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BINOMIALS IN AN HISTORICAL ENGLISH LITERARY PERSPECTIVE: SHAKESPEARE, CHAUCER, BEOWULF

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Which his fair tongue, conceit's expositor,
Delivers in such *apt and gracious* words
Love's Labour's Lost (II.1.72-73)¹

a jeho jazyk, ten tlumočník vtípu,
vše vyjádří tak *výmluvně a trefně*²

Shakespeare's language has been analyzed so many times that it may appear redundant and tiresome to give it another try. However, the following analysis takes his language as a starting point for, and illustration of, an interesting phenomenon. It will attempt to show that a poetic and dramatic mode of expression, aiming at a forceful and ornamental turn of phrase, is at the root of the emergence of a specific type of phraseological unit called a "binomial."

¹ The quotation follows the text of *The Norton Shakespeare*, gen. ed. Stephen Greenblatt (New York: W.W.Norton and Co., 1997). Italics added.

² William Shakespeare, *Marná lásky snaha* (*Love's Labour's Lost*), trans. Martin Hilský (Prague: ELK, 1999) 29. Italics added.

We took a well-known play, *Hamlet*, and used a standard concordancer (*Monopro*) to retrieve all ‘* and *’ sequences, or coordinated structures conjoined by the preposition ‘and.’ Although it is well known that conjoins are generally required to be congruous in form, function, and meaning,³ even so the result of the ‘* and *’ search in *Hamlet* was somewhat surprising in showing how far the congruence can go. Out of the 700 instances, about half of the sequences could be regarded as binomials of one type or another rather than mere coordinated structures. On second thoughts, given that the language of the play is based on prosodic principles and the choice of the vocabulary is carefully made for maximum impact and effect, it should not perhaps be so unexpected. The reason resides in the definition of a binomial, at least as presented in the principal two sources we know of and will be drawing on in this paper, Yakov Malkiel for English and František Čermák for Czech.⁴

Defining Binomials

Both Malkiel’s and Čermák’s definition implicitly encompasses the form, function and meaning congruence requirement made on coordinated structures (as mentioned in CGEL). However, Malkiel puts great emphasis on one aspect of binomials, the aesthetic/prosodic quality, and we can see that this is something which is readily supplied by the playwright’s use of language. Malkiel describes the binomial as a sequence of two words pertaining to the same form-class, placed on an identical level of syntactic hierarchy, and ordinarily connected by some kind of lexical link. He does not regard them in principle as idioms or phraseological formulas as their meaning may be compositional. Moreover, they can range from free combinations to congealed irreversibles, from nonce-formations to stereotyped combinations (only the latter ends of the scales are formulas).

³ Randolph Quirk, et al., *The Comprehensive Grammar of the English Language* (London: Longman, 1985) 971.

⁴ Yakov Malkiel, “Studies in Irreversible Binomials,” *Lingua*, 8 (1959): 113-60; Josef Filipec and František Čermák, *Česká lexikologie* (Czech Lexicology) (Prague: Academia, 1985); František Čermák, *Frazeologie a idiomatika česká a obecná* (Phraseology and Czech and General Idiomatics) (Prague: Karolinum, 2007).

He gives two sources of cohesion between the constituents, formal (outward resemblance), i.e., rhyme, alliteration and morpheme or word repetition (*obverse and reverse, day after day*), and semantic, including synonymy, complementation (e.g., *food and drink, place and time*), opposition, hyponymy (*dollars and cents*), and even succession (*rise and fall*). The formal and semantic cohesion is cemented by two kinds of linking element: a conjunction expresses addition, alternative or disjunction, and typically appears with synonyms, complements and opposites, while a preposition usually marks repetition/iteration, reciprocity, opposition, compensation, direction or delimitation. Malkiel also mentions zero-link binomials in other languages (Russian; cf. the Czech expression *bylo nebylo*). Finally, he gives six factors determining the order of constituents: chronological priority, sociocultural priority, relative strength of the antonyms, rhythmic reasons, analogy and the original ordering in loans. In addition, CGEL specifies the prosodic factor (invoking a principle of rhythmic regularity based on the dactylic and the trochaic rhythm) and mentions phonological constraints, such as low vowels coming after high ones, back vowels after front ones, etc.⁵ We could also add structural parallelism (*by hook or by crook*).

Čermák's account focuses on binomials in Czech, though he points out that they represent a very old type of structure appearing in many languages. He describes them as collocational phrasemes or idioms (though they may include even non-phrasemes) formed by a sequence of two components of the same word class (sometimes identical in form), typically nominal, displaying class or individual iteration (sometimes including proper names). They represent coordination or juxtaposition, usually fixed in word order. The iterative force is so strong that it carries over into non-idiomatic, semantically compositional combinations (*doba a místo, time and place*). The influence of the original and typically binary nominal structures is such that it produces analogous sequences with other word-classes. Accordingly Čermák distinguishes in Czech (1) nominal structures (N-N, N-conj-N and N-prep-N, *den za dnem, day after day*); (2) adjectival structures (Adj-Adj, Adj-conj-Adj), (3) verbal structures (V-V, V-conj-V, *být či nebýt, to be or not to be*); (4) adverbial structures (Adv-Adv, Adv-conj-Adv, cf. *neither here nor there*); (5) other

⁵ Quirk, *Comprehensive Grammar*, 971.

structures (Pron-prep-Pron, cf. *ideas on this or that*, Num-prep-Num, Prep-conj-Prep, *pro a proti, for and against*, Conj-Conj, *either or*, Interj-Interj, *tick tock*; special types, *techtle mechtle, hanky panky*, etc.).

Moreover, Čermák distinguishes several kinds of semantic relations obtaining between the components, especially static sense relations such as opposition, synonymy, and complementarity, but also the dynamic ones such as converseness, implication or alternativeness based on formal relations (primarily, heteronymy, homonymy or alliteration and rhyme). He finds that binomials as semantic units fall into the following six categories, describing (a) identity (*one and only*), (b) totality (*from cradle to grave, from low to high*), (c) difference, alternative, choice (*your money or your life, tit for tat, live or die*), (d) impartiality or necessity (*fear or no fear*), (e) intensification and emphasis (*time after time, on and on, wheel within wheels*), (f) immediacy, closeness (*face to face, side by side*).

Comparison between the identifying features of binomials in English and Czech shows rather interestingly that, unlike Malkiel, Čermák makes only passing mention of formal factors, alliteration and rhyme, as they are indeed of a marginal or accidental nature in Czech. In other words, the contrast between binomials in Czech and English brings out more clearly what the typical features of binomials in either language are. It can be concluded that while in both languages grammatical (word-class, coordination) and semantic relational features are no doubt important, what really sets out a conjoined structure as a distinct unit, a binomial, in each language is the aesthetic effect (prosody, alliteration, rhyme) in English, and its strongly collocational nature, familiarity in Czech.⁶ This is rather important as it explains why in Czech binomials are seen to be closer to idioms whereas in English ad hoc binomials are the norm and idiomatic ones are a minority.

In the following we shall limit our attention to binomial structures displaying the following features (i.e., both aspects of the sign – content and form): (a) semantic cohesion (producing a complex lexical term, either literal or metaphoric), achieved by sense relations such as synonymy or contrast; (b) formal linkage: aesthetic/prosodic means (rhyme, alliteration, and rhythm), accompanied by iteration and conjoining by the conjunction ‘and.’

⁶ See Aleš Klégr, “A Note on Binomials in English and Czech,” *Prague Studies in English*, 19 (1991): 83-88.

Other formal limiting criteria have been applied, such as the exclusion of sequences in which the conjunction 'and' is preceded by a comma, colon, semi-colon, exclamation and question marks, or followed by a comma, or simultaneously preceded and succeeded by any of these punctuation marks and exclusion of some types of parallelism (e.g., *of wisdom and of reach; unlike our presence and our practises, most secret and most grave*).

Analysis of Binomials in *Hamlet*

As mentioned above, this study focuses on one structural type of binomial, easily identifiable due to its form of '* and *' sequence. The 700 instances of this sequence found in *Hamlet*⁷ were then analyzed to separate cases of straightforward coordination from those that display qualities associated with binomials, i.e., those fitting the bill. With a phenomenon as fluid and mercurial as binomials the figures are necessarily approximative and show tendencies rather than hard data. Still, even tendencies may provide a valuable insight into a situation in language. Analysis showed that of the 700 sequences, 362 (51.7%), i.e., more than a half (!), could be with some confidence described as binomials. However, there were obvious differences between the sequences within this group as to the degree of binomial properties they exhibited. After close scrutiny, the group was divided into four subsets on the basis of two criteria, the degree of formal and semantic cohesion associated with the binomial status and the degree of fixedness. Accordingly, the following types of binomials were distinguished:

1. Established/fixed/idiomatic binomials – semantically and prosodically well-formed and recurrent from the point of view of present-day English;
2. Current (ad hoc) binomials – semantically and prosodically well-formed, but not recurrent;
3. Near-binomials – midway cases which do not comfortably fit in with current binomials but clearly function as a semantic

⁷ William Shakespeare: *Hamlet, the Prince of Denmark / Hamlet, dánský princ*, ed., trans. and introduction Martin Hilský (Prague: Torst, 2001).

and formal unit;

4. Quasi-binomials – cases which lack either the essential unifying semantic features, or a distinct enough cohesion-producing form (rhythm, rhyme, or alliteration), or both aspects are weakened and the impression of a whole (and thus the binomial status) blurred.

The results are summarized in the table below:

Type of Binomial	Absolute Figures	%
1. Established binomials	50	14.0
2. Current binomials	189	52.0
3. Near-binomials	67	18.5
4. Quasi-binomials	56	15.5
Total	362	100.0

The category of **established binomials**, i.e., binomials that seem to have become part of the lexicon (what some authors call “listemes”) and are shared by other speakers besides the author, presents something of a problem. Is “established” to be taken synchronically with the date of the play’s publication as the reference point, or diachronically as established from today’s point of view? For this particular analysis we decided to apply the latter approach, though the former one will be discussed below in connection with binomials in the pre-Shakespearean stages of language, i.e., those appearing in Chaucer and *Beowulf*. Determination of whether the combination found in Shakespeare is established or not was made by reference to a contemporary dictionary and, more importantly, to a present-day synchronic corpus: if at least one instance of it was found there, the combination was regarded as recurrent.

It was found that, in the set of 362 conjoined structures, 50 (14.0%) could be described as established binomials in that they are recurrent and can be found in a dictionary or in today’s English usage (as attested in the *British National Corpus* and/or the *Times 95 corpus*). It is not without interest to see which structures they are, and so we present them in full and with number of tokens if higher than 1: *by and by* (4), *heaven and earth* (4), *king and queen* (4), *day and night* (2), *dead and gone* (2), *man and wife* (2), *up and down* (2), *you and*

me/I (2), ease and grace, east and west, fair and good, flesh and blood, friend and foe, head and shoulder, heaven and hell, here and there, here and hence, high and mighty, hot and dry, length and breadth, life and soul, man and boy, mind and soul, more and less, mother and father, pith and moment, rank and station, raw and red, safety and health, so and so, sultry and hot, sun and moon, through and through, true and good, trust and hope, winner and loser.

The three most frequent ones (with four instances) include one iterative adverbial structure and two nominal 'totality' structures, describing entities formed by converse opposites. Next there are five structures appearing twice; four of them again semantically based on opposites creating a whole, one pair includes synonyms (*dead and gone*). The remaining 27 binomials with a single occurrence semantically followed suit, mostly exploiting opposition for linking its members (*sun and moon, winner and loser, more and less, man and boy*), but also synonymy (*fair/true and good, rank and station, high and mighty*) and sister terms (co-hyponyms/co-meronyms) to produce a well-rounded description (*length and breadth, trust and hope, head and shoulder, pith and moment*). The formal means, apart from the obligatory rhythmic qualities, involved alliteration (*friend and foe, heaven and hell, raw and red*, and the marginal *here and hence*) and iteration (*through and through*). The order of the constituents in a few cases vacillated compared to contemporary usage (*sultry and hot* while in the control corpora we find *hot and sultry*), but also within the text itself (e.g., *heaven and earth* in one case appeared as *earth and heaven*). Apparently irreversibility may recede if there are other considerations.

Among this group only a relatively few could be described as idiomatic, i.e., as being semantically non-compositional, cf. *by and by*. This goes to support Malkiel's claim⁸ that binomials are primarily non-idiomatic (unlike in Czech). Moreover, in the case of Shakespeare we encounter another specific phenomenon: some of the indisputably ad hoc binomials (e.g., *slings and arrows*) have become subsequently established, or at least well known, because of their appearance in the play and due to the play's popularity.

Current binomials turned out to be the largest group, 189 cases (52%). As regards the formal features that hold the constituents together, the fundamental means is of course rhythm, which is to be

⁸ See also Quirk, *Comprehensive Grammar*, 1487.

expected especially in poetic language. Alliteration appeared in 19 cases (10%) of current binomials (e.g., *amazement and admiration, bell and burial, death and danger, delight and dole, discord and dismay, extravagant and erring, how and who, sense and secrecy, scholars and soldiers, slow and stately, wild and whirling*), iteration in one (*in ear and ear*). Rhyme as such was not manifest even in this group.

The commonest sense relations holding between the constituents of the current binomials were, in descending order, co-hyponymy (55% of occurrences), synonymy (37%) and opposition (7%) in the broadest sense. The co-hyponyms are typically incompatible but, in a sense, complementary terms which together form a rounded-off whole (image, idea, situation), e.g., *amazement and admiration, fear and wonder, bugs and goblins, the empire and the rule, feed and clothe, grace and mercy, mass and charge, mute and dumb, puff'd and reckless, shreds and patches, steep and thorny, threaten and command, winks and nods*. Included in this subgroup are the occasional instances of co-meronymous combinations (*bell and burial, hear and see, spokes and fellies*).

The synonyms as constituents are combined in order to emphasize the concept to be expressed. As a matter of fact, most of the constituents are difficult to place on the cognitive-synonymy and near-synonymy scale. Not surprisingly, some of the near-synonyms shade off imperceptibly into co-hyponyms, which means that the figures for co-hyponymy- and synonymy-based subgroups of binomials are only approximate. To give some examples: *airy and light, flat and full, foul and pestilent, slow and stately, gather and surmise, food and diet, book and volume (of my brain), dearth and rareness, knotted and combined, pith and marrow, smooth and even, thaw and resolve, fair and unpolluted, depend and rest (upon)*.

The smallest subgroup of the three is the one based on opposites. No attempt was made to distinguish between the various subtypes of opposition. Not unlike in the co-hyponym binomials, the purpose of combining opposites in a binomial is to capture the full range and scope of the entity (field, group, etc.) to be described, i.e., totality. Typical examples include *delight and dole, the quick and dead, (fortune's) buffets and rewards, business and desire, wills and fates*.

The introduction of the last two categories, those of **near-binomials** (67, 18.5%) and **quasi-binomials** (56, 15.5%), is largely

an acknowledgement of the fact that binomials ineluctably form a cline, with established (dictionary-confirmed) binomials at one end and non-binomials at the other. The cut-off points between the four categories of binomials distinguished are of necessity fuzzy and arbitrary. Not surprisingly, the near- and quasi-binomials appear to have about the same occurrence as established ones, as these groups represent only the extreme poles of the binomial continuum. The following are examples of near-binomials: *in the* [[*morn and liquid dew*]] *of youth*, *As it behoves my* [[*daughter and your*]] *honour* (with prominent *my-your* opposition), *in forgery of* [[*shapes and tricks*]], *Heavens make our* [[*presence and our*]] *practises pleasant*, etc. The quasi-binomials are represented, e.g., by [[*on the view and knowing*]] *of these contents*, *For* [[*the law of writ and the liberty*]], [[*Starts up and stands on end*]], *In* [[*the dead vast and middle*]] *of the night*, etc.

There are several issues that would require separate consideration and examination, such as the grammatical function of binomials. Syntactically, binomials may occupy any of the valency slots in a sentence, starting with subject (*Our* [[*wills and fates*]] *do so contrary run*), verb (*And that your grace hath* [[*screen'd and stood*]] *between; [[Thaw and resolve]] itself into a dew!*),⁹ object (*Time qualifies the* [[*spark and fire*]] *of it*), subject complement (*He's* [[*fat, and scant*]] *of breath*), and, of course, adverbial (*roasted in* [[*wrath and fire*]]) and modifier (*Hath now this* [[*dread and black*]] *complexion smear'd*). What is not frequently mentioned is the fact that one (either first or second) or both binomial constituents may be structurally complex, without spoiling the euphonic effect, cf. first constituent being complex (*both* [[*at the first and now*]]), second (*by* [[*cunning and forced cause*]]), [[*dead and turn'd to clay*]], *to be* [[*disjoint and out of frame*]], *companions* [[*noted and most known*]]), or both ([[*The glass of fashion and the mould of form*]], translated as 'zrcadlo krásy, dokonalost formy'). Complex constituents may also include intensification ([[*So hallow'd and so gracious*]] *is the time*). Another interesting feature is the possibility of gradability of the constituents: *Are of a most* [[*select and generous*]] *chief in that*.

In some cases it was difficult to decide whether to include the sequences or not as the pairs both displayed features of binomiality

⁹ Cf. Naděžda Kudrnáčová, *Directed Motion at the Syntax-Semantics Interface* (Brno: Masarykova univerzita, 2008).

and at the same time formed the end part of multiple enumeration, and could be thus regarded as tri- or multinomials, cf. *Were nothing but to waste night*, [[*day and time*]]; *Is now most still*, [[*most secret and most grave*]].

To sum up, although the *Hamlet* data can be regarded as tentative at best due to the fuzzy and subjective criteria for and the inherent indeterminacy of the binomial status, it not only appears to be in keeping with the predominant notion of binomials, but even underlines some of the essential binomial characteristics. On the other hand, it inevitably raises further questions, suggests other tasks and features to be explored which might throw light on the functioning of binomials in language: typical syntactic functions; types of reference (generic – non-generic) and the related use of determiners; the limits of syntactic complexity of binomial constituents, their size, and others. The crucial finding is that of the 700 ‘* and *’ coordinated structures found in *Hamlet*, 52% are binomial-like and, of these, two thirds (66%) are indisputable binomials (established and current), which is quite a significant number.

Shakespeare's Binomials in Translation

The profusion of binomials in *Hamlet* and the differences within similarities between English and Czech binomials inevitably leads to the question of how they are dealt with in translation. Although such comparison will not tell us much about the position of binomials in either language, it is interesting whether despite the differences between binomials in English and Czech and the difficulties of translating Shakespeare, there is any ground at all for this type of expression to be transferred between the two languages.

Let us presume that regardless of the existence of essentially two types of binomials in the original, established/idiomatic ones and current/near-binomials, the strategies of dealing with them will be governed by higher-level considerations and will not distinguish between the two types very much. Instead, all types of indirect translation (transposition, modulation and adaptation) can be expected, with direct (literal) translation being used only where

made possible by the form and existence of direct equivalents (idiomatic or not). For this purpose, a comparison of ten established and ten current binomials as translated by Martin Hilský¹⁰ was made, with the following results.

A sample of ten structures placed within the established binomials was translated in this manner (binomials in the Czech translation have been underlined>):

by and by (4x):

Brzy, Brzičko. / Brzo. / To se snadno řekne – “brzo.”/ Všechno má svůj čas.

man and boy:

I have been sexton here [[man and boy]], thirty years
Dělám tu hrobníka už bratru třicet let.

ease and grace:

If there be any good thing to be done,
That may to thee do [[ease and grace]] to me,
Speak to me:
Jestli snad můžu skutek udělat,
co tobě uleví a mně dá milost,
mluv!

day and night:

O [[day and night]], but this is wondrous strange!
Proboha, já jsem z toho celý pryč.
Sport and repose lock from me [[day and night]]!
ať nemám klid a strádám v jednom kuse,

dead and gone:

He is [[dead and gone]], lady,
He is dead and gone;
Umřel nám, paní, umřel nám,

flesh and blood:

But this eternal blazon must not be
To ears of [[flesh and blood]].
Tajemství věčnosti však nesmím
vykřičet do uší smrtelníka.

¹⁰ Shakespeare, *Hamlet, the Prince of Denmark / Hamlet, dánský princ*.

red and raw:

Since yet thy cicatrice looks [[raw and red]]
 After the Danish sword,
 vždyť zarudlé a pořád čerstvé jizvy
 po dánských mečích budí strach a úctu

life and soul:

She's so conjunctive to my [[life and soul]],
 já na ní visím životem i duší

friend and foe, winner or loser:

Good Laertes,
 If you desire to know the certainty
 Of your dear father's death, is't writ in your revenge,
 That, swoopstake, you will draw both [[friend and foe]],
 [[Winner and loser]]?
 Dobrá, chceš vědět, kdo ti zabil otce.
 Znamená to, že pomstu pozná každý –
přítel i nepřítel, kdo ublížil,
 i ten, kdo ne

A sample of ten current binomials offered the following types of translation:

delight and dole:

In equal scale weighing [[delight and dole]],–
radost i starost pořád v rovnováze,

discord and dismay:

My soul is full of [[discord and dismay]].
Úžas a úděs sváří se nám v duši.

extravagant and erring:

The [[extravagant and erring]] spirit hies
 pak každý zatoulaný, bludný duch

feed and clothe:

That no revenue hast but thy good spirits,
 To [[feed and clothe]] thee?
 když živí tě
 a obléká jen tvoje dobrá mysl?

grace and mercy:

So [[grace and mercy]] at your most need help you,
A k tomu pomáhej vám Bůh.

smooth and even:

To bear all [[smooth and even]],
Aby šlo vše hladce,

the quick and dead:

Now pile your dust upon the [[quick and dead]],
Teď na živé i mrtvé sypte hlínu,

dearth and rareness:

and his infusion of such [[dearth and rareness]], as, to make true diction of
him, his semblable is his mirror;
že je to duch neobyčejné obsažnosti a výtvor přírody tak jedinečný, že se
mu vyrovná jen jeho vlastní obraz v zrcadle

pith and marrow:

The [[pith and marrow]] of our attribute.
vysaje morek zasloužené chvály.

buffets and rewards:

fortune's [[buffets and rewards]]
dary i rány osudu

Although the sample is too minuscule to allow any valid generalizations, it does seem, though, that current binomials survive translation into Czech somewhat better than established/idiomatic binomials. The obvious explanation is that unlike the firmly "mortised and adjoin'd" binomials with often metaphoric meaning (and so defying simple translation), the more transparent current binomials lend themselves to literal translation more often and so allow parallel structures (cf. the underlined equivalents above) in the target language.

Binomials before Shakespeare

Clearly enough, binomials are not a means which first appeared in language with Shakespeare. As a poetic device binomials (such as defined above) can be found not only in Middle English, but they have a long tradition in literature going back to the early Middle Ages. It is interesting to make at least a brief comparison of

Shakespeare's binomials with the evidence of binomials offered by another two of linguistic milestones in the history of English literature – the work of the *Beowulf* poet and Chaucer. For the purpose of the present study, we checked for binomials and their association with poetic register in two samples. The Old English sample consisted of the whole text of *Beowulf* (3,182 lines); the Middle English corpus comprised an identical number of verses from Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde*, i.e., Books I and II plus 333 lines of Book III. Both samples were analyzed for '*' and '* ' binomial structures and the findings were subsequently checked against the evidence provided by the *Dictionary of Old English Corpus* and the *Corpus of Middle English Prose and Verse*.

The *Beowulf* Sample

The text of *Beowulf* yielded 127 types and 147 tokens of binomials in all four subcategories outlined above. Of these, 121 types (95%) were found occurring in Old English poetry alone. Ninety-six were *Beowulf* hapax legomena and 14 appeared solely in *Beowulf* but with more than one hit. Eleven '*' and '* ' binomial structures were attested elsewhere in Old English poetry and another 6 appear to have been used both in Old English poetry and prose.

In terms of word class representation, nominal structures (N-and-N) predominated (79), followed by adjectival structures (Adj-and-Adj; 42), verbal structures (V-and-V, 12), and adverbial structures (Adv-and-Adv, 4), respectively. In contrast to the *Hamlet* sample, no other word classes were found. The commonest sense relations holding between the constituents of the current binomials were, in descending order, complementarity (92 instances; 72% of occurrences; e.g., *bitere ond gebolgne* 'fierce and enraged (acc.),' *eafo? ond ellen* 'strength and courage'), hyponymy (18 instances; 14 %; e.g., *bord ond byrnan*, 'shield and byrnie;' *sang ond sweg* 'song and music'), opposition (8 instances; 6 %; e.g., *dages ond nihtes* '(by) day and night', *dugu?e ond geogo?e* 'old retainers and young warriors'), and synonymy (7 instances; 5.5 %; e.g., *biter ond beaduscearp* 'cutting and battle-sharp,' *sal ond mal* 'time and occasion,' *eald ond anhar* 'old and very hoary').

In terms of lexical field affiliation, the *Beowulf* '*' and '* ' binomial

structures reflect – as could be expected and apart from meanings capturing various aspects of totality through opposition (such as *dages ond nihtes*, *geongum ond ealdum*)¹¹ – values, sentiments and dangers of heroic life. With some of the semantic categories inevitably shading into one another, the structures mostly represent lexical fields that may tentatively be labelled as War/Armour (e.g., *billum ond byrnum*, ‘swords and byrnies’), Distress/Persecution (e.g., *fage ond geflymed* ‘doomed and put to flight’), Power/Wealth (e.g., *bold ond bregostol*, ‘hall and throne’), Good/Evil (such as *leofes ond la?es* ‘(of) friend and foe’, *grim ond gradig*, ‘grim and fierce’) and Community/Kinship (e.g., *bearnum ond bro?rum*, ‘(to) children and brothers’).

The Chaucer Sample

The Chaucer sample yielded 90 types and 98 tokens of binomials in all four subcategories outlined above. Of these, 71 types (79%) were found occurring in Middle English poetry only. 39 types were attested only once in *Troilus and Criseyde* alone. 4 types were found in *Troilus and Criseyde* alone but scored more than one occurrence. 5 ‘* and *’ binomial structures occurred solely in Chaucer’s texts and 42 binomials were attested in Middle English poetry and prose outside Chaucer’s work.

In terms of word class representation, nominal structures (N-and-N) predominated (52), followed by adjectival structures (Adj-and-Adj; 16), verbal structures (V-and-V, 15) and adverbial structures (Adv-and-Adv, 6), respectively. In contrast to the *Hamlet* sample but in accordance with the *Beowulf* sample, no other word classes were found. The commonest sense relations holding between the constituents of the current binomials were, in descending order, complementarity (59 instances, 66% of occurrences; e.g., *chere and speche*, *crop and rote*), opposition (13

¹¹ It is through such co-hyponym binomials and co-meronymous combinations (e.g., *hear and see*) that the essential continuity of diction from the unknown author of *Beowulf* via Chaucer to Shakespeare manifests itself. Undoubted though not pervasive in quantitative terms, the continuity might be seen as stronger if binomials sharing one constituent or semantically parallel though formally different coordinative structures were considered (such as *man and wife* and *wer ond wif* or *head and source* and *findere and heed*).

instances, 14% of occurrences; e.g., *free and bonde, game and ernest*), synonymy (13 instances, 14% of occurrences; e.g., *falsnesse and tresoun, dissimulen and hyde*), and hyponymy (3 instances, 3% of occurrences; e.g., *dimme and donne, leef and deere*).

In terms of lexical field affiliation, the Chaucer '* and *' binomial structures reflect – as can be expected and apart from meanings capturing various aspects of totality through opposition (such as *est and west, al and som*) – values and sentiments of courtly life. With some of the semantic categories inevitably shading into one another, the structures mostly represent lexical fields that may tentatively be labelled as Distress (e.g., *distresse and care, peyne and wo*), Emotion (e.g., *hope and desperaunce, mercy and pitee*), Honour (such as *honour and bountee, honour and renoun*), Good/Evil (e.g., *fair and goodly, sinne and offence*) and Nice/Ugly (e.g., *fresh and gay, rough and thikke*).

As in the *Hamlet* sample above, the *Beowulf* and Chaucer samples included binomials that were structurally complex (including word order variations, e.g., *bowe wole and winde*, premodification and prepositional phrases, e.g., *in erthe and salte see*, etc.) as well as cases that displayed features of binomiality and at the same time formed part of multiple enumeration, and could be thus regarded as multinomials (e.g., *swote and smothe and softe*). Structural variations included only 2 instances of morphemic repetition (*out and out, newe and newe* in *Troilus and Criseyde*).

In order to specify more precisely the relative position of each item on the scale outlined for *Hamlet* above (i.e., the degree of fixedness in language), a secondary criterion was used, namely whether the sampled '* and *' binomial structures had parallel formations attested in the respective corpus. The parallel formations were defined on a formal basis, i.e., whether or not one element of the combination was found employed as a part of a binomial (irrespective of its kind) elsewhere in the Old English or Middle English corpus. Thus, for example, the *Beowulf* binomial structure *geong ond eald* ('young and old') was found having a parallel in *geong ond gu?hwat* ('young and fierce in battle,' *Fates of Apostles*, 54); the binomial structure *heah ond horngæap* ('lofty and wide-gabled') was found paralleled by e.g., *heah ond halig* ('high and holy,' *Christ*, 378) and *heah ond hleortorht* ('high and beautiful,' *Riddle* 70,4). Altogether, 67 out of 127 tokens in the *Beowulf* sample

were found to have at least one parallel formation elsewhere in the corpus (a great majority of them occurred in poetry; prose occurrences were sporadic).

The criterion of the existence of parallel formations was subsequently employed to better distinguish between the scalar categories 2 and 3 outlined above, i.e., current binomials and near-binomials, in the following way: if a binomial structure that appeared only once in the sample was found to have parallel formations elsewhere in the respective corpus, it was classified as a current binomial rather than a near one. Specifically, 63 of the 96 binomials that are attested only once in *Beowulf* and the entire corpus of Old English, were found having such parallel formations outside the sample and so were classified below as current binomials (rather than mere near ones). Likewise, of the 90 binomial types in the Chaucer sample there were as many as 80 with traceable parallel formations (e.g., *fresh and gay*, *fresh and grene*; *worship and service*, *worship and pleasaunce*). 37 of the 39 binomials that were found to be Middle English hapax legomena have such parallel formations outside the sample and so they too were classified in the quantification below as current binomials (rather than mere near-binomials).

Overall, the classification of binomials as adopted for Shakespeare above was adapted to the *Beowulf* and Chaucer samples in the following way. Binomials classified as established/fixed/idiomatic were defined as well-formed semantically and prosodically and recurrent in synchronic terms, i.e., from the point of view of the entire Old and Middle English corpus, respectively. In other words, only binomial structures recurrent in Old English texts other than *Beowulf* for the *Beowulf* sample and only binomial structures recurrent in other works by Chaucer or in other (prosaic as well as poetic) Middle English texts for the Chaucer sample were classified as established binomials. As binomials defined above under the rubric 'current,' i.e., semantically and prosodically well-formed, but not recurrent, only such structures were classified that either appear more than once in *Beowulf* and *Troilus and Criseyde*, or are hapax legomena but exhibit parallel binomial formations in the Old and Middle English corpus, respectively. Finally, the subcategory of near-binomials comprises such structures as only appear once in the entire Old or Middle

English corpus, respectively, and, at the same time, do not appear to have parallel binomial structures. The fourth subcategory of the binomial classification outlined above, i.e., quasi-binomials, had not been recognized for the Old or Middle English sample, as it proved methodologically difficult to identify, given the limited data, cases that fit the description of this category.

In plain figures, the individual subcategories in the two samples were represented as follows:

Beowulf

Type of Binomial	Absolute Figures	%
1. Established binomials	17	13
2. Current binomials	77	61
3. Near-binomials	33	26
Total	127	100

Troilus and Criseyde

Type of Binomial	Absolute Figures	%
1. Established binomials	47	52
2. Current binomials	41	46
3. Near-binomials	2	2
Total	90	100

One basic difference of the Chaucer data to that of *Beowulf* – a distinctly higher proportion of established binomials in *Troilus and Criseyde* (in contrast to, and at the expense of, both current and near binomials) – can perhaps be explained as a function of the fact that the Middle English period is much better documented and varied as to text-type and literary genre than the Old English one.

Binomials and Medieval Poetry

Our analysis revealed that the primary status of binomials, in terms of chronology and function, was poetic. The aesthetic and prosodic relevance of binomials is manifested by their high incidence in poetic texts and their deployment in the structure of the verse. The

Beowulf sample revealed profound association of binomials with the exigencies of the alliterative line and with the figure of variation. The Chaucer sample, based on a section of *Troilus and Criseyde*, revealed, apart from generally sharp predominance of poetic occurrences of the sampled binomials over prosaic ones in the Middle English corpus, a principal link between the second component of binomials and the rhyming position. In addition, binomials collected in the samples were found to be part of a rich underlying layer, formed by clusters of binomials sharing one formal element and originally promoted perhaps by the formulaic mode of early poetry in oral delivery.¹² Furthermore, being semantically compositional, Old and Middle English poetic binomials testify to the non-idiomatic nature of English binomials as an important feature that distinguishes them from their counterparts in Czech (see above).

In the *Beowulf* sample, alliteration as a pervasive formal link between the two components of the binomial (e.g., *ascum ond ecgum* '(with) spears and swords', *craft ond cen?u* 'strength and boldness') was found in 107 out of 127 tokens (i.e., 84%). Alliteration appears to be the dominant means of formal cohesion in Old English binomials at large. Rhyme, rare in Old English verse and alien to its spirit, was found in 3 instances only (in structures composed of

¹² However, it must be admitted that words for some of the crucial concepts of the Middle English period are by no means limited to poetry only. To give a telling example, the case of *penaunce* can be quoted and its instances in the corpus given: *wo and penance(s)* (*Troilus and Criseyde*); *thraldom and penaunce* (*Canterbury Tales*); *gode dedes and penaunce* (*Handlyng Synne*); *mescheff and penaunce, pardon and penaunce, passion and penaunce, pater-nostres and penaunce* (*Piers Plowman*); *prayers and penaunce* (Scottish alliterative poems); *pouert and penaunce* (*History of Troy*); *shame and penaunce, sorow and penaunce, meknes and penaunce* (Bible); *mornynge and penaunce* (Wycliff); *repentaunce and penaunce, satisfaccion and penaunce, disease and penaunce* (penitentials); *pyne and penaunce* (Psalms; *Ayenbite of Inwoyt*); *almes and penaunce, contriciyon and penaunce* (Rolle). In Middle English prose, the function of binomials often seems to have been explanatory – with the second component clarifying the sense of the first, which was presumably deemed unclear due to its polysemy, novelty or obsolescence. This function can be illustrated by such formations as *cure and occupacioun* and *cure and besynesse* or *diligence and bisynesse* and *thought and bisynysse*. A poetic instance of such sense clarification is, for example, an explanation through binomial of the verb *clippe* in the *Monk's Tale* by Chaucer: "*She made to clippe or shere his heer away... But er his heer was clipped or yshaue...*" (*Monk's Tale*, B.3257, 3261). The verb *shere* is used here to disambiguate *clippen* from its homonym, itself explicated elsewhere in Middle English texts by the binomial *clippen and callen*.

monosyllabic adjectives, such as *frod ond god* 'wise/old and good,' which operate within the bounds of a half-line and do not combine with alliteration). Morpheme repetition as another cohesive device did not occur in the sample at all. Another feature characteristic of the structural importance of binomials for the alliterative form is their high incidence in the semantically richer a-line (indicated by as many as 135 tokens out of 147, i.e., 92%).

From a stylistic point of view, binomials functionally dovetail with the rhetorical figure of variation, which has been characterized as "the very soul of Old English poetic style."¹³ 71 out of 147 tokens (i.e., 48%) comprising the *Beowulf* sample were found to participate in various types of variation structure. Through the semantic links between their components – mostly complementarity, hyponymy, opposition and synonymy – binomial structures served as convenient carriers of the two principal functions of variation – the explanatory function and the function of creative repetition.¹⁴ Performing these functions, binomials were able to throw emphasis on a symbolically, emotively or aesthetically significant facet of a thematically important concept which is subsequently elaborated by means of variation. In the verse paragraph, where textual cohesion based on word and clause variation was supported by simultaneity of reference, binomials participate in constituting what may be apprehended as fluid semantic composites in the strict nominal tenor of Old English verse. In such composites, narrative interest flickers by workings of associative imagination and additive syntax. Intimately associated with three of the most outstanding characteristics of Old English poetic language and style – the simultaneity of reference, the multifaceted narrative

¹³ Frederick Klaeber (ed.), *Beowulf and The Fight at Finnsburg*, 3rd ed. (Boston: D.C. Heath and Co, 1950) lxx. Old English poetic variation has been defined as "parallel words or groups of words which share a common referent and which occur within a single clause (or in the instance of sentence variation, within contiguous clauses);" see F.C. Robinson, *Variation: A Study in the Diction of Beowulf* (Unpublished PhD Diss., North Carolina, 1961) 18.

¹⁴ The functions were identified by F.C. Robinson, "Two Aspects of Variation in Old English Poetry," *Old English Poetry: Essays on Style*, ed. D.G. Calder (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1979) 127-45. See also his *Beowulf and the Appositive Style* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1985), esp. chapter 3. – However, the explanatory function of variation must not be confused with the explanatory function of binomial structures (manifest particularly in prose, cf. above).

perspective and fluid, highly paratactic syntax –, binomials in Old English poetry demonstrate how strongly poetic diction and stylistic arrangement are based on a specific type of syntactic and naming pattern.

In the Chaucer sample, it is neither alliteration, variation nor rhyme as a means of formal cohesion between the constituents of the binomial that reveals intimate association of this type of naming and syntactic structure with poetic register. Alliteration was found functioning as a formal link between the components of binomial in 10% of instances only. Of the 98 tokens in the sample of binomials, only 6 (i.e., 6%) were part of a variation structure. Rhyme linking the components was not attested at all. Instead, the association of binomials with poetic register was primarily borne by the pervasive participation of the second binomial component in the rhyming position: in the Chaucer sample, this was the case of 64 binomial structure tokens out of 98 (i.e., 65%).

Conclusions

The fact that of the 700 instances of “* and *’ structures occurring in a single play of Shakespeare’s, more than half could be regarded as having binomial properties of some sort and to some degree leads us to the conclusion that English binomials are first and foremost an aesthetic device which may become frozen by frequent use and only then turns into a collocational unit (a phraseme or idiom). They come into existence as a useful means of conveying a given concept in a particularly forceful way as the occasion arises. The crucial distinctive and distinguishing feature of binomials (in conjunction with the sense relations holding between the components) is their aesthetic quality. It sets them apart and together with the semantic properties singles them out as candidates for subsequent fixation and (at least, a subset of them) for the idiom status. We can reformulate the *Hamlet* data as follows: being essentially an ornamental and innovative feature in language makes the binomial eminently useful in poetic and dramatic expression, which can account for the relatively large amount of binomial structures or at least binomial candidates in Shakespeare’s language.

Significantly, most of the binomials, even those we placed in the established group, are not to be found in dictionaries, unless labelled as idioms. Near- and quasi-binomials are, of necessity, fuzzy groups and they shade off from current binomials and one into another rather imperceptibly. In general, even prototypical binomials appear to hover between the systemic and the textual status; obviously they form an important part of speakers' linguistic competence and consciousness (certainly the ability to form and appreciate them), but are too elusive and occasional to make it into dictionaries (despite appearing in speech *on and off* or *off and on* since Shakespeare). This, of course, is bad news for non-native speakers and translators, who have very little to go on when trying to understand, appreciate or form binomials when using English.

It is not surprising that most of the translation equivalents of the source text binomials that we were able to check would not qualify as binomials in Czech. However, there are indications that it is the current binomials (typically literal and transparent) that are somewhat more likely to be translated by parallel two-constituent structures to achieve the same aesthetic effect.

Binomials in medieval English of both early and late date display features fully comparable to the bearings of binomials in Shakespeare's *Hamlet*. They represent a distinct verbal strategy based on semantic and formal cohesion. Though neither *Beowulf* nor *Troilus and Criseyde* can provide a representative sample of the use of binomials in English medieval poetry (particularly not with regard to the range of Old and Middle English poetic styles),¹⁵ they confirm that the binomial is primarily a poetic device, one that principally satisfies exigencies of the respective verse form. The poetic status of binomials par excellence is manifested primarily through their intimate association with alliteration in Old English poetry and the frequent occurrence of the second binomial component in the rhyme position in the Chaucer sample. Indirectly, the poetic status of binomials is confirmed by the rich canvass of parallel binomial formations in Old and Middle English poetry as

¹⁵ Thus, e.g., the *Beowulf* poet, though his language is universally acknowledged to be representative of Old English poetic register, vocabulary and word-formation, had clearly moved well away from the traditional pole to the idiosyncratic and innovating one.

well as by the sporadic occurrence of binomial structures in prose texts (including the late Old English alliterative prose). Whereas in prose (particularly of the Middle English date) their function often seems to have been explanatory, binomials in Old and Middle English poetry were primarily used for stylistic variation, semantic complementarity and emphasis.