

English 229 - Quiz II

The Norman yoke: But another view, perhaps more widely held, sees the events of the Conquest in terms of (an at least temporary) decline: as the wrecking of a relatively sophisticated 'native' Anglo-Saxon culture by a 'foreign' and tyrannical French one, so that the continuity of English culture was ruptured and the continued existence of the English language threatened. This latter view of events may be almost as old as the Conquest itself. It is the story known as the 'Norman yoke'. Versions of this were intermittently kept alive during the Middle Ages, probably because it was politically useful for certain groups within English society (including the monarchy itself).

Statute of Pleading (1362): was an Act of the Parliament of England. The Act complained that because the French language was much unknown in England, the people therefore had no knowledge of what is being said for them or against them in the courts, which used Law French.

Widespread ignorance of French is mentioned as one justification for using English in law, yet the Statute also mentions the 'great mischiefs' that arise from ignorance of the law in general. So rather than seeing the Act as empowering all the realm's subjects by using the common language, we could see it as seeking to ensure that the government's laws were obeyed at a time of great social upheaval

Middle English (c. 1100 - c. 1500): is framed at its beginning by the after-effects of the Norman Conquest of 1066, and at its end by the arrival in Britain of printing (in 1476) and by the important social and cultural impacts of the English Reformation (from the 1530s onwards) and of the ideas of the continental Renaissance.

- **in grammar**, English came to rely less on inflectional endings and more on word order to convey grammatical information. (If we put this in more technical terms, it became less 'synthetic' and more 'analytic'.) Change was gradual, and has different outcomes in different regional varieties of Middle English, but the ultimate effects were huge: the grammar of English c.1500 was radically different from that of Old English. Grammatical gender was lost early in Middle English. The range of inflections, particularly in the noun, was reduced drastically (partly as a result of reduction of vowels in unstressed final syllables), as was the number of distinct paradigms: in most early Middle English texts most nouns have distinctive forms only for singular vs. plural, genitive, and occasional traces of the old dative in forms with final *-e* occurring after a preposition. In some other parts of the system some distinctions were more persistent, but by late Middle English the range of endings and their use among London writers shows relatively few differences from the sixteenth-century language of, for example, Shakespeare: probably the most prominent morphological difference from Shakespeare's language is that verb plurals and infinitives still generally ended in *-en* (at least in writing).
- **in vocabulary**, English became much more heterogeneous, showing many borrowings from French, Latin, and Scandinavian. Large-scale borrowing of new words often had serious consequences for the meanings and the stylistic register of those words which survived from Old English. Eventually, various new stylistic layers emerged in the lexicon, which could be employed for a variety of different purposes.

It was also during this period when English was the language mainly of the uneducated peasantry that many of the grammatical complexities and inflections of Old English gradually disappeared. By the 14th Century, noun genders had almost completely died out, and adjectives, which once had up to 11 different inflections, were reduced to just two (for singular and plural) and often in practice just one, as in modern English. The pronounced stress, which in Old English was usually on the lexical root of a word, generally shifted towards the beginning of words, which further encouraged the gradual loss of suffixes that had begun after the Viking invasions, and many vowels developed into the common English unstressed “schwa” (like the “e” in taken, or the “i” in pencil). As inflections disappeared, word order became more important and, by the time of Chaucer, the modern English subject-verb-object word order had gradually become the norm, and as had the use of prepositions instead of verb inflections.

Canterbury Tales (1400): The Canterbury Tales is one of the best loved works in the history of English literature. Written in Middle English, the story follows a group of pilgrims who are travelling the long journey from London to Canterbury Cathedral. Setting off from a London inn, the innkeeper suggests that during the journey each pilgrim should tell two tales to help pass the time. The best storyteller, he says, will be rewarded with a free supper on his return. One of the reasons Chaucer is so important is that he made the decision to write in English and not French. In the centuries following the Norman invasion, French was the language spoken by those in power. The Canterbury Tales was one of the first major works in literature written in English. Chaucer began the tales in 1387 and continued until his death in 1400. No text in his own hand still exists, but a surprising number of copies survive from the 1500s - more than 80. This suggests the tales were enormously popular in medieval England. This early and handsomely ornamented manuscript copy, from c.1450, was made within a generation of Chaucer's death.

National identity – patriotism: Histories of English have tended to explain it as an expression of English national identity. In this view, ‘England’ was a unity, a central aspect of that unity being the English language. However, it might be safer to speak here of patriotism, based on hostility towards the French, rather than of nationalism in its fuller sense in which language is seen as the decisive component of a unified national identity. Caxton’s works would help to instill a consciousness of national identity among the English people, as they would come across and question some alien values in the translated works. Printing thus opened up the minds of the people to foreign ideas and knowledge.

Bilingualism: development of bilingualism among Norman officials, supervisors; some marriages of French and English; some bilingual children. England in the late 1000s, the 1100s, and 1200s became a bilingual country. Norman French was the prestige language, English the language of everyday folk. Few Normans learned English in this early Middle English period. French was the language of court, of law, of the literature of the period (though remember that Latin was still a significant literary and religious language). Since few Anglo-Normans learned English, initially, there was little borrowing of French words into English in the period 1066-1300.

- Diffusion of English
 - a. Some nobility spoke English. This would be a natural occurrence.
 - b. Some clergy preserved English.
 - c. Some of the educated, the nobility, and clergy, then, representing the upper social strata, were bilingual.
- Diffusion of French
 - a. Knights learned French.

- b. Merchants spoke both French and English.
- c. Managers (sheriffs, bailiffs, etc.) on large estates were bilingual.
- d. For the most part, bilingualism extended only down to the middle class.

Borrowing: Borrowing is a process in which one language "borrows" words from other languages. The reason can be the fact that there isn't a word for the particular thing in the language. In some cases, a new word from another language replaced or supplemented an already existing word.

Norman invasion: French (Norman) invasion (1066), William, Duke of Normandy's conquest and unification of England, crowned king of England as William I, the Conqueror (r. 1066-1087); Normans were descendants of Danes living in northern France and spoke a French influenced by Scandinavian; death of many Anglo-Saxon nobles. French became the dominant language in England, spoken by the upper classes from 1066 until late in the 14th century. English language was relegated to the lower classes and was heavily influenced by French in matters of vocabulary, prosody, and spelling.

William Caxton and printing: Caxton was the first English printer and a translator and importer of books into England. In 1476 Caxton returned to London and established a press at Westminster, the first printing press in England. Amongst the books he printed were Chaucer's 'Canterbury Tales', Gower's 'Confession Amantis' and Malory's 'Le Morte d'Arthur'. He printed more than 100 books in his lifetime, books which were known for their craftsmanship and careful editing. He was also the translator of many of the books he published, using his knowledge of French, Latin and Dutch.

Printing which was introduced into England by Caxton in 1476, helped to increase the spread of knowledge and literacy level among the British public as more and more people had better access to reading materials. Over the centuries, as more English texts were printed, such as novels, dictionaries, the Bible and other documents, the English language gradually gained popularity and established itself as the national language of England. Apart from the advent of printing, political, social and economic factors also contributed to the development of English as a national language.

The problems facing all European printers including Caxton were that regional dialects proliferated, linguistic change was rapid, and there was a relative lack of conventionalized spellings and authoritative sources. Caxton solved this dilemma for England by default – by printing the dialect of the south-east Midlands.

~Questions~

- What is the evidence for the use of French and English (how were they related to each other within the “ecology” of England) over this period?

- **What was the effect of the separation of Normandy from Britain? 1204**

In 1204 AD, King John lost the province of Normandy to the King of France. This began a process where the Norman nobles of England became increasingly estranged from their French cousins. England became the chief concern of the nobility, rather than their estates in France, and consequently the nobility adopted a modified English as their native tongue.

French gradually lost its influence and English language once again became the dominant language in England. England lost an important part of its possessions in France. A feeling of

rivalry developed between the two countries, accompanied by an anti-foreign movement in England and culminating in the Hundred Years' War.

In the course of the centuries following the Norman Conquest the connection of England with the continent, as we have seen, had been broken. It was succeeded by a conflict of interests and a growing feeling of antagonism that culminated in a long period of open hostility with France (1337–1453), which is known as the Hundred years war. During this long period of time it was impossible to forget that French was the language of an enemy country, and the Hundred Years' War is probably to be reckoned as one of the causes contributing to the disuse of French. So, following the 100 Years War, many people regarded French as the language of the enemy. The status of English rose.

The next event that helped English re-establish itself is the Black Death and the rise of the Middle Class

- **What are the effect of the Black Death on English?**

In 1348-1350, the Black Death cut the population of England by almost half, causing serious labor shortages. As a consequence, the importance of the working classes, of artisans and craftsmen, was greatly enhanced; wages increased and the resultant ascendancy of the yeoman in the country and the bourgeois in the town; both of whom only spoke English, further abetted the use of the native tongue.

Hundreds of Latin and French teachers and scholars died during the Black Death plague. Faced with a lack of academicians versed in French and Latin, many schools resorted to English as a common medium of instruction. By 1385, the practice became general, and even universities and monastic institutions started to conduct their curricula, or academic courses, in English. The historical significance of these developments lay in the fact that by the fifteenth century, the ability to speak French had come to be regarded as an accomplishment. In schools and universities, French was taught, like Latin, as an ancillary (unimportant) language requisite to the cultural wardrobe of the properly educated person. Government officials who lacked this accessory had to retain on their staffs a "secretary in the French Language". The linguistic balance had shifted forever.

Those so-called "dregs" were primarily the peasantry – the speakers of the English language. Because a great amount of the Latin-speaking clergy had died in the plague (generally from living in close proximity to each other, as in the monasteries, or from tending to their gravely ill parishioners), they had to be replaced – often by laymen who could only speak English. Thus English came back into the Church.

On another front, because of the great number of deaths throughout England, there was a severe shortage of labor. The survivors – those sturdy peasants who spoke primarily English – were suddenly able to make demands for better working conditions and higher wages. They gained more power in the society. And their language gained power with them.

- **Why did English resurface in the 14th century?**

The status of French at court was complicated by the fact that from 1337 England was at war with France for over a century (during the Hundred Years War). Any French or French-speaking favorites of the king might be targeted by jealous rivals, and language became an issue whenever anti-French patriotism was aroused.

1. In 1337-1453, during the Hundred Years' War, French became the language of England's enemy
2. The Black Death, 1348-1350
3. In 1384, John Wycliffe made an important translation of the Bible into English
4. In 1340-1400, Geoffrey Chaucer helped make English the dominant language of Britain