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## Tracing the origins of ESP in Old English Ælfric's Colloquy and Cosmology

María Ángeles Ruiz Moneva · Universidad de Zaragoza (Spain)

### ABSTRACT

The present paper will analyse two different pieces by Ælfric, perhaps one of the leading prose-writers of the Old English period. These are, namely, his *Cosmology* –which may have been completed towards the year 993 (Burnley, 1992)–, and his *Colloquy on the Occupations* –composed a few years afterwards. These stand for two of the few writings that may be regarded as scientific prose in Old English, at a time when most of the prose works –not only scientific– were rendered in Latin, and when the greatest prose genres in Old English corresponded to history, philosophy or oratory. These two pieces are admittedly heterogeneous: on the one hand, the *Cosmology* may be said to combine aspects of both a religious and a scientific register; on the other hand, Ælfric's *Colloquy* must have been intended as a companion to his Latin *Grammar* (Mitchell and Robinson, 1964/2007). Yet, as these authors also note, the work also offers us an overall panorama of the social structure of that time. Concretely, this means that certain characters speak about the main aspects of their trades. It is this feature that makes us approach this text as a kind of forerunner of a text in the sphere of “English for Specific Purposes”. In any case, it may be expected that many of the characteristic traits of Present Day English ESP texts will not apply, among other things, because of the differences in morphology and sentence

structure between the two diachronic varieties. The two texts will be studied, with a view to offering a contrastive analysis of their characteristic features with those recurrent traits of Present-day English professional texts.

*Keywords: English for Specific Purposes, Old English genres of secular instruction and of scientific knowledge, Old English origins of texts for specific purposes.*

## 1. Introduction

Present-day English for Specific Purposes (henceforth, ESP) has been characterised as a specific branch of applied linguistics, whose main concerns deal with needs analysis, text analysis and the training of users so as to enable them to communicate effectively in the tasks prescribed by their study or work situation (Dudley-Evans & St. John, 1998). These authors explicitly point out that the study of English for Specific Purposes might have been traced back to classical Greece and Rome. Similarly, Gunnarsson (2008) draws a distinction between, on the one hand, the use of language for special purposes, which certainly has an ancient history, and on the other hand, LSP as a field of academic inquiry, which has a much shorter background. This shows, then, that it is worth searching for texts coping with specific needs in periods such as Old English. Four main branches have been distinguished within ESP: EAP, EOP, EST and EBP –abbreviations which correspond to English for Academic Purposes, English for Occupational Purposes, English for Science and Technology and English for Business Purposes.

For Dudley-Evans and St. John (1998), from the nineteen-sixties onwards, English for Academic Purposes (EAP) has been historically approached from four different perspectives: Register Analysis, Rhetorical and Discourse Analysis, Analysis of Study Skills and also Analysis of Learning Needs. From the perspective of register analysis, it has been emphasised that, while the grammar of scientific and technical texts does not differ from that of ‘General English’, yet certain lexical and grammatical forms are used much more frequently.

Trimble's *English for Science and Technology: A Discourse Approach* (1985) springs as a paradigmatic work of the application of rhetorical and discourse analysis to specialised texts, by pointing at four different rhetorical levels that the writer of these texts needs to take into account: level A, corresponding to the objectives of the total discourse; level B, which has to do with the general rhetorical functions that develop the level A objectives, such as stating purpose, reporting past research, stating the problem, or presenting information on experimental procedures; level C, which embraces the specific rhetorical functions that develop the general rhetorical functions of level B, and which are, namely, description, definition, classification, instructions and visual-verbal relationships. Finally, level D refers to the rhetorical techniques that provide relationships within and between the rhetorical units of level C. These can either be *orders*—such as time order, space order, and causality and result, or *patterns*—being the most important ones: causality and result, order of importance, comparison and contrast, analogy, exemplification and illustration.

Trimble has also sought to define the EST conceptual paragraph, as a unit of written English discourse that presents all the information selected by the writer to develop a generalisation or core statement. As Trimble (1985) says, “As long as information—whether it consists of lower-level generalizations or of details at various levels of specificity—is supporting the main generalization, it all belongs to the same conceptual paragraph” (p. 16). The conceptual paragraph may not necessarily coincide with its graphic counterpart.

The analysis of both study skills and of learning needs stands for a shift in the emphasis from teaching to learning, and tends to place the learner as the main focus of the learning process. The analysis of study skills grew out of the notional-functional syllabus and of the rationale of communicative language teaching. It was felt necessary to examine the thought processes undertaken by the language learner. It was assumed that the skills acquired by the learner through the exercises would be transferred to the fulfilment of more specific tasks. Likewise, the syllabuses of ESP or EST courses are designed to meet the learner's needs, previously diagnosed and analysed.

Authors such as Hutchinson and Waters (1987) have dealt with ESP as an *approach*, and therefore, as a *process* rather than a product. Stevens (1988) has also set out to characterise ESP, and has referred to four absolute features, namely:

first, it is designed to meet the needs of the learner –we may say, more generally, of the specialised text user–; second, it is related in content to particular disciplines, occupations and activities; third, it is centred on language appropriate to those activities in areas such as syntax, lexis, semantics or the analysis of discourse; and fourth, it contrasts with ‘General English’. Furthermore, two variable characteristics of ESP are distinguished by this author, which are directly connected with the teaching-learning process, namely: ESP may only focus upon certain skills and may not be taught according to any pre-established methodology. In this sense, Dudley-Evans and St. John further remark that the methodology of ESP teaching differs from those used in the teaching of General English.

Within the study of Languages for Specific Purposes (LSP), and more concretely, English for Specific Purposes (ESP), the notion of *genre* has acquired foremost importance. The concept of *genre* has a long history in literary criticism that goes back to Aristotle's *Poetics* and also *The art of rhetoric*. Yet, it has also been questioned by some twentieth-century critical tendencies, such as poststructuralism and deconstruction, of authors such as Derrida or Todorov, who have rejected what they considered to be its prescriptive interpretation.

In any case, in the latter part of the twentieth century, the concept somehow revived, and was extended to areas such as English for Specific Purposes –most notably, by Swales (2009, 2004, 1990) or Bhatia (2008, 2004, 2001, 1993). As Moessner (2001) points out, the notion of *genre* has called for approaches that go beyond the formal characteristics of texts and which tend to focus rather upon readers' *expectations*, as aroused by the *encyclopaedic entries* attached to particular genres –otherwise as varied and heterogeneous as tragedies, comedies, abstracts, essays, etc. In this sense, Swales (1990) claims that “the principal criterial feature that turns a collection of communicative events into a genre is some shared set of communicative purposes” (p. 46). In turn, Chandler (1997) underlines the aspect of readers' expectations concerning a definite genre: “From the point of view of the producers of texts within a genre, an advantage of genres is that they can rely on readers already having knowledge and expectations about works within a genre” (p. 6). This also means that there may be texts that are more prototypical instantiations of a certain genre, whereas the ascription of others may be less fully determinate, or fuzzier. These approaches have proven valid for computerised corpora of diachronic texts –as shown by

the Helsinki Corpus, the Corpus of Early English Correspondence (1417-1681), or the Corpus of Early English Medical Writing (1375-1750), to mention just a few representative instances.

Kohnen (2001) has dwelt upon the most important definitions of text types within historical text linguistics. Generally speaking, two main approaches have been adopted, depending on whether the focus has been laid upon external or upon formal parameters, respectively. His definition of text types aims to reconcile both formal and functional approaches: “Text types may be thought of as dynamic patterns of communication combining aspects of *function, context and form*” (p. 198, my italics). This leads Kohnen to draw two main conclusions: first, text types are not stable extralinguistic patterns of language use, but rather factors in the process of language change; and second, text type evolution may be best approached as a set of changes affecting the formal, functional and situational aspects of a text type. He also shows how the repertoire of text types and genres is liable to change over history, an idea that was also pointed at by Downing (1996). More concretely, the changes undergone by these text types and genres will affect *form, function* and *context*.

Following Biber (1988), Taavitsainen (2004, 2001) has drawn a distinction between *text types* and *genres*, so that whereas *genres* are defined as “groupings of texts according to language-external evidence”, and also as “dynamic cultural schemata used to organize knowledge and experience through language” (Taavitsainen, 2004, p. 75-76), classifications into *text types* are made on the basis of linguistic criteria. Meurman-Solin (2001) has also drawn this distinction on similar parameters. Readers tend to attach certain major features to texts that may be ascribed to a certain genre, so that genres tend to create what Taavitsainen and other authors have referred to as *horizons of expectations* that readers and audiences can recognise and share –in this sense, she mentions certain critics that can be ascribed to reader-response criticism, such as Jauss (1979) or Burrow (1982), for whom the meaning of a text is ultimately completed by the reader. Thus, for authors such as Meurman-Solin (2001) from the point of view of a socio-historical approach to genres, and also for classical authors within genre theory –like Swales (1990), or Bhatia (1993)–, there is a close relationship between the features that characterise a particular genre and the discourse or speech community of users, in connection with the purposes that it seeks to fulfil.

For Taavitsainen, the evidence necessary to characterise a certain genre embraces three basic aspects, namely, *function*, *audience* and *occasion*. In turn, the analysis of a text type has to take into consideration features such as its overall structure and its purpose. Furthermore, Meurman-Solin (2001) makes a sort of inventory of the aspects that have to be taken into account to accurately describe a particular genre: topic, audience, level of formality, purpose and communicative strategies to fulfil such objective, text category, mode through which it is diffused –most importantly, oral vs. written–, manuscript vs. printed texts, degree of interactiveness or participant relationships –especially the author-addressee relationship–, the norms, social practices and also expectations of the discourse community in the use of a certain genre, and finally the degree of codification or conventionalisation inherent to each genre.

*Discourse communities* have been defined by Swales (1990) as “socio-*rethorical* networks that form in order to work towards sets of common goals” (p. 9). The following features are shared by the members of a discourse community, according to Swales (1990): a broadly agreed set of common public goals; mechanisms of intercommunication among its members, which are primarily used to provide information and feedback; the utilisation of one or more genres in the communicative utterance of its aims; the acquisition of some specific lexis (for instance, specialised terminology, acronyms); and the capacity to have a threshold level of members with a suitable degree of relevant content and discursal expertise.

The existence of recurrent traits that may be shared by the texts ascribed to a certain genre cannot exclude a certain inner heterogeneity when these individual texts are analysed. With regard to the last mentioned aspects, and also to a topic that will be of particular interest in the analysis of Ælfric's *Colloquy*, Meurman-Solin (2001) draws attention to those text types that are particularly prone to interaction: “It seems that it is in the more interactive and the more involved texts that the various communicative functions of genres and the social factors related to writers and addressees play a particularly important role” (p. 245).

Because of these and similar features fulfilled by genres, they play an important role in the reception of texts within a definite cultural context. This also entails that the same text will be likely to be perceived in different ways depending on the readers that receive such text, and also upon the historical and

cultural context in which such reception is inscribed. What both genres and text types share is that the two represent abstractions constructed on the basis on individual texts, no matter if these generalisations are reached upon the basis of different grounds: thus, whereas such abstractions are formed on the grounds of external evidence in the wider context of culture in the case of *genres*, in turn, as far as *text types* are concerned, these abstractions rely upon the internal linguistic features of those aspects. Taavitsainen (2004) also underlines that there is not necessarily a one-to-one, biunivocal correspondence between text types and genres.

Further consequences of the cultural entrenchment of genres are, first, that they are historical phenomena, and also the fact that they are dynamic, in the sense that throughout history, the repertoire of genres will change: hence, some genres that may have been important in a certain period of time may subsequently disappear altogether, whilst new genres may emerge. Likewise, the purposes fulfilled by a certain genre in a certain historical moment may be taken over and assumed by a different one later on. We shall see next how for authors such as Gotti (2001), this is precisely the sort of relationship to be found between *colloquies*, on the one hand, and *scientific essays*, on the other hand. In this sense, Meurman-Solin (2001) draws attention to the fact that it is those factors on which users have reached consensus that are most likely to become established and eventually come to characterise a particular genre:

In tracing the evolution of genres, it is therefore necessary to distinguish between features that have been chosen by a consensus about the established elements among professional or well-trained writers, and those that are used by writers who are faced with a similar communicative task but do not know what communicative strategies, or which register, are appropriate for such a task. (p. 254).

There may be intersections between genres and text types, which for Taavitsainen can be particularly spotted through variations in those features marking *involvement* and *subjectivity*. In order to interpret and also assess the communicative functions of the linguistic features of texts, Taavitsainen (2004) proposes to take into consideration the following aspects: the communicative situation, the roles of participants, as well as the overall strategy in the creation of meaning and also in its negotiation in the course of the unfolding discourse.

She also proposes to assess the relationship between text forms and their corresponding generic realisations on the basis of different levels, ranging from *micro-level* linguistic features up to *macro-level* developments of text forms.

Van Dijk (1995, 1977, 1976, 1972, among other important works) defines *macrostructure* as “a semantic structure that would describe, at a more global level, this overall unity and coherence [i.e., of texts]” (Van Dijk, 1995, p. 385). In turn, such macrostructures are related to their local *microstructures*, defined as the propositions expressed by the sentences of a text. The macrostructures of a text are closely connected with the processes undertaken by text users to cope with the meaning of the text.

For Taavitsainen (2004), so as to adequately approach the issue of textual organisation in the history of science, the relationship between monologic versus dialogic texts has to be addressed. She points at the existence of a *continuum* in the macroforms ranging from texts whose leading roles are played by fictional characters who interact directly in the form of direct speech –as would indeed be the case with Ælfric's *Colloquy on the Occupations*–, on the one hand, and on the other hand, to those other texts which show no evidence of the receiver. These aspects will necessarily have to be described with reference to the different levels of linguistic analysis –namely, lexical, semantic, morphologic or syntactic. Likewise, the background knowledge of text types and genres must adequately be taken into account.

In this sense, it may not be forgotten that the construction of *interpersonality* in academic and scientific discourse is still a hotly-debated and highly-topical subject nowadays. This has been recently shown, for instance, in works such as Lorés-Sanz, Mur-Dueñas and Lafuente-Millán, eds. (2010), or Hyland (2010). Concretely, Hyland (2010) underlines how the approach to academic discourse as a rhetorical activity that involves interactions between writers and readers has become central to most perspectives on EAP. He proposes the term *proximity* “to refer to a writer's control of those rhetorical features which display both authority as an expert and a personal position towards issues in an unfolding text” (p. 117). He further distinguishes two different types of proximity, which in practice are difficult to separate from one another: on the one hand, the *proximity of membership*; on the other hand, the *proximity of commitment*, so that “one points to how we position ourselves in relation to our communities, and

the other to how we position ourselves in relation to our text” (p. 117). Interpersonality is then approached by Hyland as “the rhetorical construction of proximity” (p. 117). For Hyland, some of the aspects of texts that writers use with a view to negotiating proximity with readers have to do with organisation, argument structures, credibility, stance, and engagement. Hyland also claims that proximity will be made manifest in different ways, whether in popular science or in professional research writing. In the paper, we shall investigate on how proximity is manifested in the two works under analysis.

In so far as the origin of genres has been connected with *speech acts* (Taavitsainen, 2001; Todorov, 1990), as Taavitsainen (2001) notes, “genres provide the context that helps in interpreting and analysing the realisation of speech acts in a diachronic perspective”, and what is more, “speech acts may gain special functions in various genres” (p. 148), this relationship will be approached in the two texts under study.

Within an overall diachronic approach, Taavitsainen (2004) has inventoried four main larger genres of secular instruction in Old English: first, maxims and riddles; second, handbooks of astronomy, medicine and veterinary, including prognostics; third, instructive miscellanies; and fourth, language teaching. Taavitsainen draws on Ælfric’s *Colloquy on the Occupations* as a paradigmatic instance of texts devoted to instruction that unfolds in an interactive fashion. As a result, the meaning of the text is constructed and negotiated through the interaction between the different participants in the work. Instruction is, in fact, one of the main text types, together with expository, narrative, descriptive and argumentative ones –following Werlich (1982).

She also notes how there is a gap, after late Old English, before a rebirth of secular instruction took place towards the last quarter of the fourteenth century. Besides, it is in the thirteen hundreds when the scientific register must have been introduced in the vernacular. Among the genres of secular instruction referred to by Taavitsainen corresponding to Middle English and Early Modern English, the following are mentioned: encyclopaedias, handbooks of several disciplines –such as medicine, music, navigation, agriculture or astronomy–, wisdom literature, pastimes of rural life and language teaching. Taavitsainen also draws attention to the fact that no definite conclusions on the development of scientific prose may be obtained so far, as new texts are still being discovered,

and there have been editions corresponding only to a certain number of extant manuscripts.

Pahta (2001) has addressed the issue of the earliest phases in the elaboration of scientific writings in English, which would include the first treatises towards the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, in contrast to the previous tendency, when scholarly texts had been produced in Latin. In those moments, English was re-establishing its position of normal usage in all spheres of life, three centuries after the Norman Conquest and the subsequent pre-eminence of French among upper social strata. This was going to be so, even though Latin and also Greek retained their character as *linguae francae* still for some time. In any case, it was necessary then to introduce and develop vernacular terminologies and conventions. As a consequence, the situation must have been one of *diglossia* or *multiglossia*, so that English pursued to progressively gain ground in domains where Latin or Greek had been primarily used.

It must also be emphasised that the texts under study in this paper were previous to the tendencies described by Pahta (2001). In a sense, in our view, their importance lies perhaps in that they were to become a kind of forerunners to the forthcoming scientific and specialised texts of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. Some of the features and recurrent traits of the texts analysed by Pahta include the use of impersonal and prescriptive phrases and also hedges, the use of doublets which may have been formed by a Latin and a native term, and a continuum from borrowings to manifestations of code-switching.

In what follows, a brief account of the main characteristics of Present-day English for Specific Purposes will be provided. It is undoubtedly certain that Old English specific texts will present certain characteristic features. However, we believe that such a perspective may shed light upon the ways in which this linguistic genre has evolved, and also may help us to characterise Old English professional texts from a contrastive standpoint.

## **2. Main linguistics features of present-day ESP**

With a view to summarising the above discussion, it may be said that ESP refers to English language teaching and learning with a concrete utilitarian view that seeks to fulfil the needs of the learner, and whose contents are related to

particular branches of knowledge. Apart from the specific aspects referred to above, English as used for Specific Purposes shows certain linguistic features, which affect the areas of lexis and semantics, as well as morphology and syntax. These will be synthesised next.

To begin with, from the point of view of lexis and semantics, the language used is generally related to specific fields of knowledge. It aims at precision, denotative meanings, so that ambiguity is kept to a minimum, and the message is clearly conveyed.

The lexis used in specific texts may be classified into three different kinds of words: technical vocabulary, semi-technical vocabulary, and words of general usage. Technical words are those used only in each particular science, with a precise, referential meaning. Semi-technical vocabulary refers to those words that may be used in General English, but which acquire specialised and more restricted meanings in certain branches of knowledge. What is more, these semi-technical lexical items may vary in meaning across different disciplines. Moreover, scientific and technical texts need to employ words of everyday usage which maintain their own meanings.

Nowadays, scientific and technical texts make use of terms borrowed from other languages, particularly, classical languages such as Latin or Greek. It is here that we may expect a substantial difference with Old English, a language which was not so prone on loanwords as it has become in more recent times. Still, word formation is an important feature of scientific language, and in this sense, the procedures for it in Old and in Present-day English may be explored. Other aspects of today's scientific and technical vocabulary have to do with the use of abbreviations, derivational processes or compounds.

From the point of view of morphological and syntactic features, the following features may be noted: probably ESP or EST texts do not use forms of language different from those of General English. Yet, some constructions may be used more frequently. Sentences tend to be long, with different forms of subordination and embedding. Swales (1988) and also Dudley-Evans and St. John (1988) have suggested that the tenses and verbal forms most often used are the simple present, the present perfect and the past. More concretely, in the case of the research article, a peculiar occurrence of tenses in its different sections has been observed: thus, the tenses predominantly used in the introduction are

the present simple (both active and passive) and the present perfect. In the method section, the most widely used tense would be the past passive. Finally, in the discussion and conclusion sections, the past would be favoured for the presentation of the results, while the present would be used for comments.

For Dudley-Evans and St. John, it is inaccurate to say that scientific texts make a more extensive use of the passive voice. They note that the use of either the active or the passive voice may be constrained by functional considerations, so that whereas writers may prefer to use *we*-active forms when describing their own procedures or their own research, the passive seems to apply when standard procedures are being described, or when previous investigations are being referred to.

*Modal verbs* are one of the means at the disposal of the scientific writer in order to *hedge* and therefore to distance himself and approach a definite state of affairs with caution. Other forms would be the employ of verbs such as *seem, suggest, appear, tend to*. Because of the tendency of scientific prose to concentrate upon processes and results over the agent that provoked them, and also the importance of referring to abstract concepts and ideas, *nominalisations* and *grammatical metaphors* stand for an important aspect of this variety of language. Scientific and technical texts may also use *logical connectors* more frequently than general texts, on account of the importance of showing the connections to be made between different ideas and pieces of information.

However, not all these features may be expected to be present in the medieval texts under analysis, corresponding to the Old English period. It may be hypothesised that this may be partly due to those morphologic, syntactic and textual-discourse differences between the two diachronic varieties being considered. In what follows, the two texts by Ælfric that may be regarded as forerunners of 'English for Specific Purposes' will be examined. The main assumption will be that, because of the fact that we are dealing with a different linguistic period, with its own features, in all levels of linguistic analysis, and as has been just noted, those texts of Old English that may be regarded as scientific will display features of their own.

### 3. Analysis of the works: the Corpus

#### 3.1. Ælfric's Cosmology

The *Cosmology* stands for Ælfric's account of creation, as a part of *De Temporibus Anni*, a work which he must have completed towards the year 993, and which has survived in eight different manuscripts (Burnley, 1992). The main sources followed by Ælfric for the composition must have been the scriptural rendering provided in the book of Genesis, as well as two Latin works by Venerable Bede, *De temporum ratione* and *De natura rerum*. Burnley's edition provides the Anglo-Saxon text as well as a translation into Present-day English.

The importance of cosmology at Ælfric's time lies in the fact that it provided an introductory comprehension of astronomy. These sciences were important in medieval monasteries, as they stood for the basis of the computation of the calendar, and in turn they made possible the accurate identification and celebration of the religious feast days. As is also characteristic of Ælfric's writings, the author also supplies an allegorical and moral interpretation of the facts that he makes reference to.

This work has been described to reflect most of the stylistic traits of the author's earlier prose, such as the use of simple, native Anglo-Saxon and non-Latinate vocabulary, or the repetition of phrases and sequences otherwise syntactically and semantically balanced and contrasted (Burnley, 1992). Such balance may rely upon semantic opposition alone, or else combined either with a correlative syntactic structure or the alliteration of a common word pair. As in the case of the following work to be analysed, Ælfric's preference for a simple, unobtrusive style, which he found particularly suitable for instruction, is illustrated.

The overall objective of the text is to display the main events of the Creation, and how it is subservient to showing the greatness of God as Creator. The text is therefore a *narrative account* of the Creation, as made day by day by God, according to the Holy Scripture. Consequently, a first feature of the text is the merging of scientific and of religious prose. Because of the temporal sequencing,

*time order* stands as an important rhetorical technique that contributes to the creation of coherence, as in:

On ðam ðriddan dæge ...

On ðam feorðan dæge ...

On ðam ylcan dæge ...

Besides, these *parallelisms* must have enabled potential readers to grasp a faster comprehension and perhaps memorisation of the message, in so far as they provide the text with a clear syntactic structure. The text also sets out to define the main objects introduced, like the sun or the moon. The main point about these *definitions* is that they have become popular, so that they would not be regarded as purely scientific any longer. Even so, they express the class that the object defined belongs to, and also the differences with objects of that same class. This is the case of the definitions of the sun and the moon:

On ðam feorðan dæge gesceop God twa miccle leoht Ðæt is sunne and mona and betæhte Ðæt mare leoht Ðæt is seo sunne to ðam dæge and Ðæt læsse leoht Ðæt is se mona to Ðære nihte.

*On the fourth day God created two great lights, that is the sun and the moon, and assigned the greater light, that is the sun, to the day and the lesser light, that is the moon, to the night.*

Some of the definitions rely openly upon the allegorical and symbolic significance of the object being referred to. This springs as a result of the blending of the features of scientific and religious texts that is so very characteristic of medieval culture. Thus, the sun and the moon are redefined in the text, but in a more transcendental sense in the following terms:

Seo sunne getacnað urne hælend Crist se ðe is rihtwisnysse sunne swa swa se witega cwæð (...) Se mona ðe weaxð and wanað getacnað Ðas andwerdan gelaðunge ðe we sind.

*The sun symbolises our saviour Christ, he who is the sun of righteousness, as the prophet says:  
(...) The moon which waxes and wanes signifies this present congregation which we are in.*

Certain features of the prose of Ælfric are somehow significant, in the sense that they rather follow typically Anglo-Saxon features, and are not influenced by foreign practices. We are referring to the tendency to use *compound words*, based on native elements, instead of recurring to loanwords. Hence, certain forms that are not used any longer in English, such as *godspellere* (evangelist), may be found. Others have survived until our times, such as *almibtiga*. In contrast to Present-day English, then, the text makes scarce use of loanwords.

With regard to the vocabulary, it is hard to find words that may be regarded as strictly technical or semi-technical, because all the creatures and objects referred to seem to have to do with common things. Yet, it appears as if the writer had somehow established certain hierarchies between those creatures that might have been familiar to his potential readership, on the one hand, and on the other hand, those that he prefers to introduce in broader terms, for instance, by using hyperonymous terms, such as the following:

On ðam fiftan dæge he gesceop eal wyrmcynn and ða micclan hwalas and eal fiscynn on mislicum and menigfealdum hiwum.

*On the fifth day he created the race of creeping things and the great whales and the race of fish in many and various forms.*

It may be contended that in Medieval times, even learned readers must have expected in texts which were intended to be ‘scientific’ –as would be the case of this one– a combination of strictly religious material together with more objective facts. As Burnley (1992) claims, cosmology was important because it enabled the identification of religious feasts. Moreover, the text starts with a summary of God’s creation of the universe, which following the Bible occurred in seven days. Then, this religious reference gives way to those aspects that would be regarded as scientific. This combination of the religious and the scientific was in this way lying at the core of the expectations entertained by the discourse community for whom texts such as this one were primarily addressed.

The main function of the text would be to inform and to instruct readers into deeper meanings of creation, so as to make them aware of its importance, and also to enable them to understand essential aspects of the succession of day and night, and of the passing of time. In principle, it may be assumed that the text was addressed to the general reader, who needed not have any specific training or background. Therefore, the text does not seem to presuppose a threshold level of expertise in its potential readership. The method appears to have been to take the Holy Scripture as a point of departure, and then to rely on basic knowledge and aspects of everyday life, with a view to deepening into their ultimate significance. The composition of the text seems to develop the main features of each of the entities introduced: the sun, the moon, the stars, so that the existing relationships between these entities are enhanced, and the reader may follow the discussion.

The main *speech acts* (Searle, 1969) through which the text unfolds are basically *representatives*. This may have been expected of a text that is above all informative, and which has set out to provide an understandable explanation of the facts that have been put forward. The symbolic meanings are substantiated through quotations taken from the Bible, which is referred to as the source of supreme authority.

The fact that Old English tended to rely on purely Germanic vocabulary as far as it could, underlies the fact that we have practically not found any instances of doublets, which might have otherwise combined Latin and native terms. Likewise, the text shows instances of the Old English formation of new words on the basis of the combination of different Germanic lexemes, as in *rihtwisnysse*, *godnysse*.

The *verbal tenses* most frequently used in the text are the simple present and the simple past or preterite, as could be expected in an Old English text, as these are the only tenses of the linguistic system. Most of the tenses occur in the indicative mood. But it may be worth analysing the ways in which these tenses have been used. The most frequent meanings of the present tense forms used have to do with the so-called *gnomic present*, in the sense that the actions referred to in this tense have to do with eternal, non-temporal truths, as in:

Nu is ælc dæg on ðissum middanearde of ðære sunnan lihtinge. (...) On ða healfe ðe heo scinð þær bið dæg and on ða healfe ðe heo ne scinð þær bið niht.

*Now, each day in this world results from the sun's light. (...) On that side where it shines there is day, and on that side where it does not shine there is night.*

The preterite refers to those actions and facts that are narrated:

On ðam ðriddan dæge gesceop se ælmihtiga God sæ and eorðan and calle eorðlice sprytinga. (...) On ðam sefoðan dæge he gecendode his weorc and seo wucu wæs ða agan.

*On the third day the Almighty God created sea and earth and all the vegetation in the world. (...) On the seventh day he completed his task and the week was then past.*

Another verbal construction found in this Old English scientific text has to do with the use of *modal verbs*, such as the form *magon/may* in the following sentence, which expresses epistemic possibility:

We magon hwæðere tocnawan (...)

*We may discern however ...*

The counterpart of Present-day English *might* has also been traced in the text, which in the context where it appears is used to express ability or physical possibility, thus closer to the use of *could*:

Hi [ða steorran] ne mihton swa ðeah nan leoht to eorðan asendan fram ðære healian heofenan gif hi swa gehwæde wæron swa swa urum eagam ðincð.

But they could not thus send any light from their exalted heaven if they were as small as they appear to our eyes.

The former quotation also illustrates the use of subordinate constructions, such as conditional sentences, which are necessary in scientific prose, in order to express and develop complex thoughts. Therefore, it makes manifest that these constructions were also used in Old English for similar purposes.

Even though most of the verbal forms are used in the active voice, yet there are also some sentences constructed in the *passive* voice. The passive forms that have been found employ forms from the verb *beon* as an auxiliary verb followed by a past participle, as in:

*We batað ænne dæg fram sunnan upgange oð æfen ac swa ðeah on bocum is geteald to anum dæge fram ðære sunnan upgange oð ðæt heo eft becume þær heo ær uppstah:*

*From sunrise until evening we call one day, however in books it is reckoned as one day from the sun's rising until it comes again [to that point] where it earlier arose: (...)*

However, no forms with the impersonal pronoun *man* followed by a verb in the active voice have been traced in the text. This fragment also illustrates the use of conjunctions, to express different kinds of relationships, such as addition, contrast, and the like.

What the previous quotation exemplifies as well is the use, already in Old English, of the first person plural referring to a kind of generic plural or *inclusive authorial we*, which refers to collective addressees, and which expresses certain aspects on which consensus is sought (Quirk *et al.*, 1985). As a result, even though the text is mostly *monologic* –in contrast to the *Colloquy*, which will be studied in the following section–, yet at some moments, the writer of the text makes reference to his audience, in constructions such as *we batað (we call)*. These are not found in the first paragraph of the text, which summarises the Biblical account of the creation, and which therefore comes closer to a religious text, rather than a purely scientific one. Yet, they often appear in the following paragraphs, which set out to provide a medieval scientific account. The writer of the text aims therefore to establish a direct relationship with his intended audience and to share his knowledge with them. This is therefore a manifestation of what Hyland (2010) has referred to as *proximity*.

In scientific prose, many times it is more interesting for the writer to concentrate on results and on facts over the agents that provoked them, either because the latter are unknown or are judged to be uninteresting. For this reason, constructions such as the passive voice –already commented upon– as well as

*grammatical metaphors or nominalisations* are used. Once more, this tendency can already be spotted in the Old English text under consideration:

Eal swa ðicce is seo heofen mid steorrum afylled on dæg swa on niht ac hi nabbað nane *libtinge* for ðære sunnan *andwerdhyse*.

*The sky is just as thickly filled with stars in the day-time as at night, but they have no brightness because of the sun's presence.*

Lastly, it may be noted, from a discourse of textual standpoint, that the *use of logical connectors* has also been found significant, in so far as it illustrates the effort of the writer to develop and express complex thoughts, as well as to show the relationships underlying the ideas put forward. These have been found to be of different kinds, as the following instances illustrate: *hwæðere* (however); *swa braðe swa* (as soon as); *eac swilce* (similarly); and the like.

### 3.2. Ælfric's Colloquy on the Occupations

The *Colloquy* must have been written by Ælfric as a companion piece to his *Grammar*, composed a few years before. This author has been regarded as the leading prose writer of his time, at the end of the tenth and beginning of the eleventh century (Malone and Baugh, 1967/ 1989), and was presumably a monk in Dorset and Oxfordshire.

In fact, authors such as Mantello and Rigg (1996/1999), or Mitchell and Robinson (1964/2007) have noted that colloquies or conversation manuals were written to help pupils with the learning of Latin with the aid of the vernacular language, and also to enable them to learn the basic vocabulary used to refer to everyday objects and aspects of daily life. Examples of this genre have been found in England, Wales and also Ireland.

It is believed that Ælfric originally wrote the *Colloquy* in Latin, and some time afterwards another Anglo-Saxon undertook the translation of the work into Old English. Critics such as Mitchell and Robinson (1964/2007) have noted that the text tends to blindly follow Latin syntactic constructions, even though in his

edition of the work Henry Sweet (1897) revised the translation, so that it could reflect the idiomatic prose of Ælfric's time.

At the same time, as Mitchell and Robinson (1964/2007) point out, the *Colloquy* provides twenty-first readers with an overview of the social structure of the Anglo-Saxons at the time when the work was written, that is, towards the beginning of the eleventh century. Thus, individuals with different occupations, probably representative of that moment, explain the features of their trades and the functions they had in the society in which they lived. The fact that the text makes reference to foreign commerce, and that this included the purchase of certain luxurious goods reflects for some critics some of the social differences between the different social strata at that time. It is also believed nowadays that the picture of society offered in the work may probably have been representative of the ways of life at that moment all over England. As Varela Bravo (1988) points out, the original text points at different contexts, such as life and learning in a medieval monastic society, a social context, a philosophical and religious context, all of which surround the conversation itself.

In a sense, the text may be read nowadays with a very different *perspective and purpose* from the one that was originally composed: thus, if written with a foremost pedagogic intention, today it also stands out for its realism and, most importantly, for the accurate picture it provides of the occupational strata of Anglo-Saxon society (Anderson, 1974). Questions such as whether the work was meant to provide useful entertainment and therefore, whether it followed the classical Horatian view of *docere et delectare* may also be explored. If that is the case, then, it may be further sought to trace the *means* used to achieve those two central purposes. Taavitsainen (2004) refers to these means in the case of Late Medieval and Early Modern English texts. These are: first, a verse form; second, the underlying text type with descriptions and narratives at the top; third, style; and fourth, conventional forms of literary presentation.

It is certainly obvious that not all of these features apply to the texts under study. In any case, however, it may be worth exploring how the other factors may be used in these texts to achieve these twofold purposes of instructing and entertaining.

It may be underlined that, as this author remarks, verse and prose texts were oriented towards very different types of potential audiences: thus, verse was

regarded as a more elementary form of expression than prose, and consequently it was prose texts that were intended for learned readers.

Another important aspect that holds true for Ælfric's *Colloquy* referred to by Taavitsainen (2004) has to do with the fact that interactive discourse, like the one that endows this text with internal coherence, is intended to appeal readers and make them more intensely involved with the interaction taking place among the different characters and consequently with the actions and topics covered. The author also draws on the effects that have been intended with resources such as these: "Such stylistic devices are employed to make the scientific doctrines more easily accessible and instruction more personal; the whole discourse takes on an appealing and entertaining tone" (2004, p. 91).

In general, critics have regarded Ælfric's *Colloquy* as interesting in method and in theme (Ward & Trent *et al.*, 1907-21/2000). The authorship is proved by a note in one of the two manuscripts that have survived: *Hanc sententiam latini sermonis olim Aelfricus Abbas composuit, qui meus fuit magister, sed tamen ego Aelfricus Bata multas postea huic addidi appendices*. The colloquy has an Old English gloss, which has not been considered to be the work of Ælfric's.

The edition quoted and used has been Mitchell and Robinson's, which, in turn, is an adaptation and abbreviation of Henry Sweet's version, published in his *First Steps in Anglo-Saxon* (Oxford, 1897). As in the case of the previous work, and as a result of the author's training in Winchester, the piece is composed in standard Anglo-Saxon. The Present-day English translation of the *Colloquy* is our own.

Dialogues such as the *Colloquy* were going to be of interest throughout the history of English. In this sense, Gotti (2001) notes down how the experimental essay was born in the Early Modern English period, as a result of the fact that the complex processes of scientific evolution occurring from the seventeenth century onwards called for new expository genres. Yet, Gotti also remarks that the main forms available to the seventeenth-century scientist were the essay, the treatise, and also the *dialogue*. The experimental essay would be eventually favoured over the other two because of its brevity. But his study demonstrates that the form initiated by Ælfric and his contemporaries and which will be analysed in the present paper had a pervasive influence for several centuries. This idea was also made manifest by Sherburne and Bond, who claimed, "The essay (...) developed chiefly in relation to such types as the «character», the

*dialogue*, the prose epistle, the pamphlet, and the «newsmongering» periodical” (1967/1980, p. 806, my italics). It was only after the seventeenth century that the dialogue almost disappeared as a form of specialised writing, and that the experimental essay eventually became an essential aspect and genre of specialised literature (Gotti, 2001, p. 238). This must have been certainly expected: as Bazerman (1988) points out, in so far as sciences have continued to evolve, so have the linguistic and rhetorical means through which they are conveyed. As a form of dialogue or discussion, the colloquy has been defined as a literary genre in which characters debate a subject at length (Cuddon, 1976). Authors who have sought to characterise English for Academic Purposes –such as Jordan (1997)– have pointed at *initiating and responding* as two basic productive skills that may be required in this field.

As noted above, and pointed out by Taavitsainen (2004), an important aspect of the text is that meaning is constructed dynamically and unfolds through the interactions taking place between the different participants. *Ælfric's Colloquy* is, in this sense, a superb instance of that discourse form of questions and answers, which was originally a classical genre, and also stands for a forerunner of language-teaching and learning dialogues. As in the rest of works devoted to secular instruction, different means may be expected to help the reader and to guarantee that the reception of instruction was made in the intended way.

Coinciding in this respect with Gotti (2001), Taavitsainen (2004) demonstrates that the *question-answer form*, which is pervasive in *Ælfric's Colloquy*, will be found not only in books devoted to language teaching and learning, but –most importantly for the focus of this volume– also in scientific books. This confirms the importance of the work under analysis for the development of English scientific prose, no matter if the form was eventually abandoned several centuries afterwards. In fact, Taavitsainen remarks that the use of the interactive discourse form was even about to increase in the sixteenth century, in particular in manuals for quick consultation. Its most remote origins are to be rooted in Aristotelian models. Casting the contents into mimetic dialogues by introducing fictional characters and setting the conversations in literary frames was one of the devices available that enabled authors to make teaching more entertaining. Once more, *Ælfric's Colloquy* shows that this was already present in Medieval times, no matter if the form continued to be cultivated in forthcoming centuries. Indeed, Taavitsainen points to the existence of an “interesting continuity” from Old English into Early Modern English

through Middle English regarding scientific prose in genres such as maxims, proverbs and didactic dialogues (2004, p. 91).

These forms show mergings and overlappings of literary and non-literary forms of secular instruction, as well as of combinations of secular instruction and useful entertainment (Taavitsainen, 2004). They may also be said to be the case of texts such as Ælfric's *Cosmology*.

Taavitsainen (2004, 1997) also refers to some stylistic features of a text that may make it more interesting, foster involvement and also make the contents worth listening to and learning. Indeed, all of those mentioned by this author stand out in Ælfric's *Colloquy*, namely, the use of first and second-person personal pronouns, so as to make manifest interpersonal relations, proximal deictic expressions of the type of *here*, *now*, or *this*, or the use of present tense verbs. The contexts where these forms are used are worth exploring. Taavitsainen's findings showed that first-person singular pronouns were above all found in speech acts, such as thanking, apologising or complimenting. She had also noted that, in contrast, in scientific treatises these pronouns would be likely to occur in metatextual comments about the unfolding text. Whether and in what ways aspects of interpersonal negotiation of meaning, such as the use of markers of polite behaviour, are reflected in the texts under analysis are also worth commenting upon, as well as the ways in which new topics are introduced, in order to make discourse develop and unfold.

The participants taking part in the *Colloquy* are the Monk, who goes on to ask a series of characters about their occupations. These are the shepherd, the oxherd, the hunter, the fisherman, the fowler, the merchant, the shoemaker, the salter, the baker and the cook. Therefore, the first question to ask is whether they can be approached as a *discourse community*, in the terms described by Swales (1990). It may be argued that all of them would stand for typical occupations in a medieval village. Even though they argue, and some of them –like the salter or the baker– claim that their trades are more important than the rest,

[THE SALTER:] Min cræft fremþ eow eallum þearle.

[THE BAKER:] Butan minum cræfte ælc beod biþ æmettig geþuht, (...)

[THE SALTER:] *My craft does exceedingly for you all.*

[THE BAKER:] *Without my craft it will seem that every table is empty, (...)*

They may be regarded as a *discourse community*, in so far as all of them would be necessary for the welfare of the village, and therefore, would share that common objective. In so far as the text unfolds as a dialogue or colloquy, all these characters communicate with one another, the monk being a kind of moderator. Each speaker provides information regarding the main features of his occupation. Therefore, they use specific vocabulary connected with their occupations. Nevertheless, because of the fact that these skills have become known to the general readership, the words they employ would not be regarded as specific or technical for the twenty-first reader. Besides, the colloquy has been described above as a genre, and this piece in particular fulfils practically all the main features of this type of text.

It is written in a dialogic form. As noted above, even though the primary function and purpose of the text must have been to enable readers to learn and practise the language –therefore, having a metalinguistic objective–, nowadays, its purpose for contemporary readers would rather be to catch a glimpse of the Anglo-Saxon social structure and organisation.

The conventionalisation of the genre –a dialogue or colloquy– is reflected in the question-answer form. There have not been, however, any further rules that might have affected the length of the answers, or the number of questions asked each time. The questions that seem to recur, as the initial moves that give the word to each character have been found to be either *Hwæt segst þu?* (*What do you say?*), or variations of the form *Hwæt dest þu?* (*What do you do?*), such as *Hwelne cræft canst þu?* (*Which craft can you [do]?*)

It is the *topic* developed in the text that has led us to approach it as a forerunner of “English for Specific Purposes”, under the sub-type of “professional or occupational purposes”. What is peculiar about the genre of this text regards the *primary audience* –that is, who were the addressees that the text was originally intended to–, in so far as all the speakers are also listening to and receiving the message of the others at the same time. Therefore, each of them is offered the opportunity to learn about the main aspects of the trades of his companions, as well as to show the main aspects of his own. In this sense, as far as the *level of formality* is concerned, the text would be similar to those which aim to divulge a particular aspect to lay people, and those who do not have any expertise in the branch of knowledge concerned.

It is a text that is intended to be oral, or, in any case, written to be spoken. It is structured through a series of questions and their corresponding answers, which are meant to be concrete and specific. It is, therefore, a wholly interactive piece; it is the dialogues taking part between the different characters that make the text unfold. Because of the period when it was produced, it must have been a manuscript. The fact that it is basically the monk who gives the word to each of the different characters, and also that there is practically no interruptions whatsoever of the different characters may be interpreted as a reflection of the social structure: thus, the clergy is supposed to be in a different level, whereas the whole of traders would belong to the same social status, being members of the common people, of the lowest social groups.

Regarding the *context* of the colloquy, it may be noted that, as it stands, the text really starts *in medias res*, in the sense that we are made to witness a conversation among different characters, with an external character usually asking the rest of the speaker the questions. There has not been, then, any kind of introduction.

For the primary audience of the text, its main *function* must have been didactic. We have mentioned that these dialogues or colloquies were offered as an enjoyable means to learn a foreign language. For readers in our own times, the text may also teach us something, but the interest is probably very different to the originally intended one. Now, the work gives us a general panorama of a part of the social structure of those times, and of the main trades that were practised, as well as of the perception that workers had about them.

As noted above, the text is constructed through the interaction between the different characters, a speaker who is not described any further, and who acts as an initiator of the communicative interchanges, on the one hand, and on the other hand, the series of characters who describe their occupations. Let us remember how Taavitsainen (2004) has referred to a *continuum* of macroforms, depending on the played by dialogues and monologic texts. As pointed out there, Taavitsainen herself has referred to the text under analysis as a paradigmatic instance of a dialogic text within a historical approach to the macro-organisation of scientific texts. As a result, it seems obvious that *interpersonality* plays an important role for the unfolding of the text.

Up to a certain extent, and taking into account the peculiar features of the text that have already been commented upon, it may be asked whether the text under analysis shows any of the aspects of *proximity* introduced by Hyland (2010). An important peculiar feature is that there is a certain asymmetry in the roles played by characters, in the sense that, whereas we as readers can construct and entertain several assumptions about the different characters, we have no evidence or information whatsoever regarding the person who is supposed to have been asking them all. In this sense, then, there is no explicit manifestation of the writer's attempt to control the rhetorical features that might have displayed either authority or a personal standpoint. Only towards the end of the text does it appear a character that seems to stand on a different perspective from the rest, that is, *se geþeahtere*, but this cannot really be identified with the one (or the ones) that has been asking the questions before. Neither are there any manifestations of the way each character positions himself to the community, or of the relationship of any of these characters either to the text or to the potential addressees. It is only that final character that may be said to be addressing the rest of the characters, and may be said to be purporting to establish some sort of *proximity of membership* with and among them all as members of the same community:

(Se geþeahtere seǵþ:) Eala geferan and gode wyrthan, uton hrædlice geseman þas geflitu, and sie sib and geþwærnes betweox eow, and fremme ælc oþrum on his cræfte!

*(The counsellor says:) Oh comrades and good men, let us swiftly settle the dispute, the rivalry, and let there be peace and concord among you, and let each of the others do his own occupation!*

Authors such as Taavitsainen (2001) or Todorov (1990) had drawn on the relationship between genres and speech acts. In the text under analysis, a dialogue or colloquy, this relationship holds, because the most important and recurrent speech acts that we have found are the request –for information, basically– and its subsequent supply. In this way, *initiating* and *responding* have been confirmed as the main structural moves that mark the progression of the text.

From the points of view of the *morphology and syntax* of the text, not all the features described by authors such as Pahta (2001) are likely to be found, on

account of the fact that the period to which these texts belong to is previous to the origins of scientific prose pointed at by this author. Varela Bravo (2000) points at three main aspects of the deixis of the text, in so far as the grammatical structure of the text relies upon and devises a context where the communicative acts included in it can take place. These are the use of the present tense and the imperative, the use of the plural both in questions and in answers (*ge/we*), and also the use of adverbs that make direct reference to the context of situation and the discourse (*swa geornlice, swa deodlice*). Indeed, most clauses use the simple present tense, with a value or meaning of frequency, as the different characters make reference to the actions that they habitually undertake. Some of the most frequently used modal verbs have to do with the use of CUNNAN, with the meaning of “to be able to”, “know how to”, as in:

*Canst þu ænig þing?*

Anne cræft ic *cann*.

Hwelcne cræft *canst* þu?

Still, other modal verbs or preterite present verbs are found, like SCEAL, in order to refer to the aspects that may either be convenient or not to undertake by the members of a certain profession, as when the hunter points out:

*Nē sceal hunta forþtmod beon, for þæm missenlicu wilddeor wuniaþ on wudum.*

*The huntsman shall (must) not be timorous, because several wild beasts dwell on the woods.*

Instances of the use of MAGAN, in order to refer to eventual possibility may also be found:

*Ac ic wile hie wif maran weorþe her sellan þonne ic hie þær mid gebolte, þæt ic mæge me sum gæstreon begietan, þe ic me mid afedan mæge and min wif and min bearn.*

*But I want to sell them here with more value than with which I bought them there, so that I may gain some profit for me, with which I may feed myself and my wife and children.*

There are no doublets of Latin and native texts, a fact that was certainly expectable, on account of the tendency of Old English to form new words on the basis of compounding, derivation, prefixing and suffixing, rather than lending words from other languages. The style of interaction between the different characters is rather direct, so there are practically no hedges.

Very scarce uses of the passive voice have been found, which may be due to the facts that the text unfolds in the form of direct speech, through a dialogic form, where each character explains the main features of his own trade. The instance that we have found tends to emphasise the role of the agent, rather than assuming that it is well-known:

*For þam se þe his cræft forl ætt, se biþ fram þætm cræfte forlæten.*

Likewise, it may be attributed to the fact that the text follows throughout a direct, personal style, that no instances of *nominalisations* have been found. No matter if Old English was prone to the formation of nouns derived from verbs, as one possible way of vocabulary development, here the direct style of the text has not fostered such constructions.

Another consequence is that, because of the oral, spoken form of the text, sentences tend to be short, and either juxtapositions of sentences, or connections of these through conjunctions such as *and* have been preferred over more complex constructions, such as subordinations or embeddings.

#### **4. Conclusions**

The analysis carried out has shown that it is worth regarding and taking Old English as a starting point for the study of the historical development of ESP texts, both in their academic (EAP) as well as in their professional or occupational (EPP, EOP) varieties. Despite the peculiar linguistic features of Old English and its differences with Present-day English, certain recurrent traits have been spotted in the two diachronic stages, such as the uses of the present and preterite tenses, the meanings attached to certain modal verbs. Besides, these are not only of a grammatical nature: certain pragmatic aspects, such as the

different strategies to establish proximity with the intended readership –following Hyland (2010)– have also shown similar manifestations in Old and in Present-day English, respectively.

The study of Ælfric's *Cosmology* has enabled us to approach what might have been regarded, in our view, as a paradigmatic instance of a scientific text in its basic medieval origins, when religion was pervasive in all aspects of social life as well as of knowledge. The historical and cultural background has confirmed our assumption that what might have been regarded as 'scientific' texts in Old English had a very different orientation from the objects, scope, or purpose of their twenty-first century counterparts –and even from those written at least from the fifteenth century onwards. This is so no matter if, as shown above, certain linguistic aspects have been found recurrent.

As for the importance of Ælfric's *Colloquy*, we find it worth emphasising in these final conclusions that critics such as Taavitsainen (2004, 2001) or Gotti (2001) have pointed at the genre of didactic dialogues like this one under analysis as forerunners of scientific prose in English, which moreover point at the historical continuity over the centuries in the development of specifically scientific genres. In this sense, therefore, the importance of works such as the *Colloquy* should not be overlooked. This is so no matter if –as these authors have also shown– with the passing of time, and particularly from the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries onwards, these dialogic genres would eventually fall in disuse, and become restricted to more popular registers, and, therefore, they would no longer have scientific uses strictly speaking. Moreover, and as predicted by authors such as Taavitsainen (2004) in connection with the earliest manifestations of texts intended for secular instruction, religion has been shown to have been constantly present in the text under analysis.

Needless to say, further studies would be required before more substantial evidence and more definite conclusions may be reached. In this sense, and just to make reference to a contemporary influential area of linguistic analysis and methodology, we are sure that that ongoing research based on corpus studies will certainly provide useful tools and deepen into the study of these texts.

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