

# Small-time production of a big-time product: A Franco-Italian Glossary

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This paper will describe the use of scanning, the *Oxford Concordance Program* and *CD-ROM* to solve a classic philological problem: providing a lexical look-up in the form of an index for a medieval literary language, Franco-Italian.

The traditional approach to creating a lexical tool was to write index cards with citations from a selection of texts, sort these in alphabetical order, classify them under headwords (lemmas) and by differing meanings (cf. *The Oxford English Dictionary*). The person-power expended in this enterprise is such that it can only be mustered for a large corpus, for an overwhelmingly important language. It also takes a long time – 77 years for the OED.

The computer has been used to create modern dictionaries of modern languages for some time. Dictionary editors generally operate with two files, a citation and an entry file. The on-line database contains formatting instructions and links to other words, such as cross-references. This extensive set of information allows modern dictionary makers to produce multiple products from the same set of data: the editor can search and extract entries based on user-specified criteria (Larkin). This too, however, lends itself best to larger enterprises because of the extensive computational tools necessary, from large storage capacity to powerful search tools. There is currently underway a historical attempt to produce a computerized Old French etymological dictionary (DEAF), but since its inception it has so far produced a few fascicles and found itself re-inventing its format throughout production (intro).

Franco-Italian, a fourteenth-century mixed language found only in written texts from Northern Italy and generally texts of certain genres (especially the *chanson de geste*) is little-known outside a small group of cognoscenti. The most

recent census of Franco-Italian lists 65 texts (Holtus 1994). Four of these are not yet edited and published; 26 others were published before 1950. Twenty-five are *chansons de geste* or related material in prose; the corpus also includes several romances, a number of religious pieces (*Passions*) and various other writings (*Brunetto Latini, Li livres dou tresor; Marco Polo's Il Milione*). The editions available present varying critical apparatuses. Unless one has a particular need to read or work with one of these texts (there are Franco-Italian variants of well-known texts such as the *Chanson de Roland*), it is unlikely that a researcher be familiar with it.

In order to read a Franco-Italian text, one must currently rely upon in text glossaries, Old French, Italian etymological or medieval Latin dictionaries. These are not consistent in labelling the texts used (since manuscripts do not necessarily carry a title as books do, and since editors have “named” their texts differently at times) and are not necessarily all-inclusive, in the nature of dictionaries. Thus, for example, in Ms.13, the text on which I am currently working, the word *docler* appears five times, though it is not attested in any Old French, Italian, or dialect dictionary. It also appears in the *Guerra d'Attila* (which has no glossary) three times, and *qocler* with a similar meaning in the *Entrée* is considered a possible metathesis (Holtus 1985: LXV, 94).

My approach, because of the constraints of a one person project and the constant re-editing of texts, is to limit the scope of the project and to provide for a changeable “final” product. I have therefore selected five manuscripts with which to begin. Ms. Marc. 13 (also known as the *Geste Francor*) is 17,066 lines; V4, a version of the *Chanson de Roland*, is 6,011 lines. *The Entrée d'Espagne* is 15,805 lines; the *Guerra d'Attila* is 37,535 lines; the *Continuazione dell'Entrée d'Espagne* is 6,116 lines. I chose them both for their importance and for pragmatic reasons. Two I already have in computerized form; three must be computerized. I confine the Glossary to epic language, as the *chanson de geste* form is fixed, requires line-end assonance (at a minimum; many later *chansons* use rhyme), and tends to certain common subjects which limit the extent of total vocabulary. Each has a specific importance to the field and I have received copyright clearance for each where necessary. The length of the texts and the fact that they are 11/25 of the Franco-Italian *chanson de geste* corpus means that the Glossary at the end of the sabbatical year will already be useful to others. The choice of a Glossary rather than a dictionary is also pragmatic, a choice discussed at greater length in the final paper.

Production of the Glossary involves 3 main steps: scanning the text not yet in computerized format;

concording all the texts and sorting/indexing; producing the CD-ROM. Each of these steps bears its own problems. Scanning is not appropriate for every text (CETH, 2). I tested each of the prospective editions to be used before settling on the three final choices. The *Guerra* and *Entrée* are set in the clearest type and therefore most easily scanned. There are minimal footnotes (none in the *Entrée*) and there is no use of italics or multiple type faces. The type of the *Continuazione dell'Entrée* is a little more difficult to scan due to the use of italics to resolve abbreviations. But it is also shorter than the other two texts.

The index production involves multiple processes. To summarize, I must concord the edited texts as scanned in; decide upon headwords; add cross-references to words not to be defined at that citation; produce accurate and verifiable definitions for each head-word. From the initial concordance for each text, there will be corrections, no doubt, of typographical inaccuracies not caught from the scanning or from the editors themselves (in which case, differences from the original will be annotated, of course). OCP does have certain limitations: for example, labelling a word when it appears in rhyme in an index is a complicated matter. Finally, word-processing will be necessary to merge each section as it is prepared, since it is unnecessary to take up mainframe storage with many long files. The last step, producing a CD-ROM, will be a new experience. CD-ROM pressers are now available to the general public at reasonable prices. The original glossary file will be kept (possibly on tape) for updating with further texts and as new editions appear. However, the CD-ROM (which includes search engines produced for such uses) will offer a reasonably priced source for a small audience to receive a necessary reference tool, as well as leaving the possibility for future development (and cooperation with other scholars) open. The Glossary will be useful to those working in Franco-Italian, clearly, but also to those working with manuscripts from Northern Italy of the same era: Provençal texts, for example. Those working with Old French may profit as well, since there are many dialectal variations in Old French; the Franco-Italian forms, omitted from standard Old French dictionaries in many cases, may exist in other marginal Old French texts. The Glossary of Franco-Italian will therefore serve several groups and open a lexical field previously largely inaccessible to the larger world of scholarship.

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