

# Middle Cornish Lexical Register: the Role of Etymology

by John Mills

The corpus of Middle Cornish consists principally of miracle plays, a charter endorsement, a poem about Christ's Passion, a translation of Bishop Bonner's Homilies, a short chapter in Andrew Boorde's *Fyrst Boke of the Introduction of Knowledge*, and a few fragments. During the Middle Cornish period, many loanwords were introduced into the Cornish language as a consequence of language contact with Middle English; Old Norman French and Latin. This expansion of the Cornish lexicon resulted in a large number of synonyms which are distinguished according to their register. Selection among synonyms is conditioned by Field, Tenor and Mode. The paradigm of register used for this paper is that of Halliday, McIntosh, & Stevens (1964). Items of English etymology are used as a literary device to depict tyranny, to portray the discourse of certain evil characters in the miracle plays. Old Norman French loanwords expand the Cornish lexicon in the fields of government and administration, religion, art, learning, social life, chivalry, the military, medicine, law, food and fashion. Words borrowed directly Latin are principally used in ecclesiastical context. The etymologies of synonyms determines their register. In particular with regard to field and tenor.

## References

Bonner, Edmund (1555) *A profitable and necessarye doctryne, with certayne homelies adioyned thervnto set forth by the reuerende father in God, Edmonde byshop of London, for the instruction and enformation of the people beyng within his Diocesse of London, of his cure and charge.* B.L. London: Iohannis Cawodini.

Boorde, A. (1555) *The Fyrst Boke of the Introduction of Knowledge* London: In fleetestrete, at the signe of the Rose Garland.

Boorde, A. (n.d.) *Fyrst Boke of the Introduction of Knowledge* London: William Copland.

Brome, Richard (1632) *The Northern Lasse: A Comoedie* London: A. Mathewes, sold by N. Vavasour.

Carew, Richard (1602) *The Survey of Cornwall* London: Printed by S. S[tafford] for Iohn Iaggard.

*Charter Endorsement* British Library: Add. Cart. 19491.

*Exeter Consistory Court Depositions (1569-1572)* Royal Institution of Cornwall: Henderson MSS., vol. X p.176.

*Glasney Cartulary* Cornwall Records Office: MS. Dd R(S)59)

Halliday, M.A.K. (1978) *Language as a Social Semiotic* London: Edward Arnold.

Halliday, M.A.K., Angus McIntosh, & Peter Strevens (1964) *The Linguistics Sciences and Language Teaching* London: Longman.

Jordan, William (1611) *Gwreans an Bys* Collophone: "William Jordan: the XIIth of August 1611"  
Bodleian ms 219.

Oldwanton, Olyver (1555) *A lyttle treatyse called the Image of Idlenesse conteynyng certeyne matters moued betwene Walter Wedlocke and Bawdin Bachelor. Translated out of the Troyane or Cornyshe tounge by Olyuer Oldwanton and dedicated to the Lady Lust.* London: William Seres dwellynge in Powles Churchyard at the signe of the Hedge hogge.

*Ordinalia* Bodleian: 791.

*Pascon Agan Arluth* British Library: Harleian N. 1782.

*Star Chambers* Henry VIII, 8/171-175. Cited by Loth (1911b: 443) "Cornoviana: Les breton en cornwall au commencement di XVIe siècle" *Revue celtique* XXV, 215-6.

Thomas, Graham & Nicholas Williams (2007) *Bewnans Ke: The Life of Saint Kea* Exeter: Exeter University Press.

Ton, Rad. (1504) *Beunans Meriasek* Colophon, "Finitur per dominum Rad Ton anno domini 1504". National Library of Wales: MS. Peniarth 105.

*Tregear Homilies* British Library: Add. MS. 46397.