Gleaned from the Glosses:

A Window into the Development of English through Glossing

In this paper, I will explore how studying the practice of glossing has contributed to our understanding of the development of the English language, and I will also address the limitations of this method of research. Glossing, a practice in which a text is given word-for-word interlineal or marginal translations, allows linguists a primary source for insight into language interaction. Some of the most well-studied examples come from the Alfredian period of Old English, and through these we can make inferences about lexical borrowings, morphology, and the dispersal of these language changes. The study of glossing does have its hindrances, which will also be further noted below.

There are only a handful of surviving glosses from the crucial period following the introduction of Christianity to Anglo-Saxon England. Prior to the arrival of missionary monks, the Germanic inhabitants had no known written history (Smith & Kim, 2018). When religion was introduced, so too was the practice of recording and preserving culture through written records. Our initial interactions with written Old English, however, are auxiliary; they mainly exist in relation to the gospels brought over by monks which were recorded in Latin. The Old English interlineal additions do not provide exact translations of the texts; instead, they simply offer interpretations of individual words to the reader. As Esteban-Segura (2014) has explained:

> A gloss builds a text word for word, without paying much attention to grammatical ordering. Its sole purpose is to supply a clue as to the meaning of the words of the original, so that it may be more easily understood. (para. 4)

Due to the supplementary nature of these Old English inclusions, their origins are somewhat mysterious. The educated class in the eighth through the tenth centuries would have deemed Latin the preferred and distinguished language for conducting tutelage. Two of the most well-known and thoroughly considered examples of glosses, the Lindisfarne Gospels and the Rushworth Gospels, were originally transcribed in Latin in the early 8th and early 9th century, respectively. Neither received their Old English glosses until the mid and late 10th century (Esquibel & Wojtyś, 2016). The growing importance of English is mirrored in the growing size and prominence of glosses: whole texts, venerated by the church, are annotated, and the later glosses are larger and more rigorous (Stanton, 2002). While one cannot be certain of the intended audience of these English notations, it is clear that the language had asserted itself in prominence and stature to a point where history and important cultural values had to be transmitted for Anglo-Saxon posterity.

Both the Lindisfarne Gospels and the Rushworth Gospels are glossed in the Northumbrian dialect of Old English, though three other dialects also existed: Kentish, Mercian, and West Saxon (Timofeeva, 2017). West Saxon was regarded as the most correct version of English at the time as a result of Alfred the Great's court sitting in Wessex, but most research of early written Old English concentrates on Northumbrian due to the early establishment of the Lindisfarne monastery in northern Anglo-Saxon England (Esteban-Segura, 2014). Dialects outside of Northumbrian are primarily examined through later translations of sacred texts. As a result, glossing does admittedly provide a limited and imperfect view on the history of English.

While it is valuable for identifying hints at sweeping change in the lexicon, orthography, and phonology, it is important to note that glossing merely allows a glimpse into the wide

spectrum of the English language. Timofeeva (2017) points out that what scraps of Old English remain primarily represent "upper-class, male, religious, written language" and neglects "the vocabulary of the lower classes, lay people, women, speakers of OE as a second language, etc." (p. 217). Furthermore, syntax is often affected as a result of faithfully translating the original Latin script word-for-word rather than sentence-by-sentence, which may also result in an inauthentic representation of Old English (Bergen, 2008). The context, too, of the writer's circumstances and frames of reference must be taken into account. Appleton (2017) notes that Owun, known glossator of the Rushworth Gospels, had an inclination for interpreting cities and spaces as insular. This was a perspective which did not exist prior to the gospels' arrival on the island of Anglo-Saxon England. Each of these factors may be incidental on their own, but when considered together, one must be hesitant before making generalizations based off of a single gloss.

Glossing is extremely valuable for gathering evidence of lexical borrowings. The Germanic peoples encountered by the Pope Gregory the Great's missionaries lacked the language to communicate about Christianity (Smith & Kim, 2018). As a result, this gap necessitated the loaning of words, either through loan-translation or direct loans. For example, the very word *gospel* originates from the Old English *gōd-spell*. This is derived from the Latin *ēvangelium,* which comes from a Greek word made up of morphemes meaning "good" and "message", and there is direct evidence of this borrowing in the Lindisfarne Gospels (Timofeeva, 2017). Other words were directly taken from Latin, like *minister* and *psalm* (Baugh, 2013). It is possible that these glosses represent some of the first instances of these words in the English language.

In areas where proper nouns enter the frame, the glosses sometimes directly copy them; in other instances, the proper nouns are adjusted to fit Old English conventions. For example, the Latin passage from Mark 3:22 uses *beelzebub*. In the Lindisfarne gloss, this noun is not transferred. In the Rushworth gloss, it is adjusted to *belzebub* (Esteban-Segura, 2014). The dropping of the second *e* is typical of Old English; long vowels would not be doubled until orthography began to shift during the Middle English period (Smith & Kim, 2018). Not only can we study orthography in this way, but critical morphological information also exists within these glosses.

In some instances, it is possible to observe language change *in medias res.* For example, linguists have established the Northern Subject Rule to identify patterns of present tense verb inflection that shifted away from early Old English models. It asserts that the third person singular verb always takes on a word-final *-s* unless an immediately adjacent pronoun is present. By studying glosses, knowledge is afforded on when and how this change may have arisen. Cole (2017) goes so far as to use the Lindisfarne Gospels to consider that word final *-s* and *-ð* coupled with the effects mentioned in the Northern Subject Rule may have origins within Old Northumbrian itself. Where most research supposes the *-s* spread arose as a result of interaction with Old Norse, Cole finds the glossator persistently uses word-final *-s* in first- and second-person plural predating the wave of Scandinavian attacks at the end of the tenth century.

Within the Lindisfarne Gospels, there is also evidence of personal pronouns losing case distinctions. In early Old English, personal pronoun systems were in place to match gender, case, and number (Smith & Kim, 2018). When Middle English resurfaced in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, that system had experienced shortening (Smith & Kim, 2018). Cole (2017)

notes that there is apparent evidence of this even in the early tenth century, as indicated by analysis of the Lindisfarne Gospels:

> In Lindisfarne, the demonstrative pronouns *ðis, ðes, ðe and ða, ðas* and the personal pronouns *he* and *his* all occur as glosses for Latin demonstratives. Double Glosses, involving both a personal pronoun, also frequently occur, for instance *ðe onfoes ł he onfoeð ~ accipiet 'he receives'* (Mt. 10.41), *hea ł ða ~ illi* (Mt 2.5), which further illustrates the apparent interchangeability of demonstrative and personal pronouns in Old English. (p. 139)

Findings like these allow linguists to track the convergence and divergence of dialects, as well as instances of language interaction and change. By plotting the appearance of words or patterns on a map with reference to year and quantity, one can study the likely source of many separate instances of linguistic evolution. Timofeeva (2017) specifically applies this methodology to Latin loan words and compares their usage and appearance with Old English approximations, e.g. *martyr* versus *cȳpere* or *þrowere* (pp. 227-228). In this way, she proves that the Latin borrowing was more prevalent and can pinpoint when its usage overtook its Old English counterparts.

In conclusion, glossing represents a vital resource for the investigation of language contact and change. Through the Lindisfarne Gospels and Rushworth Gospels, we have been able to make educated speculations about lexical borrowings, morphology, and the dispersal of these language changes in Old English. Glosses are an opportunity to survey sources which have survived a millennium, and linguists must carefully consider the limitations of these materials

before gleaning information. Research methods utilizing glossed texts certainly have their obstacles; they sometimes present an imperfect solution for a nearly impossible riddle.

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