

MAGDALENA BATOR
University of Social Sciences, Warsaw

On the Development of the English Culinary Recipe¹

Abstract

The earliest culinary recipes found in England were written in Anglo-Norman and they date back to the end of the 13th century (*cf.* Hieatt & Jones 1986). The first English instructions were mostly translated from these. It is the 14th and 15th centuries when the text type was thriving. Scully (1995: 5) calls the period “a hey-day for medieval cookery,” due to the greater availability of the culinary texts comparing to the earlier times. Thus, a discussion of the evolution of the English recipe should start from the 14th century. The majority of the available studies deal with the particular features of the culinary instruction, as for instance Culy (1996) who discusses the use of null objects.

The main focus of the present paper is to provide a brief comparison of some selected features of the culinary recipes at different stages of their development. The discussion will proceed from the earliest available English culinary material, *i.e.*, the medieval recipe, through the early Modern English texts to the contemporary cooking instructions. The issues which will be taken into consideration are: (i) the general structure of the recipe, especially the components found in the earliest texts, *i.e.*, the heading and the procedure; (ii) the function of the recipe in the particular periods; and (iii) the intended audience for whom the recipes were written down.

Keywords: culinary recipe, structure, function, audience.

1. Introduction

Laurie Colwin, an American author of five novels, some short stories and a number of kitchen essays, wrote “No one who cooks, cooks alone. Even at her most solitary, a cook in the kitchen is surrounded

1 Project financed by the National Science Centre. Decision number: DEC-2013/11/B/HS2/02504.

by generations of cooks past, the advice and menus of cooks present, the wisdom of cookbook writers” (Colwin 1988: Foreword), indicating the bulk of knowledge which has been passed to us from generation to generation. The present paper aims to show the changes the culinary recipe has undergone from its earliest (medieval) form through the cooking instructions published in the early Modern English period until the contemporary texts so widely present, not only in the numerous cookery books but also in various magazines and Internet materials. In what follows, we will discuss the form and function of the recipes as well as the audience for whom they were written. It will be argued that all these aspects were interrelated with one another and a change of one of them triggered changes of the others.

2. The beginning of the English recipe

2.1. The term *recipe*

The term *recipe*, nowadays immediately associated with cooking, was first attested with its culinary sense only in 1631 (*OED*: *s.v.* *recipe*). Earlier, *i.e.*, from 1300, *recipe* was a medical term, first used as a verb (meaning ‘to take’) which usually occurred at the beginning of medical instructions, see (1). In the 15th century the noun *recipe* started to be used by physicians and apothecaries, mainly as the heading of medical formulas.

In the field of cookery, there was the term *receipt* which was used on everyday basis to denote the culinary instruction (2). *Recipe* with the culinary reference was first recorded in the 17th century. Apart from these, relatively late, nominal records, a number of verbal occurrences were found in a 15th-century culinary collection, see (3). However, these records might have been caused by the scribe’s misinterpretation of the recipes as medical (*cf.* Bator 2014: 177–182).

- (1) **Recipe** alisaundir-rote, persil-rote, [...] simul terantur et coquantur in dulcidrio, anglice wrt, et fiat inde cervisia et bibatur.
(T.Hunt, Pop.Med. 13th c. Eng., 1300)
- (2) A **receipt**. 3e must take wurte, and barly, and comyn, and hony, and a lytyll curtesy of salte, and sethe them in a potte togedyr tyl the barly be brostyn. And sythen, caste it abowte in pe hows wheras dowys ben vsyng etc.
(The Commonplace Book, 15th c.)
- (3) Berleggs. **Recipe** creme of almonds & alay it with floure of ryse, & cast perto gyngere; [...]
(MS Harley 5401)

For a detailed discussion of the terms *recipe* and *receipt*, see Bator and Sylwanowicz (forthcoming).

2.2. The earliest culinary recipes

The earliest culinary recipes which survived in England come from the 13th century and were in fact written in the Anglo-Norman dialect (*cf.* Hieatt & Jones 1986). According to Hieatt (2002), these Anglo-Norman collections constitute a certain link between the continental and English cuisine and may help

understand the development of the English cuisine. They are “the obvious place to start in examining the medieval cookery of England” (Hieatt 2002: 23).

Most of the recipes found in the available Anglo-Norman collections were translated into Middle English and published in the collection *Diuersa Cibaria* from 1325, which is the earliest known culinary collection written in English. It contains only 63 recipes, many of which are simple lists of ingredients rather than proper instructions how to prepare a dish. From the second half of the 14th century the amount of the culinary material was increasing.

The Middle English recipes constitute the earliest known culinary material. Earlier, that is in the Old English period, only medical recipes were found, and thus any conclusions concerning the text type in the early stages have been based on the medical collections (see for instance Görlach 2004).

3. The structure of the recipe

The structure of the recipe has already been studied by a number of scholars, such as Stannard (1982), Hunt (1990), Görlach (1992, 2004), Carroll (1999), and Taavitsainen (2001). However, they either dealt exclusively with the medical collections or did not distinguish between the medical and culinary recipes and treated them as one and the same text type. Later studies (e.g., Bator & Sylwanowicz (forthcoming¹¹)) have revealed a number of differences between the two.

Following the previous studies we may conclude that the recipe consists of a number of components: the heading, the procedure, the application and the efficacy. However, it is only the heading and the procedure (both of which may take various forms) which seem to have been obligatory.

3.1. Middle English

The medieval culinary recipes are usually short and simple in form. Carroll (2004) claims that their length varies from 40 to 120 words. Some of the earliest culinary instructions, especially those translated from the Anglo-Norman collections, are simple lists of ingredients, e.g., (4). A general tendency could be noticed that the later a recipe the longer it gets. Hieatt and Butler (eds.) (1985: 9) explain it in such a way: “[...] these recipes were passed down through succeeding generations, however, there was a tendency to spell out procedures at greater and greater length and to add and/or vary ingredients.” And thus, looking at the later medieval recipes, we may notice that they were (mostly) longer, e.g., (5).

In terms of their structure, the medieval recipes consisted of the heading (in the form of the title and/or the statement of purpose), and the procedure (in the form of the list of ingredients and/or the preparation). The analysis of almost 1,400 medieval culinary texts revealed that only 1% did not contain the heading; however, these were rather short pieces of kitchen advice than proper recipes, as for instance (6). Out of the headings found in the corpus, 79% consisted of the title, mostly in the form of a nominal phrase, e.g., (7), 20% consisted of the statement of purpose, usually in the form of an infinitive, e.g., (8), and only 1% contained both, e.g., (9) (Bator & Sylwanowicz (forthcoming¹¹)).

- (4) Dragone. Milke of alemauns, flour of rys, braun of chapoun, sucre & kanele; þe colour red of sanc dragoun.
(*Diuersa Cibaria_20_1325*)

- (5) Lange Wortes de pesoun. Take grene pesyn an washe hem clene an caste hem on a potte, an boyle hem tyl þey breste, an þanne take hem vppe of þe potte, an put hem with brothe yn a-noþer potte, and lete hem kele; þan draw hem þorw a straynowre in-to a fayre potte, an þan take oynonys, and screde hem in to or þre, an take hole wortys and boyle hem in fayre water: and take hem vppe, an ley hem on & fayre bord, an cytte on iij or iiij, an ley hem to þe oynonys in þe potte, to þe drawyd pesyn; an let hem boyle tyl þey ben tendyr; an þanne tak fayre oyle and frye hem, or ellys sum fresche broþe of sum maner fresche fysshe, an caste þer-to, an Safron, an salt a quantyte, and serue it forth.
(Potage Dyvers_2_1435)
- (6) Cranes and herouns shul be armed with lardes of swine, and eten with gynger.
(Forme of Cury_151_1390)
- (7) Connynges in cyrip
(Forme of Cury_65_1390)
- (8) To make images in suger
(Goud Kokery_15_1395)
- (9) A gammon of bakon. To make a fressh gammon of bakon without watyng.
(*Gathering of Medieval English Recipes_SA_2_1480*)

What typically follows the heading is the procedure. Apart from some of the earliest recipes, which contain the list of ingredients as in (4) above, the headings were followed by the preparation component, as in (10). It usually took the form of imperative clauses, which were given in a temporal sequence. However, it should be noted that the medieval recipes were by no means detailed instructions which would guide a cook step by step what to do (see also section 4).

- (10) To make Nowmbyls of Muskyls. Seth muskyls, & then shop team grete & medil pam with almonde mylk, & make a thyk potage; & colour it with saferon. With kokyls or with pervinches 3e may do pe same.
(MS Harley 5401_1_1490)

3.2. Early Modern English

The early Modern English period offers a greater number of culinary collections than the Middle Ages. At first glance, they do not differ drastically from the medieval instructions. In terms of their length, there are no extremely short recipes, they did not become extremely long either.

The structure also resembles the medieval recipes, *i.e.*, the heading is always followed by the procedure. Additionally, some of the optional recipe elements (rarely found in the medieval recipes) may occur, especially the application component, as in (11), but also some additional information, as in (12). All the recipes contain the heading. However, an opposite tendency has been observed than in the Middle English period, *i.e.*, 84% of the analysed recipes² begin with the statement of purpose rather than the title of the dish, see for instance (13)–(14). What follows is the procedure, which consists of

2 The collections analysed are listed in the Appendix.

the preparation component, which is usually in the form of imperative clauses sequenced in a temporal order, as in (15).

- (11) [...] and eat it cold.
(*The Compleat Cook*_92_1658)
- (12) [...] and so you may keepe them [oysters] all the yeere.
(*The New Book of Cookery*_3_1615)
- (13) To bake Brawn
(*The Compleat Cook*_135_1658)
- (14) To make stewed Broth
(*The true gentlewomans delight*_1707)
- (15) To boyle a Rabbet with Hearbes on the French fashion
Fit your Rabbet for the boyling, and seeth it with a little Mutton broth, white Wine, and a peece of whole Mace: then take Lettuce, Spynage, Parsley, winter Sauory, sweet Marioram: all these being pickt, and washy cleane, bruise them with the backe of a Ladle (for the bruising of the Hearbes wil make the broth looke very pleasantly greene.) Thicken it with a crust of Manchet, being steeped in some of the broth, and a little sweet Butter therein. Season it with Uergis, and Pepper, and serue it to the Table vpon Sippits. Garnish your Dish with Barberyes.
(*The New Book of Cookery*_12_1615)

3.3. Present Day English

The contemporary culinary recipes are much longer and more detailed than the earlier ones. Their structure is much more complete. In the analysed collections, all the recipes begin with the heading, which always takes the form of a nominal phrase, sometimes a very complex one. The contemporary headings do not contain the statement of purpose. However, this may be accounted for by the fact that its function is often included in the title, which is much more informative than the titles in the medieval period used to be. The contemporary title may summarise the major ingredients needed for the dish, the character of the dish (how it should be cooked), they may mention the author of the dish, the occasion for which the dish would be appropriate, or the degree of difficulty the dish requires to be prepared, *etc.*, see examples (16)–(18).

The title is followed by a list of ingredients together with the precise measurements (hardly ever used in the medieval period, *cf.* Görlach 2004: 130). The preparation component is detailed and precise, specifying the times and temperatures. Furthermore, the information concerning the application of a particular dish occurs frequently, as in (19), and the recipes are often full of additional information, as in (20).

- (16) Nigella Lawson's easy birthday buttermilk cake
(N. Lawson, *How to Be a Domestic Goddess*)
- (17) Braised baby leeks in red wine with aromatics
(S. Bee, *The Secret Ingredient*)

- (18) Warm shredded lamb salad with mint and pomegranate
(N. Lawson, *Nigella Bites*)
- (19) Serves 4 as a main dish.
(G. Ramsay, *Chef for All Seasons*)
- (20) Sea trout with crushed fresh peas.
Wild sea trout, like salmon, can live in fresh or salt water. Slightly sweeter than salmon and a little smaller, they are at their best between April and September.
(G. Ramsay, *Chef for All Seasons*)

4. The function and the audience

The change in the structure of the text type is interrelated with the changing function of the recipe and the intended audience. The earliest English recipes were short and consisted of terse instructions which were rather imprecise. They might have been written to consult rather than to instruct, as some memory aids for the cook to remember the ingredients used for a certain dish or the order of adding them (*cf.* Hammond [1993] 2005; Scully 1995). Brears (2008) suggests that professional cooks knew and remembered the ingredients and procedures used on everyday basis, but had to use recipes to refresh their memory when more sophisticated and occasionally prepared dishes were to be made. Diemer (2013: 140) is of similar opinion, stating that the Middle English recipes “are clearly made for professional cooks, since the modern measurements are almost completely missing.”

On the other hand, Scully (1995) noticed that the majority of the surviving medieval recipes are simply too clean to ever have been used in the kitchen. He points out that at least some of the recipes were written for the guests who enjoyed a particular meal, in order to please them.

And finally, the outstanding medieval chefs wanted to boast about their skills and competence (by giving detailed descriptions of very complicated dishes which only a master cook with a group of professional assistants was able to prepare), but at the same time refused to give instructions on how to cook some of the simpler dishes: “everyone knows how to do them,” “it is common knowledge how it is to be prepared” (*The Viandier of Taillevent*, cited after Henisch 2009: 19). All in all, it seems that despite the recipe being an instruction on how to prepare a certain dish, the medieval recipes were not so much supposed to instruct; and even though hardly any indication of the reader can be found, food historians (*e.g.*, Diemer 2013) restrict the audience to professional cooks, clergy or nobility.

In the early Modern English period writing down recipes became much more common and the number of the available collections rose significantly (see Görlach 1992). However, they were aimed at different audience. Diemer (2013: 145, after Markham 1631) writes about “a change of audience from professional to private.” Following Görlach (2004: 132), culinary collections were “directed not at a professional cook, but at the middle class mistress.” Mrs Beeton, one of the most known authors of an early Modern English cookbook, writes: “We would recommend the young housekeeper, cook, or whoever may be engaged in the important task of ‘getting ready’ the dinner, or other meal, to follow precisely the order in which the recipes are given” (1861: 54). Recipes were becoming more precise for anyone to be able to prepare a particular dish. This change is visible at first glance, for instance in the use

of non-technical language or in the form of the headings. Instead of giving the names of dishes (titles), culinary authors preferred to use the statement of purpose, so that the reader would know what the dish was for, what cooking procedures would be applied, *etc.* Not only was it more informative, but also did not require a layman to know the names of dishes. The recipes became much more precise. They were to guide the “(lay) chef” step by step on how to accomplish the dish.

In the Present Day English, the function of culinary recipes does not differ from the early Modern English period, *i.e.* it aims to instruct how to prepare certain foods. However, the contemporary publications represent a much wider variety. And thus, to make the choice easier or to encourage the intended reader, the audience is often specified already in the title of the cookbook, *e.g.*, *The Cookbook for Girls*, *A Campfire Cookbook for Real Outdoorspeople*, *The Best Cookbook for Students*, *etc.* Looking at the repertoire of the available printed materials (not to mention numerous Internet sources), we may conclude that nowadays the culinary readership may comprise any audience (representing various social groups and people with various cooking skills).

The contemporary culinary collections are designed to be as reader-friendly as possible. For instance, they are divided into sections based on (i) the type of meal (breakfast, lunch, supper, desserts, *etc.*), (ii) the main ingredient / group of ingredients (meats, fish, vegetables, *etc.*), (iii) the occasion/mood (TV dinners, rainy days, slow-cook weekend, *etc.*), (iv) the cooking procedure (roasting, boiling, baking, *etc.*), and many others. Arendholz *et al.* (2013: 133) define the function of the contemporary recipe in such a way: “Documentation and organisation of facts as well as instructing interested amateur cooks are certainly regarded as the most central functions of recipes nowadays. Moreover, today’s addressees are male and female, young and old, from various parts of the world.”

Undoubtedly the English recipe has changed a lot from its earliest form to what we know today. The text type has evolved in terms of its structure, but we can also observe the tendency to address a less trained audience. The recipes become more and more precise, the language gets less technical and the instructions more detailed.

References

- Arendholz, Jenny, Wolfram Bublitz, Monika Kirner, Iris Zimmermann (2013) “Food for Thought – or, What’s (in) a Recipe? A Diachronic Analysis of Cooking Instructions.” [In:] Cornelia Gerhardt, Maximiliane Frobenius, Susanne Ley (eds.) *Culinary Linguistics. The Chef’s Special*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins; 119–137.
- Bator, Magdalena (2014) *Culinary Verbs in Middle English*. Frankfurt a. M.: Peter Lang.
- Bator, Magdalena, Marta Sylwanowicz (forthcoming) “Recipe, Receipt and Prescription in the History of English.” [In:] *SELIM: Journal of the Spanish Society for Mediaeval English Language and Literature*.
- Bator, Magdalena, Marta Sylwanowicz (forthcoming¹¹) “The Typology of Medieval Recipes – Culinary vs. Medical.” [In:] Jacek Fisiak *et al.* (eds.) *Essays and Studies in Middle English*. Frankfurt a. M.: Peter Lang.
- Beeton, Isabella (1861) *Mrs Beeton’s Household Management*. Herefordshire: Wordsworth Reference.
- Brears, Peter (2008) *Cooking and Dining in Medieval England*. Wiltshire: Prospect Books.
- Carroll, Ruth (1999) “The Middle English Recipe as a Text-Type.” [In:] *Neuphilologische Mitteilungen* 100; 27–42.

- Carroll, Ruth (2004) "Middle English Recipes: Vernacularisation of a Text-Type." [In:] Irma Taavitsainen, Päivi Pahta (eds.) *Medical and Scientific Writing in Late Medieval English*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press; 174–196.
- Colwin, Laurie (1988) *Home Cooking: A Writer in the Kitchen*. [Kindle edition]. Penguin.
- Cully, Christopher (1996) "Null Objects in English Recipes." [In:] *Language Variation and Change* 8 (1); 91–124.
- Diemer, Stefan (2013) "Recipes and Food Discourse in English – A Historical Menu." [In:] Cornelia Gerhardt, Maximiliane Frobenius, Susanne Ley (eds.) *Culinary Linguistics. The Chef's Special*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins; 139–155.
- Görlach, Manfred (1992) "Text Types and Language History: The Cookery Recipe." [In:] Martti Rissanen *et al.* (eds.) *History of Englishes. New Methods and Interpretations in Historical Linguistics*. Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter; 736–761.
- Görlach, Manfred (2004) *Text Types and the History of English*. Berlin, New York: Mouton de Gruyter.
- Hammond, Peter ([1993] 2005) *Food and Feast in Medieval England*. Thrupp: Sutton Publishing.
- Henisch, Bridget A. (2009) *The Medieval Cook*. Woodbridge: The Boydell Press.
- Hieatt, Constance B. (2002) "Medieval Britain." [In:] Melinda Adamson Weiss (ed.) *Regional Cuisines of Medieval Europe. A Book of Essays*. London: Routledge; 19–46.
- Hieatt, Constance B., Sharon Butler (eds.) (1985) *Curye on Inglysch: English Culinary Manuscripts of the 14th c.* (Early English Text Society, SS 8). London: Oxford University Press.
- Hieatt, Constance B., Robin F. Jones (1986) "Two Anglo-Norman Culinary Collections." [In:] *Speculum* 61; 859–882.
- Hunt, Tony (1990) *Popular Medicine in Thirteenth-Century England: Introduction and Texts*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Markham, Gervase (1631) *The English Housewife*. Ed. by Michael R. Best (1986). Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press.
- Scully, Terence (1995) *The Art of Cookery in the Middle Ages*. Woodbridge: Boydell Press.
- Stannard, Jerry (1982) "Rezeptliteratur as Fachliteratur." [In:] William Eamon (ed.) *Studies on Medieval Fachliteratur*. Brussels; 59–73.
- Taavitsainen, Irma (2001) "Middle English Recipes: Genre Characteristics, Text Type Features and Underlying Traditions of Writing." [In:] *Journal of Historical Pragmatics* 2; 85–113.

Online sources

Oxford English Dictionary Online (OED). Available at: www.oed.com [ED August 2015].

Appendix: The list of culinary collections used for the present study

Middle English

- Diursa Cibaria (1325). Found in: *Curye on Inglysch*. Ed. by C. B. Hieatt & S. Butler (1985). OUP.
- Forme of Cury (1390). Found in: *Curye on Inglysch*. Ed. by C. B. Hieatt & S. Butler (1985). OUP.
- Gathering of Medieval English Recipes* (1390–1495). Ed. by C. B. Hieatt (2008). Brepols.
- Goud Kokery (1340–1480). Found in: *Curye on Inglysch*. Ed. by C. B. Hieatt & S. Butler (1985). OUP.
- MS Harley 5401 (1490). Found in: "The Middle English Culinary Recipes in MS Harley 5401. An Edition and Commentary", C. B. Hieatt (1996). *Medium Aevum* 65.1; 54–71.
- Potage Dyvers (1435). Found in: *Two 15th-Century Cookery Books*. Ed. by T. Austin (2000). OUP.

Early Modern English

A Book of Cookrye (1591). Ed. by A.W. London.

The Compleat Cook (1658). London.

The New Book of Cookery (1615). London.

A Proper New Book of Cookery (1575). London.

The True Gentlewomans Delight (1707). Ed. by E. Grey. London.

Present Day English

Bee, Sally (2010). *The Secret Ingredient*. Collins.

Huang, Ching-He (2008). *Chinese Food Made Easy*. BBC.

Lawson, Nigella (2001). *Nigella Bites*. Chatto & Windus Random House.

Lawson, Nigella (2002). *Forever Summer*. Chatto & Windus Random House.

Lawson, Nigella (2005). *How to Be a Domestic Goddess*. Chatto & Windus Random House.

Ramsay, Gordon (2000). *Chef for All Seasons*. Quadrille Publishing Limited.

*Academic
Journal
of
Modern
Philology*

The recipes date from the fourteenth century and are the earliest such examples in English. Interestingly, it appears that many of these recipes, found only on the menus of the upper classes, remained virtually unchanged until the sixteenth century. The menus include the all-important order of serving, that strict etiquette that ruled medieval mealtimes, and which meant that most members of a household were only entitled to the first course and that the more delicate dishes were served only to the higher ranks. This unique collection of recipes, or menus as they include not only how to make a dish, but also how and when to serve it, has been compiled from more than twenty medieval manuscripts. The recipes date from the fourteenth century and are the earliest such examples in English. The research shows that the English culinary language comprises underived words including ancient ones from Germanic e.g. loaf, bread, milk, flich, bacon, nut, yeast, fish, ham etc. The core cultural elements in the linguoculture are the words food, meal and dish [9]. These units are interrelated components of a unified mental food complex that can be described as an open system that undergoes the changes and is exposed to outer influences. Let's resort to the progenitor of the English language – the British English. According to Ermakova L.R., the British are conservative, ethnocentred, rese