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Exploring the penetration of loanwords in the core vocabulary of Middle English: *carry* as a test case

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This article takes as its starting point the extent of borrowing in Middle English among the hundred meanings included in the Leipzig–Jakarta List of Basic Vocabulary, a recently developed tool for exploring the impact of borrowing on basic vocabulary on a cross-linguistic basis. This is adopted for the possibility it provides for taking an empirically based approach to identifying at least a proportion of those loanwords that have most impact on the core lexicon. The article then looks in detail at a particularly striking example identified using this list: the verb *carry*, borrowed into English in the late fourteenth century from Anglo-Norman, and found with some frequency in its modern core meaning from the very beginning of its history in English. The competition this word shows with native synonyms, especially *bear*, is surveyed, and the systemic pressures that may have facilitated its widespread adoption are explored, as well as the points of similarity it shows with some other borrowings into the core vocabulary of Middle English; in particular, the hypothesis is advanced that a tendency towards isomorphism in vocabulary realizing basic meanings may be a significant factor here. The article also contends that the example of *carry* sheds new light on the receptivity of even basic areas of the lexicon to Anglo-Norman lexis in the late Middle English period. The trajectory shown by this word is particularly illuminating, with borrowing in a restricted meaning with reference to the commercial bulk transportation of goods, merchandise, etc. being followed by very rapid development of a much broader meaning, which even within the fourteenth century appears in at least some varieties (notably the works of Chaucer) to be a significant competitor for native *bear* as default realization of the basic meaning 'to transfer/carry (something, especially in one's hands)'.

Keywords: loanwords, lexical borrowing, Middle English, Anglo-Norman, basic vocabulary

1 Introduction: examining the impact of borrowing on the core vocabulary of Middle English

The enormous impact of lexical borrowing on the lexicon of Middle English is well known. Borrowing from early stages of the modern Scandinavian languages (usually referred to under the cover terms Old Norse or early Scandinavian) was heavy, and particularly affected the vocabulary of everyday life, with a marked impact on core vocabulary (most notably, the personal pronoun *they*). Borrowing from French (typically, from the Insular variety normally termed Anglo-Norman) and from Latin had a far greater impact on the core lexicon than borrowing from early Scandinavian

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in terms of overall numbers of lexical items.[1] Very many Middle English words could show borrowing from either French or Latin, and in many cases multiple input from both languages is to be suspected on the grounds of word form, word meaning and likely contexts of borrowing, particularly in the context of switch from Anglo-Norman or Latin to English in various areas of (written or spoken) technical discourse (such as business records, administration, or pleading and other legal business) in the fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries. The preceding period of widespread trilingualism – in which individuals switched between languages in different functional contexts, and in which multilingual documents were part of everyday life in many areas (especially business records) – is the crucial antecedent to the processes of lexical transfer found as English extended its functional range.[2]

Viewed from the perspective of contemporary English (i.e. adopting a teleological perspective), the impact of borrowing from French and/or Latin in this period on the subsequent shape of even the high-frequency lexicon of modern English is profound: of the 1,000 most frequent words in contemporary written English, close to 50 per cent are of French or Latin origin, and the overwhelming majority of these were borrowed during the Middle English period.[3] However, this teleological perspective masks the fact that many of these words grew in frequency in English over decades or even centuries, gradually extending their range of meanings in English (frequently by fresh semantic borrowing from the original donor words) and also gradually growing in frequency (frequently at the expense of other near-synonyms) in each meaning. Many such words are abstract in meaning and highly polysemous, for example nouns such as *act*, *action*, *nature*, *person* or *question*, where the early history in English displays a complex interplay between multiple conventional specialized uses in areas of discourse where switch to the use of English was recent; it is at least plausible, and in some cases very probable, that generalized use developed gradually from the merging of multiple streams of use. Furthermore, while words of French or Latin origin far outweigh those from any other donor in the 1,000 most frequent words, this is not the case among the 100 most frequent, where only *people* and *very* from French and *just* and *to use* from French and/or Latin are found, beside seven items from early Scandinavian (see Durkin 2014: 40). Additionally, frequency in written use does not necessarily provide an accurate reflection of how close a lexical item is to the core vocabulary of a language, concepts of core vocabulary normally being assumed to embrace other factors, such as use in a wide variety of communicative contexts, and potential for use in the simplest or most universal social situations.

One promising approach is provided by the Leipzig–Jakarta List of Basic Vocabulary, a list of 100 meanings that have been found particularly resistant to

[1] See detailed appraisals in Durkin (2014); among earlier studies see also Burnley (1992) and Scheler (1977); on instances of lexical replacement see especially Prins (1941).

[2] See especially the collections Trotter (2000) and Ingham (2010).

[3] See Durkin (2014: 34–40) for analysis based on the frequency lists derived from the *British National Corpus* in Leech *et al.* (2001); similar results are found for frequency lists derived from other corpora of contemporary written English.

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borrowing in a large cross-linguistic study, based on a survey of a much larger list of basic meanings.[4] While this list narrows the focus onto only a very small portion of the core vocabulary of any language, any borrowed word realizing any of the meanings from this 100-meaning list in Middle English can be taken to be of particular interest, especially if the word in question appears to be the usual, default word realizing this particular meaning in at least some varieties of Middle English.[5] This wordlist cannot be used as a precise tool for identifying all impact on the basic lexicon of Middle English, but it does offer a promising empirically based means of gaining a complementary perspective on long-term effects on the lexicon beside that provided by word frequencies. Here I will contend that it can also provide a useful means of highlighting lexical items which began to impact the core lexicon within the period of large-scale late Middle English borrowing from French.

Durkin (2014: 41–5, 405–11) follows Grant (2009) in examining the vocabulary of contemporary English through the lens of this wordlist. This yields twelve loanwords which are the usual realization in modern English of a meaning from this list of 100 meanings particularly resistant to borrowing: (from early Scandinavian) *root*, *wing*, *hit*, *leg*, *egg*, *give*, *skin*, *take* (the pronoun *they* is excluded from the Leipzig–Jakarta list); (from French) *carry*, *soil*, *cry*, (probably) *crush*. (No words borrowed wholly or partly from Latin are default realizations of meanings in this list.) In each of these cases, English had earlier means of expressing the same concept. The loanword has become the usual means of expressing this meaning as the result of a process of competition. Rapid examination of each word history shows that not all cases are alike.

Taking the Scandinavian loanwords first (summarizing data in Durkin 2014: 405–11):

- the process by which *take* replaced *nim* is relatively straightforward, and its diachronic progress has been studied in detail by previous scholars (especially Rynell 1948).
- *hit* has shown competition with a number of other items in a much more densely populated lexical field, and even today other items such as *strike* may be preferred in more formal registers.
- *skin* has advanced as its main native rival *hide* has shown semantic narrowing rather than loss.
- *root* showed early competition with native *wort*, which had both this narrow meaning and the broader meaning 'plant' (before *plant* was in turn borrowed from French and Latin).
- *wing* appears to have replaced in this meaning both a lexicalized use of the plural of *feather* and the related Old English derivative formation *fiðere* 'wing'.
- *leg* appears to have competed with conventional uses of *shank* (also found denoting a part of the leg) and *limb* (also found in a broader meaning), rather than with a native form which had the core meaning 'leg' and only 'leg'.
- *give* and *egg* have replaced native cognates similar in form, and it is likely that the borrowing process involved substitution of the Scandinavian form for its native cognate within a bilingual speech community, followed by gradual spread of the Scandinavian form to other varieties of English.

[4] See Haspelmath & Tadmor (2009), Tadmor *et al.* (2010) and data presented at http://wold.clld.org/

[5] See Durkin & Allan (2016) for an extended examination of a more typical case where borrowing gives rise to a cluster of minor, register-restricted near-synonyms of non-borrowed *sweet*.

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Among the French loanwords:

- *cry* presents questions of classification, since although the word is borrowed from French, the meaning 'to weep, shed tears' developed in English, not being found in clear use (i.e. distinct from 'to lament, wail, cry') before the sixteenth century, more than three centuries after the earliest attestations of *cry* in English.
- *soil* presents somewhat different issues, since even in contemporary English its relationship with *earth*, *ground* and *dirt* differs in different registers and in different varieties.
- *crush* may not show a French loanword at all (its etymology presents difficulties), and additionally conflating 'crush/grind' (as the Leipzig–Jakarta list does) fails to reflect the semantic structures of English well (the two categories are treated separately in e.g. the *Historical Thesaurus of the Oxford English Dictionary*, on which see section 2.4).

In contrast to the other French loanwords in this list, *carry* seems eminently worthy of close attention: it realizes the basic meaning in question, 'to bear by bodily effort', from the time of its earliest appearance in English (alongside other meanings); like *cry*, this meaning may have been innovated in English rather than borrowed from French, but if so, unlike *cry*, this innovation appears to have occurred almost instantaneously with borrowing, strongly suggesting that the motivation for borrowing and for innovation of this new (broadened) meaning may be linked closely to one another; in this meaning there was competition with one clear, well-entrenched, native synonym which was already firmly established in the core vocabulary of English, *bear*, which appears to have remained the more usual word in this meaning at the close of the Middle English period, although the comparative totals of uses of *carry* in the equivalent meaning in a selection of major literary texts of the late fourteenth century suggests that *carry* very quickly came to be a close rival to *bear* as the usual word in this meaning. Additionally, as will be explored in section 3, the possible motivation for the adoption of *carry* shows very interesting parallels with several of the early Scandinavian borrowings, perhaps casting some light on a general tendency that at least facilitates adoption of loanwords into the core vocabulary. Overall, it will be my contention in this article that a close examination of *carry* shows that in at least some instances the impact of borrowing from Anglo-Norman on the core lexicon of Middle English was rapid, with an innovated meaning of what originated as a rather technical term in transportation becoming a significant competitor for a long-established core use of a native word within decades of its borrowing into English.

2 The borrowing of *carry* into English

2.1 Date of borrowing

There is no doubt that *carry* had been borrowed into some varieties of English by the last quarter of the fourteenth century. Its Middle English distribution will be looked at in more detail in section 2.3, but particularly relevant to its currency in the late fourteenth century are numerous examples in multiple meanings in texts by Chaucer, Langland and Gower. Even though the manuscript witnesses of these texts generally

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date from later than 1400 (the earliest manuscript evidence is probably from the A-Text of *Piers Plowman* as witnessed by Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Eng. poet. a.1, the Vernon Manuscript, *c.*1390–1400), the spread and volume of attestations in the most authoritative manuscripts can leave no reasonable doubt that at least some of these uses are authorial. A single example from *Cleanness*, a text from the north-west of England probably composed *c.*1380 and preserved in a unique manuscript witness of *c.*1400 from Cheshire (the *Pearl* manuscript), further supports the assumption that the word existed in English at least by the last quarter of the fourteenth century, and shows that it was in currency in at least one location remote from the metropolis.

Assigning a clear 'first date' to the word's appearance in English is almost impossible, given the complex issues concerning the textual transmission of many of the texts in which early examples are found. The earliest-dated quotation offered by the *Middle English Dictionary* (*MED*) is a quotation assigned the primary date of (*c.*1385) from Chaucer's *Knight's Tale*, cited from the Manly–Rickert critical edition; *MED*'s primary date here is, as signalled by the parentheses, an assumed date of composition, given as primary date in instances like this where the textual transmission is complex and the dates of principal manuscripts fall within twenty-five years of the (assumed) date of composition.[6] If one looks at (assumed) date of composition for other sources cited in *MED*'s entry *carīen* which are assigned a manuscript date as primary date, examples from *Piers Plowman* and from the Early Version of the *Wycliffite Bible* could, if they reflect the earliest stages of each text, be slightly earlier than the evidence from Chaucer, as could the example from *Cleanness* already mentioned.

The *Oxford English Dictionary* (*OED*; in an entry the historical parts of which have not been substantively revised since its first publication in 1888) offers three examples that at first sight appear to be much earlier than this evidence. These are worthy of careful consideration, since, if they could confidently be taken to show earlier currency of the word in English, this would have a significant impact on the remainder of the discussion in this article. One is from Robert Mannyng's *Chronicle*, a text composed before 1338 but preserved in two complete manuscripts (and one fragment), none of which can be placed with complete confidence before the beginning of the fifteenth century; the example of *carry* is supported by only one of the manuscripts,[7] while the other[8] has *biried* (i.e. a past tense form of *bear*) at this point, making the authorial status of this reading doubtful; in all other instances where *bear* occurs in this text, both witnesses for the relevant section of the text agree on *bear* rather than *carry*, and I have been unable to find any further instances of *carry* in any other of Mannyng's works.

[6] See Lewis (2007) on *MED*'s policy, and http://public.oed.com/aspects-of-english/english-in-time/dating-middle-english-evidence-in-the-oed/ on the approach taken by the third edition of the *OED*.

[7] London, Lambeth Palace Library MS 131, dated *a.*1450 by *MED*, and used as the basis of the edition by Furnivall (1887).

[8] London, Inner Temple Library, MS Petyt 511, which *MED* dates ?*a.*1400. Sullens (1996) concurs with *MED*'s dating of both manuscripts, and prefers Petyt as the basis for her edition.

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The other two ostensibly earlier examples in *OED*'s 1888 entry cannot be set aside quite so easily. Both come from the text it identifies as *Alex[ander] and Dind[imus]*, styled *Alexander B* in the edition and study by Magoun (1929). Neither of these examples appear in the entry *carīen* in *MED*, even though *MED* dates this source '*c*1450 (*c*1350)', i.e. placing the English additions in the (single) manuscript (probably somewhat conservatively) in the middle of the fifteenth century, and the date of composition *c.*1350; Magoun (1929: 101) puts composition of the text in the broader range *c.*1340–70. If authorial, these examples provide interesting evidence for early use in a literary text in the alliterative tradition placed on linguistic grounds in Gloucestershire or somewhere nearby (Magoun 1929: 78, 89); it is also notable and significant for the later discussion here that one of these two examples shows a relatively uncommon extended meaning, 'to carry (a message)', corresponding to *portāre* in the Latin source; just like the core meaning that is the main focus of this article, this specialized meaning appears to be an English innovation.

2.2 *Etymology, and summary of the word's principal meanings in Anglo-Norman and Middle French*

There are clear formal grounds for identifying English *carry* as a borrowing from Anglo-Norman *carrier* rather than its continental counterpart Middle French *charrier*, since it has an antecedent which shows failure of palatalization of /k/ before a front vowel, one of the key distinguishing characteristics of Anglo-Norman (as also of the dialects of Normandy and parts of Picardy and Flanders; cf. Short 2007, Einhorn 1974; see *Französisches etymologisches Wörterbuch* (*FEW*), s.v. *carrus* 429/2 for listing of attested forms). In fact, as is typical, the evidence presented by the *Anglo-Norman Dictionary* (*AND*) under *carrier* shows evidence of mixed dialectal inputs in Anglo-Norman (cf. Durkin 2014: 270), with some forms of the type *charier* appearing in Anglo-Norman texts in addition to *carier*, *carrier*, *karier*, *kerier* and other rarer forms, but it is only the form with initial /k/ that appears to have served as an input for the English verb.

Old French *charrier* is recorded from *c.*1100, and has as its core meaning 'to transport by cart'. It is derived ultimately from Latin *carrus* 'cart, waggon, (later more broadly) wheeled vehicle' (the Latin word was itself borrowed in Antiquity from a Celtic source). In Middle French sources of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, the core meaning is 'to transport (people or things) by cart, or by any other means'; the word is also common in intransitive use, especially in the meaning 'to drive a cart' (i.e. to perform the action of a carter). There are numerous established extended meanings, largely focused on conducting, guiding or driving.[9] In the French uses the association with the base word of the word family, *char* 'cart, horse-drawn vehicle', appears to be never far from the surface. By contrast, both the core and peripheral meanings of the

[9] Extensive documentation and analysis is provided in the entry *charrier* in the *Dictionnaire du moyen français 1330-1500* (*DMF*), www.atilf.fr/dmf

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English verb seem rapidly to gravitate towards those shown by French *porter*, probably at least in part because the noun *char* 'wheeled vehicle' is much less part of the core vocabulary of Middle English.

The situation in Anglo-Norman is broadly similar to that in continental French. The core meaning is 'to carry, transport', in most cases specifically by cart. The *AND*, s.v. *carier*[1] offers four illustrative quotations for its sense 'to carry, transport'; my own inspection of the companion Anglo-Norman textbase on the *AND*'s website suggests that the textbase contains in the region of 100 examples of this verb (in various spellings), the vast majority of which refer to transporting goods, merchandise, materials, produce, animal feed, etc., in bulk. Along with several (all apparently quite sparsely attested) specialized and extended senses, the *AND* has a single example which it glosses simply 'to carry', taken from an entry from April 1373 in *John of Gaunt's Register*: 'quatre carpentres, deux masceons […] ovesque leur instrumentz […] tielx come ils purront leggerement carier' (as quoted by *AND*), 'four carpenters [and] two masons […] with their tools [...] such as they can easily carry' (my translation). Fuller context is helpful in this instance: Gaunt is making preparations for military operations in France, and requests that he be sent four carpenters, two masons and two iron workers (*overers de ferre*) to make and repair engines, trebuchets (if this is the correct interpretation of *trepgeutes*, a form not entered in *AND*) and other such things required for the expedition; they are to report to the coast on 12 May with such tools appropriate to their trades (*touchant leur ditz miestrez*) as they can easily 'carry', which is here thus likely to mean broadly 'transport' (i.e. as opposed to heavier equipment which it would be impractical to attempt to transport for this overseas expedition).[10]

It is thus notable that the donor language appears to provide no clear examples in the broadened sense defined by *MED* 'to carry (sth.) in one's hands, in a basket, etc.', which, as will be shown in the following section, is common in English from an early date, and is arguably its core meaning in English well before 1500. This may be an accident of the historical record, i.e. this meaning existed in Anglo-Norman but happens not to be shown in the surviving documents (or at least, it was not picked up in reading for either the first or second editions of the *Anglo-Norman Dictionary*, and does not appear to occur in the texts in the *AND*'s online textbase), but it should be noted that such total absences from the record, as suggested by the existence of apparent borrowings in Middle English, are somewhat rare.[11] It will be assumed in what follows that the meaning 'to carry (sth.) in one's hands, in a basket, etc.' was an English innovation; however, if it did in fact exist in Anglo-Norman, this does not greatly affect the most striking aspect of its appearance in English, namely its very rapid adoption and spread.

[10] See Armitage-Smith (1911: II, 158), also consultable as part of the Anglo-Norman Online Hub at www.anglo-norman.net

[11] See Durkin (2012; 2014: 277–80); see also, however, Durkin (2016) for a brief discussion of two somewhat striking instances, *hogmanay* and kinship terms in *grand-*, where accidental absence of Anglo-Norman words from the surviving records does seem the most probable explanation for words occurring in English.

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2.3 *A summary of use of* carry *in English before 1500*

MED's entry *carīen* gives 56 examples in total, divided between the following senses:

1. (a) To transport (sth.) by horse, cart, a boat, etc.; (b) of a horse, cart, boat, etc.: convey, carry (sth.); (c) carry (sth.) in one's hands, in a basket, etc.; (d) carry (a corpse) to burial; (e) ~ **warnestore**, collect provisions.
2. (a) To convey (sth. into one's belly), raise (sth.) to the mouth; (b) place (sth.), put; (c) send (sth.), advance (the wing of an army); (d) propel (a spear, etc.) through the air; (e) drag or draw (sth.).
3. (a) To hold up (sth.), support; (b) bear (a sword), wear, have on one's person.
4. To transfer (merit to sb.).
5. To go, proceed, travel [= **cairen**]; refl. betake oneself; ~ **cours**, pursue (one's) course.

However, only senses 1(a–c), 2(a) and 5 have more than one illustrative quotation; all of the others have only one quotation each, and in some cases we may question their typicality or degree of conventionality. Sense 5 (with nine examples given) probably owes a great deal to association and/or confusion with the Scandinavian-derived near-homonym *cairen*, which often varies with *carry* in different manuscripts of the same text, including in the 'carry/transport' senses; this sense will not be considered in detail here, as an instance of associative change in meaning (or, by an alternative analysis, associative change in the word form of *cairen*), which has not had any discernible impact on the main lines of development of *carry*.[12] Sense 2(a) is based on one example from Chaucer, to which the gloss '[to] raise (sth.) to the mouth' corresponds (see further section 2.5 for more detailed analysis of Chaucerian uses of the verb), and one from Capgrave, to which the gloss 'to convey (sth. into one's belly)' corresponds; both may perhaps better be explained as one-off contextual extensions of the word's meaning. Thus, the evidence presented by the *MED* entry points to its senses 1(a–c) as the semantic core of *carry* in Middle English.

Further useful information on the word's distribution in Middle English texts, and on the frequency of attestation of the various senses identified by *MED*, can be found by searching on quotations throughout the whole of the dictionary (i.e. quotations used to illustrate words other than *carry*). Searching on the truncated strings cari*, cary*, kari* and kary* in *MED* quotations gives approximately 192 distinct instances, after subtracting examples of sense 5, 'to go, proceed, travel' (because of its complicated etymological and textual relationships with *cairen*) and also alternative manuscript versions of particular texts quoted in different places in the dictionary. Of these:

- The biggest group by far, approximately 88 examples (46 per cent of the total) refer to transporting goods, merchandise, materials, produce, animal feed, etc., in bulk (especially by cart, by pack animal, by boat, etc.). Quotations drawn from the *Rolls of Parliament* and from various local regulatory and business documents make up by far the majority of these examples. These uses are what we would most expect on the basis of the core meanings of the word in Middle French and Anglo-Norman.
- Approximately 58 examples (30 per cent) refer specifically to bearing or transporting people, dead or alive, borne by people or animals, or in carts, litters, etc. This use is not without precedent in French, but appears to be rather more frequent and conventionalized in English.

[12] On changes of this type see Durkin (2009: 201–2).

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It is also worth remarking that this meaning is not particularly richly exemplified in the *MED* entry *carīen*, given its apparent level of frequency. *MED* in fact places examples referring to transporting living people under its sense 1(c), together with uses where the object transported is non-human; I here adopt a different approach, grouping together all examples referring to transporting people, whether living or dead.

- Approximately 39 examples (20 per cent) refer to carrying things other than people from A to B, without any implication that the object carried is merchandise, goods, etc., or carried in bulk, or in any sort of commercial setting. These form the kernel of what was to become the word's core meaning in English (henceforth identified here as 'to transfer/carry (something, especially in one's hands)'), and also the justification for regarding it as forming part of the core vocabulary of the language.
- Among minor specific senses, approximately four examples refer to bearing weapons, armour, etc., and three to taking a message; these all show developments from the emergent core meaning 'to transfer/carry (something, especially in one's hands)'.

It should be noted that the *MED* quotations in no way provide a balanced corpus; they simply provide a great deal more evidence than is provided by the quotations within the entry *carīen* itself. Such a corpus is not available on a scale that would be useful for examining the meanings of a recently borrowed lexical item in detail. It is nonetheless interesting to note here that the (probably) innovated meaning 'to transfer/carry (something, especially in one's hands)' occurs as frequently as it does, and also that the overwhelming majority of instances of the core borrowed meaning with reference to transportation of goods, merchandise, etc. occur in precisely those official and business documents where this meaning is most naturally expected to occur. Section 2.5 will look at the rather different picture which emerges from some major literary works of the late fourteenth century; this will be combined with a comparison with the frequency of native synonyms, which will be outlined first in section 2.4.

2.4 *The accommodation of* carry *into the lexicon of English*

At this point it is useful to consider what other words were available in English in this period, both to express the meaning that clearly was borrowed from French, and to express the broadened meaning that appears to be an English innovation. The primary tool for investigating these questions here will be the *Historical Thesaurus of the Oxford English Dictionary*. (Numerical references to *HTOED* locations given here will be to the print edition of 2009.)

If one looks first at the primary meaning of the French etymon, the *HTOED* category 03.09.01 vt. 'transport/convey' seems at first glance very well populated with items that have some currency in Middle English: *ferry*, *take*, *weigh*, *set*, *convey*, *weve*, *win*, *convoy*, *conduct*, *get*, *transport*. On closer inspection, these items divide into two groups on the basis of their etymology: *convey*, *convoy*, *conduct* and *transport* are all loanwords from French and/or Latin, none attested quite as early as *carry* in this meaning, and none achieving the same level of currency in Middle English (although *convey* is of interest in showing developments that to some degree echo those shown

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by *carry*). The others are all either part of the inherited Germanic vocabulary or much earlier borrowings from Scandinavian varieties; of these, *ferry* is an important item in this meaning in earlier use, but by late Middle English it is shifting decisively towards the narrowed meaning 'to transport by water', although *OED* (at *ferry* v. sense 1a) has some evidence for the wider sense as late as the late sixteenth century; the other items, *take*, *weve*, *tow* and *weigh* (the latter in spite of being cognate ultimately with Latin *vehere*), show very few attestations in this meaning (some of them of doubtful or ambiguous analysis). Thus, it is difficult to identify an obvious, high-frequency competitor for *carry* in its main borrowed meaning.

Since 'to transport by cart' often seems a default implication of *carry*, in Middle English just as in Anglo-Norman and Central French, it is also relevant to look at *HTOED* categories subsidiary to 03.09.01 'transport/convey'. Of the items in 03.09.01.06 vt. 'transport/convey in a vehicle', (non-borrowed) *lead* shows a striking level of currency; *MED* provides a densely packed set of examples under 'to carry (sb. or sth.), bear, transport', and *OED*'s broadly corresponding sense 'to carry or convey, usually in a cart or other vehicle' shows vitality through into Early Modern English (and later in northern dialects). However, inspection of some typical examples brings into focus the conceptual closeness of this sense in practice to the more central meaning of *lead*, 'to lead (an animal or vehicle)', e.g. in a 1429 example given in *MED* from the Journals of John Dernell and John Boys, Carters at the Lathes in Norwich, 'At after none loddyn muck wt oure owyn self..On ye fryday we leddyn iij lod ston.', where *lead* 'to carry or convey a load' can be read as simply a specialized contextual reading of the broader and more basic meaning 'to lead (a team of draught animals)'. (*MED* assumes, probably correctly, that the form *loddyn* in this example shows an error for *leddyn*, the form found in the second sentence.)

Somewhat similarly, under *HTOED*'s 03.09.01.06.01 vt. 'transport goods in a vehicle', *draw* shows a reasonable level of attestation, but *MED*'s examples typically have the beast of burden as agent, e.g. from the A-Text of *Piers Plowman* (Vernon Manuscript): 'A Cart-Mare To drawe afeld my donge'.

It thus appears that in *MED*'s senses 1(a) and 1(b), 'to transport (sth.) by horse, cart, a boat, etc.' and 'of a horse, cart, boat, etc.: convey, carry (sth.)', which correspond to the core meanings of the verb in the donor language, *carry* entered a semantic space in English that was hardly empty, but where there was also no clear, firmly entrenched default term. Depending on the broadness of our definition of the process, we may take this to be an instance of lexical gap-filling.

As discussed in section 2.3 (and as will be investigated further in section 2.5), right from the beginning of its history in English *carry* is also found with some frequency in the meaning that was to become its core meaning in modern English, 'to transfer/carry (something, especially in one's hands)' (corresponding broadly to *MED*'s 'carry (sth.) in one's hands, in a basket, etc.'). If one examines the *HTOED* category for this broad (and basic) meaning, 01.05.08.06|07.11 vt. 'transfer/carry', it is striking that it contains only two items, (native) *bear* and (borrowed) *carry*. (An interesting check on the sparse population of this *HTOED* category is provided by the very broad category

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'to carry, bring' in the *Thesaurus of Old English* (*TOE*): in addition to *beran*, we find listed here *brengan*, which in Middle English rarely shows uses divorced from telicity, as likewise *niman* (and also its Scandinavian-borrowed synonym *takan*); *ferian* and *wegan* have already been discussed above; *cuman*, *habban*, *hebban*, *gefēran*, *recan* and their reflexes show only occasional uses which gravitate in this direction.)

Thus, use of *carry* in the meaning 'to transfer/carry (something, especially in one's hands)' appears likeliest to be an English innovation; it is attested right from the beginning of the history of this verb in English; and in terms of its accommodation in the English lexicon, the main area of interest appears to be its competition with *bear*.

It is therefore likely to be revealing not only to look at the absolute level of frequency of *carry* in this meaning, but its frequency relative to *bear*. This is made difficult by the fact that *bear* is in late Middle English (as both earlier and later) a highly polysemous, high-frequency word; the volume of instances is huge, and the task of isolating examples in this particular meaning arduous and time consuming (there are approximately 10,000 instances in quotations throughout the *MED*, ruling out the approach taken with instances of *carry* in section 2.3). The approach that will be adopted here is to look at instances of both *carry* and *bear* in some of the most significant literary authors and texts of the late fourteenth century (nearly all from its last quarter, although largely preserved in manuscripts which are somewhat later), as accessed via published concordances.

2.5 carry *and* bear *in competition in some significant literary authors and texts of the late fourteenth century*

In this section the instances of *carry* and *bear* in published concordances of some significant literary authors and texts of the late fourteenth century will be sorted roughly according to meaning. The intention is to obtain an approximate indication of the relative frequency of *carry* and *bear* in these major literary texts from very early in the history of the use of *carry* in English, when used with reference to carrying, conveying or transporting objects from A to B, especially when this is outside the specific context of transporting goods, merchandise, materials, produce, animal feed, etc., in bulk (especially by cart, by pack animal, by boat, etc.).

Tatlock & Kennedy (1963 [1927]) record 25 examples of *carry* (in its various inflections) in Chaucer (including one instance from *Romaunt of the Rose* Fragment B, now not normally attributed to Chaucer). Of these:

- Fourteen refer to carrying, conveying or transporting objects from A to B. Only three refer to things borne by horses (*Reeve's Tale* 4032, where 4017, 4071, 4075 imply that the corn is to be carried on the warden's palfrey, *Canon's Yeoman's Prologue* 567, and *Knight's Tale* 1634: all line numbers refer to Benson 1987). All the others refer to objects borne by hand, including the gates of Gaza borne aloft by Samson at *Monk's Tale* 2050, but also two instances referring to keys (in both instances apparently borne on a particular occasion rather than habitually), *Canon's Yeoman's Tale* 1219 and *Romaunt of the Rose* (Fragment B) 2094, and even one instance referring to the Pardoner's testicles, *Pardoner's Tale* 954. Not one of the

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fourteen examples refers to transportation of goods by cart, boat, etc. (*Reeve's Tale* 4032 comes closest). (It is assumed here that *Pardoner's Tale* 784, 791, 800, 875 all refer to transportation by hand: the thieves' estimate of eight bushels of coins is a lot for even three men to carry – still more for the one who plans to complete the task after killing his two companions – but the thief who returns to town is sent to fetch bread and wine, not a beast of burden or cart, and 873–5 implies preparation for a night of hard labour.)
- Nine refer to bearing a person, living or dead (or in one instance a funeral bier bearing a body), from A to B.
- One refers (in *MED*'s analysis) to placing or putting (a windmill under a walnut shell), describing a fantastical act performed by a magician (*House of Fame* 1280), and perhaps to be interpreted as showing simply 'to carry, bear'.
- One refers to raising (a morsel) to the mouth (*General Prologue* 130, with reference to the Prioress). As noted in section 2.3, this last sense is recorded separately in *MED*, but it is arguably an over-interpretation of contextual use of the more general sense 'to convey (an object) from A to B'.

Thus, in Chaucer, over 50 per cent of examples of *carry* refer to carrying, conveying or transporting objects from A to B, and the core meaning shown by these examples as a group appears to be 'to transfer/carry (something, especially in one's hands)', with little hint of commercial bulk transportation of goods, merchandise, etc.

Tatlock & Kennedy record just under 300 examples of *bear* in Chaucer (or a little more than this total if participial uses which in modern English would be spelt *born* rather than *borne* are included). Of these, in meanings either overlapping with or close to those of *carry*:

- Thirty-three examples refer to carrying, conveying or transporting objects from A to B on a particular occasion. (I have omitted instances where money, pouches, etc. appear to be borne habitually rather than on a specific occasion, and I have also omitted fifteen instances referring to bearing weapons, banners. etc., as constituting a well-established distinct meaning of the verb. For the same reason I have omitted five examples referring to bearing a letter, message, etc.)
- Ten examples refer to bearing a person, living or dead, from A to B.

Thus, in Chaucer, *bear* outnumbers *carry* with reference to carrying, conveying, or transporting objects from A to B, but only by a margin of just over 2:1. Additionally, in Chaucer *carry* seems well established in the broadened meaning 'to transfer/carry (something, especially in one's hands)'.

The writings of Gower and Langland, and the poems of the *Pearl* manuscript provide an interesting contrast with Chaucer. Instances of *carry* are far fewer, and those that are found are much closer to the core uses of the French etymon. In Gower there are four examples of *carry*: one with reference to transportation by ass; one with reference to conveying a person from A to B; and two with reference to bearing a corpse.[13] *bear* occurs approximately 150 times, but only once of carrying an object from A to B, and twice of carrying a person (dead or alive) from A to B. In Langland, in the A, B and C texts of *Piers Plowman* there are four separate examples of *carry*: one

[13] Additionally, there is one example of *carīen* in the meaning 'to go, proceed, travel' (*MED*'s sense 5: see section 2.3).

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refers explicitly to carting; one to transporting agricultural produce (the method not being explicit); one to horses bearing passengers; and one to taking provisions home (presumably by hand).[14] In the same texts, *bear* outnumbers *carry* with reference to carrying/conveying/transporting objects from A to B, by a margin of approximately 3:1. In the poems of the *Pearl* manuscript (plus *St Erkenwald*) there is only one instance of *carry*; this is in *Cleanness* (as noted in section 2.1), and refers to bearing a corpse. There are also only two instances of *bear* in these texts with clear reference to carrying (an object or a live person) from A to B (although there are numerous instances of *bear* with reference to bearing or carrying things habitually, and to bearing arms, among 40 examples in assorted senses).[15]

Even a large body of literary texts such as these furnishes only a small number of instances of both verbs in overlapping senses from which to draw any inferences. Except in Chaucer, uses of *carry* in these texts largely focus either on bulk transportation (the core borrowed meaning) or on transporting people, living or dead; however, the non-Chaucerian texts also yield relatively few examples of *bear* in comparable senses. None of these texts contradict a hypothesis that already by the closing decades of the fourteenth century *carry* was well established as a slightly less frequent competitor of *bear* in relevant senses. In Chaucer, the process investigated in sections 2.3 and 2.4 seems already well in train, by which by the end of the Middle English period *carry* appears to have become well entrenched as a conventional means of expressing the notion 'to transfer/carry (something, especially in one's hands)', even if the evidence of official and business records and of other literary texts shows that it also had considerable currency in much narrower technical use with reference to commercial bulk transportation of goods, merchandise, etc.

3 Exploring possible causes and motivation for the rapid adoption of *carry* in a basic meaning

The evidence considered here suggests that *carry* rapidly became established in frequent use in Middle English. It is seen in widespread use, in functional business documents and in literary texts, in the meanings that formed the semantic core of its Anglo-Norman donor (and of its Middle French equivalent), with reference to transporting goods, merchandise, materials, produce, animal feed, etc., in bulk. A broadened sense, 'to transfer/carry (something, especially in one's hands)', appears to have been innovated in English, and also appears to have spread rapidly, being frequent in at least some varieties by the end of the fourteenth century. This meaning falls within a broad definition of the basic vocabulary of English, in which *bear* was already very well established as the usual default term realizing this meaning.

[14] Additionally, some manuscripts have *carīen* in the meaning 'to go, proceed, travel' (*MED*'s sense 5), varying with *cairen* in others.

[15] Figures in this section are based on concordance data in Pickles & Dawson (1987), Witting (2001) and Kottler & Markman (1966).

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It is worth exploring the possible causes and motivation for this rapid change in an area of the basic vocabulary. One explanation is simply the general high prestige of Romance loans in this period, but areas of basic vocabulary are generally more resistant to Romance borrowing, and this particular meaning has been a focus for the present investigation precisely because it appears particularly resistant to borrowing across a range of languages (see section 1); additionally, the semantic starting point of the word in English, bulk transportation of goods, does not belong to a markedly prestige area of the lexicon. Also, as noted in section 2.2, the meanings of the French word appear closely associated with the noun *char*, while the much less central position of *char* in the lexical field of wheeled transport in Middle English probably acted as much less of a 'break' on the word's semantic development; however, this does little to explain why the English word showed such rapid semantic development into a core area of the lexicon.

Other explanations may be sought in the other member of the competing pair of terms, *bear*: perhaps functional pressures on *bear* might explain the rapid adoption of an alternative term.[16] One possibility is that *bear* was functionally overloaded: more specifically, physical meanings may have been pushed out as (originally metaphorical) abstract or mental meanings became increasingly entrenched as the new core of the verb's meaning. Investigating this hypothesis in detail would involve a close examination of relative frequencies of different meanings of the verb in Old English and Middle English that is outside the scope of this study; however, it does not appear immediately promising, since analysis of Old English *beran* in the *Dictionary of Old English* (*DOE*) shows that abstract or mental meanings were not at all rare even in Old English. Thus, any overload would appear to have been tolerated for a very long period before the appearance of *carry*. Additionally, another closely related (although much less high-frequency) physical meaning of *bear*, in reference to load-bearing structures or materials, has remained in currency through to the present day (see *OED* bear *v.*[1] II, *MED* bēren v.(1) 3, *DOE* beran vb. 8).

Another, not mutually exclusive, possible explanation is that there may have been ambiguity between different senses of *bear*. The likeliest candidate would seem to be ambiguous overlap between use with reference to carrying something from A to B on a particular occasion and use with reference to habitually carrying an item about one's person, or to the wearing of clothing, armour, jewellery, etc. (compare *MED* bēren v.(1) 2); however, this argument seems undercut by the extent to which the very frequent use of *bear* with arms or a weapon as object has long shown both of these semantic possibilities, either the habitual carrying of arms or a particular weapon about one's person, or the carrying of arms or a particular weapon on a specific occasion (compare examples at *DOE* beran vb. 1b, *MED* bēren v.(1) 2(d), *OED* bear *v.*[1] 6a).

[16] For accounts of functional approaches to lexical change, including from more sympathetic and more sceptical viewpoints, see for example: Ullmann (1959); Samuels (1972); Lass (1980); Samuels (1987a), with reply by Lass (1987) and rejoinder by Samuels (1987b); Anttila (1989); Hock (1991); Geeraerts (1997); Fortson (2003); Traugott & Dasher (2005); Hock & Joseph (2009); Geeraerts (2009).

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A further possibility is that the adoption of *carry* in the meaning 'to transfer/carry (something, especially in one's hands)' reflects a general tendency towards isomorphism, i.e. a correspondence of one word form to just one core meaning, and conversely of one core (or basic) meaning to default realization by a particular word form. That such a tendency may be particularly strong in the case of core vocabulary is perhaps suggested also by some of the Scandinavian loans touched on briefly in section 1: in particular, *root*, *wing* and *leg* all appear to have offered new means of realizing particular basic meanings by a simplex lexeme which had this and only this as its core meaning. There were existing conventional means available of expressing all of these concepts, but none offered the same unambiguous correspondence of a simplex lexeme to this single core meaning. In the case of *carry*, adoption as a realization of the meaning 'to transfer/carry (something, especially in one's hands)' may have been aided by the word's comparative semantic simplicity; although the word had a variety of specialized meanings, its main trajectory was semantic broadening from use specifically in relation to transporting of bulk loads, probably followed by reconceptualization of this original narrower sense as no more than a special application of the new broader core meaning.

4 Conclusion

Close examination of the early history of *carry* in English is illuminating. Firstly, it shows rapid widespread adoption in the technical meaning shown by the donor word; examining *HTOED* data suggests that this was motivated by its introduction into a semantic field where there was no clear, firmly entrenched default term for this meaning, and hence it filled a lexical gap.

Secondly, and much more surprisingly, it appears very rapidly to have broadened in meaning, to become a synonym of *bear* in the basic, core vocabulary meaning 'to transfer/carry (something, especially in one's hands)'; so far as the early attestations of the word in English are concerned, this new meaning appears essentially simultaneously with the borrowed technical meaning. (The alternative hypothesis cannot be ruled out that this meaning already existed in the donor language but is not attested in the surviving records so far examined by lexicographers, but, as noted, such situations are rare among French loanwords of this period.) The fact that this innovated meaning features in the Leipzig–Jakarta List of Basic Vocabulary as being among 100 meanings found particularly resistant to borrowing in a broad cross-linguistic survey provides an interesting further perspective on the receptivity of even the core vocabulary of English to newly borrowed French lexis in this period. That this borrowing occurred in the period when large-scale borrowing accompanied the switch to use of English in many functional (especially written) contexts where Anglo-Norman was previously employed seems unlikely to be coincidental.

A detailed examination of uses of *carry* in some major literary works of the late fourteenth century, and particularly of the rather numerous examples of the word in Chaucer's works, shows that, even though *carry* was apparently borrowed only in the

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second half of the fourteenth century, by the end of that century it appears already in some varieties to be emerging as a serious rival to *bear* as default realization of this basic meaning.

Comparison with other borrowed words realizing meanings from the Leipzig–Jakarta list suggests that a tendency towards isomorphism is a plausible motivating factor in this process, although such functionalist approaches cannot be separated from the cultural specificities and functional language switch generally favouring adoption of Anglo-Norman (and Latin) lexis in later Middle English.

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