THE CATHOLICON ANGLICUM (1483):
A RECONSIDERATION

Gabriele Stein, Heidelberg

Introductory comments

Within the history of English lexicography, bilingual word lists with the language order Latin-English precede those with the order English-Latin. Stein (1985) compared the two earliest English-Latin dictionaries, the Promptorium parvulorum (1440) and the Catholicon Anglicum (1483) and suggested that the overall organization of the Catholicon Anglicum seems to be more geared towards the encoding language needs of the 15th-century English person learning Latin than was the case with the Promptorium parvulorum. In the present article, this suggestion is taken up and developed further by looking at the Catholicon Anglicum from learners' point of view. It is shown that the compiler's strategies to meet the learners' needs interestingly anticipate the pedagogical and lexicographical methods that became commonplace in learners' dictionaries only several centuries later.

In The English Dictionary before Cawdrey (1985), I compared the first Latin-English dictionaries, the Medulla grammatice and the Ortus vocabulorum, and the first English-Latin dictionaries, the Promptorium parvulorum and the Catholicon Anglicum. Within the history of English lexicography, bilingual word lists with the language order Latin-English precede those with the order English-Latin. The sources of these types of dictionaries are the great Latin dictionaries of the Middle Ages as well as the works of classical Latin authors. Compilers of early Latin-English dictionaries could therefore put their headword list together by selecting Latin entry
words from the various sources consulted and then supply English translation equivalents for them. This is what they did, and when an English equivalent was not known or at hand, the space was simply left empty.

For compilers of early English-Latin dictionaries, the lexicographical task was more difficult. They had to compile an English headword list and had to decide which English spelling to choose for the lemma (obviously, more of a problem than where the English form merely glossed a Latin word). They might, of course, have turned around Latin-English word lists, making the English equivalent the headword and the Latin lemma the corresponding translation equivalent. That this was one of the lexicographical working practices becomes manifest from a close study of early bilingual dictionaries matching Latin and English.

Comparing the two earliest English-Latin dictionaries and trying to establish the lexicographical methods used by their compilers, I suggested in 1985 that the overall organization of the Catholicon Anglicum seems to be more geared towards the encoding language needs of the 15th-century English person learning Latin than was the case with the Promptorium parvulorum. The earliest dated manuscript of the latter goes back to 1440 and that of the Catholicon Anglicum to 1483, which puts nearly two generations between the two works.

In the present article, I would like to come back to this suggestion and develop it further by looking at the Catholicon Anglicum from a learner’s point of view.¹

My textual basis is the only edition that exists of the work, provided by Sidney J.H. Herrtage and published in 1881. Herrtage had intended his edition as a companion to Albert Way’s three-volume edition of the Promptorium parvulorum, published 1843-1865, and therefore introduced a number of symbols (a dagger, an asterisk) to indicate whether the entry word had already been discussed by Way in the Promptorium parvulorum edition or whether it was unique to the Catholicon Anglicum. These edito-
rial additions will be ignored here. The same holds for Herrtage’s inser­
tions of readings from BM Add. MS. 15,562. His expansions of contrac­
tions in the Monson manuscript will be silently adopted, without ty­
pographical indication.

Assuming that medieval Latin dictionaries and inverted Latin-English
word lists constituted the working bases for 15th-century compilers of
English-Latin dictionaries, their first task will have been to select from this
rich word stock those lexical items that were to be included in their re­
spective dictionaries. The respective compilers of the Promptorium parvulo­
rum and the Catholicon Anglicum acquitted themselves well and in similar
ways. They opted to exclude material that was regarded as too encyclo­
pedic in nature, and thus only a few proper names appear in their dic­
tionaries (cf. Stein 1985: 96-7; 110). They also excluded specialized vocabu­
lary. Lexical coverage in the first English-Latin dictionaries was thus
much smaller than in the Latin-English dictionaries: Huntsman’s edition
of the Medulla grammaticie has nearly 17,000 entries (Huntsman 1973:
xxviii), whereas the Promptorium parvulorum has about 12,000 and the Ca­
tholicon Anglicum one third less, about 8,000 (Stein 1985: 110).

The next major task was to determine the order in which the head­
words were to be arranged. It is here that the compiler of the Promptorium
and the Catholicon took quite different decisions. The compiler of the
Promptorium parvulorum, a Dominican friar from Lynn Episcopi in Nor­
folk, stayed within the tradition which had by then developed for bilin­
gual word lists: the overriding lexicographical principle was the gram­
matical one, the alphabetical one was subordinate. The word list was di­
vided into a “nominale”, containing all lexical items which were not
verbs, and a “verbale”, listing all the verbs. Grammatical homonyms are
thus separated. The unknown compiler of the Catholicon Anglicum, how­
ever, made alphabetical order the overriding principle, thus producing a
single word list for his users instead of two, which must have made con­
sultation more difficult and time-consuming. Yet alphabetical order is inte-
terrupted and interspersed with word-family organization. This morpho-
logical principle may have been suggested to the compiler by the Latin
source material. Take the entries based on the adjective lemma soft:

**Softe;** molis, molliculus, mulcibris.
to make **Softe;** mollificare, mollire,
de-, e-, mollitare.
to be **Softe;** mollere, e-, mollescere,
e-.
a **Softnes;** mollicia, mollicies.

In a Latin-English word list, alphabetical order would have linked the
items molis (mollis), mollere, mollescere, mollicia, mollicies, molliculus, mollire,
mollitare, etc. By changing the language order, the English translation
equivalents soft, to make soft, to be soft, softness would have come to be
headwords. The compiler then decided to leave the word family together,
not entering to make soft under m, and to be soft under b as the Lynn friar
might have done. Yet the compiler of the *Catholicon Anglicum* also assem-
bled word family entries independently from a pre-given Latin alphabetical
list, as can be shown with the lexical entries based on the verb to eat:

to **Ete;** epulari, con-, comedere, co-
messare, vessi, con-, edere, con-
ex-, fagin grece, mandare, man-
ducare, papare, prendere, pran-
sare, pransitare.

**Eteabylle;** comessibilis, edilis,
an **Eter;** comestor.
an **Etynge;** comestio, commassacio.
**Etynge;** edax, edaculus, edens.
an **Etynge place;** pransorium.
Etyn; commestus, estus, esus, mansus, pransus.

Clear proof that the compiler was concerned with observing word families in the headword structure of the *Catholicum Anglicum* as a lexicographical principle comes from his policy of providing antonyms for verbs and adjectives, e.g.:

to *Close*; vallare, sepire, circum-, ob-.
to vn*Close*; dissepire, discludere.

*Frendly*; Amicalis, Amicabilis, humane, Amicus, & comparatur Amicior, Amicissimus.

vn *Frendly*; inhumanus, inimicus;
inhumane, inhumaniter.

As we can see from the examples to vn *Close* and vn *Frendly* capitalization has been given the role of highlighting the lexical basis of the word family. Ordinarily, the use of capitals in early word lists was mainly to signal the beginning of a new line. In the *Catholicum Anglicum* it identifies the headword lexeme and thus even penetrates the word level when the word is a complex one, such as a prefixal derivative.

The examples quoted show another distinctive feature of the *Catholicum Anglicum*: English nouns are preceded by a determiner and verbs are listed with the particle *to*. In this case, too, it may have been the inversion of Latin-English word lists to English-Latin ones that prompted the compiler to give such "prelemmatic" items (cf. Stein 1997: 197). It was quite common practice in Latin-English word lists to render Latin nouns, whether or not preceded by a gender-indicating demonstrative (*hic, hec, hoc*), by an English translation equivalent, specifying at the same time the
grammatical class (a for countable nouns, a zero article for uncountable nouns, and the for nouns of unique reference). And verbs were preceded by the particle to to signal infinitive status. The compiler of the *Catholicon Anglicum* obviously decided to carry these grammatical features over into his English headword list. One may wonder why English native learners of Latin should be told that verbs in their mother tongue were preceded by to, or that nouns had to be used with a specific kind of determiner. There is no way of knowing whether the compiler may have meant to further his users’ grammatical education in the mother tongue. Yet what is manifest from the compiler’s decision is that in retaining the prelemmatic features he achieves a clear grammatical differentiation of homonyms. The searching eyes of the dictionary users would have been able to identify the lexical item they were looking for at a single quick glance.

It thus looks as if the compiler of the *Catholicon Anglicum* by means of prelemmatic grammatical elements and by capitalization of the headwords proper increased their accessibility for the dictionary users. And in linking this with a word-family organization he supplied his learners with the necessary linguistic items allowing rephrasing in a different form, thus helping the learners to express themselves in Latin. A further indication of the compiler’s concern to enable his dictionary users to find what they are looking for is the cross-reference system in the *Catholicon Anglicum*, co-referring spelling variants and synonyms.

I turn now to the foreign language component of the dictionary to look into what the compiler singled out from the rich description of Latin found in his source material.

Variations in form are given, e.g.:

- a *Bacheler*; bacalarius vel bacularius.
- a *Brassure*; braciale vel brachiale.
- a *Crab*; Arbitum vel Arbota.
In cases where a Latin vowel is contracted or should not be contracted, attention is drawn to the correct pronunciation:

- vn Lyke; dissimilis, insimilis, dispar correpto -a-, separ omnis generis,
  correpto A in obliquis.
- a Manslaer; assisini, grassator.
  homicida, letifur, correpto [i], plagiarius, sicarius, spiculator.
- an Oxe stalle; bostar, -ris, produceto A, bucemum.

For nouns grammatical gender as well as the genitive form is given, for adjectives the masculine, feminine and neuter form is provided, e.g.:

- An Abbacy; hec Abbacia e.
- Abbott; hic Abbas tis.
- Abylle; hic hec Abilis & hoc le,
  Aptus a um, conueniens, congruus
  a um, consonus a um, Idoneus
  a um, hic hec vtensilis & hoc le.

The compiler is quite aware that with nouns referring to a person gender in English is covert and he therefore supplies the forms for the male and female in Latin, e.g.:

- a Diffamer; diffamator, -trix.
- a Grawnter; largitor vel -trix.
- a Leper; saltator, -trix.
Occasionally, grammatical complementation is explicitly stated, e.g.

to **Cownsell**e; consiliare, consulere, suadere, iudicare, & tunc construitur cum datiuo caso.

a **Thowsande**; Millenarius, Millenus, Millecies, mille indeclinabile & hec milia -lium differentia (inter mille et millia secundum Ugonem) mille notat vnum millenarium, & milia notat plures millenarios indeterminate, unde recept adiectiu, vt duo milia, & potest esse oratio & cetera; construitur cum genitivo plurali.

The entry may be accompanied by an example showing the constructional pattern in actual use:

**Borři**; natus, ortus, oriundus & construitur cum genitiuo, vt ‘sum oriundus parcium tuarum’.

to **Seme**, or it **Semes**; decet, -bat personale vel impersonale; vt toga decet me, impersonale vt decet me loqui.

to **Sit on A horse**; jnsedere & construitur cum datiuo, vt: jnsedeo equo vel eque.
But such illustrative examples also occur without a specific construction pattern having been outlined. They illustrate the use of adjectives, nouns, grammatical words such as *how* and *or*, and, above all, verbs. Here are some examples:

**Berynge**: ferax, *vt*, ‘*istud solum est ferax frugum; jsta aqua est ferax naium*’ …

**Stille**: placidus, pacificus, quietus, tacitus, taciturnus, tranquillus, suspensus, *vt*: *ille sedet suspensus*.

a **Fronte**: frontispicium, *vt* frontispicium ecclesiarum.

an **Image**: imago, caracter, effigies, figura, sculptile, signum; *vt*: *vidi signum sancti johannis*; …

**Howe**: qualiter, quomodo, quam; *ut*, *nescis quam male loquitur iste de te*; *vel sic*, *quam bene diligis me*, *cum similibus*.

**Or**: Aut, *vel sev*, *que*: *vt iohannes Robertusque legit*; sive.

to **Parysche**: perire, valere, *vt* valeant *i. pereant inimici regis*. 
to Plese; libere, -bescere, placere, 
per-, vacare vt vacat michi scribere. i. placet.

to Set jn stede; substituere, sufficere, 
ut: sufficio te in loco meo.

to Smyte out; labifacere, vt: ego 
labifaciam dentes tuos.

As we can see, the phrase and sentence examples are always introduced by the particle ut and they represent ordinary language use. They are not translated into English, the learners’ mother tongue. Illustrative examples in the learners’ mother tongue translated into the foreign language were to be one of the outstanding characteristics of the first English dictionary matching two vernaculars, John Palsgrave’s *Lesclarcissement de la langue francoyse* of 1530 (cf. Stein 1997).

Scholars have drawn attention to the wealth of Latin synonyms included in the *Catholicon Anglicum* and the many superb synonym discriminations helping learners to pick the right Latin word when writing or composing a text (cf. Starnes 1954: 22; Stein 1985: 113-5). Here are some examples:

**Dumme;** mutus, elinguatus, sine 
lingua est, elinguis habet linguam 
set eius caret vsu.

**an Ere;** Auris hominum est, Auricula brutorum, Ansa est olle, 
Ansula diminutinum; Auricularis, Auricus.

**an Example;** exemplum, exemplar, 
exemplum est dictum vel factum
Sewnds of Words – A tribute to Arne Zettersten

alicuis autentice persone mutac
one dignum, sed exemplar est ad
cuius similitudinem ad fit simile,
idea, parabola, paradiogma.

Such meaning differentiations may be accompanied by collocation pat-
terns, e.g.:

a Drope; gutta est grauioris hu-
moris ut mellis; guttula est
diminutiuum, guttosus partici-
pium; stilla est leuioris ut
aque; vel dicitur gutta dum
pendet vel stat, stilla cum
illa cadit; stillicidium, mitos,
greece.

to Sownde; strepere, As-, per-, pop-
uli est, crepare, con-, crepitare,
ignis crepitat, aqua murmurat,
ferrum stridet, sonare, per-, re-,
jn-, reboare, tinnire, tinnitus.

The semantic discrimination of Latin synonyms may also include
mnemonic verses. These may be more personal in style, including pro-
nouns of the first or second person, thus addressing or involving the dic-
tionary learner, e.g.:

to Drynke; bibere, con-, potare, con-
e-, haurire; versus:
Poto, do potum; poto, sumo
michi potum.
Calicare; bibit qui aliquid re-
linquit, ebbit qui totum bibit.
bibimus ex necessitate, Potas-
The word-family principle which we have noted in the arrangement of the English headwords is also manifest in the Latin section of the dictionary. After the immediate translation equivalents further Latin derivatives of the latter are provided, thus offering more choice to the learner. Such vocabulary additions (by way of derivational formations) typically comprise:

(1) Derived adjectives ('participium' is the term used for 'adjective' in the *Catholicon Anglicum*) for nouns, e.g.:

**Crystalle; cristallus; cristallinus participium.**

a **Daynte; dilicee, lauticia, lauticie, epule; delicatus, deliciosus, lautus participia.**

(2) Diminutive derivatives for nouns, e.g.:

a **Fische; piscis, pisciculus diminutivium.**
Worlds of Words – A tribute to Arne Zettersten

(3) Locative derivatives for nouns, specifying where the referent of the noun is found:

a Crekethole; grillarium, grilletum
   est locus vbi habundant.

an Ellyrtre; Alnus; alnicetum est
   locus vbi crescent.

(4) Words relating to ill-health may be followed by a derivative referring to someone who is a sufferer e.g.:

pe Dropsye; idropis; jdropicus qui
   patitur infirmitatem.

pe Emeraudes; emoroide, emorois;
   emoroissus qui patitur talem
   infirmitatem.

(5) Abstract and agential nouns derived from verbs may be listed, e.g.:

to Discharge; exonerare, -tor, -trix,
   & -cio.

to Ondyr putte; supponere, -tor, -trix
   & -cio; -ens participium.

Occasionally, the morphological analysis becomes an explanation of the word origin, as in:
A Nampkyn; Manifra, manupium A manu & pio i. purgare, manifra dicitur de manu & foros i. ferre.
a Schryne; colossium, quia ibi coluntur ossa, capsas, capsula, capsella.

In content, such explanations resemble the type of special or usage notes found in modern dictionaries, added in an extra paragraph at the end of a dictionary entry. That the concept of such additional notes was not unfamiliar to the compiler of the Catholicon Anglicum emerges from entries like the following:

Odde; disper, inequalis, impar .i.
sine pare. Et nota quod omnia composita de hoc par sunt omnium generum.

Vn Abylle; inabilis.

\[ \begin{align*}
\text{Not} & \quad \text{Nota quod omnia hu-iusmodi idiomataji-} \\
\text{Regula} & \quad \text{cippiencia ab vn sunt} \\
\text{requirenda ad sua simpicia; verbi gra-} \\
\text{tia vnabylle vbi abylle.}
\end{align*} \]

And just as modern learners’ dictionaries draw attention to divided usage in such notes, the compiler of the Catholicon occasionally comments on differences in usage or even disputed usage. The comment may be general as in:
Harde; stuppa; quidam dicunt stupa.

Or it may relate to old use, as in:

a Cankyr; cancer, -is secundum antiquos, sed modo est secunde declinationis, cancer, -cri.

But in most cases, the differences in use are quoted with their authorities, e.g.:

a Lawe, fas est lex humana, jus est lex diuina: versus contrarius quem ponit hugo; versus:
¶ Ius est humana lex, sed fas esto diuina.

Saw[n]dyrs; sandix, vel sandex secundum iannensem, est enim genus rubei coloris.

I have tried to show that the Catholicon Anglicum is concerned with the specific encoding needs of native-speaking learners. Indeed, its compiler addresses these needs, armed with strategies that interestingly anticipate the pedagogical and lexicographical methods that became commonplace in learners’ dictionaries only several centuries later.

Note
1. I am grateful for the help and advice of Randolph Quirk, like me a long-standing friend of the dedicatee, Arne Zettersten.
Works cited