

# **The Influence of French on Society and Language in the Middle English Period**

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## **Abstract**

The history of languages is one of the most wonderful studies to such an extent that one could spend all his life trying to unveil the secrets of this unique and particular vehicle that has contributed to the construction of our societies since ancient times. Both oral and written languages have not only shaped the full history of humanity, but also evolved throughout the centuries. They have undergone substantial changes, whether semantic, syntactic or morphological, they are still in motion and will always be. With regard to English language, it is noticeable that among the Indo-European languages it may be the one that has undergone the deepest transformations since its origins that go back to the multiple invasions that England suffered from the Roman colonization until the Norman Conquest.

The Norman Conquest of 1066 has left a considerable mark on the English landscape in the form of cathedrals, churches, and castles, and had a massive impact on the English language (Trotter 39). Both of these are still visible today. It is well known that a high percentage of the vocabulary of our Modern English is of French origin. Although the roots of the English language come from different origins, such as Celtic, German, Anglo-Saxon and Scandinavian, French can be regarded as the key language that has subsequently influenced the development and the complexity of the world's major "lingua franca" nowadays. The introduction of the French lexicon did not take place immediately, but was gradually adapted to the wants of daily matters. Initially, the language of the Norman conquerors including the specific vocabulary of the army was necessarily adopted. Then, it was followed by the French origin terms referring to law and administration, which were part of the elite that ruled England. Most French words are not to be deemed as loanwords in the conventional sense, that is to say words incorporated from a foreign language, but terms taken over into English at a time of sustained language contact between English and French, when the two languages coexisted in the country. At the same time, due to the strong influence of the various cultural aspects that the Normans brought to England, Old English terms derived from

German lexicon started to disappear, given that the duplicity of two words meaning the same concept made often Old English vocabulary die out in favour of its French counterpart, although sometimes both terms were kept.

## **Introduction**

The contact between the languages is the source of their lexical wealth. They adopt and assimilate foreign terms and in the opposite direction, they put into practice the diffusion of their lexicon with their distinctive morphological features. Both French and English participate in this phenomenon, the same as other modern languages do. All natural languages change and because they change, they have histories. Every language changes in different ways, so their histories are unique and different. The history of a given language is the description of how it has changed over time. The history of English is the record of how one dialect of West Germanic origin has evolved over the past fifteen hundred years. In this regard, it is useful to distinguish the external history from the internal history. The former concerns the events that have happened to the speakers of Old English leading to changes in the language, for example, the Norman invasion that made French the official language of England for about three hundred years, which profoundly affected the English language, whereas the internal history refers to the changes that occur within the language itself and cannot be attributed directly to external forces. Since the Norman Conquest in 1066 and over the centuries, the Gallicisms or French expressions have been able to take root into the English lexicon thanks to the History that both languages have shared. It is worth noticing that the process of the linguistic transfer is somewhat complex. The conventionality of the lexicon is a process that gradually leads a lexical item to its introduction into a linguistic community. Through the contact with the speakers of the receiving language, the lexicon progressively takes the main features, such as pronunciation, of the said language. English has experienced many periods during which there have been different successive waves of loanwords from French and above all from Norman French (which became Anglo-Norman). These periods overlap the

historical times when both English and French speakers' cultural identity merged. Nowadays, one can assert that the lexicon borrowed from Norman French is more than ever ingrained in Modern English.

### **State of the Art**

The purpose of the analysis of the present paper is to show why French was the language that better suited the needs of the Middle English speaking people at the time when it was introduced and how the borrowing process took place in the medieval era. This is not a simple process of transfer of vocabulary from one language to another, but a matter of different factors that explain why French borrowings occur at a specific time and in a particular place. Over the past century, many linguistic studies have been carried out by scholars to find out the grounds why a particular language has traditionally adopted terms or borrowed lexical items from another language. The current views support the idea that the receiving language needs to fill some gaps in its existing vocabulary and at the same time it sees the borrowing process as a distinctive mark of prestige, considering that the new language is viewed as refined and sophisticated.

In this regard, we have to stress the importance of a range of social and cultural factors that have tended to the progressive and successful introduction of French into England soil. One of the most outstanding features concerns the creation of the language of English Law in the Middle Ages that occurred in the thirteenth century. At that time, the native language of the legal personnel was English, but the fact that they chose French in spite of English was because this language was a linguistic medium intelligible in the whole country and these specific French terms were free from dialectal variations, unlike English. So, the adoption of French legal terms is not only supported by a matter of prestige or to plug gaps, but also by a question related to the concepts that the English lawyers gave to those words, refining and adding to their meaning as they went along. Another major concern to better understand the phenomenon of lexical borrowing has to be searched through the considerable interpenetration of the Anglo-

Saxon and Norman societies that coexisted on the soil of England. However, this process was far from being a mere adoption of foreign terms to cover some deficiency or strive after the prestige of the French culture. It rather shows that the two cultures blended and therefore the blending of English and French was evident in many areas of activity, where two lexical items were used indistinctly. In short, we can assert that the bulk of English terminology of religious, legal and administrative organization is French in its origin. The reason lies in the fact that the social and religious constitution of medieval England was such that the royal court, the nobility and the clergy lived in castles and abbeys, the chief buildings of the urban centres, and French was the language of these inhabitants who were to a large extent of Anglo-Norman origin.

The sources of the research on the adaption of the French lexicon from the period of the Norman Conquest are owed in the first place to Professor William Rothwell. William Rothwell was educated at Oxford and went on to study Medieval French with Wagner and Provençal with Boutière at the *Ecole des Hautes Etudes* in Paris. A lectureship at the University of Leeds led to a Readership in Medieval French at the same university and then to the Chair of French Language at Manchester University, from which he retired in 1982. He worked on the first edition of the *Anglo-Norman Dictionary (AND)* from 1963 to the completion of the First Edition in 1992 and is General Editor of the Revised Edition: <http://www.anglo-norman.net/bios.html>. Initially, the *AND* was very "literary" in its coverage, but towards the mid-1980s, under the editorship of Professor William Rothwell, who had by then retired from Manchester, it began to incorporate important amounts of resolutely non-literary words and sources, in the form of material gleaned from legal, administrative, commercial, private, and generally more down-to-earth documents.

In the second place, I have to mention the late Professor David Trotter, who studied at Oxford and Paris and had his first academic post at the University of Exeter. He was Professor of French at the University of Wales, Aberystwyth, where he has been Head of the Department of European Languages since 1993 and was Dean of the Faculty of Arts from 1996 to 2000. As well as leading the *Anglo-Norman Hub* project, he

had particular responsibility for Letter 'A' of the revised *Anglo-Norman Dictionary*. He was the foremost authority of his generation on medieval French language and lexicography. His greatest academic legacy was probably his editorship of the online *Anglo-Norman Dictionary*, which records the variety of French introduced to Great Britain by the Norman conquest of 1066.

In the third place, a special mention is to be addressed to Otto Jespersen who was a Danish linguist and a leading authority on English grammar. He helped to revolutionize language teaching in Europe, contributed greatly to the advancement of phonetics, linguistic theory, and the history of English. As a Professor of English at Copenhagen (1893–1925), he led a movement for basing foreign-language teaching on the use of conversational speech rather than on textbook study of grammar and vocabulary, and he wrote a number of textbooks used in Denmark and other countries. Jespersen published extensively on English; one of his most vital works is *Growth and Structure of the English Language* (1905). His great work in this area was the *Encyclopedic Modern English Grammar*, 7 vol. (1909–49).

## **Methodology**

The initial point of departure for my research was to find any kind of materials related to the key issue of the subject, i.e. the influence of the French lexicon in the Middle English. So, there are two important aspects to be taken into account, which are the study of the Anglo Norman, the language of the Norman conquerors, and the historical context of England in the eleventh century, the period when two major circumstances occurred, namely the introduction of French and the beginning of Middle English.

I started to investigate through Linceo+, the platform of the UNED Library, to find the first papers related to the above research, which has proved to be of a great interest as a first step. Another major resource has been provided by JSTOR, a valuable digital library of academic journals and books whose contents include a wide range of papers

edited for over one century. As the matter to be investigated is related to both Linguistics and also Literature, given that the history has substantially shaped the growth and the development of the English language, I have also found considerable information through PROQUEST. The key words “Anglo Norman” have enabled me to find out the most outstanding written information on the relationship between the Norman Conquest and its influence on English society in general. The *Anglo-Norman On-Line Hub* website includes a great deal of texts of primary importance for my study. I also have to state Google Scholar as a search engine, which has been of a help to gather information from complete books.

The next step has consisted of importing the most relevant sources thanks to REFWORKS in order to create a database, which allows me to collect and save the references of the most valuable articles for my own bibliography.

### **Chapter One: The Historical Context of Old English in the Eleventh Century**

The history of English language is defined by historical periods throughout the centuries. In the case of the period we are concerned with, that is the Late Old English which further led to the beginning of Early Middle English, there are two historical events that took place between 899 and 1066: the death of King Alfred the Great (871-899), the first king of the House of Wessex, and the Norman Conquest. At that time, Anglo-Saxon England was the name of the country where four dialects were spoken: Northumbrian, Mercian, West Saxon and Kentish. Yet the only dialect in which there is a larger collection of texts is West Saxon. We also have to bear in mind that this was not the sole language in which texts were written. As everywhere in the medieval age, Latin was the first and most influential language used in religion and literature, however, it began to be replaced by the vernacular language that prevailed under King Alfred's reign. The political climate that existed during his reign favored the union of the different kingdoms of England and consequently had important philological implications. Alfred's son and



successor, Edward the Elder (899-924), continued the ambitious policy of his predecessor and assumed the translation of original Latin manuscripts into Old English, such as Pope Gregory's *Regula Pastoralis*, the A-version of the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* in its earlier parts and the earliest manuscript of the translation of *Orosius's Historiae Aduersus Paganos*. Among the dialects that most influenced the grammar of Old English is the Mercian dialect, due to the linguistic influence of King Alfred's scribes who were of Mercian origin. The reason why the West Saxon political elite respected Mercian attitudes was the fact that Mercia was the junior partner in the Kingdom of the Anglo-Saxons. Moreover, the prominence of Mercian scholars in both Alfred's and Edward's court circles was acknowledged for their Latin learning and their expertise in rendering Latin texts into the vernacular. So, the early West Saxon manuscripts were composed of an admixture of Mercian dialect owing to the presence of Mercians who attended the various royal duties, and of the West Saxon dialect spoken by the natives; all of them reflected the political and linguistic reality during these kings' reigns. As a result, we can consider that this supradialectal language gave rise to the Standard Old English or what is also acknowledged by Late Old English, which was to become the vernacular used for the written texts, but not for spoken language. This phenomenon refers not only to phonological and morphological forms of the West Saxon dialect but also to the regularization of the orthography in texts whose diffusion spanned over all England. There is one phenomena called "Winchester vocabulary" that is known for its concern for the refinement of the vernacular language. Its name is attributed to Æthelwold, bishop of Winchester (963-984). Winchester usage was introduced to reproduce the Latin Christian terminology; it functions, as Mechthild Gretsch<sup>1</sup> points out:

"For Latin *ecclesia* in the abstract sense 'the Catholic Church' the Winchester words would be *gelabung* and the non-Winchester synonyms would be *cirice* or *gesammung*. Like *gelabung*, the majority of the Winchester synonyms pertain to the language of the Christian religion" (168).

As a further example, we can assert that the authors who employed the Winchester words could distinguish the lexical meaning of the two words in Standard Old

English whose counterpart in Latin was *ecclesia*. *Gelapung* denotes the Catholic Church whereas *cirice* means the church building, which rendered more lexical precision than in Latin. The reason why the Anglo Saxons did not adopt more Latin words may be due to the fact that there was no Latin-speaking community living in actual contact with the Anglo Saxon society, so the influence of Latin came primarily from the ecclesiastical circles through the medium of writing. Thus, Winchester words revealed the concern of the scholars for using the resourcefulness of Old English words especially the terminology of Christianity in its semantical aspect. This phenomenon started during King Æthelstans' reign (924-939), fostered by the unification of England under West Saxon supremacy in 927 and the brilliant development of culture in his court. As was already the case under King Edward's reign, Mercian scholars were in charge of developing the standardization of Standard Old English. Poetry written in Old English is characteristic and richer than prose. The amount of synonymous terms is extraordinary and can be found in the most renowned Old English work *Beowulf*. To name 'hero' or 'prince' we find thirty-seven terms; for 'battle' we have at least twelve synonyms and for 'sea' we find seventeen expressions. As Otto Jespersen points out:

"[...] the number of synonyms is great enough to call for an explanation. A language has always many terms for those things that interest the speakers in their daily doings. [...] In many cases we are now unable to see any difference in signification between two or more words, but [...] we may assume that the Anglo-Saxons did not use them indiscriminately. It is characteristic of primitive peoples that their languages are highly specialized" (52-53).

Later, under King Edgar the Peaceful's rule (959-975), the kingdom of England experienced a stable political and intellectual climate and the resulting awareness contributed to the promulgation of two important normative tendencies, such as the *Regularis Concordia* to regulate life and liturgy in all England monasteries and the "Reform of Coinage" whereby a uniform currency was introduced in the whole country.

As described before, not only Latin coexisted with and influenced Old English, but there is an important element which also contributed to the development of the said

language: this is Scandinavian. The invasion of England was carried out in three stages: the first two incursions in 793 and 850 respectively were mainly attacks and plunders, whereas the third stage covers the period of assimilation from 878 to 1042, noticeably during King Canute's reign (1016-1035), as he achieved the union of the whole country into one peaceful realm. The Scandinavians brought a considerable amount of loanwords related to daily habits, which were easily adopted by the English, showing that the culture and civilization of the foreign settlers was not superior to that of the natives. Plenty of present place-names ending in *-by*, *-thorp*, *-beck*, *-dale*, etc. show a trace of the Scandinavian period. Indeed, if the Scandinavians ruled England for a short time, the settlers themselves did not belong to the ruling class.

"The Scandinavian loan words are homely expressions for things and actions of everyday importance; their character is utterly democratic" (Jespersen 79).

## **Chapter Two: The Introduction of Specific Terms of Norman French Origin**

The Old English lexicon was largely inherited from its Proto-West Germanic ancestor and shared its practices of lexical morphology with other West Germanic languages. The core of Middle English vocabulary, that is the set of words which have the most widespread currency, derives from Old English and consists to a large extent of single stems, many of them monosyllabic. A characteristic feature of Middle English is its habit of borrowing from other languages to increase its word stock. There seems to have been some reasons for this tendency towards loanwords during the Middle English period: Firstly, the large-scale contact between English speakers and users of other languages such as varieties of Norse and French. Secondly, the Latin revival of the twelfth century meant the widespread use of Latin for documentary purposes, and finally, the fact that Middle English was less inflected than Old English made it easier to adapt words from foreign languages to merge with the syntactic structures of the borrowing language. As a result, there are three main sources of loanwords during the Middle

English period: Norse, Latin and French. Most words from Norse origin and dating from the Middle English period express very common concepts. The Latin lexicon came into English as learned words carried over in the translation of Latin texts. By far, the largest number of words borrowed into English during the Middle English period comes from varieties of French, namely Norman origin. The major historical event that gave rise to the introduction of Norman French origin words was the Norman Conquest by William the Conqueror. Such borrowings reflected the role of French as the language of the ruling class who was not induced at all to learn the language of the inferior class, which the people from the new conquered land belonged to. Most of the new borrowings were comprised in the fields of the administration, army, justice and church among others. Most of these words were adopted from Norman French. For instance, the adopted word in Present Day English compared with its Present French cognate shows the following term in both Middle English and Norman French: *war* = *guerre* (Middle English and Norman French: *were*). Lexical borrowings are not a random practice, as terms are adopted from one language into another in particular social conditions. Each takes up its semantic place for social factors rather than linguistic reasons.

The Norman French influence can be said to have had a much more direct and observable impact upon the vocabulary than other linguistics aspects, such as phonology or syntax, although French has had some significant impact on the latter. The new terms introduced had to do a lot with the aristocratic side and the upper class status of the conquerors: *govern, reign, power, minister, council, authority, parliament, people, nation*, all are political words.

With the introduction of feudalism, many ranks are of French origin: *prince, duke and duchess, marquis, viscount, baron, court, noble, countess*. The name of the earl's wife has been retained, although 'count' is only used to designate continental ranks, not England's nobles. Yet, the words *king* and *queen* have not been displaced by the French words '*roi*' et '*reine*'.

The military matters were handled by the Normans and so were the following terms borrowed: *war, peace, battle, arms, dart, assault, siege* and the titles of the military

hierarchy: *lieutenant, sergeant, soldier, troops, vessel, navy*. In addition, terms of the military sphere which are of common use nowadays: *enemy, danger, escape, aid, prison, march, force, company, guard*.

The consequence of the Norman influence is greatly found in the field of justice and law: *Justice* itself is the more relevant example, *judge, jury, defendant, plead, cause, session, accuse, traitor, damage, property, privilege*, all of them may be grouped in the technical juridical vocabulary, whereas *case, marry, prove, male, female* are terms used by the lawyers, but which are of common use.

The same applies as regards the church, in hands of the higher classes: *religion, service, savior, angel, saint, abbey, cloister, clergy, baptism, homily, miracle, pray, sermon*. Moreover, morality terms such as *virtue, vice, duty, conscience, grace, charity, cruel, desire, jealous, pity, discipline*, have also a French legacy.

Not only are the above terms of essential importance for their influence and daily use on the today's language, but a special attention must be paid to the names of the animals whether we are speaking of living or dead animals. As Otto Jespersen puts it:

“Sir Walter Scott made it popular in *Ivanhoe*, that while the names of several animals in their lifetime are English (*ox, cow, calf, sheep, swine, deer*), they appear on the table with French names (*beef, veal, mutton, pork, bacon, venison*). This is generally explained from the masters leaving the care of the living animals to the lower classes, [...] the use of the French words here is due to the superiority of the French cuisine, which is shown by a great many other words as well, such as *sauce, boil, fry, roast, toast, pastry, soup, sausage* [...] as well as *dinner and supper*” (89).

Since the Normans were the masters and teachers in the field of the arts and architecture, a great deal of French borrowings relating to technical vocabulary are found too: *beauty, colour, image, design, figure, ornament* on the one hand, and *arch, tower, pillar, porch, column* on the other hand.

It is worth noticing some artisan names which have retained the native words, i.e. Old English origin: *baker, miller, smith, weaver, shoemaker, shepherd*, in comparison

with other occupations which were thought to be in close contact with the upper classes, thus of French origin: *tailor, butcher, mason, painter, carpenter*. The above list of words is obviously not exhaustive. I have listed some of the most well-known terms as samples for each of the head matters.

Otto Jespersen in *Growth and Structure of the English Language* (93) made a study of the influx of 1000 French words at different periods, starting before the Norman Conquest until the end of the nineteenth century. I will only show the periods which spans the Middle English age, namely the four centuries of greater French influence.<sup>2</sup>

Period	Number of words
1051 – 1100	2
1101 – 1150	1
1151 – 1200	15
1201 – 1250	64
1251 – 1300	127
1301 – 1350	120
1351 – 1400	180
1401 – 1450	70

We can observe that the first century following the Conquest does not show a significant increase in the number of French words. It is not until the second half of the thirteenth century that the input of French borrowings is of a real importance and like this until the middle of the fourteenth century. Therefore, the development of French in medieval England can be split into two distinct periods: the first one covers the Norman influence until the early thirteenth century and the second one has been influenced by the Central French dialect. William Rothwell reports the following statement in *The Cambridge History of the English Language*: “French influence came from two separate dialects of French: firstly, from Norman, both as spoken and written language, and later,

as an artificially acquired literary language, from the French of the Ile de France” (426). The historical event that underlies this second wave of French influence is the massive immigration of new incomers from South France, further to the marriage of Henry III to Eleanor of Provence.

### **Chapter Three: The Influence of the New Lexicon on the Different Social Classes**

It is widely accepted that French culture has had a deep impact on the Medieval English society in every respect. Since 1066 the major part of the English people experienced a linguistic segregation in the fields of justice, science, arts and literature, yet the introduction of the French lexicon primarily served the upper and educated social classes. As a matter of fact, the lexical borrowings have been taken from the upper registers of the language, such as the texts concerning the administration, the law and science, which meant that this specific terminology was essentially used by a small and influential section of French origin people who lived in the cities and were in charge of the administrative and legal matters, as well as by the important merchant class that developed trade activities in the country. The power that the aristocracy, the military and the clergy exerted on the population gave rise to the influence of the French customs on the local inhabitants.

Although French was the native language of a small group made up of nobles and wealthy people, it was considered as the living and principal language in which most treatises, books and literature in general intended for all kinds of readers were written in England. Moreover, the marriages between the Norman and the English contributed to accelerate the diffusion of French, which implied a growing difference of a social nature between French speaking and English speaking people. As a result, Anglo-French became for centuries one of the two languages of record used in government. On the one hand, there were the officials and their clerks who were to a large extent English and copied records by moving from one language to another, i.e. from Anglo-French to

Middle English. The lexical enrichment of English started with the passing of Anglo-French terms into Middle English thanks to the transfer of words on their simplest level, with their form and meaning unchanged, by borrowing in the conventional sense, then by adopting cases forms into English from the insular spoken Anglo-French. This resulted in the considerable amount of absorption of French vocabulary into English, which found its basis on the close interpenetration of the Anglo-Saxon and Norman societies, giving rise to a real degree of bilingualism, in which coexisted a lexical contact issued from the blending of two cultures, as for instance the following pairs of words of both English and French origin: *shut* 'close', *answer* 'reply', *smell* 'odour', *yearly* 'annual', *stool* 'chair', *settle* 'couch', *kettle* 'pot'.

Nevertheless, this bilingual situation was primarily spread to a small portion of the population, the wealthy and cultivated. As Stephen H. Bush mentions: "The overwhelming mass of the population, composed as it was of illiterate agricultural laborers and including at most only a few small landed proprietors, continued to speak nothing but English" (162). English was undoubtedly the mother tongue of the whole population and the language that at the spoken level could cover all the domains and be understood by every person. "The most important factor in the continued use of French by the English upper class until the beginning of the thirteenth century was the close connection that existed through all these years between England and the continent [...] as the kings of England were likewise dukes of Normandy" (Baugh and Cable 111).

The reign of Henry II and Eleanor d' Aquitaine still had a great influence in promoting French and making England a bilingual country. This situation started to change when King John lost Normandy in 1204 and the nobility who owned estates on the continent saw how the king Philip II of France confiscated them. The political isolation of England from the continent implied that more and more members of the ruling class turned to the insular vernacular. Albeit French was the native language of William the Conqueror and his followers, whichever their social status might be, their descendants having contracted marriage in England with non-French people were naturally



intermingled, hence the fact that French started to lose its status as a vernacular language by the beginning of the thirteen century.

According to William Rothwell, “that French was widely used at that time no one would deny, but there is a world of difference between a language in widespread use and a vernacular” (453). French though widely used for culture, was more readily understood than Latin, which remained a learned language used only for administrative, legal and religious purposes, as it lacked of native people unlike French and English. The true role of French as from the first half of the thirteen century was of an acquired language; it is noteworthy that a new type of literary production directed towards those who wished to learn it, as a foreign language, became increasingly significant. A great deal of works written by non-native French authors and intended to non-native speakers of the said language appeared to promote the teaching of French to people who were willing to read and be instructed in different spheres of knowledge. Thus, manuals and treatises dealing with religion, science and medicine that were so far restricted to scholars or people having a good command of Latin, were published in French. Latin was gradually replaced by French as a language of culture and administration. The appearance of books for the nobility to speak and cultivate French demonstrates that English was the mother tongue, still French was acknowledged by the ruling class as the language of prestige.

Language instruction in this period was practical and made frequent use of dialogue and texts as in the *Manière de Langage* published in 1396. This manual was composed to help English people who wanted to travel to France, to teach them vocabulary relating to the basic necessities of any traveler when faced alone in a foreign country, such as ask for food, drink, shelter, learn greeting, counting, etc. In the middle of the thirteen century, Walter of Bibbesworth wrote his famous *Tretiz* or ‘Treatise’ with the aim of providing his patroness Dyonise de Mountchensi<sup>3</sup> with French terms belonging to the rural terminology so as to enable her to teach his children French. In this manner, words such as names of birds, plants and trees, sun and wind, rain and snow, household

tasks and activities typical of the world of agriculture were compiled in the ‘Treatise’. Walter of Bibbesworth’s introduction reads as follows:

*“Le tretiz ki munseignur Gauter de Bithesweth fist a madame Dyonise de Muntechesni pur aprise de langage. [...] et tut issint troverez vous le dreit ordre en parler e en respundre qe nuls gentils homme coveint saver. Dount tut dis troverez vous primes le fraunceis e puis le engelise amount”.*

“The treatise that Sir Walter of Bibbesworth made for Madame Dionisie de Muntchesny for learning the French language. [...] and thus in all of this you will find the proper terms and order for speaking and responding that any cultivated person ought to know. In all of this you will first find the French and then the English above”.

One interesting section of this manual is devoted to collective terms for various domesticated and wild animals, on animal vocalization in which the terminology is essentially onomatopoeic in both English and French. Here is a list of verbs for animal vocalization, called synthetic, given that the verb tries to reflect the sound produced by each of the animals listed. There is a relevant similarity in the vocabulary between the Anglo-Norman and Middle-English words and, further, between the Modern French and English ones:

Animal	Anglo-Norman	Middle-English	Mod. French	Mod. English
Dog	baier	berken	aboyer	bark
Lamb	baleier	bleten	bêler	bleat
Snake	cifler	cissen	siffler	hiss
Sow	groundiler	gounen	grogner	grunt
Horse	henir	neyen	hennir	neigh
Cat	mimouner	mewen	miauler	mew
Wolf	ouler	yollen	hurler	howl
Lion	rougir	romien	rugir	roar

The success of Bibbesworth's manuscript made it so popular that it served as the basis for the instructional manual known as *Femina*, in the early fifteenth century, to enable mothers to teach their children French and also intended for the education of the class of administrators who hardly had an adequate background of French. The text is composed in Anglo-French and contains glosses in Middle-English to help pupils to comprehend the French lexicon.

The linguistic situation in the countryside was such that to impede the decline of the minority French speaking community, different types of agricultural treatises dealing with estate management were written in Anglo-French nearly at the same period. For instance, we can cite the four essential treatises on agricultural management. The earliest one was the *Rules* of Robert Grosseteste, Bishop of Lincoln, in 1240; then by 1270 the anonymous treatise *The Seneschaucy* to instruct stewards and bailiffs and *The Hosbondrye* of Walter of Henley represent the more relevant texts in medieval England. The fourth treatise entitled *Husbandry* dates from the end of the thirteenth century. The landowners who were for the most part Francophone used a great number of Anglophone labourers under the supervision of officials. The masters needed to pass the orders in French to their stewards who in turn had to interpret the right instructions to transmit them to the Anglophone peasants. The separation created by the relationship between these two distinct social classes affected the overall linguistic situation in rural areas, unlike the situation of the urban centres, where the contact between both linguistic communities was real. As William Rothwell explains: "[...] as is proved by the absence of any sizeable body of French terms in English farming today, the native English terminology would be transmitted by word of mouth alone amongst a population that was very largely illiterate and static by law, hence most unlikely to adopt a foreign vocabulary" (390).

## **Chapter Four: The Progressive Loss of German Words**

The Middle-English period meant a considerable change in the whole conformation of English, not only due to the introduction of the French lexicon, but also because the Norman Conquest influenced the development of Old English, affecting the language in its phonology, grammar and vocabulary. Not only did the phenomenon of partial or complete substitution of words of German origin take place, but also other grammatical features of the language gave rise to a new structure that meant the passing from Old English to Middle English: changes in spelling conventions, letter forms and the alphabet used, changes in pronunciation, changes in word structure, changes in the grammar and word order. Orthography of words recorded in Old English changed for it adopted French spelling rules. For instance, the French vowel sound *OU* to say /u/ as in *hus*, which became 'house'. The French consonant group *QU* replaced /cw/ as in *cwic* 'quick' and *cwene* 'queen'. Modern English unlike other Germanic languages has just one pattern of regular plural formation ending in '-s'. Amongst the most important ones we can mention the reduction of inflections, in other words, the endings of the noun and adjective marking distinctions of number and case, partly due to the temporary eclipse of English by French as the language in use for written records after 1066. The elimination of the four cases (nominative, accusative, genitive and dative) is nonetheless a distinctive feature that still survives in Modern German. Although both Middle and Modern English are considered essentially a Germanic language, the former underwent a deep transformation at morphological level, allowing for its ability to adapt words from foreign languages and cohere with the syntactic structures of the borrowing language in relation to Old English, consequently it led to a change from a synthetic language with inflections and declensions to an analytic language, that is a language which incorporates an increasingly number of prepositions, presumably due to the French influence, this language being an analytic one.

The introduction of Anglo-French words into Middle English meant the arrival of a new civilization as well. If they indeed came to fill a need, the vast majority of borrowings competed with Old English words, expressing approximately the same idea. A struggle

ensued that resulted in the loss of many of the equivalent Old English terms. Some of them fell into disuse while others had to share their place with the new language brought by the conquerors. The Anglo-French vocabulary originally introduced had a great deal of words related to the army. Yet, some Old English words existing had by that time a synonym as in the following pair of words: *here* and *werod* 'army', *leod* and *folc* 'people'. Then as now, every individual had a couple of synonyms at his disposal, although one out of the two words sometimes underwent a displacement, died out or still survives, often determined by semantic issues, but especially for purposes of prestige, insofar as one language is deemed as superior, as was French. The point is to determine what Old English words still living at the time of the Norman Conquest were wholly or partially replaced by words from Anglo Norman, as new words appear while old ones are no longer used. A considerable number of vernacular, inherited words died out and were replaced by loanwords of French origin. Some of the lost words denoted concepts or institutions that had disappeared, like *sceop* 'court poet and singer', or the word *gesið* 'member of the nobility'. Others related to war and to the navy, *orrest* 'battle', *lip* 'fleet'. But the majority of the losses is found among common words: verbs like *fōn* 'to catch', 'to seize'; *hātan* 'to command', 'to name'; nouns like *ræd* 'counsel'; adjectives like *ēadig* 'wealthy', and adverbs like *swīþe* 'very'. Occasionally, the original English words of German origin survive in the dialects. Thus, the Old English word *ēam* means 'uncle', but it is still used as *eme* in Scotland, the same as *blēo* 'color' nowadays *blee*, though archaic. The word *dōm* 'judgment' is no longer used in the field of justice, but it has acquired a different meaning as in "the day of doom".

Here are some examples of Old English words displaced by the lexicon of French origin during the first period of French influence, some of which have kept their meaning in Modern German:

- *ferd, lay*                      host, army
- *gewitan*                        to depart
- *frip*                                peace (in German 'Friede')
- *earm*                              poor (in German 'arm')

- *sib* peace (*sib* is an obsolete word meaning 'family', 'relation', and has also given rise to *sibling*: 'brothers' or 'sisters')
- *fremð* strange (in German 'fremd')
- *casere* emperor (word borrowed from Latin during the continental period, in German 'Kaiser')
- *cumb* valley (survives in proper names)

The following Old English words are synonyms of French words. Although they are still in use, they are obsolete or of poetical use:

- *weald* forest (in German 'Wald')
- *lyft* air (in German 'Luft')
- *dōm* judgment
- *bliss* joy

These Old English words are of common use, though their meaning is slightly differentiated:

- *cild, child* infant
- *wundor, wonder* marvel (in German 'Wunder')
- *milde, mild* gentle
- *lust* desire (in German 'Lust')

Old English was a language that had the property of creating new vocabulary by affixation. A marked feature of new words formation was the use of prefixes to extend or develop meaning, as in the following examples: *brecan* 'to break', *abrecan* 'to destroy', *bærnan* 'burn', *forbærnan* 'consume'. It may be observed that the extended forms *abrecan* and *forbærnan* have been wholly replaced by words of French origin, i.e. 'destroy' and 'consume'.

After the Norman Conquest, the language started to lose those resources, and the word formation by affixing gave way to the introduction of new lexical items from French origin. In a similar way, the use of compound nouns was very extended in Old English. For example, to denote a small book, the system of utilizing the vernacular stock of words resulted in *handbōc*; yet this word was disused in the Middle English period, for it was replaced by the French word 'manual'. In the nineteenth century, the word 'handbook' reappeared in English as an instruction book.

The most apparent loss lies in the Old English prefixes. For instance, the prefix 'for-' (*ver-* in German) adding intensity, as in *forhang* 'put to death by hanging' in Middle-English. Now, this verb has died out. There are only a few verbs in Modern English which have kept the prefix 'for-', as 'forbear', 'forget', 'forgive', 'forsake'. The prefixes 'to-' (*zer-* in German) and 'ge-' have completely disappeared. It must be noted that the prefix 'ge-' was the most common one. In Old English, the prefix 'ge-' denoted the completion or result of an action. Like German, Old English did use 'ge-' as a prefix to form past participles. Another prefix 'with-' (meaning against) gave rise to the verbs 'withdraw', 'withhold', still in use today, but many others were replaced by Latin prefixes, already existing in the French borrowings, such as *withsay* by 'renounce' (*re-* in Latin) or *withspeak* by 'contradict' (*counter-* in Latin).

Not only did part of Old English prefixes lose their function, but also the decline was also noticeable in some suffixes. "The suffix '-lock' survives only in 'wedlock', '-red' only in 'hatred' and 'kindred'. Many of the Old English abstracts in '-ship' were lost. We have kept 'friendship', 'worship' but not 'fiendship' " (Baugh and Cable 178).

### **Chapter Five: Comparison between Vocabulary of Common and Specific Use**

The introduction of new terms of French origin has gradually been adapted to the needs of the ruling class in the first place and those of the native people living on England soil. The borrowings from Anglo-Norman, though they have played an essential

role in enriching the lexicon of the Middle English, are to be studied considering that this movement has not followed a linear pattern over the three centuries of French influence. Instead, there have been two distinctive periods or waves whose dividing line takes place around 1200. The first period comprises the lexical items derived from Anglo-Norman whereas the second period shows a lexical influence from the Central French or French of Paris, the French language spoken by the French nobility in the continent. We have to remember that by the middle of the eleventh century, not only was Old English the vernacular language in England, but Latin was then in widespread use as a language of record. Thus, Latin lexicon was largely found in the legal and religious texts that scribes and clerks used to carry out the daily administration, and although it was primarily the language used by European scholars to compile works of literature, it became the base language of the records in medieval England. Yet, just as Latin and Anglo-Norman coexisted in the official records, the former was a dead construct, since there were no native speakers, while the latter was a vernacular language brought by the Normans.

The development of French in England over the three centuries following the Conquest took lexical forms that differed substantially from the Continental French. A new linguistic situation started to develop as the inhabitants of England who used French in their profession brought an increasingly creative approach to the treatment of their adopted language. For instance, the greatest number of lexical words borrowed from French since the early times of the Conquest pertains to the religion, due to the necessity to transmit religious beliefs to the people. As early as the end of the twelfth century, England was culturally trilingual. There existed a situation of "Triglossia" wherein three languages were spoken in a given space, namely that Anglo-French, Middle English and Latin were the languages used by the clerks and scribes, and the knowledge about the linguistic state of the society was owed to this class of writers. As William Rothwell points out: "The question of the enrichment of the Middle English lexicon by the introduction of French terminology needs to be tackled in the first instance by the study in depth of the interplay of the three languages that went to make up the trilingual civilization of medieval England" (164).



Thus, the mixing of Anglo-French and Middle English was a process that took place as a result of the trilingual situation, in the sense that it contributed to the evolution of the insular lexicon of French origin, which has taken an etymological path from Anglo-French to Modern English different from the Continental French. In other words, French borrowings that had developed semantically since 1066 were absorbed with their semantic values into the native English language of generations who lived on the soil of England and evolved in an environment of Middle English, and not Continental French, throughout three centuries. Therefore, the semantic issue is one of the key aspects that underlies the difference in meaning, the use of common and specific vocabulary as synonyms, doublets and triplets, and also the *faux-amis*, 'false friends'. From a semantic perspective, false friends are the semantic relics of pragmatic language use over time.

What we must understand by synonyms when both of them are in use in Modern English, one of them native and the other of French origin, is the fact that the former is closer to the national feeling and has a strong association with popular and primitive emotions, whereas the latter has often a formal and polite denotation. Here are some examples:

- *hut – cottage, friendship – amity, help – aid, happiness – felicity*
- *hearty – cordial, holy – saint, deep – profound*
- *darling – favourite, lonely – solitary, indeed – in fact*

In some cases, the difference existing between the native and the French word has to do with a colloquial meaning versus a more literary function:

- *begin – commence, hide – conceal, feed – nourish*
- *hinder – prevent, inner – interior, outer – exterior.*

Similarly, the following doublets show semantical nuances:

- *ask - demand, room - chamber, wish - desire, might – power*

Register can be defined as: “*the linguistic manifestation, the variety of a language or a level of usage, as determined by degree of formality and choice of vocabulary, according to the communicative purpose, social context, and standing of the user*”.<sup>4</sup>

English language owns a wide range of synonyms called “at three levels”, which stem from the influence of French and Latin, besides native words. Each synonym meets the needs of the level of register required for specific purposes, whether popular, literary and learned, the latter being the more complex element. The following sets of three words demonstrate the variation in tone and use existing between the English, the French and the Latin lexical item:

- *rise – mount – ascend; ask – question – interrogate*
- *goodness – virtue – probity; fast – firm – secure*
- *fire – flame – conflagration; fear – terror – trepidation*
- *holy – sacred – consecrated; time – age – epoch*

The transformation of the vocabulary due to the wholesale use of French, in the later thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, has meant the creation of *faux amis*, basically French terms taken into English and on England soil which have undergone a semantic development distinct from continental French. The uniformity of Anglo-French despite its confusing spellings was the touchstone that enabled it to become a propagator of semantic innovation. As the rulers and upper classes in England became more English, hence less French, Anglo-French ceased to be considered a dialect of French. Insular scribes failed to observe the phonetical and morphological rules of the French spoken in France. Thus, original French words took on new meanings as a result of being written the same way as spoken.

*Faux amis* started to appear in several spheres of the medieval English society as early as the fourteenth century. For instance, in the academic world students in Oxford were taught to compose formal letters on administrative matters. From then comes the pair of *faux amis*, *degré* ‘degree’ and *exhibition* ‘exhibition’, both carrying academic

senses. While *degré* is a French word meaning 'level' and 'degree', the English word has taken an additional meaning, as follows: "*The use of degree for an academic qualification came from the medieval Mastership or Doctorate, which was attained in stages or degrees*".<sup>5</sup> The same applies to 'exhibition' which, unlike French, has kept the academic sense: "*A scholarship awarded to a student at a school or university, usually after a competitive examination*".<sup>6</sup>

In the commercial context, the pair of words *coin* 'coin' comes from the French whose original and current sense is 'wedge'. The English term denotes a die for stamping money, or a piece of money produced by such a die, that is a new sense related to trade activities carried out in Anglo-French, but unattested in France. We also find the words *parcelle* 'parcel', which meant a piece of land considered as part of an estate, a sense still retained in French. The Modern English 'parcel' meaning 'package' developed from Anglo-French in the sense of "itemised account" or "*a quantity of a substance or a number of goods wrapped up in a single package*".<sup>7</sup>

There is a singular and topical case which still nowadays arouses confusion. This is the case of the French word *travail* 'work' and the English 'travel'. The sense of 'travel' comes from Anglo-French *travail* "painful or laborious effort". Travelling is thus a semantic change as it may be considered a laborious task. In the same way, we find the word *journée* currently 'daytime', meaning "a day's travel, a day's work" in Old French, and the English word 'journey'. Although both French and English terms have the same root, they differ in their meaning, as the English definition for 'journey' reads: "an act of travelling from one place to another". This is an example of general words that acquired their English sense during the Anglo-French period of influence.

The legal register has plenty of *faux amis* as well. The verb 'to attach' has developed a specialized sense in Medieval England, with the meaning of 'to arrest' and 'to seize'. In French, however, neither in the Middle-Ages nor nowadays has the verb *attacher* acquired that legal sense, his more common meaning being 'to fasten' or 'to tie'. Likewise, the pair of verbs *empêcher* 'to impeach', whose original Old French form *empescher* was used both in England and France the same way in the sense of 'to

hinder', 'to impede'. Yet the current meaning "to accuse of treason" appears only in England. Similarly, the adjective *haineux* 'heinous', from the Old French *haineus* meaning 'hate', 'hatred', still refers in current French to people in their character, full of hate, whereas English 'heinous' has developed the meaning "utterly odious or wicked", restrictively applied to crime.

I will still briefly mention a couple of semantic changes in food, particularly *faux amis* related to fruit: The pair *raisins* 'grapes'. Both are of course of French origin, although French *raisins* in plural mean "fresh grapes", the English 'raisins' denote dried grapes. The shift in meaning is also patent in the English word 'grapes' whose French equivalent is *grappe*, though the French sense is 'bunch', for instance a "bunch of grapes". A similar semantic shift can be seen in the pair *prune* 'plum', both French borrowings. The French *prune* means the fresh fruit as opposed to the English 'prune', a "plum preserved by drying". Here is an interesting quotation expressing the above mentioned: "*However, just as raisins seem different from grapes, so do prunes appear to be distinct from plums*".<sup>8</sup>

"Whether it be [...] in the development of the English legal system, administration or commerce, the semantic innovation displayed by Anglo-French right across the board is the root cause of the differences that become increasingly noticeable between the two kinds of French separated by the Channel as the thirteenth century moves towards its close" (Rothwell 44).

## **Chapter Six: Instances in the Heritage of the English Society**

The fusion of the two peoples Normans and English in the years following the Norman Conquest was quite rapid and led to the acceptance of the new order by the people living in England. As stated previously, the Normans who were largely issued from the nobility and the army quickly started to identify themselves with the new country where they contracted matrimony with English ladies. Furthermore, the Normans brought

their knowledge, especially in the fields of administration, justice, religion, literature, and also in several aspects of the daily life, like trade, cooking, courtesy, which have had a deep impact on shaping the English Society of the Middle Ages. Considering that the new incomers belonged to the upper classes, it goes without saying that French became the language used by the English upper classes since 1066, as it was a mark of social distinction. Over the time, it is patent that French was also known by the members of the Middle Class, like the knights and the merchants, and in general the inhabitants of the towns. The ability to speak English as well as French was thus quite general in the English society, giving rise to a bilingual society by the end of the twelfth century. The distribution of the Francophone and Anglophone sections of the population in terms of residence and social classes emphasized the separation of the two languages. The situation of communal life in the towns meant that their inhabitants of both English and French descent were prone to engage with each other to carry out social and commercial activities, maintaining a sustained contact in their respective native languages, while the situation in the countryside was quite different, given the predominance of Anglophone and often illiterate labourers working for a small number of francophone landlords. The linguistic exchanges that took place between the masters and the labour force inevitably entailed a social gulf between these two linguistic groups, which affected the linguistic situation in the countryside.

The transition from Anglo-French to Middle English as the language of trade took place without breaking the continuity of the practice performed by various generations of scribes since the early times of the Conquest; hence the French character of much of the vocabulary of Modern English commerce. From the later twelfth to the fifteenth century Anglo-French was the language used for the influential wool trade between the towns of the West Midlands, the main land where the sheep were reared. The wool trade was regulated by Anglo French *estaples* 'staples', i.e. "*a centre of trade, especially in a specified commodity*"<sup>9</sup>, in other words, markets for the buying and selling of wool, established by royal decree across the Channel.

Most significantly, the names of the cloth manufactured in that area were named after French towns, like “cambric”, a lightweight, closely woven white linen or cotton fabric; and “arras”, a wall hanging made of a rich tapestry fabric. Both names denote fabrics made in Cambrai and Arras respectively and are surprisingly unknown in France, for they must have been coined in England. The French had no corresponding topographical name for the product, only the neutral *couverture* ‘blanket’, ‘cover’.

The writers of Middle English lived in a trilingual society of which Anglo-French was a dominant factor and the instrument of expression favoured by literate classes in a powerful independent kingdom that played an increasingly important role on the European stage. The literary production in Anglo-French is as wide as the texts produced in Continental French: epic tales, romances, fables, treatises on cosmography, agriculture, culinary recipes, medical texts, teaching, all of them are largely impregnated by French culture. The importance of the Anglo-French inheritance for the development of Present Day English can be evidenced in the works of the most famous writer of the Middle English period, Geoffrey Chaucer (1343-1400). His use of French is a linguistic indicator of the social importance of Anglo-French in later medieval England. Thanks to his connections with the literature of France, we can appreciate the true extent of his complete work and the study of his vocabulary reveals that the author was permeated not solely by continental French, but also by Anglo French culture.

Two major works written by the end of the fourteenth century, *Piers Plowman* by William Langland and *The Canterbury Tales* by Geoffrey Chaucer, all contain a great deal of words of French origin. *Piers Plowman* contains about one hundred words of French origin in the first hundred verses, which is very significant. As regards *The Canterbury Tales*, starting with the *General Prologue*, then *The Reeve’s tale*, *The Pardoner’s tale*, *The Man of Law’s tale*, in each and every one his characters, though fictional, offer numerous insights into the customs and practices of the time. The French elements are so embedded in these texts that if they were removed it would be impossible to replace them by non-French terms.

“The French that lies behind much of Chaucer’s vocabulary penetrated Middle English in general. It was not “borrowed” piecemeal from across the Channel, but was present in England as a complete language in widespread use for centuries amongst the literate minority of the population from the time of the Conquest onwards, its merger with Middle English eventually creating the English of today” (Rothwell 536).

The cultural legacy in the English society owes much to Henry of Lancaster <sup>10</sup> (1310-1361) who was actively engaged as a diplomatic representative of the King Edward III in numerous enterprises in the Wars in France. His wisdom and prowess in negotiations with the French led to the fulfillment of peace agreements in the course of the Hundred Years War. He was also renowned for his *Livre de Seyntz Medicines* ‘The Book of Holy Medicines’, an allegorical and autobiographical account of his sins, which reflects his comprehension of medical matters and the increasing interest in medicine among the educated ruling class in late medieval English society. In William Rothwell’s opinion: “This book makes him an important figure as far as the linguistic history of England is concerned” (319). Henry of Lancaster’s command of French may be deemed as a natural second language in his daily activities, like Chaucer’s, whose work as a diplomat abroad must have regularly involved French, this being the language of the international trade as well as of diplomacy.

Other instances of the heritage on the soil of England can be seen in ecclesiastic buildings, such as the Cistercian houses founded by the French monks from Citeaux (France), the place of origin of Cistercian order. These abbeys played a leading role in the rearing of sheep and the export of their wool, notably the French-named *Fountains* (1132) and *Rievaulx* (1132) located in Yorkshire. The three medieval cathedrals of the West Midlands region, Hereford, Worcester and Gloucester, all share a French-based architectural vocabulary originated in the Norman Conquest: *arcade, armature, chantry, chevet, choir, trefoil*.

Likewise, mercantile companies kept their records in Anglo-French until the first half of the fifteenth century, French being the generally accepted language of trade. We must mention *The Grocers’ Company of London, The Company of Barbers, The*

*Goldsmiths' Company, The Merchant Taylors' Company*, among others that retained French for their written documents. The French influence is illustrated as well in the names of local taxes gathered for the duchy of Lancaster: *pavage, passage, payage, lestage, stallage, tallage, carriage, pesage*.

Legal terminology is to a great extent indebted to French in that this language, together with Latin, had national documentary functions. Both languages for instance were used for the writing of *Magna Carta* in 1215 under the reign of King John, the major constitutional work besides *The Statutes of the Realm, The Provisions of Oxford, Rotuli Parliamentorum, The Parliamentary Writs*. When Middle English took over the role of Anglo-French as a language of record, it simply adopted the existing legal terms; hence the pervading presence of French in Modern English legal terminology. The year 1362 is a turning point insofar as the Parliament passed a statute, though written in French, declaring that French would no longer be the language of government and of the legal system, because that language was too poorly understood. Although the judicial terminology used by the lawyers remained French, the syntax in general was now English.

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“It seems much more likely that French had been the language of the royal courts from the very beginning of the system of central royal courts established by Henry II and that French was their language because in that period it was the first language of the men appointed as royal justices and of many of the litigants” (Rothwell 534).

William Rothwell also comments on the words that John H. Baker<sup>11</sup> contends in his *Manual of Law French*: “Most of the terminology of the common law, even today, is of law French origin; and yet very few of the terms have any close equivalent in the French of France” (535).



Under the influence of Anglo-French legal terms, in the fourteenth century the phrase “*in lei*” ‘in-law’ began to appear to be added to names of family relationships. When contracting marriages, people designated by the expression ‘in-law’ were acquiring the same degree of affinity, such as the following ‘in-law’ compounds present in the current English vocabulary: brother-in-law, sister-in-law, father-in-law, mother-in-law, amongst the most common ones.

Just as a matter of interest, it is curious to note that the origin of the English expression “o’clock”, when telling the time, comes from the invention of the striking clock in public buildings and churches from about 1370. The passage of time was recognized aurally, each day having twenty-four hours and thus twenty-four clock hours. The name ‘clock’ comes from the Anglo-French *cloche/clocke* ‘bell’ meaning the instrument responsible for the ringing of the bell, the striking mechanism of a watch.

It is also interesting to note that the current English Monarchy has inherited her motto from the French influence in the medieval period. The Royal Coat of Arms features both *Dieu et mon droit* ‘God and my right’, and the motto of the Order of the Garter *Honi soit qui mal y pense* ‘shame upon him who thinks evil of it’.

## **Conclusion**

From the above chapters, I have tried to explain how the Norman Conquest had such a pervasive influence that it led to the transformation not only in the appearance but also of the character of English. To make it clear, Anglo-Norman or more accurately Anglo French is the form of French used in England between 1066 and the middle of the fifteenth century, although some scholars like William Rothwell illustrates it as follows: “The decades from the later thirteenth to the end of the fourteenth century form the crucially important of Anglo-French, far richer in historical consequences than the early period after the conquest, the period of the traditional *Anglo-Norman*” (26).

The amount of loan words borrowed into English has turned it into a language of international origin in particular of Romance origin, given that the French and Latin lexicon, two sophisticated languages of culture used by the upper and literate class, prevail over others. According to Albert C. Baugh and Thomas Cable, “the total number of French words adopted during the Middle English period was slightly over 10.000. Of these, about 75 percent are still in current use” (174).

It is a generally acknowledged fact that insular French in medieval England was a living language which mostly contributed to the foundation of medieval knowledge. Its adoption was the common shared medium of the dominant social strata that participated in politics, legal, administrative and ecclesiastic matters, since it served as a unifying linguistic factor in a country divided by dialectal variations. If in the fourteenth century it became increasingly a written language of record, it did not differ substantially from the French of France. However, from a semantic and lexical point of view, it started to contain important differences, namely the consequence of three centuries of independent development, giving English new peculiar linguistic categories.

Throughout my research, I have established the existence of significant events that meant a milestone during the last decades of the fourteenth century, as far as the progressive rise of English over French is concerned. In 1362, under Edward III, a parliamentary statute decreed that French would not be any longer the language of government and the legal system. The French that had been used as the official language of written records under the influence of the Norman nobility, merged into Middle English marking the beginning of Modern English. Likewise, Middle English developed over time from being a spoken language to become the national language at all levels.

With regard to the relations with France, the Hundred Years War (1337-1453) contributed to create hostility towards the French element and propel the feeling of nationalism among the English society which associated French with the enemy. Despite the animosity inspired by this conflict, French remained the language of the law, although it became more artificial and formulaic. We can venture to say that French might have

eliminated English had it not been for the Hundred Years War, which in part divided the nobles of French ascendancy, for most of them felt closer to England soil than to France. Since William the Conqueror's reign, Henry IV (1367-1413) was the first king of England to be brought up in English, as all his predecessors had French as their mother tongue. Accidentally, both William I and Jeanne of Arc have orientated their destiny, in that the former's claim to the English throne and the latter's exploits in the Hundred Years War changed the course of the English language: in the first instance, the introduction of French by the Normans and, eventually, the end of the supremacy of the French language. Two features linked between them that marked the revival of English were the Black Death (1349) and the Peasants' Revolt (1381). As Albert C. Baugh and Thomas Cable put it: "[...]the effect of the Black Death was to increase the economic importance of the laboring class and with it the importance of the English language which they spoke" (137).

The importance of French and consequently of Anglo-French in the history of England has many times been subject to critical and disparate interpretations. Some scholars, like Bailey and Maroldt (1977) have asserted that English is the product of a creolization. In William Rothwell's words it comes to say that: "the character of the French brought into England at the time of the Conquest was transformed into a 'creole' by the impact of English [...] in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries a second 'creolization', running this time in the opposite direction, did the same for Middle English by an influx of French terms imported from mainland France" (3). Others like Juliette Dor<sup>12</sup> speak of 'pidginisation' contending that there was not a bilingual situation, but instead a simplification of the French language and its dialects, with a reduction in the syntax.

For many Anglicists of the early twentieth century, like Mildred K. Pope (also known as Miss Pope) and Johan Vising, Anglo-French of later medieval England has been regarded as a corrupt language, unworthy of serious study. In addition, the French of England has been discredited despite the fact that its lexicon has highly contributed to the making of Modern English. Conversely, William Rothwell argues that the English language was enriched by the transfer of French lexical and syntactical processes and

absorbed part of the word stock available, thus French components were combined with English elements. He rejects the opinion of the great majority of historians who claim that Anglo-French cannot be considered an unintelligible language or jargon. A large collection of treatises published in Anglo-French during the late medieval England, as detailed in my paper, offer a great knowledge of innumerable spheres of medieval life. It is worthy to point out that the richness of those manuscripts owes much to the trilingual civilization of the fourteenth century, a period in which the written records were the product of a scribal class fluent in Anglo-French, Latin and Middle English. One can really doubt of their valuable contribution to the lexis of Modern English and to the evolution of English society?

Despite the traditional views that have perpetuated, conferring upon Anglo French the status of a dead language, if it had not been for the absorption of the Anglo French into Middle English, we would not have been able to enjoy the literary supremacy of the universally renowned works of Chaucer nor Shakespeare.

Thanks to the *Anglo Norman dictionary*, a new insight into the etymologies given by the traditional dictionaries of English has been made possible. Anglicists will be able to trace the history of many English words and find out a new approach on the diachronic evolution of former French words that took place from the Conquest until these days. William Rothwell argues that, “the more we learn about the vocabulary of Anglo-Norman, the better we shall understand the growth of our own English vocabulary” (134).

Although English was and is still a Germanic language, in its sounds and its structure, we can wonder how there is so great a variation in the stages of development between Old English and Modern English, if we compare it with German. Indeed, Modern German has hardly changed and remains a clearly Germanic language, whereas Old English has lost around 80 percent of its word stock in Modern English. As shown previously in my paper, it is undeniable that Scandinavian influence was more influential than French in the adoption of core grammatical terms, like pronouns, articles, etc. on the one side, and that native elements make up the large number of prepositions, conjunctions, auxiliaries and lots of words denoting everyday objects, concepts and

ideas, on the other side. Nevertheless, the role of French over three hundred years of history is of crucial importance and has definitely transformed the development of Middle English; therefore, we can contend that Modern English is absolutely the most Romance of the Germanic languages.

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### **Notes**

- 1 Mechthild Gretsch is a Professor in the Department of English at the University of Gottingen, Germany.
- 2 The first hundred French words in the New English Dictionary for each of the first nine letters and the first fifty for “J” and “L”.
- 3 Dyonise de Mountechensi was a noble lady, the wife of a wealthy landowner.
- 4 [www.oxforddictionaries.com](http://www.oxforddictionaries.com)
- 5 [www.oxforddictionaries.com](http://www.oxforddictionaries.com)
- 6 [www.oxforddictionaries.com](http://www.oxforddictionaries.com)
- 7 [www.oxforddictionaries.com](http://www.oxforddictionaries.com)
- 8 [www.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/english/prune](http://www.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/english/prune)
- 9 [www.oxforddictionaries.com](http://www.oxforddictionaries.com)
- 10 Henry of Lancaster, also known as Henry of Grosmont, First Duke of Lancaster.
- 11 John H. Baker is a Professor of Law at the University of Cambridge, England.
- 12 Juliette Dor is a Professor of English Medieval Literature at the University of Liege, Belgium.

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