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STRUCTURAL AND SEMANTIC FEATURES
OF ANGLO-SAXON LAND CHARTERS (9ᵀᴴ-11ᵀᴴ C.)

SUMMARY. This article is devoted to the analysis of structural and semantic features of Anglo-Saxon land charters of the 9ᵗʰ-11ᵗʰ centuries. The early official documents of the Anglo-Saxon period evolved through hybridization of religious, legal and administrative discourses. The dominance of Latin contributes to the elements of a religious moralizing discourse in Anglo-Saxon land charters. The standardized elements of legal and administrative character gradually prevailed, thus indicating the development of a specialized sphere of institutional discourse. The system of features, ranging from the prescriptive nature and impersonal tonality of the text to precision and standardization, marks the emergence of the official document within the field of institutional communication closely linked with morality, culture and law as the dominant moral standard of the Anglo-Saxon epoch.

KEY WORDS. Anglo-Saxon land charters, official document, structural and semantic features, code-switching, hybridization of styles and discourses.

The present article is devoted to a linguistic analysis of structural and semantic features of the Anglo-Saxon land charters of the 9ᵗʰ to late 11ᵗʰ centuries from a diachronic perspective. The authors seek to analyze both the content and structure of the Anglo-Saxon land charters with particular focus on land grants and land leases. Additionally, efforts will be made to cast light on a specific phenomenon of discursive hybridization relevant for the texts under consideration. The corpus of material gathered for the analysis includes approximately 6000 lexemes, word collocations and micro contexts derived from land charters collected by B. Thorpe and F. Harmer [1; 2]. The gathered lexical and textual material will be investigated through the prism of a structural-semantic analysis, a contextual analysis and a discourse analysis.

Anglo-Saxon charters as a text type have been discussed at length in many publications. Recent studies have for the most part analyzed specific varieties of land charters (A. Campbell, M. Sheehan, L. Tollerton, D. Whitelock), their lexical features (E.B. Gusynina, O.G. Chupryna, S.V. Shabardina, A. Breeze, G. Dempsey, E. Ekwall, G. Grundy, A. Rumble, K. Sandred, A. Smith) and syntactical peculiarities (C. Carlton). Anglo-Saxon land charters have also been studied from the point of view of dialectology (P.R. Kitson, K.A. Lowe) and the theory of translation (K.A. Lowe).

Although initial attempts have been made to observe the structure and semantics of Anglo-Saxon land charters within a context of evolving institutional discourse (L.J. Brinton, M. Fludernik, T. Givón, A. Jacobs, A.H. Jucker), to the best of our knowledge, the problem has not been well-explored to date. The status of the Anglo-Saxon land charter as an official document remains controversial [3]. The research undertaken is concerned with the evolution and hybridization of styles and discourses in the emerging field of institutional communication, which can be treated as an indispensable part of the religious, legal and administrative environment of the Anglo-Saxon epoch. We argue that the semantic and structural analysis of the Anglo-Saxon land charters with a focus on hybrid discursive practices is of a particular interest for both diachronic linguistics and diachronic discourse analysis. **It is also obvious that the Anglo-Saxon land charters of the Old English period serve as a very valuable source of cultural and historical information for a scholar to reach a deeper understanding of the socio-economic aspects of life in Anglo-Saxon England.** The texts under discussion reflect a peculiar mode of interaction between members of Anglo-Saxon society and can assist linguists in reconstructing specific fragments of the Anglo-Saxon worldview.

The term *charter* is used by historians to refer to "a legal document or 'deed' [...]" by which grants, cessions, contracts, and other transactions are confirmed and ratified" [4; 5]. The Anglo-Saxon charter (< L. cartula *charter*, lit. *small paper or writing*) is termed "a legal document or 'deed' written (usually) upon a single sheet of paper, parchment, or other material" [5]. Some 2000 land charters have survived from the Anglo-Saxon period, with their dates of origin ranging from the last quarter of the 7th century up to the Norman Conquest. The Anglo-Saxon land charters available for analysis were produced for the most part in the mid-10th century [6]. The early land charters and the charters of the 9th-11th centuries were composed in Latin; even later, charters written in Latin were far more numerous [2]. Latin was utilized as the official written language, and Latin sources, particularly charters from the Papal chancery, served as a specimen for compiling documents [7].

Anglo-Saxon land charters have much in common with Latin-based legal documents and usually contain three essential sections. The norm for Anglo-Saxon land charters is to begin with an invocation which is subsequently complemented by a combination of the title of the text and an inscription fragment coupled with a salutation formula; this is followed by the preamble, the notification, the exposition, the disposition, along with a sanction clause and respective clauses of corroboration; finally, the concluding section of Anglo-Saxon land charters includes a dating clause and an appreciation [8].

The main aim of Anglo-Saxon land charters is to authorize a range of land-related legal and administrative activities, such as the establishment of a land ownership / occupancy right, to be effected in conformity with the terms and conditions of the charter. The parties to land charters are kings, ealdormen, bishops, churches, monasteries and private individuals. As a rule, the transaction is initiated by a king

(Ic Eadwerd cyning *I King Edward;* Ego Berchtwulf cyning / Ic Berhtwulf rex *I King Berhtwulf;* an ealdorman (Ic Osuulf aldormonn *I ealdorman Oswulf;* Ic Ælfred dux *I ealdorman Alfred*) or a bishop (Ic Denewulf bisceop *I bishop Denewulf*), while the primary beneficiaries are clergymen and laypeople (Beornulfa, Wulfrede, Ælfrede). The names and titles of the parties are given in the introductory section of Anglo-Saxon land charters (entitling / inscription). The following nominations can be found in the inscriptions: Cristes cirican *Christ church*; Forðrede minum ðegne *my thegn Forthred;* Cyneðryðe Eðelmodes lafe aldormonnes *Cynethryth, ealdorman Aethelmod's widow*; Denulfe biscepe *bishop Denewulf;* Eadwarde kyninge minum hlafurdæ *my lord King Edward*, etc.

The interaction of interlocutors occurs in the main section of Anglo-Saxon land charters. As far as land grants are concerned, the right to a land plot is legally conferred upon a beneficiary in the disposition by employing a performative marker 'sellan' *to give, to put into the possession, to transfer ownership*: Ic Osuulf aldormonn mid Godes gæfe ond Beornðryð min gemecca sellað to ... Cristes cirican ... ðæt lond at ... xx swuluncga *I Oswulf, ealdorman by God's grace, and Beornthryth my wife, give to Christ Church ... the land at ... , twenty sulungs* [2]; Ego Berchtwulf cyning sile ... nigen higida lond in ... in ece erfe *I, King Berhtwulf, give ... an estate of nine hides in ... for him to have in perpetual inheritance* [2]; Ceolred abbas 7 ða higan ... sellað Wulfrede ðet land ... in ðas gerednisse *Ceolred abbot and the community ... give to Wulfred the land ... on this condition* [1]. The size and the actual boundaries of a land plot are also specified in the main section of Anglo-Saxon land grants (Ðis synt ða gemæro *These are the boundaries*), together with legal terms and conditions relevant for the transfer of the ownership right in each concrete situation (in ece erfe *in perpetual inheritance* [2]; in ðas gerednisse ðet he hit hæbbe 7 bruce sua lange sua he life 7 anum ærfeuuarde æfter him *on this condition that he have and enjoy it as long as he lives and one heir after him* [1]).

In the case of land leases, a lease transaction is marked by a group of basic verbs lettan, ænlænan, onlænan, lætan *to let out on lease*: Denewulf bisceop 7 þa hiwan... leton to Beornulfa hiora landes xv hida ... wið þam gafole ðe he wið bisceop 7 wið hiwan ... ared ... *Bishop Denewulf and the community ... have let to Beornwulf fifteen hides of their land at ... at the rent which he has settled with the bishop and the community ...* [2]; Eadward cyning 7 þa hiwan ... lætað to Dænewulfe bisceope twentig hida landes ... þreora manna deg ... *King Eadward and the convent ... let to bishop Denewulf twenty hides of land ... for three men's day ...* [1]. The size and the actual boundaries of a land plot, together with other terms and conditions that are relevant for a standard land lease contract, such as a lease period and a fee payment schedule, are specified in Anglo-Saxon land leases: on ðæt gerad þet he gesylle ælce gere to hærfestes emnihte ðreo pund to gafole ... *on the condition that he give every year, at the autumnal equinox, three pounds as rent* [1].

The main section of Anglo-Saxon land charters also includes a corroboration clause to validate the document which is followed by a deal confirmation made by

appropriate witnesses: Ic ðonne Uulfred mid Godes gaefe archiepiscopus ðas forecuaedenan uuord fulliae ... *Now I Wulfred, by God's grace archbishop, confirm these aforesaid words* [2]; 7 ðæt wæs an byrg gereht beforan ðæm weotum ðe hevro noman here benevðan awritene sindon *And this declaration was made in the city, before the councilors whose names are written below* [2]. The concluding section of Anglo-Saxon land charters gives witness details coupled with a dating clause and an appreciation (Valete in Domino *Farewell in the Lord*).

Anglo-Saxon land charters are characterized by an obvious bilingual nature and usually resort to Latin and Old English linguistic resources within the same context by means of code-switching techniques [9]. Although Old English is used as the primary language in the Anglo-Saxon land charters, nearly all vernacular charters are marked by the presence of specific Latin words, phrases or sentences. However, in some Anglo-Saxon land charter texts, Latin is employed to a far greater extent and can be typically though not exclusively found in textual fragments of a predominantly formulaic nature, such as invocations, dating clauses and witness lists [7]. The invocation formula which is intended to solicit divine help and consideration from God is verbally expressed in Latin and starts with a ritualistic phrase: In nomine Domini *In the name of the Lord*; In nomine Patris et Filii et Spiritus Sancti *In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit*. The Anglo-Saxons took steps to translate the foregoing and similar invocation formulae from Latin into Old English during the late Old English period (In usses Dryhtnes naman Hælendes Cristes). It must be said that code-switching techniques are represented in Anglo-Saxon land charters by various intra-sentence and inter-sentence switches. The inter-sentence switches are quite common in invocations (In nomine Domini), while intra-sentence switches can be realized by a parallel application of Latin and Old English terms to refer to lay and religious titles (dux *leader*, rex *king*, episcopus *bishop*, diaconus *deacon*, minister *priest*).

The land charters under discussion have a hybrid nature. It is obvious that such features as the lack of emotional coloring or impersonal character, which are peculiar to modern official documents, cannot be found in Anglo-Saxon land charters. However, the system of standardized features in Anglo-Saxon land charters, such as prescriptive nature, precision, standardization, impersonal character [10], marks the emergence of the official document within the field of institutional communication closely linked with morality, culture and law as the dominant moral standards of the epoch. These standardized elements of legal and administrative character gradually prevailed and led to the development of a specialized sphere of institutional discourse. The markers of precision in Anglo-Saxon land charters include contract terms (geþingð *an agreement*; sellan *to put into the possession, to transfer ownership*; boc *a legal document, a title deed*), indicative forms and clichés. For instance, the texts under analysis contain basic terms for land grant and land lease deals, parties to land grant and land lease deals, and payment procedures (æht *possessions, property*, erfe = ierfe *inheritance, inherited property*, ge-mǽre *boundary, border*, londceap *price of the*

land, gafol *tax, rent*, feoh *moveable goods, money*, gerihte *due*, bot *compensation for an injury*, sceatt *payment, tax, rent*, ænlænan *to let out on lease*). Anglo-Saxon land charters are also characterized by extensive use of conjunctions, which results in the gradual development of discursive cohesion (forecweden word *aforesaid words*, on ða gerad ðæt *on condition that*, foresprecen *above-mentioned*, þǽrtó *thereto*, forþon *consequently, therefore*).

It must be noted that Anglo-Saxon land charters also contain elements of religious discourse which can be found in invocation, sanction and appreciation fragments of charter texts: In usses Dryhtnes naman Hælendes Cristes *In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ* (invocation); ... Crist sylf ... þane awyrgde on ecnesse þe þas gife æfre awende oþþe gewanude *Christ himself ... would curse for ever anyone who should ever divert or diminish this gift* [2]; ... gif aenig monn ðas ure ge witnisse incerre on owihte ðaet he aebbe ðaes aelmaehtgan godes [unhlisan] ... *if any man change that in any way, he shall incur the infamy of Almighty God* [2] (sanction); Valete in Domino *Farewell in the Lord* (appreciation). Legal and administrative documents are treated by Anglo-Saxons as a part of a broad social and cultural context, in which God, morality, culture and law occupy a central position. The legal and administrative discursive practices evolved in land charters must be accordingly understood as intrinsic components of the religious and social context of the Anglo-Saxon epoch. The moralizing intention of Anglo-Saxon land charters, which is quite in line with the religious and moral beliefs of Anglo-Saxon England, is to a large extent realized through the use of different lexical items related to religion and morality (éaðmód *humble, obedient*, ælmeslic *charitable*, wís *wise*, heofonlic *heavenly*, tréowlic *true, faithful*, manful *wicked, evil*).

Therefore, Anglo-Saxon land charters belong to the emerging field of institutional communication which can be treated as an indispensable part of the religious, legal and administrative environment of the Anglo-Saxon epoch. Anglo-Saxon land charters can be interpreted as hybrid texts which combine elements of legal, administrative and religious discourse within the same document. Anglo-Saxon land charters are characterized by an obvious bilingual nature and usually use Latin and Old English linguistic resources within the same context by means of code-switching techniques.

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