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IN SEARCH OF *HAPPINESS*: *FELICITAS* AND *BEATITUDO* IN EARLY ENGLISH BOETHIUS TRANSLATIONS

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1. Introductory

In this paper I will discuss the expressions of the concept of happiness from Old to Modern English and hope that this choice of topic will be interpreted as wishing "many happy returns" to Roger Lass, whose comparative approach to linguistic problems and alert sensitivity to the movements of the human mind has been a source of inspiration to both his own contemporaries and a generation of younger scholars. The main purpose of my paper is to show how a study of translations throughout the centuries will help us to understand the developments of the lexis of English, from the time when the introduction of the classical/Christian literary culture was making completely new demands on language, to the period when borrowed and native elements were amalgamated into an efficient tool for argument even at a highly abstract level of expression.[1]

Boethius' *De Consolatione Philosophiae* offers us an excellent source for comparing English translations of one and the same text over a long time span. Because of its philosophical content, this text is a challenge even to a present-day professional, not to speak of translators who had to cope with a much less sophisticated vehicle for expressing abstract ideas. The earliest English Boethius translation dates from King Alfred's time, possibly compiled by the king himself;[2] there are two Middle English translations, Chaucer's in prose and Walton's in verse, and a number of Modern English ones dating from various centuries.

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[1] For the importance of translation in shaping the English language in its early periods, see Blake (1992).

[2] For the sake of brevity, the Old English translation is referred to as 'Alfred's' in the present paper, despite the uncertainty about the actual translator.

My observations on the words indicating 'happiness' are mainly based on the Helsinki Corpus samples of Alfred's, Chaucer's, Colville's (1556) and Preston's (1695) translations of *De Consolatione Philosophiae*.[3] Reference is also made to the occurrences of these words in other parts of the translations and in the Boethius versions of John Walton (1410) and I.T. (1609).

Prose 9 of the Third Book of *De Consolatione Philosophiae* begins as follows:

(1) a. *"Hactenus mendacis formam felicitatis ostendisse suffecerit, quam si perspicaciter intueris, ordo est deinceps quae sit uera monstrare." "Atqui uideo," inquam, "nec opibus sufficientiam nec regnis potentiam nec reuerentiam dignitatibus nec celebritatem gloria nec laetitiam uoluptatibus posse contingere."* (Boethius 256)[4]
(For a translation, see (1b), below.)

The second sentence of this passage contains a number of coupled abstract nouns, with rather subtle differences in meaning. In his translation dating from the end of the 17th century, Richard, Lord Viscount Preston, the latest of the translators in my survey, makes use of loan words borrowed from French or directly from Latin, often using two synonymous nouns to indicate a concept. The only native word he uses is *kingdom*.

b. *Let it suffice that I have hitherto described the Form of counterfeit Happiness: So that if thou considerest well, my Method will lead me to give to thee a perfect Draught of the true.* **Boet**. *I now see plainly that Men cannot arrive at a full Satisfaction by Riches, nor at Power by enjoying Principalities or Kingdoms, nor at Esteem and Reverence by the Accession of Dignities, nor at Nobility by Glory, nor at true Joy by carnal Pleasures.* (Preston 124)

It is interesting to see how translators from Old to Early Modern English have solved the problems of the related but contrasting concepts in the Boethius passage quoted above.

c. *Genog ic þe hæbbe nu gereaht ymb ða anlicnessa & emb ða sceaduwa þære soðan gesælðe. Ac gif þu nu sweotole gecnawan meaht þa anlicnesse þære soðan gesælðe þonne is siððan ðearf þæt ic þe hi selfe getæce. þa andwyrde ic & cwæð: Nu ic ongite genog openlice þætte ælces goodes genog nis on ðissum woruldwelum, ne æltæwe anwald nis on nanum weoruldrice, ne se soða weorðscipe nis on þisse weorulde, ne þa mæstan mærða ne sint on ðysse woruldgylpe, ne sio hehste blis nis on þam flæsclicum lustum.* (Alfred 74)
"'I have now told you enough about the images and shadows of true happiness. But if you would now like to understand clearly the image of true happiness, then it is necessary that I show it to you myself". Then I answered and said: "Now I understand clearly enough that a sufficient amount of everything good cannot be found in worldly wealth, nor can perfect power exist in any earthly kingdom, or true respect in this world, or the greatest renown in pride or the highest bliss in the pleasures of the flesh".'

d. *"It suffiseth that I have schewyd (='shown') hiderto the forme of fals welefulnesse (='wealfulness'), so that yif (='if') thou loke now cleerly, the ordre of myn entencioun (='intention') requireth from hennes forth to schewe the verray welefulnesse."*
"For sothe," quod I, "I se wel now that suffisaunce may nat comen by rychesse, ne power by remes (='realms'), ne reverence by dignites, ne gentilesse by glorie, ne joie be delices." (Chaucer 429.C1)

e. *As vnto þis I suppose it suffise*
To haue schewed þe forme of fals felicite,
Whiche ȝif þou wilt behalde and well avise,
I trowe þou myght þe verray sothe see.
Fro hennes forþ now most my processe be
To schewe þe forme of verray blisfulnesse."
"In soth," quod I, "full clere it is to me
þat ȝe haue schewed of worldly wrecchidnesse.
I see þat richesse yefeth (='gives') no suffisaunce,
Ne hyhe estate ne worldly reuerence,
And þogh þat worldly fame a man avaunce,
Of gentilesse it ȝeueþ (='gives') none evidence.
Ne riall powere wiþ his excellence
Ne may not gyue ne causen verrey myght.
Ne fleschely lust with all oure diligence
Verray gladnesse causeth not be right."
(Walton 161-162)

f. *Hetherto it suffyseth that I haue shewed the maner and forme, of false felicite or blessednes, which if thou beholdeste perfetlye, it restythe to declare from henceforthe, whyche is the very true felicitie.*

[3] The same Boethius passages of each translation are included in the Helsinki Corpus. These are: Bk III, Prose 9-11; Bk IV, Prose 4, 6. In the Helsinki Corpus, there are also passages from Queen Elizabeth's Boethius version, but as this rather slavish and clumsy translation does not add much to the picture of the development of lexis, I have not included it in my survey.

For a description of the Helsinki Corpus of English Texts, see, e.g., Rissanen – Kytö – Palander-Collin (1993); Kytö (1996).

[4] For the editions of the Latin and English Boethius versions, see the list of references.

BOE: Truelye I do se, that ryches cannot be satisfied with suffysaunce, nor power wyth kyngedomes, nor reuerence with dygnities, not glory with nobilitie or gentles, nor myrth with pleasures. (Colville 68)

g. *Let it suffice that wee have hetherto discovered the forme of false felicitie, which if thou hast plainly seene, order now requireth, that we shew thee, in what true happinesse consisteth. I see, (quoth I) that neither sufficiencie by riches, nor power by kingdomes, nor respect by dignities, nor renowne by glory, nor ioy can be gotten by plesures."* (I.T. 66v)

As can be expected, Alfred uses only native words in his version. He renders the subtle contrasts of the Latin words by skilfully using positively evaluative adjectives (*ældæwe, soð, mæst, hehst*) and the concepts of *woruld* 'world(ly)', and *lust*. The difference between his translation and Chaucer's is predictably that Chaucer uses borrowed words for these concepts; four of these are cognates of the words in the Latin original.[5] Walton, perhaps surprisingly, is more fond of native equivalents than Chaucer, using *myght*, *gladnesse*, and *lust* in his metrical but nevertheless remarkably accurate rendering. Like Alfred, he improves the accuracy of his translation with the descriptive adjectives *hyhe* 'high', *worldly*, *verrey* 'true', and *fleschely*.

Colville's translation follows Chaucer's fairly closely; it is worth noting, however, that he substitutes the native *kingdom* for *re(au)me* 'realm' and *myrth* for *joie*. The still unidentified I.T. follows Colville but uses the Chaucerian *joy* instead of *mirth*. Finally, Preston, like Walton, returns to the Alfredian method of translation. Although he uses only borrowed vocabulary to render the Latin words under consideration (with the sole exception of *kingdom*), he specifies the concepts indicated by borrowed nouns by the adjectives *full*, *true* and *carnal*, and the noun *accession (of)*. His aim of exactitude can also be seen in his use of word pairs (*principalities or kingdoms*, *esteem and reverence*).

Thus even a survey of a single sentence gives us a general picture of how both native and borrowed elements were effectively used to indicate fairly subtle nuances in the translation of abstract ideas. Let us next see how the translators cope with the concept of happiness.

In *De Consolatione Philosophiae*, Boethius defines two types of happiness, which he refers to with the nouns *felicitas* and *beatitudo*. The former is the more general term and indicates worldly happiness, particularly if it is used in opposition to *beatitudo*, which indicates mainly 'the happiness of heaven'. The following passages illustrate the polarity of the two Latin words:

(2) a. *Aliis mixta quaedam pro animorum qualitate distribuit; quosdam remordet ne longa felicitate luxurient* (Boethius 348)

[5] In the discussion of Chaucer's translation, it has to be kept in mind that his rendering also echoes the French translation attributed to Jean de Meun.

b. *Upon some he lays grievous heavy Crosses, lest they should grow luxurious by too long a Course of felicity.* (Preston 198)

(3) a. *Nam quoniam beatitudinis adeptione fiunt homines beati, beatitudo uero est ipsa diuinitas, diuinitatis adeptione beatos fieri manifestum est* (Boethius 270-272)

b. *Because by the attaining of Beatitude Men are happy, and Beatitude is Divinity it self, by the attaining of Divinity it is manifest that men are made happy* (Preston 137)

When the contrast between these two stages of happiness is not emphasized, the more general *felicitas* is normally used, but if the context contains some kind of reference to the 'not-worldly' state, *beatitudo* is also possible.[6] This optionality can also be seen in the translations.

In the first sentence of (1a), *felicitas* is the appropriate Latin word for 'happiness'. The translations show, once again, interesting variability: *gesæld* (Alfred); *welefulnesse* (Chaucer); *felicite* and *blisfulnesse* (Walton); *felicite or blessednes* (Colville), *felicity and happiness* (I.T.) and finally *happiness* (Preston). The translations of *beatitudo* in (3a) are *gesæld* (Alfred), *blisfulnesse* (Chaucer and Walton), *blessednes* (Colville and I.T.) and *beatitude* by Preston. Only Alfred uses the same word to translate both *felicitas* and *beatitudo* in (1) and (3).

Table 1 shows that the translators referred to above do, indeed, make an effort to distinguish between the two types of 'happiness'. Although none of them follows the Latin original quite consistently,[7] it is obvious that some words prevail as the translation of *felicitas* (*woruldgesæld*, *welefulness*, *felicity*, *prosperity*), while others are mainly used to translate *beatitudo* (*blissfulnes*, *blessedness*, *beatitude*). I will next discuss the choice of the words for 'happiness' in each Boethius translation in some more detail.

[6] Cf. Payne's (1968: 67) definition:

> '[In Boethius' book III] the first nine proses concern the shadows of happiness, represented by the fortune's goods; the last three concern the true happiness which is God.

See also Gruber's (1978) comment on Bk III, Prose 5.3.

[7] It must be kept in mind, of course, that we do not know what the Latin text of *De Consolatione Philosophiae* undrlying each of these translations was. They seem to show, however, so much consistency of content that this uncertainty does not significantly diminish the value of the comparisons attempted in this paper. The special character of Alfred's version, which was in many places more a paraphrase than a translation, will be commented on below.

Table 1. The translations of *felicitas* and *beatitudo* in the early English translations of Boethius *De Consolatione Philosophiae* (Bk III, Pr. 9-11; Bk IV, Pr 4, 6)

Boethius	felicitas	8	beatitudo	25	Other	
Alfred	gesælþ	6	gesælþ	21	gesælþ	29
	woruldgesælþ	2				
Chaucer	welefulnes	5			welefulness	1
	blissfulnes	3	blissfulness	18	blissfulness	16
			felicite	1		
Walton	felicite	4	felicite	2	felicite	2
			blissfulness	19	blissfulness	5
			wilfuln.	1		
	welthis	3				
Colville	felicity	3	felicity	3	felicity	6
			blessedness	12		
	fel./bldness	2	fel./bldness	7	fel./bldness	6
	prosperity	2	prosperity	1		
	Prosp./richn.	1				
I.T.	happiness	2	happiness	5		
			blessedness	20		
	felicity	3				
	prosperity	2				
Preston	happiness	4	happiness	21	happiness	2
	felicity	3			felicity	2
			beatitude	2		

2. Alfred

As is well known, Alfred's version of Boethius is rather a paraphrase than a translation in many places. It is, however, entirely possible to observe his renderings of the key concepts of the original, as can be seen in (1c) above.

Alfred's typical translation of both *felicitas* and *beatitudo* is *gesælð*, which occurs 56 times in the Helsinki Corpus sample and more than 150 times in the entire text. This is not surprising, since *sæl* 'happiness' occurs in Old English poetry although, according to the information given by the Toronto Old English corpus, the word is more common in the sense of 'occasion', 'a fit time' (cf. Bosworth-Toller, s.v. *sæl* f.). *Sælð*, too, can be found in poetical texts. It seems, however, that *gesælð* in the sense of 'happiness' may have been Alfred's coinage to render the philosophical concept, the earliest texts in which it occurs in this meaning being *Cura Pastoralis* and Boethius.[8]

[8] In *Andreas* 3633, the meaning of the word is 'a hap, future, event' (Toller s.v. *gesælþ* I). Cf. the development of the meaning of *happiness*.

Although Alfred does not attempt a systematic lexical distinction between *felicitas* and *beatitudo*, he is capable of expressing the contrast when need be, by using such adjectives as *soþ*, *ece*, *hehst*, *selest*, *mæst*, or *leas*, *mennisc*, *andweard*, *eorðlic*, to specify *gesælð*, as in (4), or (1c) above:

(4) *sio lease gesælð hio tihð on last neadinga þa þe hiere to geðeodað from þæm soðum gesælðum mid hiere oliccunge.* (Alfred 48)
'the false happiness withdraws at last by force those who attach themselves to her from true happiness by her flattering.'

The most important innovation in Alfred's rendering of the concept of 'happiness' is, however, his use of the compound *woruld(ge)sælða*. This plural compound, which translates *felicitas* twice in the Helsinki Corpus sample, occurs with one exception[9] only in Boethius, the total number of instances being c. 30. If this word was, indeed, Alfred's coinage to emphasize the contrast between *felicitas* and *beatitudo*, he may have modelled it on the pattern occurring in a large number of Old English compounds, such as *woruldbliss*, *worulddream*, *woruldhyht*, *woruldfeoh* 'worldly wealth', *woruldgestreon* 'worldly gain', etc.

In the Helsinki Corpus sample, *woruldgesælð* translates *felicitas* in the following passages:

(5) a. *laeta uero magnum bonis argumentum loquuntur, quid de huiusmodi felicitate debeant iudicare quam famulari saepe improbis cernant.* (Boethius 348)
b. *þæt is swiðe sweotol tacn þæm wisan þæt he ne sceal lufian to ungemetlice ðas woruldgesælða, forðæm hie oft cumað to ðæm wyrrestum monnum.* (Alfred 134)
'that is a very clear sign for the wise man that he must not too excessively love (worldly) happiness, because it often comes to the worst people'.

(6) a. *Alios in cladem meritam praecipitauit indigne acta felicitas; quibusdam permissum puniendi ius, ut exercitii bonis et malis esset causa supplicii.* (Boethius 350)
b. *Manegum men bioð eac forgifene forðæm þas weoruldgesælða þæt he scile þæm goodum leanian hiora good, & þæm yflum hiora yfel.* (Alfred 134)
'(Worldly) happiness is also given to many a man therefore that he should reward the good for their goodness and (punish) the evil for their evil'.

The later translations, too, emphasize the contrast between the kinds of happiness in these passages (see below).

[9] It is perhaps worth noting that the compound *woruldgesælig* occurs once in the *Battle of Maldon*.

3. Middle English translators

As is well known, Chaucer was an innovator in language and his texts abound in Latin loanwords, mainly borrowed through French.[10] This can be seen even in the passage quoted in (1d) above. Against this background, it is interesting to note that Chaucer uses native words to express both *felicitas* and *beatitudo*: *welefulnesse* 'wealfulness' and *blisfulnesse*. Both words occur frequently in his Boethius version, 31 and 86 occurrences in the whole text (*welefulnesse* is used as a translation of *felicitas*, e.g. in the passages quoted in 5a and 6a). The fact that they do not occur at all in his other writings indicates a conscious choice for rendering Boethius' subtle distinction between the different kinds of happiness. This is also suggested by the following marginal gloss:

(7) *the heritage is to seyn the doctryne of the whiche Socrates in his opynyoun of felicite, that I clepe [='call'] welefulnesse* (Chaucer Bk I pr. 3 32)

Welefulnesse was probably never established in the language; there are no instances outside Chaucer's Boethius in the Helsinki Corpus, and the OED only records one (Lydgate, *Chronicle of Troy*, OED s.v. *wealful*). *Blissfulness*, too, seems to remain infrequent, since there are no other instances in the Middle or Early Modern sections of the Helsinki Corpus, with the exception of one from Queen Elizabeth's Boethius version (p. 64). The OED records a few instances, including one Middle English (in Wyclif's 1382 Bible translation). The fact that no instances are recorded between 1633 and 1858 indicates the rarity of the word.[11]

Why, then did Chaucer take the trouble of using two native derivatives for 'happiness' although there would have been ample opportunity to resort to borrowings? He uses *felicity* only once in Boethius (besides the passage quoted in example 7):[12]

(8) *Philosophie. "Tak now thus the discrecioun of this questioun," quod sche; "yif alle thise thinges," quod sche, "weren membris to felicite, thanne weren thei dyverse that on fro that othir.* (Chaucer 433)

It seems that Chaucer regards *felicite* as too general a word to indicate the contrast with *blisfulnesse*, as is also suggested by his comment in (7) above. That the word as such was not alien or unpleasant to him is indicated by the fact that he uses *felicite* sixteen times in his other writings. The choice of *blisfulnesse* is significant, too; the loan word *beatitude*, which first occurs in Caxton's text (1491, OED s.v. *beatitude* 1) and *Chester Plays* (OED s.v. *beautitude*), would have been entirely possible. Even *blessedness*, which is Colville's solution in rendering *beatitudo* (see below), would have been possible: the word occurs as early as *Cursor Mundi* (c. 1300; see OED, s.v. *blessedness*). All in all, Chaucer's choice of native words, and his possible coinage of *welefulnesse*, shows that Middle English, a period of explosive expansion of the borrowed element in lexis, had not lost its capacity for native derivation to indicate abstract concepts. Further proof of Chaucer's independence of the vocabulary of his originals is given by the fact that his only use of *felicite* in Boethius (8) translates *beatitudo* and not *felicitas*.

Walton's verse translation may be lacking in poetical elegance, but it is a surprisingly skilful and accurate rendering of a difficult original. While his text clearly suggests familiarity with Chaucer, his choice of words stands as evidence not only of independence of the great master but also of his ability and willingness to use native resources to indicate the concepts of the original text; cf. (1e) above. Walton was obviously not happy with Chaucer's *welefulnesse* and usually renders *felicitas* by *felicite*. It is significant, however, that he renders *beatitudo* by *blisfulnesse* and uses the translation *wealths* to render *felicitas* in the passages corresponding to (5) and (6), where Alfred has *woruldgesælða* and Chaucer *welefulnesse*.

4. Early Modern English translators

While it is only to be expected that the Early Modern period meant an increase in the borrowed vocabulary in English and a greater variety in the lexis indicating abstract concepts, sixteenth and seventeenth century Boethius translations show that loan-words never superseded native vocabulary in expressing 'happiness', and that, in this particular case, the end result of the development was the victory of a native word and the restriction of the loan to marked meanings or contexts.

Even a superficial comparison between Chaucer's translation with George Colville's (1556) clearly indicates Colville's dependence on his predecessor. Nevertheless, Colville rejects both *welefulnesse* and *blisfulnesse*, and uses *felicite* and *blessedness* instead, often linking the two, as in (1f). The replacement of *blissfulness* by *blessedness* is understandable because the first element of this compound effectively provides the word with religious overtones. Colville does not use *blessedness* to render *felicitas*. In general, as is shown by the use of the terms as a word-pair, Colville is not too particular about keeping the

[10] See, e.g. Elliott (1974). The influence of the French Boethius translation on Chaucer's version is discussed, for instance, by Aertsen (1992).

[11] There are no instances of *blissfulness* in the Brown, Lancaster-Oslo/Bergen, or London-Lund Corpus, or in the *Authorized Version of the Bible*.

[12] Jean de Meun's French version which certainly influenced Chaucer's choice of words uses *beneurté* to translate both *felicitas* and *beatitudo*, without making a distinction between the two types of happiness. Thus the French version has not influenced Chaucer's choice of *felicite* in this passage.

For Chaucer's coinages from native resources see Elliott (1974: 160-162).

two aspects of 'happiness' apart. A more detailed study of the translation would no doubt reveal what the basic motivation for Colville's frequent coupling of the two words is and how systematic his using either a single word or a word-pair might be. That Colville was not indifferent to the distinction between *felicitas* and *beatitudo* is indicated by his translation of *felicitas* in (5a) and (6a) by *prosperitie* instead of *felicity*.

It is notable that although the Old Norse loan *hap*, the derived verb *hap(pen)* and the adjective *happy* can be found in Middle English texts from early Middle English on, the noun *happiness* only occurs in Early Modern English. The OED gives its earliest instances from Palsgrave (1530) and Spenser (1590); the Helsinki Corpus has two from Ascham's *Scholemaster* (c. 1570). The rapidly increasing popularity and extension of the semantic domain of this new word is shown by its frequent occurrence in I.T.'s Boethius translation of 1609, as seen in Table 1, above. I.T. uses *happiness* as a general term for the concept to render both *felicitas* and *beatitudo*; *felicity* is also used, but only to render *felicitas*. The passages quoted in (5a) and (6a) are translated by *prosperity* by I.T., a usage implying the same sensitivity to nuances as the earlier translators' choice of words for these passages.

The final establishment of *happiness* is witnessed by Preston's late seventeenth century translation. Perhaps surprisingly, Preston seems much less concerned about the distinction between the types of 'happiness' than the earlier translators; he uses both *happiness* and *felicity* to render *felicitas*, and *happiness* to indicate *beatitudo*, with only two exceptions in the Helsinki Corpus passages, quoted in (3b) above. In these passages, the divine character of *beatitudo* is particularly emphatic.

With Preston, the lexical development of the words for 'happiness' seems to have reached its conclusion. The native word has conquered, to the extent that Preston finds other, more technical terms useful only when the distinction to be made between the types of 'happiness' seems particularly important. Just like Alfred, he also uses attributive adjuncts for specifying the character of 'happiness', including *counterfeit*, *genuine*, *true (and consummate)*, *very*, *highest*, *absolute*. Preston's usage indicates that, by the end of the eighteenth century, *blissfulness* and *blessedness* were more or less obsolete and *felicity* had become a semantically restricted and stylistically marked term.

5. Concluding remarks

It is worth asking why it took so long for *happiness* to find its way to the core vocabulary of English, although the noun *hap*, the verb *hap(pen)* and the adjective *happy* all occur in Early Middle English. The original meaning of *hap* seems to offer an answer to this question. The adjective *happy* probably first indicated 'timely', 'felicitous', with reference to actions and events, and

'fortunate', 'lucky', with reference to people. Instances of these uses are recorded from Middle English on (cf. OED s.v. *happy* 2, 3, 5). The meanings 'blessed', 'beatified', or 'having a feeling of great pleasure or content of mind, arising from satisfaction with one's circumstances or conditions' (OED s.v. *happy* 2b, 4) developed in Early Modern English. The noun *happiness* was derived from the adjective only after this change had taken place. The pattern of sense development and derivation is remarkably similar to that of *sæl* and *(ge)sælð* in Old English, referred to above.

Finally, what caused the need of another word to supplement and gradually replace *felicity*, *blissfulness* and *blessedness*, a fairly well-established loan and two transparent native derivatives? It would be tempting to suggest that one reason for this might be a change in the world view in sixteenth-century England. In addition to the state of blessedness only to be reached in heaven, and the state of well-being given by worldly wealth and prosperity, the concept of a heightened feeling of contentment, harmony and balance, not necessarily caused either by purely material or other-worldly factors, needed expression – and this was the beginning of *happiness*.

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