

POTTERING IN THE FRENCH GARDEN

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(Summary of some points from a paper given to the Linguistic Society of New Zealand on 17th October 1960)

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This paper as originally compiled included notes on the words collected for Gillieron's Atlas under the rubric Louer un Jardin (A.L.F. 712), with an historical note on each, an attempt being made to order them chronologically and socially. Evidence for the spread of individual words at the expense of others was also discussed, and an explanation offered for the continued presence in patois of words long unknown to standard French.

Space here allows only a few comments on methodological factors which arose out of this study, which was intended to be principally a semantic one. To make these comments more easily comprehensible, we have chosen to relate them to one only of the words revealed by a study of Carte No 712.

The word jardin was chosen because a concept such as garden or area of workable land would be expressed by the earliest of the country's inhabitants; because the expression of this concept would be affected in its use and development by newcomers to the country whose own denomination for such ground would also change with the shift in space and time; because such "original" words would be tenacious of life in patois areas remote from commercial and other influences. The aire of jardin is broken by several smaller aires: the aire of jardinier, a much more abstract term, and a later formation, is remarkably homogeneous.

One of the words used to indicate a garden is found in a very small aire in Charente. This is ouche, of which traces are found in most of the low-lying, river-drained areas of France. The use of ouche in no way implies an ignorance of jardin: whereas Edmont was using a general term, to him almost an abstraction (the use of the expression Louer un jardin does limit this reference), his informant necessarily referred to his own household plot. Later enquêteurs have tried to resist this tendency to confusion of reference by using as questioners persons well versed in the local idiom and social customs (as one reflects the other, this is an important consideration). This has, however, led to the neglecting of the generic term (e.g. jardin), and to the study of an area in isolation instead of as a part of a whole.

The linguistic map indicates the results of historical development in vocabulary. To trace development in use and meaning of ouche, recourse was had to etymological dictionaries and glossaries, of O.F. particularly. The root of ouche we found to be the Gallic or Iberian olca or olga: Neogrammarians could use it as an example

of regular phonetic development. What was more our concern was the meaning of olca. As its earliest speakers left no written material to speak of, any meaning assigned to this word can be done so only on the basis of later recorded uses and the meanings derived from them. Though comparison with other languages may help to limit its reference, meanings so arrived at are at best conjectural: material on social life is also lacking. It is only by the collation of as many examples as possible of a word's use that a meaning can be accurately recorded (this, too, so often with reference to other words). The word in isolation has no meaning: it is only in a context that it assumes meaning.

Text reading to find examples of words used in context is not by itself sufficient, in any discussion of meaning, particularly with relation to changes. As vocabulary (or words) is part of a language, so language is an essential part of culture. (Whether language is culture does not here concern us.) Culture is based on society. Hence it is very necessary in any undertaking of a lexicological nature that there be ample material on and from the period to be examined - the subject must be limited in time as well as space - from the point of view both of vocabulary and of social and economic development.

Much more complete dépouillements need to be made in the period covered by Du Cange's Glossarium, for example. Because words are used in a Latin text, they should not be discounted in any discussion of meaning in O.F. Olca in a French context is not found before the twelfth century, when it appears in an O. Prov. text (F.E.W.). Yet it is obvious, from an examination of Latin texts of earlier date, that the word is extensively used by the peasant class at least (it occurs frequently in connection with words such as incolae, rustice, vulgo). A comparison of Latin and French texts of a given period can reveal differences in use, in particular social distinctions; one similarity noted was the use of olca and ouche followed by a partitive genitive. The datings given in etymological dictionaries for the appearance of a word in French can assume too much importance if the links with the use of a word in Latin are not taken into consideration. Often in the history of a Latin-based word the actual date of appearance is not as important as its use in a French context compared with its use in a Latin one.

The disappearance of a word from the vocabulary is bound to affect other words within the "meaning-orbit" of this word. Even in the case of words which become phonetically weak and so "die", there is bound to be a sociological reason as well for its ultimate disappearance, for, to dispense with a word, the society must either have no further need of the reference, or have adopted a new convention of naming the object. That this latter course is closely related to the development of meaning in words of similar reference, which are in the same "orbit", is obvious.

A final point which arose concerned the value and signifi-

cance of equivalents or explanations of words used: as in ". . . un mantel . . . fust cher à terre en un ort, autrement dit oche" (1383), and numerous other examples among the "garden" words studied. Is this a stylistic device, O.F. verbal exuberance; do the explanations have a strengthening effect, etc.? In examples like "un ort ou jardin . . .", "un ort ou courtil . . .", "un ort ou vergier", (all 15th century), does the second word particularise further?

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