

PAIRED ADJECTIVES
IN THE MIDDLE WELSH *YSTORYA BOWN O HAMTWN*

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The use of paired adjectives is one of the stylistic devices typical for medieval Welsh literature. Paired adjectives are usually either two synonyms (*noeth-lumun* ‘stark-naked’) or two words denoting attributes of a certain character or object; for instance, *cadarn-wychyr* ‘strong and brave’ is typical for a description of a knight. However, there can be more than two adjectives in a “pair”: *kyweiraf a gwisgocaf a theckaf* ‘the best-attired and the best-dressed and the fairest’. The adjectives are either connected with conjunctions ‘and’, ‘or’, ‘nor’ (*kyn hacret na chyn dybrytet* ‘neither as ugly nor as hideous’) or placed side by side without any formal connection (*llom doll dreuledic* ‘worn, full of holes and threadbare’). Paired adjectives can also form a compound (*gwychyr-lew* ‘brave and courageous’). Davies calls such adjective pairs “formulas” (Davies 1995: 182-5), as they are highly idiomatic and semantically generalised, meaning that they emphasise the intensity of the attribute rather than just denoting an attribute. Other parts of speech can also be “paired”, as is described in more detail in (Poppe 1999: 308-311).

Adjective pairs occur not only in Welsh native tales but also in adaptations of continental material, such as the Anglo-Norman (hereinafter AN) chivalric romance *Geste de Boeve de Haumtone*, which was translated into Middle Welsh (hereinafter MW) in the second half of the thirteenth century (Watkin 1958: xxi-clxxiii). In my contribution, I would like to focus on the specific question of what exactly in the AN source was translated into MW by paired adjectives. The closeness of the MW translation to the AN original (see Poppe, Reck 2007: 143) allows such a study. Following E. Poppe and R. Reck I am using the edition of A. Stimming (1899) for the AN text.

I divided twenty nine examples of adjective pairs found in a partial edition of *Ystorya Bown o Hamtwn* (Poppe, Reck 2009) into the following groups:

- Adjective pair in the AN source > adjective pair in the MW translation (AN *pruz e hardi* ‘brave and bold’, MW *cadarn-wychyr* ‘strong and brave’; AN *fort e combataunt* ‘strong and fighting’, MW *dewr kyuoethawc* ‘brave and mighty’), three times, 10.3%.
- One adjective in the AN source > adjective pair in the MW translation (AN *nu* ‘naked’, MW *noeth-lumun* ‘stark-naked’; AN *grant* ‘big’, MW *mawr braf* ‘great and huge’), four times, 13.8%.
- [ADVERB *mult, tut, si, plus, bien* + ADJECTIVE] in the AN source > adjective pair in the MW translation (AN *bien vestue, mult ... bèle* ‘well-dressed, very ...

beautiful', MW *kyweiraf a gwisgocaf a theckaf* 'the best-attired and the best-dressed and the fairest'; AN *plus orgulos* 'more arrogant', MW *ryfugus llamsachus* 'bold and prancing'), eleven times, 37.9%.

- Comparative construction in the AN source > adjective pair in the MW translation (AN *large com croupe de olifant* 'broad like elephant's croup', MW *mawr amhyl* 'big and large'), twice, 6.9%.
- Adverb in the AN source > adjective pair in the MW translation (AN *tost* 'rapid', MW *ehut-hwimwth* 'quick and swift'), once, 3.4%.

A pair of adjectives is also found in the MW translation when a noun has no attribute at all in the corresponding AN fragment. This occurs 8 times, 27.6%. Thus, paired adjectives in the MW *Ystorya Bown o Hamtwn* tend either to have no equivalents in the AN source text or to correspond to [ADVERB *mult, tut, si, plus, bien* + ADJECTIVE] construction.

The MW translation as opposed to the AN source is notable for a higher degree of attribute variation. Combining individual adjectives in pairs in different ways allows the creation of several synonymous attributes and avoids repetitions. For example, AN *mult estreitement* 'very strictly' is translated into MW with the following paired adjectives: *gwychyr lew* 'brave and courageous', *ffenedic wychyr* 'bold and brave', *cadarn gryf* 'firm and strong', *cryf fenedic* 'strong and stout', *туруиг gadarn* 'hard and strong' (Poppe 1999: 310). This is indicative of the translator's originality in the stylistic organisation of the text, as these paired adjectives appear not to be a literal translation from French, but a sensibly chosen native artistic device.

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References

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