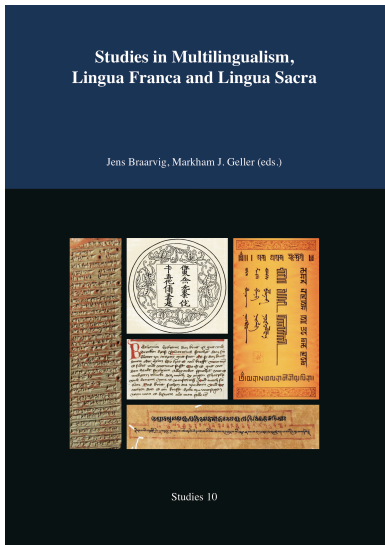


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Studies 10

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Konrad of Megenberg: German Terminologies and Expressions as Created on Latin Models



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Chapter 4

Konrad of Megenberg: German Terminologies and Expressions as Created on Latin Models

Kathrin Chlench-Priber

Konrad of Megenberg or *Conradus de Montepuellarum* was born in 1309 into the lower nobility at Mäbenberg, a district of Schwabach in middle Franconia. Presumably he had already learned to read and write before he went to Erfurt at the age of approximately 13 or 14 years, where he went to school. He stayed there until 1330/31, thus for about 8 years, studied intensely, and made his living by working as a tutor.¹ It was in fact possible to study at Erfurt and acquire the knowledge of a master, *magister artium*, but the Erfurt schools did not have the privileges of a university, which meant that they could not confer academic degrees. We do not exactly know which lectures Konrad attended but from the statutes of the later university of Erfurt dated 1412 as well as from the transmitted manuscripts, it is possible to reconstruct the fields of knowledge with which Konrad came into contact.²

Undoubtedly, Konrad had to take the standard subjects *grammatica, logica, philosophia naturalis, philosophia moralis and mathematica*. In this context, he certainly came across *Sphera mundi* of John of Holywood (*Johannes de Sacrobosco*) for the first time, a text he later translated from Latin into German. However, his engagement with grammar can be considered more formative than with the other standard subjects mentioned above.

Erfurt was a stronghold of modistic grammar, which is a special kind of realistic language theory. Thomas of Erfurt wrote his main work *Tractatus de modo significandi*, also known as *Grammatica speculativa*, between 1300 and 1310.³ Following Aristoteles, he distinguishes between entities, the mental concept of entities, and its verbal expressions. Just as entities and the ability of cognition are considered as universal, the semantic and grammatical principles of all languages are the same, only the *voces or signifiants*—to use a nearly equivalent modern term—differ. After having understood (*modus intelligendi*) the different properties of the given entities (*modus essendi*), the two mentioned aspects of an object can be connected by the *modus significandi* with expressions (*voces*). The result of this process is a linguistic sign which is congruent with reality regarding its lexical and grammatical signification (Figure 1).⁴

It is not intended here to explain the modistic concept in detail, but we have to consider that Konrad of Megenberg became first a realist and then a convinced modist from the time of his studies in Erfurt. Throughout his life, he concerned himself with questions of philosophy

¹ See Gottschall (2004, 25–31).

² See Lorenz 1989.

³ Thomas von Erfurt (1972).

⁴ See Gardt (1999, 25–38).

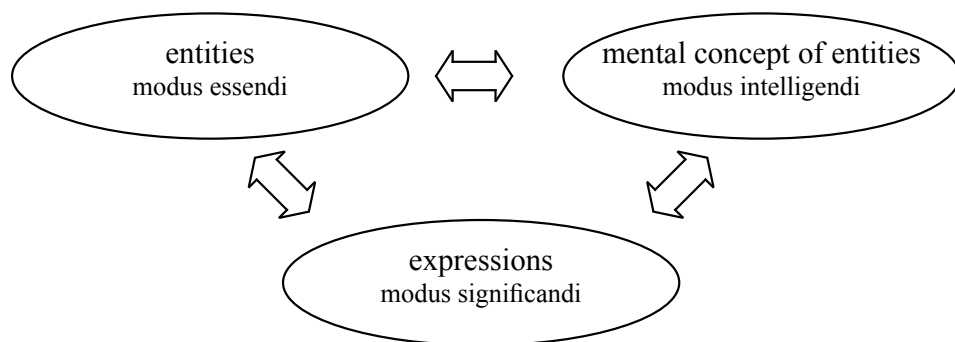


Figure 1: Modistic Grammar Theory.

of language. Still, in his *Yconomica*⁵ and *De mortalitate in Alamannia*,⁶ both written in the mid-fourteenth century, he dealt with this subject and assails the position of the nominalists, in particular of William Ockham (1285–1347).⁷

1330 Konrad relocated to the Sorbonne in Paris where he soon finished his studies in philosophy and obtained the degree of *magister actu regens* not later than 1343. He was therefore obliged to lecture at the artistic faculty for two years but went on to teach there for eight years and at the same time studied theology.⁸ In 1343, he became schoolmaster of St. Stefan's school in Vienna, which is closely involved with the origins of the later prominent university. Five years later, in 1348, he changed to Regensburg and was appointed canon; he also worked as priest at the cathedral of St. Ulrich from 1359 up to 1363. In Regensburg, where he died in 1374, Konrad finished or produced most of his approximately 25 works. The subjects are diverse: theology, canon law, moral philosophy, political science, hagiography, and natural science. Nearly all of them were written in Latin, which was the language of scholars in the Middle Ages, but Konrad also translated two scientific works from Latin into German.⁹

The first of these is *Die deutsche Sphaera* based on John of Sacrobosco's *Sphaera mundi*, translated between 1347 and 1350. It is an astronomical text, describing the composition of cosmos and the movements of planets according to Ptolemy. The second work is *Das Buch von den Naturleichen Dingen*, often also called *The Book of Nature*, which is predicated on the third redaction of Thomas of Cantimpré's (1201–1270/72) *Liber de natura rerum*. It was begun in 1348 and finished in 1350. Konrad divided his text into eight books dealing, for example, with herbs, birds, humans, planets, or jewels. Every single book is composed of many articles, so that the work as a whole has an encyclopedic character. Therefore *The*

⁵Konrad von Megenberg (1973–1984).

⁶Konrad von Megenberg (1971–1973)

⁷See Gottschall (2004, 36–37).

⁸See Gottschall (2004, 75–76).

⁹The third text often ascribed to Konrad is the tractatus *Von der sel*, written in 1359. It is a translation of chapters 2–7 of Bartholomäus Anglicus' (ca. 1190–ca. 1250) *De proprietatibus rerum*. The text can only be found in the second version of *Buch der Natur*. It is arguable whether Konrad was the redactor and even translator of this text, therefore I will not treat *Von der sel*. Dagmar Gottschall (2004, 21–22) gives convincing arguments concerning the style of translation which cast Konrad's authorship into doubt. See further Schuler (1982).

Book of Nature was often alleged to be the first encyclopedia written in German, even if this term is anachronistic and does not cover the fact that Konrad's main intention was to make nature understandable, for nature refers back to God's devices and finally to God himself.

To recapitulate: Konrad had already been working as a tutor or teacher for almost 25 years when he began his translations. This means that he was conversant both with the Latin language and with the subject matter of his sources. Presumably, he began his translations for an elite who was not educated enough to understand Latin texts.¹⁰

Concerning language, Konrad had a highly reflected point of view which was ingrained in modistic language theory. The interesting point for us is how he translated texts into German—a language in which, at that time, neither technical nor scientific terms existed. In the following, I shall exemplify Konrad's translation strategies using his two German texts: *Die deutsche Sphaera* and *Das Buch von den Naturleichen Dingen*.

Die deutsche Sphaera is based on a Latin astronomical text which every student of the liberal arts was required to study. The text is not too demanding—there are much more complicated astronomical texts from the same period—but it gives a firm groundwork in cosmological and astronomical questions. Quite naturally, the Latin text contains the typical terminology of this subject. How else would it be possible to explain, for example, the position of climate zones on earth or the movements of the planets?

While the Latin terminology was already well developed, there was none in German that Konrad could use in his translations. This means that Konrad had to decide how to transfer the Latin, especially the *termini technici*, into German.

The method *verbum e verbo*,¹¹ which follows the Latin text very closely, often rebuilds the syntax of the Latin source and uses the foreign words as technical terms. The method *sensum de sensu* transfers the patterns of foreign grammar completely into the target language and creates new *termini technici* in German. Translations by the first method are in the worst case unintelligible, but the technical terms are more or less definite, even if they remain foreign. The second method yields readable texts and offers more comprehensible terms in vernacular, but it also produces polysemy and homonymy (Figure 2).

Scientific language in medieval translations based on Latin could be described as a “funciolect” of vernacular, which has its own vocabulary and style but does not differ completely from vernacular. Depending on whether the texts are very close to Latin or not, their language could be described as a “diasystem” between those two extremes.¹² Konrad chose the second way because intelligibility was most important for him. Relating to his technical terms, it means that he tried to develop a new comprehensible terminology.

To give some examples: Konrad called the sun's orbit (ecliptic) *scheinprecher*, “shine destroyer,” because an eclipse of sun or moon can only happen if the moon crosses this line.¹³ He named the equator *ebennechter*, “equinoxer,” because the sun touches this circle twice, when day and night are equally long.¹⁴ The horizon he termed as *augenender*, “eye ender,” because it limits the view.¹⁵

¹⁰See Wolf (2011, 313–318). See further Koopmann (2016, 9–15).

¹¹The division of those two methods was already reflected in the ancient world; the Church Father Hieronymus also made this determination in *De optimo genere interpretandi*, which was written in 415 CE. See Hieronymus (1980).

¹²See Wolf (1987).

¹³See Deschler (1977, 105).

¹⁴See Deschler (1977, 101).

¹⁵See Deschler (1977, 143).

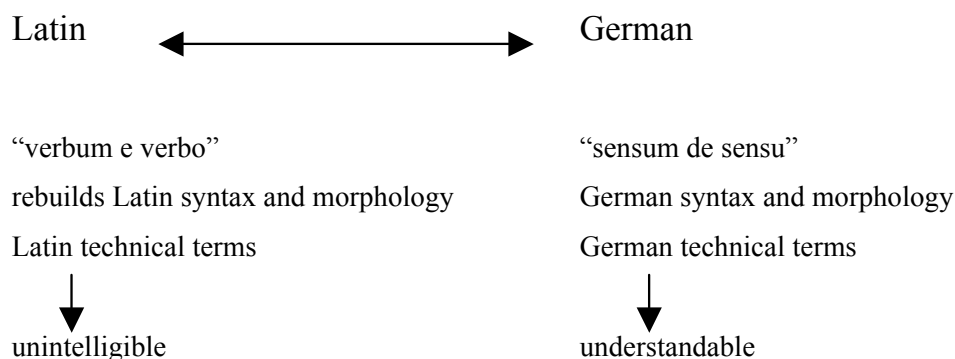


Figure 2: Comparison between the two translation methods.

Often Konrad offered two or more German terms for one Latin word to clarify an issue, such as *halphimel* or *halpwerld*, “half sky” or “half world,” for hemisphere. And the other way around, he used one German word for different Latin terms, such as *gesiht*, for *sensus visus* (visual sense) and *aspectus* (angle of planets in the ecliptic). Even certain vernacular words obtain a new meaning, such as *festerlin*, little window, which also can name components of an astrolabe;¹⁶ or *dick*, thickness, which is used to denote the diameter of a circle.¹⁷ Whereas those two examples are very easy to comprehend, the next one is more sophisticated. Konrad pointed out that *drachen* (dragon) is the vernacular word to describe the flaming tail of a comet; other than the mentioned term he used *wispaum*, which means long rigid bar, to denominate the form of the celestial phenomenon. Even if we do not know if Konrad invented this new meaning, he provided the first documentation of this application, which can still be found in sources of the nineteenth century.¹⁸

We can assert that Konrad’s terms are really suggestive but his terminology is still quite far from what we expect of scientific terminology from a modern point of view: it is not precisely defined, which would otherwise enable brief and accurate communication. But this is not what Konrad aimed for; he simply wanted to render the text in understandable German.

Let us compare Konrad’s expressions with other cosmological and astrological texts. John of Sacrobosco’s text has been translated four times into German.¹⁹ The anonymous *Puechlein von der Spera* was the second attempt to convey John’s knowledge into German. It was, however, completely uninfluenced by Konrad’s work. Even Konrad Heinfogel, who contributed the second translation after Konrad, did his work independently, although it is certain that Heinfogel used his namesake’s translation.

Even after having compared Konrad’s terminology with those of randomly chosen astronomical codices of the fifteenth century, such as Codex Vindobonensis 3055, we can

¹⁶See Deschler (1977, 53).

¹⁷See Deschler (1977, 35).

¹⁸See Deschler (1977, 305). See also *Das Deutsche Wörterbuch von Jacob und Wilhelm Grimm*, sub voce “Wiesebaum”: <http://woerterbuchnetz.de/DWB/>, accessed May 22, 2017.

¹⁹See Heinfogel (1981, I).

ascertain no influence of Konrad's translations. By examining German astronomical texts, we can discover that the technical terms vary from text to text, which means that in general translations were developed independently of one another. So the reason why Konrad's terms remained almost without effect in German astronomical terminology is not the lack of quality of his translations. The main reason is in fact that the German translations of astronomical texts were isolated; they were not spread widely and not well circulated. Astronomy was confined within the walls of the universities where the prevalent language was Latin. With more than 200 editions, the *Sphere* of John Holywood was much more successful than Konrad's translation, which is only transmitted in 11 manuscripts. This could be explained by the fact that John's text was part of the *corpus astronomicum* and had to be read by all who studied at the art faculty. Furthermore, everyone who wanted to deal with astronomy earnestly did so in Latin and not in German.²⁰

Let us now take a closer look at *The Book of Nature*: In the rhymed prologue of *Das Buch von den Naturleichen Dingen* Konrad informed us about the motives and justification for his translation.

Ein wirdig weibes chron,
in welhem claid man die anſicht
so fint ir tugendleichev werch an chainem end verhandelt.
[...]

Sam tû div edel chunft:
in welher ſprach man sei durch chift,
doch ift ſi unverhawen an ir ſelben mit den zungen.
[...]
div red ſchol vnuerſchetet fein, mit clarheit ſchon vmbſchlungen.

Konrad claimed to be entirely in accordance with the modistic grammar theory, according to which all languages are suitable for describing scientific facts. More decisive than the choice of language is the applied style, which means that the speech should be clear and without "shadows" that "becloud" the intention. In order to clarify relations, Konrad even approved the use of metaphors or allegories. This shows again that Konrad did not translate literally, but loosely. In this way, he addressed a wider audience because literal translations were often only written for use in schools. This attests the large number of manuscripts of *The Book of Nature*: 69 texts contain the whole work and there are more extant fragments. This fact is certainly connected with the interest in the content and with Konrad's translation skills.

An explanation could be provided by taking a closer look at Konrad's manner of working, using the example of *nomia rerum* with which almost every article in *The Book of Nature* begins. Two cases can be distinguished: the name of an entity either exists in vernacular or it does not.

²⁰See Deschler (1977, 324).

In the first case, Konrad's endeavor is to find the correct German equivalent to identify the treated object. To give a basic example: *Taurus haizzt ochf* (Taurus means *ochf*, bull).²¹ Often he used a signal formula like *haizzt ze dāutfch...* (that means in German) (III.A.32), which has the function to mark the beginning of a translation of *nomina propria*.²² We have to consider that in the fourteenth century, standardized German had not yet been developed. Konrad, who was born in Franconia and lived in Erfurt, Vienna, and Regensburg, became familiar with different German dialects. He was aware of this variety and used it by designating the entities partly with multiple names from different German dialects: *Locusta haizt ein hæfchreck oder ein habersfchrek* (Locusta, locust, is called *ein hæfchreck* or *habersfchrek*), (KvM, III.F.16). Sometimes he even comments the alternatives:

Der schaur haizzt in anderr dāutfch der hagel. (KvM, II.20)

“fchaur,” the hail, is called “hagel” in a different dialect.

Der chranwitpaum haizt in meinr mütterleichen dæutfch ein wechalter. (IV.A.20)

“chranwitpaum,” the juniper, is called “wechalter” in my mother tongue.

Ich Megenbergær wān, daz deu wurtz, die etzfwā merretich haizt vnd anderfwa chren, radix haizzet ze latein. (V.68)

I, Megenbergær, guess, that the root, which is called somewhere “merretich,” horseradish, and elsewhere “chren,” is named “radix” in Latin.

By giving such alternatives, Konrad enabled his translation to be spread more widely than in just an area where a certain German variety with special *nomina propria* was used. We can ascertain that manuscripts of *The Book of Nature* that were written in the eastern upper German area often keep all variants in the text, whereas in those written in other regions frequently only one variant is chosen or even replaced by a name of the own variety.²³ This kind of adaption was necessary both to make the text understandable for users and to market it in different areas.

In the second case, there are no existing *nomina propria* in German for the entities. Konrad reflected this situation:

Nv mōhftu sprechen zū mir: Du nennest mir vil tier mit chriechifchen worten, die schōlft du mir zū dāutfch nennen oder du bringft daz lateinifch pūch niht reht ze dāutfch. Dez antwūrt ich dir vnd ſprich, daz div tier vnd andriv dinch, die in dāutfchen landen niht ſind, niht dāutſcher namen habent. Darvmb tūft du mir vnreht. (III.A.19)

Now you will say: You call many animals with Greek or Latin words; you should use German terms, otherwise your translation from the Latin book is not acceptable. I answer to this, that animals and other things, which do not exist in German countries, have no German names. So you wrong me.

²¹ Konrad von Megenberg (2003, III.A.63), in the follow quoted/cited with roman numbers.

²² See Nischik (1989).

²³ See Berend (1999, 51–53).

Konrad was determined to bring the Latin or Greek terms into German. If he could not find a suitable German word, he adapted the foreign one carefully into German, which means that he created a loanword.²⁴ Mostly, Konrad left the endings and theme-elements out and applied the weak declension.²⁵

Von dem killen. Kylion oder killon [...] daz mag ein kill haizzen. (III.C.13)

About kill. Kylion or killon, a fabulous marine animal, can be called “kill.”

In the next example, he did the same but added the German name for easier identification:

Tortuca haizt ein tortuk [...] vnd haizzend ez etlich dæutfch læut ein schiltchroten. (III.E.33)

Tortuca means “toruk” [...] and many Germans call it “schiltchroten,” turtle.

The next example given seems to be of the same type:

Tarans haizt ein tarant. (III.E.34)

Tarans, tarantula, is called “tarant.”

However, *tarant* was not created by Konrad of Megenberg. The word had already been documented in *Partonopier und Meliur* by Konrad of Würzburg, who died in 1287, or in Hugo of Langensteins’s *Martina* from about 1300. This shows that we have to examine carefully which words were actually introduced for the first time by Konrad.²⁶ Another method he often used was to create loan translations by transferring morpheme by morpheme.²⁷

Onocratulus mag ze dæutfch ein anchrätel gehaizzen. (III.B.54)

Onocratulus, the white pelican, can be called “anchrätel” in German.

Pellicanus haizt nach der aigenchait der latein grabhaütel. (III.B.55)

Pellicanus is called according to his properties in Latin “grabhaütel,” grey skinned/skinny.

Implicitly, Konrad dissected the Latin *pellicanus* into *pellis* (skin) and *canus* (grey) to form an etymologically correct translation. Accessorily, he added the diminutive suffix -el, which seems to be one of his favorite affixes. The output is *grabhaütel*, but this word was only understandable in connection with Latin and was thus never established in German.

In other cases, he tried to create new words, which were accurately related to the properties of an entity that was being described:

Concha oder coclea haift ein fnek vnd ift ze dæutfch als vil gesprochen als ein flächlink oder ein eytlink, wan fo der mon ab nimt, fo werdent ir schaln flach hol vnd eytel.

Concha or coclea is called fnek and it means in German something like “flächlink,” plainling, or “eytlink,” vainling, because if the moon wanes, its scallops become plain, hollow, and vain.

²⁴Referring to Werner Betz’s (1944) terminology, this kind of transfer is called “Lehnwort.”

²⁵See Nischik (1989, 503).

²⁶An examination of affix-based word formations in *The Book of Nature* is contained in Brendel et al. (1997).

²⁷Referring to Werner Betz’s terminology, this kind of transfer is called “Lehnübersetzung.”

Another example is the name of the animal *denckfuezz* (III.C.5) (leftfoot), which has a small right and a big left foot. In these cases, Konrad tried to combine German words in a new way to clarify the foreign name. We call this method loan creation.²⁸

We see a different but related type, when Konrad used the common German word *merjuncfrawe* (III.C.18), mermaid, for a marine animal *Scilla*, because they both have fabulous properties and live in water. The established word has obtained a new meaning; therefore this kind of type is called loan meaning.²⁹

Konrad's ambition to create new *nomina propria* in cases of missing German terms could be explained by the fact that in the Latin text etymologic explications are often already given. Behind all this, the realistic conception can be discerned that one can truly understand an entity by explaining its name. Isidor of Sevilla (ca. 560–636) wrote the *Etymologiae* in 623, a work which was *inter alia* a predecessor of Konrad's main source.

There are many articles in *The Book of Nature* that contain such explanations for the Latin words. To render this in German, Konrad had to give German translations for those Latin words that may have inspired him in his own creations, for example, when he said:

Gladiolus haizzet flaten chraut vnd haizt aigenleichen nach der latein swertlinch oder swertchravt darvmb, daz es an finer gefalt it sam ein fwertes chling. (V.42)

Gladiolus is called "flaten chraut" and is actually named according to Latin "swertlinch" or "swertchravt," "swordling" or "sword herb," because it is formed like a blade of a sword.

Whereas the astronomical terms in are not necessarily definite, Konrad wanted to give every entity mentioned in *The Book of Nature* a distinct name. It can be demonstrated by the following example. In Konrad's source, there are two different chapters, both dealing with the nightingale. One of those chapters is entitled "*De philomena*," the other "*De lucinia*." Konrad translates "*Phylomena haizt ein nahtigal*" (III.B.62, Philomena is called nightingale.) With this short phrase, the German term is assigned and this is the reason why Konrad did not want to use it again for *lucinia*. He trusted his source, which seems to describe two different birds, although Latin-German glossaries from as early as Old High German times translate both *philomena* and *lucinia* with *nahtgala*.³⁰ And we can assume that Konrad used such glossaries for his translations. The German name he offered for *lucinia* is *leutz*, a term that he created himself. The relation between the Latin and the German name could be explained by conditioned and spontaneous sound change.³¹ We can say that he probably imitated by analogy what he observed with other older German loanwords adapted from Latin.

From all this examples, we see that Konrad tried to find adequate German words to denominate and characterize the entities given in *The Book of Nature*. If no *nomina propria*

²⁸In Betz's terminology "*Lehnschöpfung*."

²⁹According to Betz's terminology it is called "*Lehnbedeutung*." For further examples for all those mentioned types, see Scholz (1992, 931).

³⁰See Köbler (1993): *sub voce* *nahtgala*.

³¹It seems that Konrad rebuilt the *i*-umlaut, which changed the long *u* into the long *ü* before *i*, and whose process was already terminated in Old High German times. Besides, he used diphthongization, which changes the long *ü* to *eu* in the early New High German period. The ending of the Latin word was left out. This way of adaption is quite remarkable because Konrad used a phonologic pattern with the *i*-umlaut that was no longer active in his time. See Nischik (1989, 504).

existed, he used, as in *Die deutsche Sphaera*, certain word forming patterns that are still used today. We know them from as early as Old High German times, when Latin clerical vocabulary was transferred into German. Unlike the theological words that had been in common use and were accepted gradually into German, Konrad's loan coinage did not become established in vernacular. Even if *The Book of Nature* was widely spread, it was not influential enough to install the *nomina propria* in vernacular, presumably because they were not even needed. Scientists who were seriously occupied with botany, zoology, astronomy, or medicine did it as a matter of course in Latin and used the Latin terms. Konrad's translations could explain to them at best the etymology or meaning of terms.

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