A Social and Cultural History of English

S. Gramley, WS 2009-10
The Middle English Period
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Text 3.1 (from *The Owl and the Nightingale*) shows English verse under French influence (rhyme rather than OE stress and alliteration) (McCrum et al. 123). Two more texts are printed in McCrum et al. (a northern text of 1272 and a Herefordshire one of 1230). They show the continuity of ME in regard to OE (124ff).

Ich was in one sumere dale
In one suþe diʒele hale
Iherde ich holde grete tale
An hule and one niʒtingale
þat plait was stif and starc an strong
Sumwile softe an lud among

I was in a summer(y) valley
In a very hidden corner
I heard a great debate being held
An owl and a nightingale
Who were pleading firmly, severely, and strongly
Sometimes softly and loudly in between
French Influence on Middle English and the Question of Creolization (this and the next five slide are “background” information)

As for French – English creolization, Bailey / Maroldt suggest that ME is the product of massive English borrowings into the OF by the UC in medieval England.

Since the basic vocabulary of English stems from OE, this seems to be pretty far-fetched, and this without OE replacement of OF grammar.

Furthermore, the usual case in abrupt creolization is the presence of many languages; yet, in England there were only two.

Bilingualism seems to be a much more likely candidate when it comes to explaining linguistic change in ME (T/K: 307).
Note the following factors:
- the low number of French speakers in England
- the move to English as early as 1235
- the unlikelihood of large numbers of English-speakers learning French between 1066 and 1250 (afterwards, little need to do so)
- missing simplification in the dialects in strongest contact with French
- the Eastern Midlands (and ultimately the North) as the source of simplification
- the disproportion between massive French influence on vocabulary and none on syntax and morphology and its trivial influence on phonology – and this after French ceased to be spoken widely

What we find is
- a high degree of lexical borrowing;
- the phonologizing of initial /f/-/v/ and /dʒ/-/j/ (French influence),
- but no new phonemes (phones) from either French (or Norse).
- The particles borrowed (e.g. {-able}) were abstracted later and then widely used;
- no demonstrable influence of word order; none on concord.

Rather, French speakers learned English – and their French suffered as a result (T/K: 308).
There was little simplification in southern ME; only the following:

- loss of the dative (but optional singular {-e} remained after prepositions) (T/K: 310)
- loss of genitive plural (but original {-ene} became a derivational ending forming denominal adjectives [golden, oaken, wooden])
- reduction of gender/case agreement on prenominal modifiers
- loss of small noun classes (< 10 members)
B/M say the creole origins of ME are obvious, but have to go against obvious interpretations to the contrary (T/K: 311). For example, to insist that a move to analytic structures must be due to foreign influences and count as creolization goes too far. Actually, there are no texts of vernacular English between 900 (“as the last reliable point of reference”) and 1200 (when the vernacular is once again documented). But then we see:

- little change in the South vis-à-vis OE
- some Norse-influence change in the Midlands (312)
- a great deal of this in the North (312f)
- superficial French influence everywhere, but esp. in the South

“We specifically deny that French has had a disruptive influence on English in the sense of having promoted simplification or denaturing.” Rather simplification was already in progress before the Conquest and was a purely internal process. What changed was vocabulary, the most superficial of changes (313), and these borrowings are seldom part of the colloquial language (313f).
“Finally, there is the acceleration of the normal processes of change which takes place under the special conditions of contact resulting from migration or invasion (6.3). ... This applies to migrations within the area of a single language, and is seen in a mild form in the differences of development between conservative peripheral areas and innovating central areas. But it is seen more clearly in the comparison of cognate languages, as for example within both the Roman and the Germanic groups of languages: in both, the most isolated areas show the lowest rate of change (Sardinian, Icelandic) and similarly in both, the two areas to show the highest rate of change are those that have absorbed conquering invaders speaking a branch of Indo-European long separated and therefore virtually non-cognate: Northern France, conquered by the Franks; and England, conquered by the Normans.” (Samuels 1972: 133)
Language shift (including language imposition)

depends on one – and usually more – of the following conditions:

- military conquest
- a long period of language imposition
- a polyglot subject group
- material benefits in the adoption of the conquerors' language (cf. Brosnahan 1963:15-17).
- urbanization
- economic development
- educational development
- religious orientation
- political affiliation (Fishman et al. 1977:77-82)
The Norman Conquest and the Influence of French

The Conquest is frequently portrayed as monumental for the development of English (“progress” toward “civilization”).

Some see this as a rupture in the continuity of English. This view has propagated the myth of the Norman yoke, which turned out to be opportune for, among others, the monarchy.

In emphasizing this the idea of English-French competition was engendered and continued up into the 20th century: “hostility mixed with admiration.”
The Norman Invasion is described in *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* in “doom-laden paragraphs,” and it changed the face of English forever. The Normans “seized control” with “systematic rigour” and built strong points with English labor, but manned by Norman soldiers.

William also purged the church. The country was “dominated by French-speaking Normans” for several generations after. So “the overwhelming majority of English people experienced the humiliations of a linguistic apartheid: religion, law, science, literature were all conducted in languages other than English, as words like *felony, perjury, attorney, bailiff* and *nobility* testify.” (McCrum et al.: 73)

An episode is recounted which “expresses the bitter resentment the English felt.” “In court, church and government circles, French was established as the smart and Latin as the professional language.” (74)
A circumstance which greatly tended to enhance the tyranny of the nobility, and the sufferings of the inferior classes, arose from the consequences of the Conquest by Duke William of Normandy. Four generations had not sufficed to blend the hostile blood of the Normans and Anglo-Saxons, or to unite, by common language and mutual interests, two hostile races, one of which still felt the elation of triumph, while the other groaned under all the consequences of defeat. ... All the monarchs of the Norman race had shown the most marked predilection for their Norman subjects; the laws of the chase, and many others, equally unknown to the milder and more free spirit of the Saxon constitution, had been fixed upon the necks of the subjugated inhabitants, ... (Ivanhoe, chap. 1)
At court, and in the castles of the great nobles, where the pomp and state of a court was emulated, Norman-French was the only language employed; in courts of law, the pleadings and judgments were delivered in the same tongue. In short, **French was the language of honour, of chivalry, and even of justice**, while the far more manly and expressive Anglo-Saxon was abandoned to the use of rustics and hinds, who knew no other.

Still, however,. the necessary intercourse between the lords of the soil, and those oppressed inferior beings by whom that soil was cultivated, occasioned the gradual formation of a dialect, compounded betwixt the French and the Anglo-Saxon, in which they could render themselves mutually intelligible to each other; and from this necessity arose by degrees the structure of our present English language, in which the speech of the victors and the vanquished have been so happily blended together, and which has since been so richly improved by importations from the classical languages, and from those spoken by the southern nations of Europe.
The encounter between Wamba, the jester, and Gurth, the swineherd

"Why, how call you those grunting brutes running about on their four legs?" demanded Wamba.

"Swine, fool, swine," said the herd, "every fool knows that."

"And swine is good Saxon," said the Jester; "but how call you the sow when she is flayed, and drawn, and quartered, and hung up by the heels, like a traitor"

"Pork," answered the swineherd.

"I am very glad every fool knows that too," said Wamba, "and pork, I think, is good Norman-French; and so when the brute lives, and is in the charge of a Saxon slave, she goes by her Saxon name; becomes a Norman, and is called pork, when she is carried to the Castle-hall to feast among the nobles..."

In the continuation we find:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>A-S</th>
<th>Norman</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ox</td>
<td>beef</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>calf</td>
<td>veau (veal)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Middle English

Middle English is generally placed between 1100 or 1150 and 1500. Although this is a short period, it saw massive changes in pronunciation, such as the *Great Vowel Shift*, grammar, e.g. the continuation of the loss of inflections which had already begun in the OE period, and enormous additions to vocabulary from French.

The Great Vowel Shift refers to a set of changes in the long vowels of English which took place between the early ME period and the beginning of the ModE period, e.g. /iː/ became /eɪ/ (= ModE /æɪ/ *(tima* → *time*) and /uː/ became /ɑːʊ/ (*ful* → *foul*). We will look at it later.
Vocabulary from French

The eleventh century brought the last military conquest of England, by the Norman French.\(^1\) Since much of the new ruling class spoke French while the common people continued to speak English, it was less words for everyday things and activities which entered the language than words the new masters were likely to use (cf. the passage from *Ivanhoe*). This involved fashion, art and literature, and learning. Beyond this French words were taken into English massively in the areas of law and administration as well as the military. The church also provided numerous new additions.

The influence of French was more of the Central than of the Norman variety, esp. after 1204, when the kings of England lost Normandy.

\(^1\)The name Norman comes from the Northmen (Norse Vikings) who had taken possession of the French coast at Normandy as well.
Typical early loans were the following (French loan words in ocher):

- fulluhtere
- forecwedere
- hlæfdige
- hlaford
- baptist
- prophete
- dame
- sire
- mæžester
- halig
- eald-modor
- ðeling
- meister
- seint
- grandame
- æþeling
- prince

Note that **hlaford** < *hlafweard* "warden of loaves" (cf. *hlaf* with Slav. *xleb*)
and that **hlæfdige** "lady" comes from "kneader of loaves" > I-E *dig- "knead," cf. *dough*

As we can see, religion terms (domain: church) and feudal titles were prominent.
**Vocabulary from French**

French replacements 1200 → 1250 (taken from Brut, a Southwestern text)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>French word</th>
<th>English translation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>boc-runen</td>
<td>lettre</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>æhte</td>
<td>tresur</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>munuclif</td>
<td>abbey</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>munstre</td>
<td>nunnery</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>milce</td>
<td>grace</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>heren</td>
<td>serve</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>here-toga</td>
<td>chieftain</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>here-marken</td>
<td>pensiles</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ñisles</td>
<td>hostages</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>friðe</td>
<td>park</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>wisen</td>
<td>atyr</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>bolle</td>
<td>coupe</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>at-breac</td>
<td>ascapede</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>hoðien</td>
<td>aspien</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>husting</td>
<td>conseil</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- > monk + life
- [cf. milsian, milts to pity, mercy]
- [to honor, cf. ravage, harry]
- “standards”
- cf. Geisel
- “protected place” to “hunting reserve”
- “attire, guise”
- “cup”
- “consider” to “see” > hogian “study, think, be anxious”
- Norse > hus + thing
In the 13th and 14th centuries this source becomes more prominent and includes names of people, with their classes, ranks, temperaments and offices, terms for finance, property and business, for building and for homes equipment, for law and social organization, religion, war, the arts, clothing and food, entertainment, hunting, animals, esp. foreign, science and medicine. It is chiefly nouns which are adopted, but fairly many verbs and adjectives and a few other forms are as well.

The vocabulary of power, rank, and status. Here a new evaluative function of terms is established, esp. as “the projection of attitudes that are upper-class on to the words.” These items include: king, queen, lord, lady, duke, prince, squire, villain, alderman, thane, earl, knight, gentle, churl, villain, peasant, vulgar, common, illiterate, lewd, burgess, and bourgeois (Leith: 80-82).
fashion: *gown, robe, cape, frock, petticoat*, etc.

art and literature: *art, painting, music, beauty, poet, romance, story*, etc.

learning: *medicine, physician, study, grammar, logic, geometry*, etc.

law and administration: *jury, verdict, sentence, fine, prison; govern, administer, crown, state, realm, royal, court, council, parliament*, etc.

military: *army, navy, battle, combat, siege, peace*, etc.

church: *sermon, sacrament, baptism, chaplain, parson, pastor, vicar*, etc.

**The Influence of French on English**
The later borrowing from Central French "was indeed borrowing from a language of high culture into one of lower culture." In contrast the English were more advanced than the Normans in everything except military sophistication (i.e. castle-building) at the time of the Conquest (Strang: 251). In 1066 there were a recorded 50 French loan words in English, but many from Latin and Norse.
Norman French kept Germanic /w/, but adapted it to /gw/, then to /g/. Early borrowing have /w/, but from the 14th century on /g/ forms, sometimes the two side by side

| were       | guerre    |
| wile       | guile     |
| ward(en)   | guard(ian) |

An indigenous French change is of /k/ to /tʃ/ before /a/, so

- Norman gives us *carpenter, caudron*
- CentFr gives us *chair, charity*
- Doublets are *cattle-chattel*
  - *catch-chase* (*chase* reflect the later change */tʃ/ → /ts/ → /s/*)

- Norman has /g/ as in *garden, gaol*
- CentFr has /dʒ/ as in *joy, jest, jail*
- Norman has /ei/ as in *obey, air, fair*
- CentFr has /oi/ as om *esploit, poise, royal, loyal*
Jespersen points out that writers originally (say, in the 13th century) used a French word with an English one next to it as an interpretation, e.g. "cherité, þet is luve."

By Chaucer's time the reader would have been familiar with both members of a pair and they would serve to heighten the effect of the passage, e.g. "in honour and worship" or "olde and auncyent doctours." (Jespersen 99-101)

It is Jespersen from whom we have "undemocratic" hypothesis (see next slides), and it is he who remarks, "...the differences that have developed in course of time between two synonyms when both have survived, one of them native, the other French. The former is always nearer the nation's heart than the latter, it has the strongest associations with everything primitive, fundamental, popular, while the French word is often more formal, more polite, more refined and has a less strong hold on the emotional side of life. A cottage is finer than a hut, ..." (102).

And he continues with bill and beak; dress and clothe, amity and friendship, help and aid, folk and people, hearty and cordial, and more yet (102-104).
Lexical and word-formation borrowings

Borrowing already took place before the Conquest though then and initially after the Conquest not very fast, for first bilingualism was necessary, and Anglo-French bilingualism was slow to develop on a significant level. But then loans poured in (Strang: 250). First Anglo-Norman, than Central French ones.

Borrowing came to prevail over word-formation, which Jespersen regarded as “undemocratic,” for compounds and derivations are transparent while borrowed words are opaque and require more education, cf. mouth-oral and hear-auditory in comparison with German Mund-mündlich and hören-hörbar. A mistaken notion is that English was missing the words it borrowed and that borrowing reflects inferiority in vocabulary and culture. The mass of words borrowed were redundant.
Jespersen also points out that the French were the fashion leaders of the Middle Ages (see the list above). But the English words were retained for everyday occupations (baker, miller, smith, weaver, saddler, shoemaker, wheelwright, fisherman, shepherd, etc.

He also maintains that common folk have difficulty with non-native words and recounts the following episode (originally published in 1879) about a clergymen
"who blamed a brother preacher for using the word felicity. "I do not think all of your hearers understood it; I should say happiness." "I can hardly think," said the other, "that any one does not know what felicity means, and we will ask this ploughman near us. Come hither, my man! you may have been at church and heard the sermon; you heard me speak of felicity; do you know what it means? "Ees, sir!" "Well, what does felicity mean?" "Summut in the inside of a pig, but I can't say altogether what." (102)

He also quotes Shakespeare (As You Like It, Act 5, Scene 1):
"Therefore, you Clowne, abandon, - which is in the vulgar leave, - the societie – which in the boorish is companie, - of this female, - which in the common is woman; which together is, abandon the society of this Female, or Clowne, thou perishest; or, to thy better understanding, dyest."
Pyles says 85% of ME vocabulary is of French origin.

Based on Swadesh's 200-word list of basic vocabulary and “a 700-word non-cultural, non-regional diagnostic list” research by Kaufman shows 7% (in Modern English) comes from French and 7% from Norse

– and many of these items only enter the English language later than the ME period.
Word formation: “While we have not abandoned this technique altogether, it is generally true to say that English has been particularly receptive to the possibility of absorbing foreign words; instead of making up new words, we borrow them; ...” (Leith: 62)

Leith view, while appropriate on the one level, seems to ignore the enormous amount of compounding and metaphor, both of which are enormously productive.

Furthermore, new derivational morphemes were adopted into the language, as the next slide demonstrates.
Romance (French) derivational morphemes (suffixes)

-ard (also: {-art}) from OFr but of Germanic origin, cf. {-hard} as in Gerhard; “one that is characterized by some action, quality, or thing. Here {ger-} means “sword”
From this period we have shreward “like a shrew”

-ery from OFr {-ier / -er} + {-y / -ie}; "having the quality of" (snobbery); the art or practice of (quackery); place of doing (bakery); collection of (finery); state or condition of (slavery)
From this period: husbandry “the practice of husbanding, careful management“

-ous from OFr {-ous / -eus / -eux} from Latin {-osus} abounding in (poisonous)
From this period: gluttonous

-ment from OFr, but ultimately from Latin {-mentum}, a suffix denoting a concrete result; the result of something (statement, government)
From this period: chastisement
The presence of
(a) a large number of non-native words
(b) employing a different set of affixes and
(c) using different stress patterns
(d) has had a lasting effect on the morphology of English.
(e) However, it has not eradicated the deep-seated distinction between Romance and Germanic lexical items, even though it has blurred the edges at a number of spots.
Why were words borrowed?

Words are borrowed mainly for one or both of two reasons:

(a) the donor language has more prestige, e.g. French terms for government and organization, cookery, etc. in Norman England.

(b) the recipient language has a lexical gap.

Prestige explains the large influx of Latinate words in the 15th and 16th centuries of the ME period: “It can be no coincidence that writers throughout this period characterised English as ‘rude’ and lacking in eloquence.” (Samuels: 94)

The donor language may die out despite prestige – as French in England did. The Norse invasions led to the adoption of many Scandinavian words, even grammatical forms, possibly because of their mutual intelligibility, but Norse as such died out.
Literature:


Scott, Walter. Ivanhoe. 1815
