Word be worde—andgit of andgite:
A Study of the Medieval Rhetorical Formula

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1. Introduction

A number of circumstances make the study of translation principles in the Anglo-Saxon period a challenging and tricky task. Firstly, translation methods varied from verbatim translation to paraphrase, sometimes within the same text. Secondly, the little written evidence on translation methods that we have is mostly restricted to a special text type, the *praefatio*. Most importantly, there is a millennium-sized difference in attitude and thinking about translation, as well as in terminology and rhetoric about the matter. Therefore coming across a speculation on word-for-word vs. sense-for-sense translation, we should think carefully whether this juxtaposition might have the same implications when used in the context of documents created in a different epoch and different model of culture by a language that had newly acquired a written form.

The formula *word be worde—andgit of andgite* first appears in the preface to King Alfred's translation of the *Pastoral Care* and is later carried over to his version of the *Consolation of Philosophy*. It must have been well known to the king's advisors, for Asser borrows it for his *Life of King Alfred*.

Ælfric uses the Latin counterpart of the formula *nec verbum ex verbo, sed sensum ex sensu* in his prefaces to the First Series of the *Catholic Homilies*, the *Lives of Saints* and the *Old English Letters for Wulfstan*. The history of this medieval formula goes back to Church Fathers and classical writers like Cicero and Quintilian, while its syntactic pattern is used in various text types; e.g., in the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed.

Given the frequency of this syntactic construction in general, and the *verbum ex verbo* formula in particular, we can perhaps doubt the pertinence of their contextual meaning. It should be noted that classical and medieval prefaces, where the formula occurred, were characterized by a number of more or less obligatory elements that established the authorship and circumstances of a composition or translation in order to validate the work (Minnis 1984: 16; Wilcox 1994: 65–71). The word-for-word vs. sense-for-sense formula may, therefore, be regarded as a kind of rhetorical borrowing. Being one of the preface elements, it did not exactly say how the translation had been done, but rather pointed to the fact that the Anglo-Saxon written tradition was incorporated into the European cultural context, that the Old English writers were aware of the current means of argumentation required in a discussion of translation.

2. A Survey of Texts Where the Formula Occurs

The formula *word be worde—andgit of andgite* is used in several Old English texts to talk about translation (Marsden 1991: 327–8). I shall begin here with the two famous fragments from the prefaces to Alfredian translations of the *Pastoral Care* and the *Consolation of Philosophy*. Although this formula is not originally Old English, these two instances are probably ones of the first to be found in vernacular writings.

(1) ða ongan ic … ða boc wendan on Englisc … hwilum **word be worde**, hwilum **andgit of andgiete** … Siððan ic hie ða geliornod hæfde, swæ swæ ic hie forstod, 7 swæ ic hie andgitfullicost areccean meahte, ic hie on Englisc awende (CPLetWærf 58)[1]

"I began ... to translate the book into English … sometimes word by word and sometimes sense for sense ... And when I had learnt it as I could best understand it, and as I could most clearly interpret it, I translated it into English"

(2) Ælfred kuning wæs wealhstod ðisse bec, 7 hie of boclædene on englisc wende, swa hio nu is gedon. Hwilum he sette **word be worde**, hwilum **andgit of andgite**, swa swa he hit þa sweotolost 7 andgitfullicast gereccan mihte (BoProem 1.1)

"King Alfred was translator of this book, and turned it from book Latin into English, as it is now done. Sometimes he rendered word by word and sometimes sense for sense, as he could most plainly and most clearly interpret it"

The similarity between the two passages is conspicuous. Moreover, a similar phrase occurs in one more text of the same circle. Asser uses it to talk of Wærferth's translation of *Gregory's Dialogues*.

(3) At tunc Deus … transmisit Werfrithum, scilicet Wigernensis ecclesiae episcopum, in divina scilicet scriptura bene eruditum, qui, imperio regis, libros Dialogorum Gregorii papae et Petri sui discipuli de Latinitate primus in Saxonicam linguam, aliquando **sensum ex sensu** ponens, elucabratim [sic] et elegantissime interpretatus est; (Asser 77.1)

"And then God … sent Wærferth to Alfred, the bishop of the church of Worcester, who was well instructed in Divine Scripture, and also at the king's command first translated the books of the *Dialogues* of Pope Gregory and his disciple, Peter, painstakingly and most elegantly, from Latin into the Saxon language, sometimes rendering sense for sense."

The author of the *Life of King Alfred* must have been well read in the prefaces to Alfredian translations since his *aliquando sensum ex sensu ponens* is a very close rendering of *he sette ... hwilum andgit of andgite* in (2), a feature commented upon by Marsden (1991: 327–8) and Smyth (2002: 234). I suggest that his choice of *elucabratim et elegantissime* in the description of Wærferth's style is dependent on the same passage in the preface to Boethius: *sweotolost 7 andgitfullicast* (2). It is remarkable that Asser translated back into Latin the formula that had been originally calqued from Latin sources.

The Latin counterpart of the formula is also used by Ælfric in his Latin prefaces to the First Series of the *Catholic Homilies* (4), the *Lives of Saints* (5) and the *Old English Letters for Wulfstan* (6).[2]

(4) Nec ubique transtulimus **verbum ex verbo**, sed **sensum ex sensu**; (ÆCHom I (Pref 1a) 107.9)

"We have not translated word for word throughout but also sense for sense"

(5) Nec potuimus in ista translatione semper **verbum ex verbo** transferre, sed tamen **sensum ex sensu**, sicut invenimus in Sancta Scriptura, diligenter curavimus vertere simplici et aperta locutione quatinus proficiat audientibus. (ÆLS (Pref 5a) 120.21)

"We have not been able in this translation always to translate word for word, but we rather have taken care to translate diligently sense for sense, as we find it in Holy Scripture, in such simple and clear language as may profit our listeners."

(6) [N]on tamen semper ordinem sequentes nec **verbum ex verbo**, sed **sensum ex sensu** proferentes, quibus speramus nos quibusdam prodesse ad correctionem (ÆLetWulf (Pref 8e) 126.5)

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[1] Abbreviations of the Old English titles are given in accordance with the *Dictionary of Old English Corpus in Electronic Form*.

[2] I have used Wilcox's edition of *Ælfric's Prefaces* (1994), altering his translation from Latin where necessary in order to make it more literal.

"By not always following the order word for word, but presenting sense for sense instead, we hope to contribute to the correction of some people"

As we can see, the formula *verbum ex verbo, sensum ex sensu—word be worde, andgit of andgite* is extremely common in prefaces and occasionally finds its way into the narrative. It is repeated literally or almost literally and carried from one text to another with such persistence that it nearly loses its acuity and makes us wonder what it really meant.

The history of this medieval formula goes back to the letters and prologues of Jerome (Marsden 1991: 324–3). Here is the description of his translation method in the prologue to the Book of Judith.

(7) magis **sensum e sensu** quam **ex verbo verbum** transferens (Idt (Prol) 6)[3]
     "rendering rather sense for sense than word for word"

But perhaps the best known is the following abstract from the letter to Pammachius *De optimo genere interpretandi* (*On the Best Method of Translating*).

(8) Ego enim non solum fateor, sed libera voce profiteor, me in interpretatione Græcorum, absque Scripturis sanctis, ubi et verborum ordo mysterium est, non **verbum e verbo**, sed **sensum** exprimere **de sensu**. (PL 1877: XXII, 571)
     "For I myself not only admit but freely proclaim that in translating from the Greek (except in the case of the Holy Scriptures where even the order of the words is a mystery) I render not word for word but sense for sense."

It is generally assumed, partly because Jerome himself (later on in the same letter) acknowledged their authority, that this formula echoes similar statements by Cicero and Horace in *De optimo genere oratorum* (*On the Best Kind of Orator*) and *Ars Poetica* (*The Art of Poetry*) respectively.

(9) Converti enim ex Atticis duorum eloquentissimorum nobilissimas orationes inter seque contrarias, Aeschinis et Demosthenis; nec converti ut interpres, sed ut orator, sententiis isdem et earum formis tamquam figuris, verbis ad nostram consuetudinem aptis. In quibus non **verbum pro verbo** necesse habui reddere, sed genus omne verborum vimque servavi. Non enim ea me adnumerare lectori putavi oportere, sed tamquam appendere. (Cic. *Opt. Gen.* 14)[4]
     "That is to say I translated the most famous orations of the two most eloquent Attic orators, Aeschines and Demosthenes, orations which they delivered against each other. And I did not translate them as an interpreter, but as an orator, keeping the same ideas and the forms, or as one might say, the 'figures' of thought, but in language which conforms to our usage. And in doing so, I did not hold it necessary to render word for word, but I preserved the general style and force of the language. For I did not think I ought to count them out to the reader like coins, but to pay them by weight, as it were."

(10) publica materies privati iuris erit, si
     non circa vilem patulumque moraberis orbem,
     nec **verbo verbum** curabis reddere fidus
     interpres, nec desilies imitator in artum,
     unde pedem proferre pudor vetet aut operis lex. (Hor. *Ars* 131)
     "In ground open to all you will win private rights, if you do not linger along the easy and open pathway, if you do not seek to render word for word as a slavish translator, and if in your copying you do not leap into the narrow well, out of which either shame or the laws of your task will keep you from stirring a step."

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[3] See also similar statements in Jerome's prologues to his translations of the Book of Esther (Est (Prol) 2) and the Book of Job (Iob (Prol) 4, 16).

[4] In examples (9), (10) and (11) translations are given in accordance with the respective editions.

However, the same syntactic pattern can be found in many other texts dedicated to subjects other than translation. Quintilian, for instance, in his description of tropes, says

(11) Illa quoque quidam catachresis volunt esse, cum pro temeritate *virtus* aut pro luxuria *liberalitas* dicitur. A quibus ego equidem dissentio; namque in his non **verbum pro verbo** ponitur, sed **res pro re**. Neque enim quisquam putat luxuriam et liberalitatem idem significare; verum id quod fit alius luxuriam esse dicit, alius liberalitatem, quamvis neutri dubium sit haec esse diversa. (Quint. *Inst.* 8.6.36)

"Some, indeed, would give the name of *catachresis* even to cases such as where we call temerity valour or prodigality liberality. I, however, cannot agree with them; for in these instances word is not substituted for word, but thing for thing, since no one regards prodigality and liberality as meaning the same, but one man calls certain actions liberal and another prodigal, although neither for a moment doubts the difference between the two qualities."

Several clauses in the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed follow a similar pattern.

(12) Credo in unum Deum, Patrem omnipotentem, factorem coeli et terrae, visibilium omnium et invisibilium. Et in unum Dominum Jesum Christum, Filium Dei unigenitum. Et ex Patre natum ante omnia saecula. **Deum de Deo**, **lumen de lumine**, **Deum verum de Deo vero**. (MR)

"I believe in one God, the Father Almighty, maker of heaven and earth, and of all things visible and invisible. And in one Lord, Jesus Christ, the only begotten Son of God. Born of the Father before all ages. God of God, Light of Light, true God of true God."

Verbum (*v*) and *sensus* (*s*) can be joined by means of several coordinators. The following variants of the formula can be distinguished:

a)   non/nec *v*, sed *s*   "not *v*, but *s*"
b)   vel *v*, vel *s*   "either *v*, or *s*"
c)   nunc *v*, nunc *s*   "sometimes *v*, sometimes *s*"
d)   magis *s*, quam *v*   "rather *s*, than *v*"

While Alfred favors the (c) variant, Ælfric is constantly using the (a).

It is difficult to say whether these minor structural differences signified any principal distinctions in translation methods. Frederick M. Rener has tried to show that there were in fact two forms of the formula: one of them was an adverb and referred to a particular method of translation, the other was used as a noun and denoted a neologism that appeared in the target language either 'through a direct and literal translation of the word' (*verbum e verbo*) or through explicative transformations (*verbum e sensu*) (1989: 104–5). Ælfric uses both approaches when he is dealing with Latin grammar terms, translating *grammatica* as *stæfcræft* "the art of letters" and *participium* as *dæl nimend* "the part-taking" (*verbum e verbo* approach), *pronomen* as *ðæs naman speliend* "taking the place of the noun" and *adverbium* as *wordes gefera* "the verb's companion" (*verbum e sensu* approach) (ÆGram).

3. The Role of the Formula in Prefaces

The preface (*praefatio*) was a special genre of text. Unlike many texts in the Old English period, prefaces were not anonymous, authors working with this genre insisting upon their authorship of the prefaces and of the texts that they preceded. Although they introduced both original and translated texts, prefaces almost inevitably shared the same topics and the same structure. As Tore Janson has phrased it in the introduction to his *Latin Prose Prefaces*, 'The limited range of variation and the influence of tradition often result in the same chains of thought being repeated in preface after preface from the same period' (1964: 7). Thus, only a few topics were exploited by numerous writers from late Antiquity well into the Middle Ages, the most popular of them being the author's modesty and self-deprecation,

lack of mental endowment or stylistic schooling, dedication to a friend or patron, and admonitions to the scribes who will copy the work (Curtius 1967: 79–105; Janson 1964: 159–60). These rhetorical topoi should not be mistaken for biographical fact (Nichols 1968: 215).

Several structural elements in the prefaces were employed to establish the authorship and circumstances of a composition, a repertoire of seven rhetorical circumstances, namely, 'who', 'what', 'why', 'in what manner', 'where', 'when' and 'whence' (or 'by what means') (Minnis 1984: 16). This convention was also adopted by the Old English writers (cf. Stanton 2002: 144–71). I will use the above outline of the rhetorical circumstances to illustrate how they worked in the Old English prefaces.[5]

The question 'who?' requires an identification of the author, which we often find in the opening lines of the prefaces.

(13) Ælfred kyning hateð gretan Wærferð biscep (CPLetWærf 1)
"King Alfred bids greet bishop Wærfeth"

(14) Ic, Ælfric, munuc and mæssepreost (ÆCHom I (Pref 1b) 108.1)
"I, Ælfric, a monk and masspriest"

The question 'what?' refers to the text itself and requires a statement of the title.

(15) ða boc … ðe is genemned on Læden *Pastoralis*, ₇ on Englisc *Hierdeboc* (CPLetWærf 58)
"the book that is called in Latin *Pastoralis* and in English *Shepherd-book*"

(16) boc … þe is gehaten *Grammatica* (ÆGram (Pref 3b) 115.1)
"the book that is called *Grammatica*"

The question 'why?' can be answered in different ways: while Alfred embarks upon an ambitious enlightenment project, Ælfric has more modest claims,

(17) for ðan ðe stæfcræft is seo cæg ðe ðæra boca andgit unlicð, and ic þohte, þæt ðeos boc mihte fremian iungum cildum to anginne þæs cræftes, oð ðæt hi to maran andgyte becumon (ÆGram (Pref 3b) 115.3)
"because grammar is the key that unlocks the sense of books; and I thought that this book might be useful for little children in the beginning of the art, before they approach greater knowledge"

Although the reasons given by Ælfric for his translation of *Grammatica* seem plausible and well founded, his metaphor of *grammar/key* is yet another commonplace in the medieval written tradition. Since all scholarship started with familiarity with grammar, the lowest of the seven liberal arts, grammar was often personified and depicted as a lady showing a young schoolboy the alphabet tablet with her one hand and holding the key to the temple of knowledge in the other (Piltz 1981: 17; Rener 1989: 34).

'In what manner' might imply a particular mode or fashion in which the author wrote: verse vs. prose mode, or word-for-word vs. sense-for-sense mode (Minnis 1984: 17). The latter has already been demonstrated in examples (1), (2), (4), (5), and (6). Here is one more extract from *Gregory's Dialogues* followed by the Old English translation.

(18) Hoc uero scire te cupio quia in quibusdam **sensum** solummodo, in quibusdam uero et **uerba cum sensu** teneo, quia si de personis omnibus ipsa specialiter et uerba tenere uoluissem, haec rusticano usu prolata stilus scribentis non apte susciperet. (GDPref 16.86)

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[5] The introductory schema certainly depended on the kind of text it introduced, thus introductions to poetical texts differed from introductions to philosophical texts. On the particular types of introduction and their evolution in the 12th century, see Hunt (1980: 117–44) and Minnis & Scott (1988: 12–36).

"So I would like you to know that in some cases I follow only the sense while in others—the words with the sense, for if I had wished to preserve exactly the same words for all the characters, the style of the writer would not have been able to adopt such rustic language."

ic wille, Petrus, þæt þu wite, þæt ic nime in sumum **þæt andgyt an** ₇ in sumum **þa word mid þy andgyte**: forþon gif ic be eallum þam hadum synderlice þa word animan wolde, þonne wæron hi forðbrohte mid ceorlisce ðeawe, ₇ hi na seo hand ₇ þæt gewrit þæs writendan swa gecoplice ne onfengce. (GDPref (C) 9.10)

The questions 'where?' and 'when?' inquire the place and time of composition, while 'whence?' identifies the materials or sources from which the book was drawn.

(19) Hos namque auctores in hac explanatione sumus secuti, videlicet Augustinum [Y]pponiensem, Hieronimum, Bedam, Gregorium, Smaragdum, et aliquando [Hæg]monem, horum denique auctoritas ab omnibus catholicis libentissime suscipitur. (ÆCHom I (Pref 1a) 107.12)
"For, indeed, we have followed these authors in this exposition: namely, Augustine of Hippo, Jerome, Bede, Gregory, Smaragdus, and sometimes Haymo, for the authority of these is most willingly acknowledged by all the orthodox."

(20) swæ swæ ic hie geliornode æt Plegmunde minum ærcebiscepe ₇ æt Assere minum biscepe ₇ æt Grimbolde minum mæsseprioste ₇ æt Iohanne minum mæssepreoste (CPLetWærf 58)
"just as I had learned it from Plegmund my archbishop and from Asser my bishop and from Grimbold my masspriest and from John my masspriest"

Allusions to earlier writers, especially Christian writers, or learned priestly advisors gave more validity to the work and ensured its orthodoxy. Thus, Ælfric relies on the authority of the Church Fathers, writers of the Carolingian revival, and Bede (19), while Alfred enumerates the advisors who helped him with his translation (20).

Although these preface elements were normally characteristic of prose texts, some of them can be identified in the Metrical Preface to the *Pastoral Care*. The first lines of the poem contain an allusion to the orthodox authorities: St Augustine of Canterbury, who brought Christianity to England and St Gregory, who was both the author of the *Pastoral Care* and the pope who sent the mission of Augustine.

(21) Þis ærendgewrit   Agustinus
     ofer sealtne sæ   suðan brohte
     iegbuendum,   swa hit ær fore
     adihtode   dryhtnes cempa,
     Rome papa.   (CPPref 1)
     "Augustine brought this message across the salt sea from the south to island-dwellers, as the Lord's warrior, the Pope of Rome had ordered."

Alfred, the author of the translation, is referred to in *CPPref* 11 and the reasons why the translation was undertaken are given in *CPPref* 8–10 and 15–16. However, with all the prose elements considered, the Metrical Preface remains first of all the verse: it has metrical half-lines with alliteration as well as touches of vocabulary characteristic of and confined to verse. Its language is figurative: the book speaks in the first person as if introducing itself (Stanley 1988: 354–5).

To sum up, the rhetorical circumstances not only provide a plan for the preface but also establish the validity of the whole composition. The *word be worde—andgit of andgite* formula should therefore be seen as part of the rhetoric of the *praefatio* genre.

4. Verbum/Sensus Dichotomy in the Context of the Medieval Language Theory and Educational System

Among many other things inherited by the Middle Ages from Antiquity was the common notion of the nature of words. The tradition going as far back as Aristotle held it that the word (*verbum*) is the sign of a thing (*res*). The various aspects of the relationship between the *verbum* and the *res* were discussed by writers as different as Cicero, Quintilian, Augustine, and Gregory the Great. Several important principles emerged from the discussion of this relationship; e.g., it was generally agreed that words and things are interdependent but 'the measure of this dependence is not equally distributed between the two' (Rener 1989: 19). Things were considered superior to words although they had to depend on words in order to exist outside the human mind in a spoken or written form. The idea of the superiority of things created a particular attitude towards the words in the original text shared by the ancient and medieval translators. Hence, the primary concern of the translator was to render the content of the original (Rener 1989: 20–2).

The word consists of letters and syllables and is, in its turn, a component of progressively larger units. 'The smallest unit is called a *comma*, a combination of such units constituting a *colon* and a combination of these finally making a *periodus*' (Rener 1989: 162).

These ideas were very influential in the history of language theory and we also find them present in the methods of teaching and studying the language throughout the Middle Ages.

Although grammar took the lowest position among the seven liberal arts,[6] it was indeed the key to the temple of knowledge, the necessary foundation, upon which all the other arts were constructed. It was both a matter of how to write and speak well, and how to study and interpret authoritative texts. The first of these activities, according to the traditional subdivision of grammar found in Priscian, included orthography, prosody, etymology and syntax. At this stage, the medieval grammarian (*grammaticus*) explained to his pupils the details of verse and metre, difficult or rare words, grammatical and syntactical features, and figures of speech, included in a given passage. The second activity was aimed at the intellectual content of a text, at its historical, legal, geographical, mythological and scientific allusions and details (Minnis 1984: 13–4; Rener 1989: 37). 'Pupils were thereby enabled to understand fully each passage of the work. So one begins with "the letter", working out grammatical construction and continuity of a passage; then, one proceeds to expound its *sensus* or most obvious meaning; and, finally, the *sententia* or deeper meaning is sought' (Minnis 1984: 14).

It is obvious that having received such training translators were bound to go through the same procedures when doing their job. They would read the target text, look for lexical and grammatical correspondences, explain what was not clear, and add commentaries for the culture-specific elements. Therefore, the combination of *word be worde* and *andgit of andgite* was not just possible but necessary and inevitable (cf. Rener 1989: 126).

5. Conclusion

The *verbum ex verbo—sensum ex sensu* was a well established formula in late Antiquity, which was used extensively in prologues and epistles. The *word be worde—andgit of andgite* formula emerged as a syntactic calque of the Latin model, coined by the Alfredian circle. Ælfric made use of the formula only in his Latin writings although musings on the relationship of the *word* and the *andgit* can also be found in his vernacular works (see, e.g., his preface to the translation of *Genesis*).

Further analysis of the cultural context of this rhetorical model shows that this syntactic calque is just a superficial aspect of much more complex processes of conceptual borrowing. In the context of prefaces, it becomes an integral part of the orthodox rhetoric. In the broader context of the medieval Christianity and culture, it relies heavily on the medieval understanding of the *word*, on the system of education in general and on the practices of the study of authoritative texts in particular.

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[6] The seven liberal arts were divided into the *trivium* (grammar, rhetoric and dialectic, the inferior group) and the *quadrivium* (music, arithmetic, geometry and astronomy, the superior group).

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