

Geoffrey Chaucer and Early Modern English: With Special
Reference to *The Knight's Tale* Translated by John Dryden

Saki Aso

The Early Modern English period is said to be a time when English developed especially rapidly. In this paper I deal with *Palamon and Arcite* written by John Dryden and *The Knight's Tale* written by Geoffrey Chaucer. *Palamon and Arcite* is the translated version of *The Knight's Tale*, which was published as one of the poems in *Fables Ancient and Modern* in 1700. This is often considered the last year of the EModE period, and also the last year of Dryden's life, when he was around seventy. By comparing them, I attempt to make clear the difference between Early Modern English and Middle English, in terms of the phonological and grammatical developments and the styles of language. Furthermore, I would like to clarify the historical changes from the fourteenth century to the seventeenth century because both Dryden and Chaucer seem to have been affected by the society of their times.

The most remarkable difference in terms of phonology between Dryden and Chaucer is the usage of couplet and triplet. Although it seems very difficult to translate a verse into the other verse, Dryden translates *The Knight's Tale* in his own way and creates new styles and techniques which are also valued in present-day English.

The usage of tenses became more strictly regulated in EModE than ME. The differentiation between the simple and progressive aspect, and the differentiation between the perfect and the preterite is considered to be the remarkable development achieved in the EModE period. But the usage of the tenses seems to be still unfixed in this period.

The important development which can be found in the usage of relatives is the differentiation between *which* and *who*. The relative *who* became to be used instead of *which* to indicate persons in the EModE period. The new forms of relatives with prepositions such as '*with whom*' and the usage with genitive case are also found in Dryden's English.

The usage of modal auxiliaries highly developed in the EModE period.

Firstly the distinction between *will* and *shall* was regulated. We found some changes of the meanings of each modal auxiliary from ME to EModE. Secondly, the development of the auxiliary *do* is striking from the historical point of view in English. The auxiliary *do* gradually regulated in EModE and became to be used in negative and interrogative sentences.

Dryden seems to have used many kinds of words from other countries in his works because of his occasional use of words from Latin. But on the contrary, he insists that he made an effort to choose the best words regardless of their origins in his works. He also put a variety of paired words and compound words. Some of them are from Chaucer's English, and others are newly created by Dryden.

Dryden changes the original story by adding his own words and omitting the original lines. These addition and omission seem to show the style of Dryden. While he makes many linguistic attempts boldly in his works, he succeeds to the notions related to the ideas of astrology and justice, which Chaucer had in the ME period. In particular, the political allusion which often be seen in Dryden's additions, show his view of the period of the unsettled political situation.

Through this study I became more interested in the relationship between the social incidents and the development of English around seventeenth century. I need to research into the poetry in this period more deeply comparing with as many works of contemporary writers as possible.