those that occur more than fifty times according to Tyrkkö's numbers:³⁶

- i) *men and women* (*man and woman*; *man or woman*; *men or women*); [907]
- ii) *day and night* (*days and nights*; *night and day*; *day or night*; *night or day*); [546]

³⁵ Cf. e.g. the statistics by Tyrkkö in Kopaczyk, Sauer (2017).

³⁶ Tyrkkö in Kopaczyk, Sauer (2017); esp. his Tables 3 & 4; cf. also Benzo. In contrast to Tyrkkö, we count combinations such as *men and women*, *man and woman*, *men or women*, etc. as variants of the same binomial, and we have changed the sums accordingly; the number of occurrences is given in square brackets.

- iii) *father and mother (father or mother)*; [306]
- iv) *life and death (life or death)*; [200]
- v) *women and children*; [179]
- vi) *mind and body (body and mind)*; [172]
- vii) *brothers and sisters (brothers or sisters; brother and sister)*; [147]
- viii) *flesh and blood*; [138]
- ix) *bread and butter*; [112]
- x) *hands and knees*; [112]
- xi) *wife and child (wives and children)*; [106]
- xii) *heart and soul*; [105]
- xiii) *husband and wife*; [102]
- xiv) *gold and silver*; [95]
- xv) *body and soul*; [94]
- xvi) *boys and girls (boys or girls)*; [88]
- xvii) *hands and feet (hand or foot)*; [80]
- xviii) *years and years*; [77]
- xix) *hair and beard*; [73]
- xx) *ladies and gentlemen*; [62]
- xxi) *bread and cheese*; [61]
- xxii) *face and form*; [58]
- xxiii) *father and son*; [57]
- xxiv) *odds and ends*; [57]
- xxv) *eyes and ears*. [56]

Interestingly, the most frequent binomials also have the greatest internal variation. Some semantic groups also clearly emerge. The largest groups refer to people (9×: *men and women; father and mother; women and children; brothers and sisters; wife and child; husband and wife; boys and girls; ladies and gentlemen; father and son*), or to the body and parts of the body (9×: *mind and body; flesh and blood; hands and knees; heart and soul; body and soul; hands and feet; hair and beard; face and form; eyes and ears*). Smaller groups refer to time (*day and night; years and years*), and to food (*bread and butter; bread and cheese*); other references are rarer and also difficult to classify (*gold and silver; odds and ends*). Moreover Tyrkkö deals only with nouns; it would, of course, be interesting to count the frequency of adjectives and verbs as well.

According to Berger (1993: 63ff.) many of the binomials mentioned above were also current in Old English, especially the following eight: ‘father and mother (mother and father)’, ‘day and night (night and day)’, ‘life and death’, ‘flesh and blood’, ‘gold and silver’, ‘soul and body’ (OE *sawol and lichama*; see also section 14.2.(a)), where it is spelled with <o>, ‘foot and hand (hand and foot)’, ‘brother and sister’; these can certainly be regarded as formulaic. Frequent in Old English, but no longer very frequent in Modern English (at least according to the material analysed by Tyrkkö) are a number of binomials with Christian associations, e.g., ‘God and man’, ‘God and world’ (OE *god and woruld*), ‘heaven and earth’. Their relatively low number in

Tyrkkö's material points perhaps to a changing cultural climate, more specifically to the diminishing importance of religion, at least in the Western English-speaking world.³⁷ No longer current are also binomials that reflect an earlier world-picture, i.e. earlier assumptions about the make-up of the earth and of man, e.g. *hot and dry* (attributes of fire and of a choleric temperament) or *hot and moist* (attributes of air and of a sanguine temperament), or *cold and moist* (as attributes of water and of a phlegmatic temperament), as attributes of the elements and also as mixture of humours in man.

But binomials can also be used flexibly and can be created on the spur of the moment. One sign of flexible use is that many words appear in several binomials; in other words: the elements of binomials are often exchangeable, for example:

- a) Nouns: *laud* occurs, e.g. in *laud and glory*; *laud and fame*; *laud and praise*, etc.; *virtue* occurs, e.g. in *virtue and wit*; *virtue and cunning*; *virtue or deed*; *possessor* occurs, e.g. in *possessor and lord*; *possessor and owner*, etc.
- b) Adjectives: *silent* occurs, e.g. in *calm and silent*; *still and silent*; *lecherous* occurs, e.g. in *hardy and lecherous*; *rich and lecherous*.
- c) Verbs: *grow and multiply*, but also *be multiplied and fulfilled*; *quaked and trembled*; *trembled and shook*, etc.

However, even binomials that have one fixed and one variant element can be frequent and thus formulaic; from the examples given above this is true of *mind and body – body and soul – heart and soul*, or *hands and knees – hands and feet*.

Thus the question of formulaicity is not easy to answer and even for frequent and formulaic binomials one has to allow a certain amount of variation, such as switches in the position of the elements, elements used in the singular or in the plural, elements connected with *and* or with *or*.

16. Conclusion

Binomials have a continuous tradition in the history of English, i.e. they have been used from Old English to Present-Day English, partly as recurrent formulae and partly as *ad hoc* creations. Binomials are a complex linguistic and stylistic phenomenon; they can be analyzed, e.g. according to their word-classes (mainly nouns, adjectives and verbs), the connection of their elements (mostly with *and*, sometimes with *or*, etc.), features such as alliteration, furthermore their etymology (native words – loan-words), their meaning (i.e. the semantic relation between the elements, which can entail synonymy or antonymy or complementarity), the sequence of their elements and the factors governing that sequence, their frequency (or rarity) and formulaicity. Whereas some binomials have been common throughout

³⁷ Of course this would require further research; one possible problem is how far the data can be really compared: whereas much of the Old English material comes from religious texts, Tyrkkö has analyzed modern novels (where religion on the whole probably plays less of a role). A comparison with modern religious texts might yield different results.

the history of English, others were coined or varied on the spur of the moment. Related to binomials are multinomials, e.g. trinomials, quadrinomials, and so on. In translated English texts there are often more binomials than in their (Latin or French) sources; obviously the English translators took over many binomials from their source-texts, but in addition also often introduced many new binomials. Binomials also offer many opportunities for further research, because for many authors and text there are not even lists of the binomials which they use, let alone analyses according to the criteria which we have just mentioned.

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