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THE NOMINAL AND ADJECTIVAL MORPHOLOGY OF BOUNDS TO S 179 – A CASE STUDY

The paper is a case study investigating the nominal and adjectival morphology in the English text of bounds to S 179, a post-Conquest forgery. The aim of the study is to determine what linguistic means of authentication were applied by an eleventh-century forger who devised a text which was supposed to look 200 years old at the time of its production, as well as to search for modern features which give the forgery away, at the same time allowing an insight into early Middle English. The study represents research into “transitional”, post-Conquest English (Faulkner 2012) and the status of English under the Norman rule.

Keywords: forgery, charter, bounds, Norman Conquest, Old English, Middle English, nominal morphology

1. Introduction

The Norman Conquest is doubtlessly among the most significant events in the history of England, whose consequences permeated all aspects of life throughout all social layers, including profound changes in the linguistic reality of the conquered kingdom. Even though medieval European culture was based on Latin, before 1066 English boasted a great number of manuscripts written in the vernacular compared to any other contemporary kingdom on the continent. Moreover, Old English was used for a number of functions, from literature and poetry to administrative records. The Conquest meant that English ceased to be the *Schriftsprache*, replaced from its former functions by Latin and, gradually, Norman French (Gretsch 2013: 291). This shift led to far less new material produced under the Norman rule compared to the abundance of Old English texts, resulting in some misconceptions regarding the status of English, which

boil down to an oversimplification that it was hardly used anymore¹, “went underground”², becoming an embarrassing language (Thomas 2003: 387) of the common people³.

The loss of status coincided with significant morphological and morphophonological changes – some took place after 1066, others resulted from earlier historical events, such as the establishment of Danelaw, but were first attested only after the Conquest. Moreover, the nature and scope of those changes were highly varied in terms of their geographical distribution (Faulkner 2012: 280, Thomas 2003: 379, Bartlett 2000: 496). The period between the 11th and 13th centuries is thus often referred to as “transitional” English (Faulkner 2012: 276, Bartlett 2000: 49). Although the term *transitional* deserves a separate discussion – there are valid arguments both for and against compartmentalization of language history – considering those (roughly) two centuries as a separate stage in the history of English is nonetheless useful, especially that it was neglected for a long time, considered unworthy of academic attention (Da Rold 2006).

However, over the past two decades or so there has been a lot of work going on to identify and catalogue material in English which was produced within those time frames. This interest is evidenced especially by the project *The Production and Use of English 1060 to 1220*, conducted jointly by the University of Leicester and the University of Leeds, which resulted in a rich corpus of English literary production dating to the titular period. This significant volume of uncovered material has been intensely analysed applying new approaches, methodologies and perspectives, such as postcolonialism (see especially *Living through Conquest* by Elaine Treharne), communities of practice, multilingualism, etc. The corpus also testifies to the longevity of Old English after the Conquest, as there is ample evidence that it was still used well into the 12th century and beyond (Faulkner 2012), for a number of purposes, such as: “teaching, preaching, chronicling, and carrying out all ecclesiastical and pastoral duties” (Treharne 2012: 97).

Sometimes these purposes were fraudulent. The introduction of the feudal system and the fact that William sought support for his campaign against Harold by promising land as a reward⁴ had serious administrative repercussions: by 1086

¹ “For a long time before and after 1100, there is a great scarcity of English productions... This scantiness is partly due, no doubt, to an actual disuse of English composition” (Ker in Treharne 2012: 94).

² “(...) English was relegated to the underworld of the unprivileged” (Davis 1976: 103).

³ Such claims are rather counter-intuitive in the light of the fact that Norman aristocracy spoke English already by 1100 (Bartlett 2000: 490), and that bilingualism was common (Thomas 2003: 385).

⁴ William presented himself as the heir of Edward the Confessor, stressing legal continuity with the English tradition (O’Brien 1995: 354). As a result, formally there was no seizure of land (Wightman 1966: 127). Nonetheless, land seizure was a common legal complaint following the Conquest (Gransden 1982: 67-68).

around five thousand pre-Conquest estates, which constituted approximately 50% of the English land, had been concentrated in the hands of 200 major tenants in chief (Daniell 2003:17)⁵. As a major landowner, the Church was also affected: in 1066, there was only one foreign abbot in England, whereas in 1087, as many as 30 most important religious houses were led by a foreigner or a person trained abroad (Daniell 2003: 22). Most grants of manors were passed to the new Norman lords together with already granted rights, privileges, and obligations (Roffe 1990: 174). These changes constituted a key factor in intensive documentary production – almost five hundred charters were produced only between 1066 and 1100 (Newman 1988: 19).

Another reason for the increase in the number of new documents represented a shift in the legal culture:

The growth of the administrative records was part of a longer-term trend in the twelfth century of the written word becoming important as proof of transactions. Society increasingly moved away from an oral, memory-based culture to one where there was more emphasis upon the written word as proof. This process is well shown by the attempts of monks and Churchmen to write down what they thought, or remembered, to be true, which often resulted in blatant forgeries (Clanchy 1993).

A forged document is “any piece of writing, which according to the intention of its producer, gives itself for something other than it really is” (Hiatt 2004: 14). Apart from obvious cases when a document was devised from scratch for deceitful purposes, also genuine documents with added clauses and those which replace lost, damaged, or non-existent originals⁶ can all be considered forgeries (Giry 1925: 863-4, in Hiatt 2004: 6). Monasteries had a vested interest in proving their rights to estates to secure their income, and many did not shy away from forgery, especially in the case of incomplete documentation, which often resulted from the said Anglo-Saxon reliance on the oral tradition (Clanchy 2013: 160, Hiatt 2004: 22, O’Brien 1995: 11-12). In fact, the Norman Conquest triggered what is known as the “Golden Age” of forgery in England (Hiatt 2004: 22). The practice of fabricating archival records was so widespread that some monasteries – most notably Westminster, St. Augustine’s, Christ Church, Canterbury, Durham, and Glastonbury – specialized in forgery, producing fake documentation both for themselves and for others⁷ (Hiatt 2004: 22, O’Brien 1995: 12).

⁵ In fact, 20 richest lords and 12 richest prelates held 40% of land as expressed in value (Daniell 2003:17).

⁶ For example when an institution relied on the oral tradition.

⁷ The phenomenon was so widespread that monastic forgery practices were commonly shared between various scriptoria (O’Brien 1995: 13).

The aim of the study is to analyze the English language of a confirmed forgery, i.e. bounds to S 179, in order to identify the linguistic means of authentication used by its eleventh-century forger, who devised a text which was supposed to look 200 years old at the time of its production, as well as to search for modern features which give the forgery away, thus allowing an insight into early Middle English. The paper is structured as follows: Section 1 has introduced the historical background, Section 2 presents the material the study is based on and how it will be analyzed, Section 3 is devoted to analysis and discussion, and Section 4 summarizes the paper and outlines conclusions. The full English text of bounds to S 1798 is provided in Appendix 1.

2. Materials and methods

The study investigates bounds to S 179⁸, a charter forged in the 11th century (Finberg 1972, Hart 1975). The forgery was based on a genuine charter, S 180 (Hooke 1999: 42-43) – large portions of the main Latin text of S 179 are copied from S 180 verbatim, or with minor differences. Both documents are dated to 816 A.D. S 179 was allegedly issued by Coenwulf (king of Mercia) to bishop Deneberht and his clergy at Worcester, granting privileges at several villages, with inserted bounds of Hallow. The main text is in Latin, whereas bounds (circa 500 words) are in English. The original document is lost, and only one cartulary copy from the second half of the 12th century survives: London, British Library, Cotton Tiberius A. XIII, ff. 119-200, ff. 152r-154r. Unfortunately, the folio containing approximately 40% of the bounds was partially damaged in a fire in 1731.

The aim of the study is to analyse the English of bounds to S 179, focusing on morphology, in order to identify the linguistic means of authentication which were applied by the eleventh-century forger fabricating a document which was supposed to look roughly 200 years old, as well as to determine whether there are any linguistic clues which give the forgery away – identifying such modernizations may allow an insight into eleventh-century developments in English.

The study is based on the following assumptions:

1. Bounds to charters are a good basis for analysing nominal morphology and prepositional phrases; due to the nature of this kind of texts, they contain numerous nouns.
2. The language of forged documents was styled to pose for genuine Old English, thus reflecting what the eleventh-century forger imagined ninth-century English sounded and looked like.

⁸ Charters will be referred to using their Sawyer number: <https://esawyer.lib.cam.ac.uk>.

3. Eleventh-century English was different from Old English in terms of morphology and morphophonology; this means that the linguistic features may give away the fact that the text was forged by containing more modern elements than suggested by its date.

A preliminary analysis showed that the text of the bounds is highly inconsistent in terms of language forms, which makes it a remarkable example of a forgery containing Old English: the final part (approximately 40%, which coincidentally is also the text from the folio damaged in fire) is palpably different from the first 60% in terms of the use of prepositions and nominal morphology – hence apart from observations regarding the whole text, the differences between the two parts will also be considered.

3. Analysis and discussion

To start with some general observations, nouns and prepositions indeed constitute almost 50% of the whole text, making it a good basis for a study into nominal morphology. Excluding proper names and attributive nouns, which are generally uninflected (e.g. *þa land gemæru*), the text contains 111 nouns. This high number stems from the characteristic sentence structure of bounds, in which the same phrases are typically repeated, e.g. ...to *þam haran stane of þam stane into...* [to the hoary stone, from the stone into...]. Almost all nouns are in the singular, with only seven plural forms, which is due to the fact that bounds rely on landmarks, such as *sprynge* [spring], *stige* [path], *heafdan* [peak], etc., which tend to be in the singular. Most belong to either the strong masculine or strong neuter declension. Given that the majority of Old English nouns were inflected according to those two characteristic paradigms (Hogg and Fulk 2011), this is unsurprising – in fact, the forger might have recognized those declensions as characteristic features of Old English. There are also several examples of weak declensions (e.g. *heafdan*, *sceagan*, *weallan*), and some strong feminine nouns. Interestingly, two short, one-syllable strong feminine nouns, *dic* [ditch] and *ac* [oak] appear only in one, uninflected form throughout the text, even though in theory they should end in *-e* in the accusative, genitive, and dative singular, *-a* when in the accusative and genitive plural, and *-um* when in the dative plural (Hogg and Fulk 2011). Moreover, in one example, *of þære alde dic* the demonstrative indicates either the dative or genitive case, but the adjective's inflectional ending suggests the accusative case, even though elsewhere in the text *of* is followed by the dative case. Moreover, the demonstrative creates a definite context, hence the adjective should be declined according to the weak paradigm. Additionally, in two more instances the noun is preceded by a plural numeral, hence it should be in the plural (*of þreom ac* and *in þreom ac*), but it has no inflectional ending.

The differences between the two parts manifest themselves clearly in the use of prepositions. Most nouns in the text are in the dative case (67 examples), which results from the extensive use of prepositions expressing direction. However, the fact that those prepositions are used inconsistently is noteworthy. In the first part the phrase *from...to...* is expressed either with a combination *of...into...*, or *of...to...* followed by the dative case, whereas in the second part the same structure is expressed with *of...in...* followed by the accusative case: there are no occurrences of *in* in the first part, and no occurrences of *to* in the second part, and neither are there any instances of *into* and *ofer* in the second part (although this might of course be a coincidence given that the former preposition appears only 10 times throughout the text, and the latter – four times). Moreover, even in the *of...in...* combination the accusative is used inconsistently – for example, *in þreom ac* contains a numeral which is in the dative case followed by an uninflected one-syllable noun; the phrase *in bradi burne* also contains a noun in the dative case. Another example of a preposition followed by nouns in a different case in the two parts is *bi*; although there are only three occurrences – *bi þam heafdan* (twice), and *bi þæt wad lond* (once) – again those which appear in the first part are followed by the dative, whereas the only instance from the second part is followed by an uninflected noun. All the other prepositions which appear more than once are used consistently throughout the text: *æfter* (eight instances), *æt* (3 instances), *into* (10 instances), *of* (32 instances), and *wið* are always followed by the dative, whereas *ofer* (4 instances) is always followed by the accusative.

There are three more observations concerning the differences between the two parts which are worth mentioning. Firstly, the numeral *þreom* is a late form (*Anglo-Saxon Dictionary Online*), too modern for the ninth-century Old English text. Secondly, the seven occurrences of the noun *ford* are noteworthy for the inconsistent use of the dative ending. Although both *-a* and the regular *-e* ending are possible, in the first part of the text only the former form appears, whereas in the second part – only the latter. Finally, there are 26 instances of adjectives in the text: 15 in the first part: *ærest*, *grenan*, *haran*, *lytlan*, *ealdan* (twice), *hæðenan*, *lytlan*, *hwitan*, *bradan* (twice), *wohgan*, *haran*, *mær*, *norðmæstan*, and 11 in the second part: *grene* (twice), *neowe* (twice), *wærriht* (twice), *bradi* and *brade*, *alde* (twice), *west*. As can be seen, there are no instances of the weak adjectival declension in the second part, which results from the fact that there are fewer nouns preceded by demonstratives there. Nonetheless, as has already been mentioned on the example of *þære alde dic*, even in those instances when there are demonstratives which would require the weak adjectival declension, in the second part such adjectives are either uninflected (*þa wærriht ac*), or have an *-e* ending (*þæs grene wegges*, *þæm neowe hege*, *þa alde dic*). This discrepancy between the two parts is significant due to the fact, that the *-e* ending in adjectives modifying definite nouns is a feature characteristic of early Middle

English (Burrow and Turville-Petre 2004: 27-28), which would make another example of forms too modern for a text pretending to be written in ninth-century Old English.

The table below summarizes the analysis:

Table 1. A comparative summary of the analysis of the English bounds to S 179

Feature	First part	Second part
Dominance of strong masculine or neuter paradigm	Yes	Yes
Uninflected one-syllable strong feminine nouns: <i>ac</i> and <i>dic</i>	Yes	Yes
<i>From...to...</i> expressed as...	<i>Of...into...</i> + DAT, or <i>of...to...</i> + DAT	<i>Of...in...</i> + ACC/DAT
<i>Bi...</i> followed by...	DAT	ACC
DAT sg ending in <i>ford</i>	-a	-e
Adjectives	Almost exclusively weak declension	No examples of Old English weak adjectival declension, inconsistent use of inflectional endings in adjectives, Middle English forms
Other late forms	N/A	<i>Preom</i>

The first assumption the study is based on has been confirmed quantitatively, but the other two require some discussion. The language of bounds to S 179 is clearly complex, and the text is linguistically inconsistent. It looks like the forger did not struggle with inflecting nouns from the most prominent Old English declensions, i.e. the strong masculine and strong neuter. However, apparently he found the strong feminine declension problematic. Indeed, it was not as common, with far fewer nouns belonging to it compared to the other two strong paradigms. Additionally, the lack of inflectional endings in *dic* and *ac* may mean that the eleventh-century forger already used forms with dropped unstressed final vowels. Moreover, given that other strong feminine nouns appear both with and without the *-e* ending, perhaps very short, one-syllable nouns were more prone to dropping final unstressed vowels, which would explain why *dic* and *ac* appear without any inflectional endings throughout the text.

The fact that the language *within* the analyzed bounds is simultaneously so consistent and inconsistent is curious: the first part of bounds displays a different set of characteristics than the second one, as summarized in Table 1. Moreover, the characteristics of the first part are internally consistent, whereas the language of the second part is far less predictable and reliable. The second part contains

some modernizations which are not found in the first part, such as the form *Preom* or the regular, *-e* ending for the dative singular case of the noun *ford*. Moreover, there are significant differences in terms of adjectival declension: the adjectives from the first part are mostly inflected according to the Old English weak paradigm due to the fact that most nouns in that part are preceded by determiners creating the definite context, whereas in the second part there is not a single example of weak declensions – instead, adjectives which modify definite nouns in that part end in *-e*, which is another modern feature. There are several possible explanations: there might have been two forgers, the bounds might have been copied from two different sources, the second part might have been an *ad hoc* creation, whereas the first part may have been copied from or based on some genuine Old English exemplar, the differences may also reflect some regional variety or training at different scriptoria. All these explanations could potentially account for the discrepancies between the two parts. Unfortunately, with no access to the original document it is hardly possible to indicate which of these possibilities – and if any – is the right one.

4. Summary and conclusions

Bounds to S 179 offer a valuable insight into the practice of medieval forgery of archival records, showing which forms might have been seen as the most characteristic of the Old English period (i.g. strong masculine and neuter declensions), as well as evidence of eleventh-century modernizations, such as signs of dropped unstressed inflectional endings or early Middle English adjectival declension. Obviously further research into the language of forged documents is required. The biggest question stemming from the present case study, i.e. the reason behind the discrepancies between the two parts of the analysed text, remains unanswered. Nonetheless, it has been demonstrated that post-Conquest forgeries can offer a good basis for research into the state of the language from a relatively understudied period in the history of English.

The very fact that forger(s) responsible for the English text of bounds to S 179 put effort into creating an impression that the text was genuine testifies to the longevity and significance of English after the Conquest, that English was a “legitimate and legitimizing phenomenon” able to “validate truth, establish lineage, secure status and land (Treharne 2012: 344). Although forged documents have been studied by historians and diplomatists for decades, there are no studies devoted strictly to linguistic analyses of the state of the English language in these manuscripts, making the English of forged charters an underutilized resource. This is due to the fact that – ironically – the Norman Conquest was the main reason behind the “Golden Age” of forgery on the one hand, and on the other, it translated into a decline in the amount of new

material in English. Even though there is a growing interest in resources dating to the “transitional” period following 1066, which for a long time were either understudied or blatantly ignored, much is still to be done: even the impressive, seemingly comprehensive corpus of texts devised within the project *The Production and Use of English Manuscripts 1066-1220* contains only a handful of forgeries.

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Appendix 1: The English of bound to S 179

The text below is a transcription of the English bounds to S 179 based on the surviving copy and the transcription provided by the project ASChart (<https://www.aschart.kcl.ac.uk>). The text is divided into two parts which are linguistically inconsistent with each other, as indicated by preliminary reading. All nouns and their demonstratives are in bold. Additionally, nouns are tagged with case and number.

Part one:

bis synd **þa** land **gemæru** [NOM pl] to halhagan **wudes** [GEN sg] 7 **feldes** [GEN sg] þæt is ærest æt **þæs bernes** [GEN sg] **ende** [DAT sg] æt **þæs wæteres** [GEN sg] **sprynge** [DAT sg] æfter **þam wætere** [DAT sg] into hallinga **homme** [DAT sg] of **þam home** [DAT sg] into **rames** [GEN sg] **cumbe** [DAT sg] æfter **þam grenan wege** [DAT sg] into **þære mylnstige** [DAT sg FEMININE] of **þære mylen stige** [DAT sg FEMININE] into cyles **dene** [DAT sg] to **þam haran stane** [DAT sg] of **þam stane** [DAT sg] into scobbe **stane** [DAT sg] of scobbe **stane** [DAT sg] suþ to **þam lytlan beorge** [DAT sg] 7 swa suþ ofer turcendene into **þam crum dæle** [DAT sg] of **þam crum dæle** [DAT sg] suþ 7 west to **þære ealdan dic** [DAT sg] 7 ii **æceras** [ACC pl] wið utan 7 swa west wið **þam heafdan** [DAT sg] þæt hit cymð to **þære ealdan dune** [DAT sg] andlang **dune** [DAT sg] west þæt hit cymed into dina **more** [DAT sg] of dina **more** [DAT sg] into hehstanes **pytte** [DAT sg] of hehstanes **pytte** [DAT sg] eastward east weard bi **þam heafdan** [DAT sg] to **þam hæðenan byrigelse** [DAT sg] wiþ heallinga **weallan** [DAT sg] swa east ofer **þa sealt stræt** [ACC sg] to **þam crundælan** [DAT sg] of **þam crundælan** [DAT sg] bi **þam heafdan** [DAT sg] to **þæs bernes** [GEN sg] **ende** [DAT sg] bis is **þæs wudes** [GEN sg] **gemære** [NOM sg] ærest of hrambroces [GEN sg] **forda** [DAT sg] svþ þæt hit cymeþ to **þam slæde** [DAT sg] of **þam slæde** [DAT sg] þæt hit cymþ to bacga **slæde** [DAT sg] of **þam slæde** [DAT sg] þæt hit cymed up to **þam hrycge** [DAT sg] of **þam hrycge** [DAT sg] west þæt hit cymeþ to **þam lytlan sceagan** [DAT sg] 7 swa west ofer **þa salt stræte** [ACC sg] to **þæs wudes** [GEN sg] **efese** [DAT sg] west swa þæt hit cumeð to **þære hwitan dic** (DAT) 7 swa adun ofer **þa ecge** [ACC sg] þæt hit cymð to crimes **hulle** [DAT sg] of grimes **hulle** [DAT sg] þæt hit cymþ to sponwælle **hæfdan** [DAT sg] 7 swa west þæt hit cymð to **þære bradan ac** [DAT sg] of **þære bradan ac** [DAT sg] þæt hit cymð to **þære wohgan apeldran** [DAT sg] þanon norð rihte þæt hit cymeþ to **þære haran apeldran** [DAT sg] to **þam broke** [DAT sg] æfter **þam broce** [DAT sg] þæt hit cymð to **þam gemyþan** [DAT sg] of **þam gemyþan** [DAT sg] east riht þæt hit cymeþ to buddinc **wican** [DAT sg] east rihte swa ut of **þam wudu** [DAT sg] of **þæs wudes** [GEN sg]

efese [DAT sg] þæt hit cymeþ to sibbe **stapele** [DAT sg] of sibbe **stapole** [DAT sg] æfter þam slæde [DAT sg] þæt hit cymeþ to **peofa** [GEN pl] **dene** [DAT sg] 7 swa east riht be **þam wuda** [DAT sg] þæt hit cymeð to mær **apeldran** [DAT sg] 7 swa æfter **þa** norðmæstan port **weige** [ACC sg] þæt hit cymð eft into ramforda

Part two:

þis his **þa** lond **gemæra** [NOM plural] of halhegan into wontes **forda** [DAT sg] Of wontes **forda** [DAT sg] in wontes **dic** [ACC sg] Of wontes **dic** [ACC sg] in Ceor Of þa Ceore in cisburne. Of cisburne in **cattes** [GEN sg] **stycce** [ACC sg] Of **cattes** [GEN sg] **stycce** [DAT sg] in grene **weg** [ACC sg] onlong **þæs** grene **weges** [GEN sg] in þreom **ac** [ACC pl]. Of þreom **ac** [ACC pl] in gundes **stige** [DAT sg] Of gundes **stige** [DAT sg] in neowe **heg** [ACC sg] æfter **þæm** neowe **hege** [DAT sg] þæt cyme in laure. Æfter laure þæt cyme in lauric. Æfter lauric þæt cyme in balde næscas **ford** [ACC sg]. Of balde næscas **forde** [DAT sg] in **þa** wærriht **ac** [ACC sg]. Of þæt wærriht **ac** [ACC sg] bi þæt wad **lond** [ACC sg]. Of þa wad **londe** [DAT sg] in gearri **ford** [ACC sg]. Of gearri **ford** [ACC sg] in bradi **burne** [DAT sg] Of brade **burne** [DAT sg] in **þa** alde **dic** [ACC sg]. Of **þære** alde **dic** [DAT sg], in **sice** [DAT sg] æt halheogan betweenen griman 7 halheogan in wær legan. Of pærlega in sæferne **stream** [ACC sg] þis synd **þa** lond **gemæra** [NOM pl] in halheogan on west **half** sæferne [ACC sg]