

Word Pairs in *The Canterbury Tales*:
With Special Reference to *The General Prologue* and *The Tale of Melibee*

Kyoko Hirafuji

Word pairs have been used in verse and prose from Old English onwards. In the Middle Ages verses using alliterated word pairs were popular. On the other hand, the prose was mainly religious prose, and used to persuade people.

The aim of this thesis is to examine word pairs. It focuses on *The General Prologue* and *The Tale of Melibee* in *The Canterbury Tales* which was written by the famous English poet, Geoffrey Chaucer.

The main reason is that I survey word pairs by making a comparison between verse and prose. I have examined word pairs in both *The General Prologue* and *The Tale of Melibee*. I have defined word pairs as being pairs of words which have the same pattern combined with the conjunctions “and”, “or”, or “neither...nor”.

In Chapter I, I have examined word pairs, in terms of word origins, word classes, rhymes, etc in *The General Prologue*. In Chapter II, I have examined word pairs in *The Tale of Melibee* in the same way as in Chapter I. In Chapter III, I have made a comparison between the word pairs in *The General Prologue* and *The Tale of Melibee*. In Chapter IV, I have discussed word pairs in terms of the usages of similarities and differences.

The most frequent categories of word pairs in both texts are the A and B patterns at over 80 %. Concerning the etymology of word pairs, the most frequent usage of word pairs in *The General Prologue* is the combination of OE+OE, while in *The Tale of Melibee* the most frequent usages are OE+OF and OF+OF. In respect of word classes, there are many pairs combining noun and noun at over 50% in both texts. Similarly, there are many synonymous word pairs in both texts. In terms of the comparison of rhyme, in *The General Prologue* there are head rhymes in 73% of the word pairs, but in only 8% in *The Tale of Melibee*.

In *The General Prologue* word pairs occur in a wide range of fields comprising a large number of French words relating to fashion, food, people, etc. Chaucer has depicted the characters effectively using French word pairs in his works. He has gently criticized and satirized the society. His

expressions are full of hidden meanings - in other words, he has expressed ambiguity by means of French word pairs.

In contrast, *The Tale of Melibee* is a moral tale and is written in prose. Prudence persuades Melibeus not to take revenge on his enemies by using various kinds of word pairs. Chaucer has used chiasmus four times in *The Tale of Melibee*. There are more repetitions of word pairs in prose than in verse.

In conclusion, it can be presumed that word pairs have been used on the basis of Cicero's and Aristotle's rhetorical theories. The word pairs are used in various kinds of ways, that is to say, we can see emphasis, chiasmus, and persuasion in prose, and ironic and ambiguous criticism in verse. In respect of two texts, I may say that synonymous word pairs emphasize the meaning and express it fully so as to heighten and strengthen it in a convincing speech and explanation; therefore, word pairs are effective in his works.