„Conversatoria Linguistica”
XIV, 2022
PL ISSN 1897–1415

Weronika Kaźmierczak

The Higher School of Tourism and Foreign Languages, Warsaw, Poland
ORCID: 0000-0002-9826-5626 | e-mail: weronikamkazmierczak@gazeta.pl

Selected Middle English adjectives of happiness: their representation in the *Innsbruck Corpus*

DOI: 10.34739/clg.2022.14.01

Previous studies on semantic change

The phenomenon of meaning change has attracted due scholarly attention, which resulted in numerous articles, conference papers, and monographs published in Poland and abroad. Studies on its nature and complexity have been extensively conducted by linguists from the Rzeszów School of Diachronic Semantics whose research of novel semantic categories such as zoosemy (animal metaphor), foodosemy „a process in which human beings are conceptualised in terms of various foodstuffs” (Grząśko 2020: 119) and gustasemy the operation of which brings about the shift of sense from purely sensory experience to more abstract spheres of human experience and cognition” (Kleparski 2013: 59) paved the way for new directions in this field.

The research of scholars from Rzeszów is a recent stage of examining the evolution of diachronic semantics. Grygiel and Kleparski (2007: 11) observe that „since the beginnings of linguistic thought the problem of change has always been high on the agenda of linguistic investigations”. An interest in the change of meaning made diachronic semantics not only a scholarly but also an academic discipline, like diachronic morphology, syntax, phonology and etymology. The last one is considered by Whitney (1892: 55) (…) the historical study of individual words, is the foundation and substructure of all investigations of language”.

In his monograph, Berndt (1982) investigates changes in the sphere of lexis, including losses within native word stock, the emergence of loanwords, motivations for and types of semantic change, such as expansion, substitution, regrouping and euphemising. Bately's (1996) research compares Old and Middle English vocabulary related to fortune, fate, destiny and chance, unlike Coleman's (1996) who deals with the perception of sexual vocabulary in Middle English. The monographs published in the series Warsaw Studies in English Historical Semantics provide a detailed description of Medieval English lexis concerning medicine and elevations. Sylwanowicz (2007) analyses Old and Middle English *sickness*-nouns (*adl*, *broc*, *cothe*, *gedrecednes*, *uncyste*), while Sądej-Sobolewska (2011) explores the synonyms of *hill* and *mountain* (*fyrgen*, *gesweoru*, *gewyrpe*, *hype*, *mor*). Durkin's study (2014) sheds light on the linguistic situation in the British Isles from Proto-Old English onwards and offers an insight into Scandinavian, Latin and French borrowings that entered the language at that time. Basic semantic phenomena are extensively discussed in Kay, Allan (2015: 25–47), a monograph which focuses on fundamentals such as reference, sense, and types of meaning. They also refer to Componential Analysis and Prototype Theory and cognitive linguistics in general.

The concept of happiness, usually associated with the state of well-being and satisfaction, remains within the sphere of psychological research and gives rise to numerous scholarly publications focused on the analysis of human psyche. As Sang Ho says:

> By now, there is more and more evidence that happiness is associated with Love, Insight, Fortitude, and Engagement, or LIFE for short – for qualities that reflect the mental capital of a person (2013: 27).

As regards linguistic research on the concept of happiness, there are a number of publications dealing with this topic. Among those who attempted at analysing such terminology are Żyśko (2015) who investigate the semantics of 'joy' terms, while Żyśko (2016) carries out her study within cognitive historical linguistics, employing the concepts of cognitive domains, profiling and categorisation, concentrating on *dream, game, gladness, glee, joy* and *mirth*, while Żyśko, Izdebska (2021: 421–435), drawing on the framework of Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT), discuss the HAPPINESS IS HEAVEN metaphor, as exemplified in the historical meanings of nouns like *bliss*, *cheer*, *dream*, *game* and *joy*. On the other hand, Łozowski (2000: 100) analyses the

meanings of *dream* and examines the types of relations between them. According to his study, supplemented with data from *DOE*, *dream* had the meaning 'earthly joy or happiness, frequently contrasted with heavenly bliss' as early as Old English[1]. In his other contribution, Łozowski examines the adjective *sad* and traces its development from 'satisfied' to 'unhappy'. He assigns its negative meaning to „cross-generational mentality of the English" (Łozowski 2012: 46) and argues that "for ideological and / or cognitive reasons, the positive import of *sad* was questioned, rejected and, ultimately, reversed; in a way, *sad* now means the opposite of what it used to" (Łozowski 2012: 46). By contrast, Molencki (in press), deals with the demise of the Old English adjectives of fortune (*blīþe*, *ēadig*, *(ge)sælig*) and their replacement with *happy* and / or *lucky*, while his other study focuses on the spread of the Old Norse root *hap-*, on which the adjective *happy* is based (Molencki 2020: 335–353). An earlier contribution, that by Fabiszak (2001: 43–81), examines Old and Middle English words of joy, such as *bliss*, *blīþe*, *dream*, *glædness*, *gefea*, *liss*, *mirhþ*, *wynsumness*, *cheer*, *delight*.

Historical semantics, even though approached by linguists from many angles, still leaves much room for discussion, as there are numerous lexical fields which have not been thoroughly examined and thus call for an in-depth study.

Aims of the study and research method

The aim of the present study is to trace the development of adjectives which gained the sense 'happy' in Middle English and to verify whether it was their core or peripheral sense. The analysis of contexts in which they occurred allows one to establish the proportion between the meaning 'happy' and other identified senses (see Table 1).

The first step of the study was a selection of lexemes which demonstrated the above meaning. On the basis of the examination of the *HTE*, the terms *beneurous*, *benewred*, *felicious*, *gracious*, *happy* and *seely* were selected as those also recorded in the sense under scrutiny. As may be supposed, the meaning in question was primarily conveyed by the adjective *happy* since it has been the term's original and exclusive sense surviving until the present day. As for the remaining terms, the sense 'happy' developed along with other

[1] *Drēam* is classified in *A Thesaurus of Old English* under the category 'good feeling, joy, happiness' among items like *bliss*, *blīþnes*, *ēadwela*, *ēstnes*, *fægennes*, *gefeohtsumnes*, *hyhtwynn*).

uses gained in time. Remarkably, its influence on the semantics of *gracious* and *seely* proves to be insignificant. Each term was analysed with regard to the total number of orthographic variants identified in dictionaries. The research reveals that particular spellings were strongly preferred, while others unattested in the *Corpus* were probably unknown to the authors of the texts.

Analysis of data

The following section focuses on the frequency of the terms examined and discusses potential reasons for their loss or survival in the language. A preliminary analysis allows one to draw some tentative conclusions as regards the position of each term in the analysed texts. The observable predominance of *happy* (97) with a simultaneous marginalisation of *beneurous*, *benewred* and *felicious* may lead one to assume that these three items were hardly familiar to the compilers of the texts, a situation which, as a result, probably contributed to their becoming obsolete in English.

Table 1. The frequency of the examined adjectives meaning 'happy' in the *Innsbruck Corpus*

Adjective	Number of tokens
happy	97
gracious	13 (346)[2]
seely	7 (102)
benewred	2
beneurous	0
felicious	0

Source: own study

The native adjective *happy*, a derivative of ON *happ* 'luck' (from PGmc **hampą*, PIE **kob*-) entered English in the sense 'favoured by fortune, fortunate, prosperous, lucky' (*MED*, happy). It was first recorded in Higden's *Polychronicon*, a universal history written by Ranulf Higden, a monk of the Benedictine abbey of St. Werburg. The original sense survives in phrases such as *happy medium, happy as a clam, happy as a lark, exultantly happy*. As can be observed, the predominance of the adjective *happy* over the remaining items seems indisputable, but its spread in the *Corpus* is irregular. The earliest Middle English sources (c. 1100–1350) represented by e.g. *Ancrene Riwle*,

[2] The numbers in brackets refer to the total of attestations recorded in the *Innsbruck Corpus*.

Life and Passion of Saint Julian, *Old English Homilies*, *Sawles Warde*, *The Peterborough Chronicle*, *Vices and Virtues* and *History of the Holy Rood-Tree* contain no attestations of the adjective *happy*, which may suggest that the term was redundant when expressing the relevant semantic content in these texts. However, the situation changed in time. The research of the earlier texts brought three attestations found in the narrative *Mandeville's Travels* (c. 1350–1400) as the only evidence of the use of *happy* before the 15th century.

A remarkable growth to 94 tokens was observed in the period 1400––1500. The study reveals that of all 15th century texts, two predominated as regards the total number of tokens. Thus, *The Fire of Love*, by Richard Misyn, contains 13 of 94 tokens, contrary to other texts, which witness a steady decrease in the number of uses. For example, 9 uses are found in *Dicts and Sayings of the Philosophers* (15 c.), an incunabulum, a prose compilation of biblical and philosophical knowledge, whose Middle English version is a translation of an Arabic original, 7 uses in *Familiar Dialogues of the Friend and the Fellow* and *The Doctrinal of Sapience* down to 2 uses in the *Testament of Love* or *The Three Kings' Sons*. Its single records in sixteen other texts (e.g. *Fistula in ano*, *Early English Versions of the Gesta Romanorum*, *The Tale of Melibeus*, *The History of Reynard the Fox* and *Tulle of Olde Age*) testify to an almost entire abandonment of the term.

[1] *Well* ***happy*** *ben they that God vysyteth in theyr lyf by somme tribulacio[n], to thende that he punysshe them not ouerfore and hard at thende* (1450+ The Doctrinal of Sapience (59/r28)).

[2] *And Valerius tellis þat when he had getten þe kyngdom be þis chawnce, he wexid so prowde þat he axkid cowncell of Apollo his god, if þer war any in þis werld þat was* ***happyer*** *þan he was* (1400+Alphabet of Tales (428/r20)).

[3] *Wherfore I counseylle you to fynde the waye and the manere for to haue a kysse or cusse of her mouth, how so euer that it be / Yf ye doo so, I ensure yow ye shal be the* ***happy est*** *of alle other* (1400+ (c1489) Blanchardyn and Eglantine (39/r9)).

[4] *Of þe which some mervailed and said that the fader of that childe was right* ***happi*** *to be so riche and to haue þe will to sett his childe to scole, the whiche louethe konnyng so wele* (1450+ Dicts and Saying of the Philosophers).

[5] *Than was tolde the maner of his comyng, and howe grete ioie fferaunt had therof. «fforsothe», «saide the kynge» / he is* ***happy*** */ & hath cause to be* (1450+ (c1500) The Three Kings' Sons 118/r30).

[6] *O how* ***happy*** *& truly desyrefull swetnes his saule fulfillys!* (1450+ (c1500) The Fire of Love 95/r33).

[7] *The .ix. day of the mone ys* ***happy*** *to begynne alle werkys vp-on* (1450+ (c1450) Works of John Metham: Days of the Moon 150/r31).

As regards its semantic developments, *happy* was often employed in non-contrasting pairs with items like *eurous*, *blessed* and *fortunate* to form part of binomial constructions (Kopaczyk, Sauer 2017: 1–24; Sauer, Schwann 2017a: 83–96; 2017b: 185–204). Binomials such as these (8–12 below) are seen in several texts, e.g. *The Curial made by Maystere Alain Charretier*, *The Tretyse of Love, Melusine*, *Blanachardyn and Eglantine* and *Familiar Dialogues of the Friend and the Fellow*:

[8] *Thenne shalt thou be most meschaunt / Of somoche as thou wenest to be most* ***ewrous and happy*** (1450+ The Curial made by Maystere Alain Charretier 5/r15).

[9] *'O ye* ***blessed and happy*** *spowse of jhesu cryste* (1450+ The Tretyse of Loue 15/r23).

[10] *For certaynly as for my part there shal be no fawte. But that ye shal be the moost* ***fortunat & happy*** *that ever was of your lynee* (1500 Melusine 58/r7).

[11] *And that moche peple dyde moche peyne to gadre and multyplye vertues / Regned in fryse a kynge of right* ***benewred and happy*** *fame / loued / doubted and wel obeyed of his subgettis* (1450+ Blanchardyn and Eglantine 11/r10).

[12] *But y beleue þe contrary, for whereas the comon wele ys euyl at ese ther may no man be wele at eese. Who syttyng yn estate precyously arrayde yn purpyl and fulfylled wyth delycates festes, esed and molyfyed yn hys soule wyth armonye and musycal swetnes, may calle hymself* ***happyor ioyfull*** *syttyng yn a house for lak of sustynaunce lyke to oppresse hym to the dethe?* (1400+ Familiar Dialogues of the Friend and the Fellow 27/r31).

A conclusion drawn from the examined data permits one to state that *happy* was often paired with semantically related adjectives denoting fortune, prosperity or joy (e.g. *blessed and happy*, *benewred or happy*, *happy or*

joyfull), but never was the term contrasted with its antonyms (e.g. *sad*), to generate forms with an opposite meaning.

Another adjective, *gracious* (<PIE *$*g^{w}erH$- 'to express approval, elevate', Skr. *gūrtí* 'praise, welcome', Lat. *grātiōsus* 'agreeable, enjoying favour', F *gracieux* 'courteous, mannerly') entered English with the sense 'endowed with grace or charm of appearance; beautiful, attractive, characterised by elegance or good taste; graceful, charming' (*OED*), mainly used to describe the appearance or manner. The meaning above can be found in 14th century Kentish *Ayenbite of Inwyt*, a translation of the French original *Somme la Roi*, a treatise on Christian morality. The discussed meaning 'fortunate, successful, happy, wealthy, prosperous' was attached in the 14th century to be lost at the end of the 17th century.

As may be observed, the term developed an extraordinarily large number of spelling variants, recorded in *MED* and the *OED*, as exemplified in (9; the list of spellings is adduced in order to make easier search for relevant forms in various sources):

[13] (a) gracewis, graciouce, gracis, gracos, gracous, gracyows, gracyuose, grasyos, graciows, graceux, gracieux, gracyous, gracyouse, gracyus, gratius, graceous, gracios, graciose, graciouse, gracius, gratious, gratiouse, gracious, graceoss, gracioux, gratyous, gratyouse, gracyousse, grasyus, grashus, grayshus, gracius, graciuss, gracyows, gracyus, gratious, gratiows, gratiowse, gratius, gratyws, gracious, graashoos (*OED*).

(b) grac(i)eux, graco(u)s, grati(o)us, & gracewis, & gracivose (*MED*).

The spelling variation of *gracious* included forms characterised as non-standard or regional, like the spellings *grashus* and *grayshus*. The above list also includes the Irish form *graashoos*[3], notrecorded in the *Corpus*.

Of 346 attestations of *gracious* in the *Corpus*, only 13 had the meaning 'fortunate, successful, happy, wealthy, prosperous'. When recorded in the sense above, *gracious* was often paired with *fortunate* (< Lat. *fortu natus* 'lucky, fortunate') to yield forms such as *gracious and fortunate*, e.g. in the *Abbreviation of Chronicles* (15):

[3] As suggested in the etymology section of the *Oxford English Dictionary*, the spelling *graashoos* comes from Wexford, a county town located in the south east of Ireland. As mentioned above, the spellings *grashus* and *grayshus* are labelled "dialectal and non-standard" but it has not been stated which dialect they belong to.

[14] *Insule Fortunate þat beeþ þe **gracious** ilondes* (a1387 J. Trevisa tr. R. Higden Polychronicon).

[15] *This King Edward was **gracious** and fortunat in þes,*deuoute onto þe Cherch, fortunat in batayle, neuyr steyned, saue þat in his age he was gretly langaged with lechery* (1450+ Abbreviation of Chronicles 181/r24).

[16] *Alixandre..Þat grete god Amon in **graciouce** timus Bigat on Olimpias þe onurable queen* (c1450 (▸ c1350) Alexander & Dindimus).

[17] *I haue hope of þe bettir side and of þe **gracioser** lott* (c1475 (c1445) Pecock Donet).

Seely (< PGmc **sæligo-,*sæli-z* 'lack, happiness'), a cognate of OS *sâlig*, Fris. *sêlich*, OHG *sâlig*, MHG *sælic*, Fris. *salig*, Du. *zalig* and Ger. *selig*, is a clear instance of semantic pejoration. From the original meaning (A) 'observant of due season, punctual' (c. 1200), over seventy years later (a. 1272), *seely* shifted to designate (B) 'happy, blissful; fortunate, lucky, well-omened, auspicious'. In the meantime, the term gained two strongly religious meanings (C) 'spiritually blessed, enjoying the blessing of God' and (D) 'pious, holy, good', both dated to a. 1225, and a single non-religious sense (E) 'innocent, harmless', used with reference to beings suffering undeservedly. The gradual pejoration of its meaning, attested at the end of the 13th century, involved a shift towards (F) 'deserving of pity or sympathy, pitiable, miserable, poor, helpless, defenceless' and then to (G) 'insignificant, trifling, mean, poor, feeble' (*OED*), both first recorded in Robert Gloucester's *Chronicle*. The meanings (F–G) deteriorated further to designate (H) 'frail, worn-out, crazy', which ultimately brought (I) 'foolish, simple, silly', the sense used in Modern English.Like *gracious*, *seely* also demonstrated much spelling variation, as illustrated in (18) below:

[18] (a) seoly, seli(e), zely, sely, sele, selli, cel(l)y, selly, cele, sealie, sealy, seally(e), seilie, seilye, selle, sellie, sel(l)ye, sielie, siely, zelie, seeley, seelye, seelie, seely (*OED*).

(b) seliȝe, celi, zeli, sil(l)i, sali, seoli, sæli(ȝ), seliere, sæligre (*MED*).

The majority of the spellings of *seely* identified in *Middle English Dictionary* and *The Oxford English Dictionary* contain the voiceless fricative, spelt <s> (*seoly*, *seli(e)*, *sely*, *sele*), contrary to the few apparently Kentish instances

with the voiced fricative, spelt <z> in the initial position (*zely*, *zelie, zeli*). Forms with <s> predominated in both dictionaries and the *Innsbruck Corpus*, while those with <z>, identified in the *OED*, lack evidence in the *Corpus* material.

Semantic pejoration from 'happy' to 'silly' was a significant meaning change *seely* was subject to. This was simultaneously accompanied by the phonological narrowing [e:] > [i:], a change reflected in the contemporary English spelling *silly*.

Of 102 attestations of *seely* in the *Corpus*, 7 were recorded in the sense 'happy, bringing happiness'. Three instances are found in the different versions of *Ancrene Riwle*, an anonymous early 13th century text, a guidance for three women recluses, who chose to live a highly spiritual life in seclusion. The text was associated with the *Katherine Group*, a collection of five Middle English devotional works written near Herefordshire and surviving in seventeen manuscripts, nine of them containing part or the whole text in its original English version, four in Anglo-Norman and four in Latin translations. Four instances were identified in Thomas Usk's *The Testament of Love*, an allegorical prose work written by the author in prison, (19a) but the term was recognised in several other works of the period cited under (19):

[19] *Than, say I, thou art blisful and fortunat* ***sely****, if thou knowe thy goodes that thou hast yet beleved, whiche nothing may doute that they ne ben more worthy than thy lyf?* (1500+ Testament of Love 86/108).

[20] *Egipte folc adden nið, For ebris adden* ***seli*** *sið* (a1325 (‣ c1250) Genesis & Exodus).

[21] *And than the gude lady Charite, als scho þat es most worthy by-fore alle oþer, sall be abbas of this* ***sely*** *abbaye* (1400+ The Abbey of the Holy Ghost 54/r5).

[22] *Blissed &* ***celi*** *he is þat haþ in temptacioun þolemodenesse* (1200+ (c1225) Ancrene Riwle79/r9).

The French loanwords *beneurous* and its derivative *benewred* belong to the most peripheral formations employed in the sense 'happy'. Their marginal evidence in texts is probably the main reason for their quick disappearance at the end of the period.

Beneurous (< OF *beneureus* 'happy, blessed') entered English in the second half of the 15th century. The examples below come from the *OED* since the *Corpus* texts lack relevant instances.

[23] *The **beneurous** or happy* (1483 W. Caxton tr. Caton).

[24] *He took the righte **benewrous** reste of deth* (1483 W. Caxton tr. J. de Voragine Golden Legende).

The term was recorded in *Caton*, a translation from a French gloss of the Parvus Catho and Magnus Catho and in the *Golden Legend*, a medieval collection of the lives of saints translated by Caxton.

Two attestations of *benewred* recorded in Caxton's *Blanchardyn and Eglantine* made it a peripheral term used in the sense 'happy' and its very limited application in literary texts contributed to its loss.

[25] *Right well it were your fayt and welthe / for to goo rendre your personne vnto her, for to serue her as a soudyoure for tacquyre praysynge of worthy_nesse and goode renomme, that thurghe this cause shall mowe growe to your ward, somoche that the bruyt wherof haply shal come to her knowlege, vnto the preiudyce of her pryde dampnable / And to the felycyte of your **benewred** persoune / deseruynge ther-by her goode gr*ace (1450+ Blanchardyn and Eglantine 38/r17).

Benewred, used attributively in (21), modifies the noun *persoune* and at the same time is preceded by the noun *felycyte*. The phrase *And to the felycyte of your benewred persoune* illustrates the use of two semantically related terms in close proximity, and thus it may have been claimed that *felycyte* influenced the meaning of *benewred*. It should be stressed that the *Oxford English Dictionary* contains no quotation of *benewred* from *Blanchardyn and Eglantine*, a 15th century prose romance, included in the *Innsbruck Corpus* but it provides three citations from Caxton.

The noun *beneurte* 'happiness, blessedness' occurred once in Caxton's translation of Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, while the adverbial form *benewrely* 'happily' could be identified in *Golden Legende*, a collection of hagiographies compiled by the Italian chronicler Jacobus de Vorgaine between 1259 and 1266.

[26] *Of felachyp most **felecyows*** (c1485 Digby Mysteries).

[27] *In all, which [wars] she was ever **felicious** and victorious* (1641 Naunton's Fragmenta Regalia).

Felicious entered English with the sense 'happy, joyous' (*OED*) in the 15th century. The term belongs to the group of adjectives unattested in the *Corpus* and also scarcely represented in the *OED*. Only two attestations which illustrate the sense 'happy, joyous' confirm that the term was scantly used by the texts' compilers, and therefore did not enjoy a high frequency of occurrence. In the sense above, *felicious* was last recorded in Cockaigne's translation of Loredano's novel *Dianea* (1654).

It is likely that the meaning 'happy, joyous' influenced the Early Modern English sense 'fortunate, prosperous' (16 c.), which was the last recorded meaning *felicious* attached and to the same extent underrepresented in texts. The *Oxford English Dictionary* quotes only two its instances. A citation under (22b), in which *felicious* forms a binomial pair with *victorious*, to illustrate felicity caused by a victory in a war, comes from the novel *Fragmenta Regalia or Observations on the Late Queen Elisabeth, Her Times and Favourites*, written circa 1634 by Sir Robert Naunton and first published in 1641.

Other meanings of Middle English adjectives of happiness

The semantics of the terms in question covers a range of peripheral meanings they gained in the course of time. Of all the items examined in the present study, *seely*, recorded in a few senses such as (I) 'deserving of pity and sympathy; pitiable, miserable, 'poor'; helpless, defenceless' (23), (II) 'foolish, simple, silly' (24) and (III) 'spiritually blessed, enjoying the blessing of God' (25), the last of which predominated in the examined texts, seems to offer a great semantic variety but, of them, (I) and (II) survived beyond Middle English, by the 19th and 17th centuries respectively[4]. Senses associated with holiness are mostly confined to religious texts, e.g. *Ancrene Riwle* and *Holy Maidenhood*, but a single instance of such a use can be seen in Chaucer's *Prioress Tale* (*OED*), (26):

[4] The *OED* dates the last citation of the sense in (I) to 1858, while (II) proves to be last recorded in 1622.

[28] *Þis word dude muche wo to þis **seli** olde king* (1297 R. Gloucester's Chronicle).

[29] *To helpen **sely** Troilus of his wo* (c1374 G. Chaucer Troilus & Criseyde).

[30] *A **seli** sin-ful sco was an, And first als a comun woman* (a1400 (▸a1325) Cursor Mundi).

[31] *Bisech for me þine **seli** sune Milce and merci and ore* (a1240 Lofsong in Old English Homilies).

[32] *Ha..þurh **seli** martyrdom uerden..to Criste* (c1225 (?c1200) The Life of Saint Katherine).

[33] *For **sely** child wold alday soone lere* (c1386 G. Chaucer Prioress's Tale).

Shifts affecting *seely* led to considerable modifications as of its semantic structure. Meanings A–D (see above) fell into disuse at the end or shortly after Middle English. Later, *seely* attached negative senses associated with pity or misery. Data from the *Oxford English Dictionary* reveal that the senses (E–H) were preserved longer than (A–D) and therefore might have influenced the present-day meaning 'exhibiting or indicative of a lack of common sense or sound judgement, weak in intellect' (*MWD*).

The adjective *gracious*, quite extensively represented in the *Corpus*, developed a range of meanings associated with mercy, benevolence, kindness and generosity. Its original sense 'endowed with grace or charm of appearance; beautiful, attractive' (*OED*), which describes the qualities of human appearance, such us beauty or attractiveness, was first attested in *Ayenbite of Inwyt* (1340), a confessional prose work written in the Kentish dialect of Middle English:

[34] *Þe uirtues of kende huerby som ys kendeliche more þanne oþer, oþer larger..oþer **graciouser*** (1340 Ayenbite of Inwyt).

Apart from the use above, *gracious* acquired meanings related to appearance, behaviour and attitude, identified in texts from the second half of the 14th century, which include: (A) 'characterised or exhibiting kindness, courtesy, or generosity of spirit; courteous, considerate, tactful, generous' (28), (B) 'kind, indulgent or benevolent to others of lower (social) status' (29), (C) 'abounding in grace or mercy; merciful, compassionate, benevolent' (30)

and (D) 'characterised by, conveying or filled with divine grace; godly, righteous, pious' (31).

A gradual evolution of a term occurs when new meanings develop from older ones to extend the semantic scope of a word, old senses weaken to disappear from language, and thus involve changes in the semantic content of a word. This was the case with *gracious* whose step-by-step progression is illustrated by (A–D) and exemplified by appropriate fragments cited below:

[35] *Williams moder..so god was & **gracious**..so witty & willeful to wirche alle gode dedes* (a1375 (▸ *c*1350) William of Palerne).

[36] *Be **gracious** and do largesse* (a1393 J. Gower Confessio Amantis).

[37] *A! **gracious** gode god! þou3 grettest of alle!* (a1375 (▸ c1350) William of Palerne).

[38] *Harald..made a **gracious** ende, and þat was i-knowe by his laste confessioun* (a1387 J. Trevisa tr. R. Higden *Polychronicon*).

Meanings (A) and (C), both first cited in the French romance poem *William of Palerne* (14c.), developed simultaneously and persisted into Late Modern English with reference to the virtues of benevolence, courtesy and mercy. Meaning (B), associated with social rank, proved to be one of the longest surviving uses, whose last citation goes back to 2010 (*She approved the menus that Mrs. Nesbitt brought upstairs each morning, and ate with a **gracious** smile whatever was put in front of her*; 2010 New Yorker 22 Nov. 79/2). Being the longest surviving sense in English, (B) influenced current meanings cited in the *Merriam-Webster Dictionary*: (i) 'marked by kindness and courtesy', (ii) 'characterised by charm, good taste, generosity of spirit, and the tasteful leisure of wealth and good breeding', (iii) 'marked by tact and delicacy'.

Conclusions

The analysis of data from the *Innsbruck Corpus of Middle English Prose* allows one to formulate certain generalisations concerning the use of the analysed terms. As may be observed, the meaning 'happy' was conveyed by several Middle English adjectives of different frequencies, as attested in the *Corpus* material. Regarding *happy*, *beneurous* and *benewred*, 'happy' was their only meaning, where as *gracious* and *seely* conveyed a number of other senses

identified in the *Corpus* and the dictionaries. Regarding *gracious*, the term retained its 14th century meaning ('characterized by or exhibiting kindness, courtesy, or generosity of spirit; courteous, considerate, tactful, generous') and as such survives in Modern English, e.g.:

[39] *People for whom beauty is at best an anachronism and at worst an embarrassing joke, like* ***gracious*** *conduct or any hint of duty or service* (2008 *New Yorker* 4 Aug. 79/1).

Changes which affected *seely* present a considerable shift from semantic amelioration towards pejoration. The earliest text evidence from the *OED* testifying to the negative uses of *seely* goes back to the 16th century (a. 1529), in Skelton's poem *Colyn Cloute*.

The proportion of *happy*, *gracious* and *seely* to *benerous*, *benewred* and *felicious* leaves no doubt as to the position of these terms in texts from the period 1100–1500 and leads to the answer why *happy*, *gracious* and *seely*, demonstrating a higher frequency ratio, survived to fix their position in language, unlike *benerous*, *benewred* and *felicious*, scantly represented or even omitted in the *Corpus* and hence quickly lost. Summing up:

1) The meaning 'happy' was conveyed by several terms of foreign and native origin whose proportion in the *Innsbruck Corpus* differed strongly. As regards *happy* it was the only meaning attached, while the French borrowing *gracious* included that sense as one of its readings.
2) Loanwords with a limited range of meanings (*benerous*, *benewred, felicious*) were hardly represented or entirely ignored in the *Innsbruck Corpus*, contrary to well-established items such as *happy* and *seely*.
3) The phonetic structure of a term (its length and pronunciation) may have influenced its application in texts. Length and complicated pronunciation may have been the potential reasons why the abovementioned French loans were ousted from English.
4) The total frequency of the terms does not correspond to the number of tokens recorded with the meaning 'happy'. Such striking difference between the absolute number of 346 tokens and only 13 ones used in the sense 'happy' may be observed with regard to *gracious*, which confirms that its current meaning was more widespread in English and thus better known to the compilers of the texts. A similar situation may be observed with regard to *seely*. Only 7 of 102 attestations point to the use

of the term in the sense 'happy' suggesting that in contexts requiring the use of a term in the sense 'happy' other terms were preferred.

5) Medieval scribes used a range of adjectives denoting happiness, which means that they could make decisions as regards the choice of a term. Such choices were made based on the stylistic requirements of the context and other individual preferences of texts' compilers.

Literature

Special studies

Bately J. (1996): *Towards a Middle English Thesaurus: Some terms relating to FORTUNE, FATE and CHANCE*, in: *Middle English Miscellany: From Vocabulary to Linguistic Variation*, ed. J. Fisiak, Poznań, p. 69–82.

Berndt R. (1982): *A History of the English Language*, Leipzig.

Coleman J. (1996): *The treatment of sexual vocabulary in Middle English dictionaries*, in: *Middle English Miscellany: From Vocabulary to Linguistic Variation*, ed. J. Fisiak, Poznań, p. 183–206.

Durkin P. (2014): *Borrowed Words: A History of Loanwords in English*, Oxford.

Fabiszak M. (2001): *The Concept of 'joy' in Old and Middle English. A semantic analysis*, Piła.

Grygiel M., Kleparski G.A. (2007): *Main Trends in Historical Semantics*, Rzeszów.

Grząśko A. (2020): *To devour one's love: The concept of TASTE in the world of endearments*, "SKASE Journal of Theoretical Linguistics" 17(3), p. 118–129.

Kleparski G.A. (2013): *Historical semantics: A sketch on new categories and types of semantic change*, in: *Historical English Word-Formation and Semantics*, eds. J. Fisiak, M. Bator, Frankfurt am Main, p. 59–88.

Kopaczyk J., Sauer H. (2017): *Defining and exploring binomials*, in: *Binomials in the History of English: Fixed and Flexible*, eds. J. Kopaczyk, H. Sauer (eds.), Cambridge, p. 1–24.

Łozowski P. (2000): *Vagueness in Language: from Truth-Conditional Synonymy to Un-Conditional Polysemy*, Lublin.

Łozowski P. (2012): *The word as a symbol of experience: from 'satisfied' to 'unhappy' in sad*, in: *Words in Contexts: from Linguistic Forms to Literary Functions*, eds. P. Łozowski, A. Włodarczyk-Stachurska, Radom.

Molencki R. (2020): *Perhaps happiness happens: On the expansion of the Old Norse root hap- in Middle English*, in: *Mostly Medieval: In Memory of Jacek Fisiak*, eds. H. Sauer, P. Chruszczewski, San Diego, p. 335–353.

Molencki R. (in press): *From eadig to happy: the lexical replacement in the field of Medieval English adjectives of fortune*, in: *Contact in English Historical Linguistics*, eds. B. Molineaux, A. Honkapohja, B. Loss, Amsterdam–Philadelphia, p. 97–118.

Osuchowska D., Kleparski G.A. (2012): *On the scope of English gustasemy with parallel developments in other languages*, in: *Words in Contexts*: *from Linguistic Forms to Literary Functions*, eds. P. Łozowski, A. Włodarczyk-Stachurska, Radom, p. 126–140.

Sang Ho L. (2014): *The Psychology and Economics of Happiness*: *Love, Life and Positive Living*, London.

Sauer H., Schwann B. (2017a), *Heaven and earth, good and bad, answered and said: A survey of English binomials and multinomials (Part I)*, "Studia Linguistica Universitatis Iagellonicae Cracoviensis" 134, p. 83–96.

Sauer H., Schwann B. (2017b): *Heaven and earth, good and bad, answered and said: A survey of English binomials and multinomials (Part II)*, "Studia Linguistica Universitatis Iagellonicae Cracoviensis" 134, p. 185–204.

Sądej-Sobolewska K. (2011): *The Synonyms of Hill and Mountain in Medieval English: Explorations in Historical Semantics*, "Warsaw Studies in English Historical Linguistics" 5, Warsaw.

Sylwanowicz M. (2007): *Old and Middle English Sickness-nouns in Historical Perspective: A Lexico-Semantic Analysis*, "Warsaw Studies in English Historical Linguistics" 1, Warsaw.

Whitney B. (1892): *Language and the Study of Language*, New York.

Żyśko A. (2016): *English 'joyful' Vocabulary – Semantic Developments*, Frankfurt am Main.

Żyśko A., Izdebska M. (2021): *Heaven as a locus aomenus – an analysis of the HAPPINESS IS HEAVEN metaphor behind historical meanings of 'joy' terms*, "Studia Filologiczne UJK" 34(1), p. 421–435.

Żyśko K., Żyśko A. (2015): *Motivation for meaning construction: Historical Semantics of English 'joy' vocabulary*, in: *Within Language, Beyond Theories: Studies in Theoretical Linguistics*, eds. A. Bondaruk, A. Prażmowska, Newcastle, p. 374–385.

Sources

DOE = Dictionary of Old English, <https://doe.artsci.utoronto.ca/> (date of access: V 2022).

HTE = Historical Thesaurus of English, <https://ht.ac.uk/> (date of access: V 2022).

Markus M. (2008): *Innsbruck Corpus of Middle English Prose*, Innsbruck: University of Innsbruck (date of access: V–VI 2022).

MED = Middle English Dictionary, <https://quod.lib.umich.edu/med> (date of access: VI 2022).

MWD = Merriam-Webster Dictionary, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/> (date of access: VI 2022).

OED = The Oxford English Dictionary Online, <www.oed.com> (date of access: VI 2022).

Abbreviations

Du.– Dutch
F – French
Fris. – Frisian
Ger. – German
Lat. – Latin
MHG – Middle High German
OF – Old French
OFris. – Old Frisian
OHG – Old High German
ON – Old Norse
OS – Old Saxon
PGmc – Proto-Germanic
PIE – Proto-Indo-European
Skr. – Sanskrit

Selected Middle English adjectives of happiness: their representation in the *Innsbruck Corpus*

The present paper analyses the fates of the Middle English synonyms of the adjective *happy*. The group of the examined words contains adjectives *beneurous*, *benewred*, *felicious*, *gracious*, *seely* and the key item *happy.* Focusing on their fates in the period under question, the study uses data from the *Innsbruck Corpus of Middle English*, a collection of 129 Middle English digitised texts, preserved in 159 files, to determine token frequency, text distribution and semantic changes of the examined adjectives. Other sources used in the study are *Middle English Dictionary* (*MED*), *The Oxford English Dictionary* (*OED*), *Historical Thesaurus of English* (*HTE*) and AntConc, a freeware corpus analysis program. The evidence from the *Innsbruck Corpus of Middle English Prose* shows considerable discrepancies in the token frequency of the analysed terms and the number of attestations employed in the sense 'happy'. Although the position of the adjective *gracious* was extraordinarily strong (354 attestations), the termyielded only 13 attestations used in the sense under study. The marginal status of *benewred* (2 attestations)and lack of *beneurous* in the Middle English texts examined announce their loss at the end of the period.

Keywords: *adjectives, happy, Middle English, semantic change*
Słowa kluczowe: *przymiotniki, szczęśliwy, Middle English, zmiana semantyczna*