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MIDDLE ENGLISH: ENGLISH OR FREGLISH?

L.M. IKALYUK, U.T. TATSAKOVYCH

Abstract: The article focuses on a general description of Middle English considering the impact of the French language on its development during this period. Despite an extensive number of French borrowings in different layers of the English language, the language remained English and its predominant features were still those of Germanic origin.

Keywords: globalization, cross-cultural communication, Middle English, French borrowings, Norman Conquest.

1. INTRODUCTION

In times of globalization cross-cultural communication is becoming increasingly important. In the world where everything is interconnected and interdependent, people from diverse cultural backgrounds are supposed to interact, i.e. to communicate and cooperate by sharing ideas, values, traditions, and beliefs. Cross-cultural communication is not new, though. It appeared when people from different cultures began to come into contact with one another, and since then different languages have interacted and influenced one another as well as people who speak them. As for the English language, it was affected by many languages throughout its history, but the strongest influence was that of French during the Middle English (ME) period. It might be possible to label ME as "Frenglish", denoting the mix of English and French as a result of integration and assimilation. Their long-lasting contact at that time is felt to the present day. The importance of historical interlingual contacts nowadays due to multilingualism and cross-cultural communication determines the topicality of our research.

The aim of the article is to give a general description of Middle English taking into consideration the influence of the French language on it at that period.

Traditionally, the Middle English period is dated from the 11th to the 15th century. The opinions about the exact chronological boundaries vary: in some sources, the beginning of Middle English is dated 1066, i.e. the Norman Conquest of England; in others it is circa 1050, when the synthetic character of Old English (OE) starts to change [7, p. 115]. The end of Middle English is not easy to define as well: it is either the year 1476, the introduction of printing, or the year 1485, when Henry VII, the first Tudor Monarch, came to the throne. Some sources point out the year 1500 as the end of ME, when the most radical morphological and syntactic changes are complete [7, p. 115]. It should be mentioned that language changes do not occur so abruptly that we could fit them into a particular chronological

framework. During this period English underwent such an extensive development that at the end it differed considerably from the language of Alfred and Beowulf.

In terms of grammar, for instance, ME gradually developed from a highly synthetic to analytical language, relying more on word order than on inflectional endings to express relations between words. The range of inflections peculiar to OE was drastically reduced, and the ME systems of noun, pronoun and adjective declension were hugely simplified. The vocabulary of Middle English became largely heterogeneous due to the borrowings from Scandinavian, French, or Latin and consequently underwent considerable changes in semantics and derivational morphology. French orthography gave the ME spelling system quite a new look, so that OE words in the ME period were spelled in a totally different way. Some of the changes were a continuation of tendencies that started in Old English; others were the result of external influence, primarily from French, caused by the Norman Conquest.

The Norman Conquest had an irreversible effect on the linguistic situation in Britain. As the Normans emerged victorious after the battle of Hastings on October 14, 1066 and a new French-speaking king, William the Conqueror, came to the throne, French together with Latin became the languages of state, law, army, and church. Intellectual life, teaching and writing were in the hands of French-speakers; that is why, a good deal of the English population were gradually becoming bilingual. English, despite being disregarded by the state, remained alive in the streets as the language of common people. Being almost exclusively a spoken language, English was therefore more open to various kinds of changes as well as external influences and could develop without any constraints. On the whole, we can suppose that during the first centuries after the Conquest, English faced a potential threat of being engulfed by the predominant language, but it was not the case. For over three hundred years, until the time came for it to reemerge as the language of the nation, it continued to evolve and change in the form of different dialects and resist the danger of disappearance.

2. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

2.1. MIDDLE ENGLISH VOCABULARY

When two languages exist side by side for a long time, their interaction is inevitable. It is especially observable in a considerable transference of French vocabulary into Middle English. Approximately 10,000 French words were borrowed within three centuries after the Conquest [3]. It is worth noting that during the 11th-13th c. ME was under the influence of Old French (OF) and most of the borrowings during this period came from the northern dialect of OF called Anglo-Norman (or Anglo-French) that differed somewhat from central, Parisian French. Middle French borrowings began to penetrate into ME from the 14th onwards.

French loanwords did not enter the English language immediately; they appeared in ME in two phases with the year 1250 as the dividing line [4, p. 156]. During the first stage, from 1066 till 1250, the influx of French words was not so rapid, obviously because the languages had not come into a close contact yet. Roughly 900 words associated with power, social life, literature and church were borrowed [4, p. 156]. According to information given in the dictionaries [15, 16], the ME words *prisun, castel, werre, croune, stat, tresun, traitour, crime, court, baroun, dame, noble, prynce, duk, per, chapele, celle, clergie, charite, feith, miracle, messenger, ministrel, jogelour, feste, seruaunt, rime, storie* (MoE *prison, castle, war, crown, state, treason, traitor, baron, prince, duke, peer, chapel, cell, clergy, charity, faith, messenger, juggler, feast, servant, rhyme, story*) were recorded during 1100-1250. These words, as we can observe, reflect the speech of aristocracy and that of the middle class who was in contact with the French-speaking nobility.

When Normandy was lost to France in 1204, French speakers in England were cut off from their cultural and linguistic roots. As a result, French- and English-speaking classes mingled and by the middle of the 13th c. those who used to speak French were gradually becoming bilingual while English speakers picked up French words by the thousands [3]. Relying on the data found in the books [2, 4, 11] and in the dictionaries [13, 14, 16]:

–More words dealing with government and administration, such as *gouverne, amynistre, roial, regnen, realme, souereyn, majestee, septre, tyrannie, parlement, assemblée, statut, nacioun, trettee, aliance, taxen, alegeance, subjecten, publique, liberte, rebellen, power*, were introduced as well as words indicating the titles of many offices: *tresorer, mareshal, governour, viscounte, castelain*; titles and ranks of the nobility: *counte, countesse, princesse, duchesse, squier* (except king, queen, lord, lady and earl); titles of respect: *sire, madame, maistresse*; and other words relating to society: *paissaunt* “peasant”, *vassal, homage, maner* “manor”, *demein* “demesne”, *baillif*, etc.

–Many ecclesiastical words are borrowings from French: *preiere* “prayer”, *sanctuarie* “sanctuary”, *merci* “mercy”, *vertu* “virtue”, *theologie, confessioun, saviour, mysterie, prechen, chanten, preien, sacrifice*, and others.

–As the Normans took law in their hands, the English legal vocabulary was replenished with such words, as *acusen, aquiten* “acquit”, *plaiden* “plead”, *sentence, juge* “judge”, *jurie* “jury”, *aresten, warant, justice, bille, petition, compleynte, evidence, profe* “proof”, *bayle* “bail”, *verdit* “verdict”, *punishment, blamen, assignen, asaut* “assault”, *damage, defendaunt, proprete* “property”, *estat* “estate”, *heritage, heir, rente, executour, marien* “marry”, *mariage, moneie* “money”.

–Military terms came from Anglo-Norman: *ayde* “aid”, *armee, navie* “navy”, *garisoun, souldier, garde* “guard”, *spien* “spy”, *archer, enemi, bataille* “battle”, *capitain, defeten* “defeat”, *escapen, vessel, sergant, sege* “siege”, *force, regiment, pees* “peace”, *banere* “banner”.

–Many innovations in domestic life and architecture were introduced by the French together with their names: *celer* “cellar”, *chimenee* “chimney”, *columnne, couche, cortin* “curtain”, *cusshin* “cushion”, *lampe, piler* “pillar”, *porche, warderobe, chaire* “chair”, *table, lanterne, towaille* “towel”, *basin* “basin”, *parlur* “parlour”, *mansioun* “mansion”, *tour* “tower”, etc.

–Words that pertain to the domain of fashion: *bote* “boot”, *cote* “coat”, *coler* “collar”, *dressen, furre* “fur”, *garnement* “garment”, *goune* “gown”, *veile* “veil”, *butoun* “button”, *bokel* “buckle”, *broche* “brooch”, *las* “lace”, *embrouderie* “embroidery”, *meteyn* “mitten”, *kerchef, luxurie* (along with the names of colours: *blewe* “blue”, *scarlet, tauny* “tawny” and precious stones: *emeraude* “emerald”, *safir* “sapphire”, *perle, diamant* “diamond”, *cristal*).

–Entertainment: *leisir* “leisure”, *plaisir* “pleasure”, *daunce* “dance”, *tornement* “tournament”, *entertenen* “entertain”.

–Art and literature: *musik, beaute* “beauty”, *colour, image, figure, adornen* “adorn”, *embellisshen* “embellish”, *ornement, chapitre* “chapter”, *romaunce, volume, prologe*.

–Education and learning: *studie* “study”, *gramery* “grammar”, *nowne* “noun”, *clause, copie* “copy”, *penne* “pen”, *gendre* “gender”.

–Medicine: *surgien* “surgeon”, *fisicien* “physician”, *maladie, peyne* “pain”, *puls* “pulse”, *remedie, oynement, basme* “balm”, *poisoun* “poison”, etc. were introduced into English.

–Nearly 500 words dealing with food, cooking and eating are loans from French: *appetit, tast* “taste”, *plate, diner, soper* “supper”, *salad, salmoun, makerel, sardeine, oistre, sausige, bacoun, fruit, orange, letuse* “lettuce”, *peche, pomegarnet* “pomegranate”, *lymon, gely* “jelly”, *sugre* “sugar”, *creme, olive, vinegre, herbe, frien* “fry”, *rosten* “roast”, *boillen, stewen, blanchen*, etc. Some of them reflect the distinction between the life of the upper classes and that of the folk: the names of cattle are native English words, whereas the names of meat are derived from French, cf. *ox, cow, calf, sheep, deer, swine* (< OE *oxa, cu, cealf, sceap, deor, swīn*) and *beef, mutton, veal, venison, pork* (< OF *boef, moton, veel, veneison, porc*) [3].

Thus from the middle of the 13th century as the relationships between French and English speakers were becoming increasingly close, the French language came to penetrate more profoundly into every area of the English society. As a result, the French influence on the Middle English vocabulary turned out to be practically universal.

Furthermore, the process of language intermingling resulted in different kinds of changes in the vocabulary. Some native English words were substituted by French equivalents, e.g. the French loanwords *noble, army, warrior, peace, easy, very, river, mountain, witness, envy, people, crime, guilty, age, praise, air* ousted the OE *æpele, here, cempa, sibb, ēaþe, swīþe, ēa, beor̥, cýþere, anda, leod, firen, scyldig, ieldu, lof, lyft* [16, 14]. Many of them changed their meaning, e.g. *hærfest* in OE meant “autumn”, and *herveest* in

ME began to denote “the process of gathering crops” [8, p. 85]. The meaning of some words simply narrowed, like that of *apple*: in OE *æppel* meant any kind of fruit; in Middle English it acquired a specific meaning since the word *fruit* (< OF *fruit*) appeared.

Very often a native English word remained in the language whereas its derivative was replaced by a loanword, e.g. OE *þynčan* developed into ME *thenken* “to think” while OE *offþynčan* was substituted for *repenten* “to repent” (< OF *repentir*) [8, p. 85]. But most frequently French words settled down with the existing English words enriching the vocabulary with synonyms and adding to the precision and flexibility of the language. In modern English native and borrowed words still coexist, each with a slightly different shade of meaning: cf. native *hare, swan, axe, bit, wish, might, room, freedom, ask, answer, begin, hide, shun* and French *leveret, cygnet, hatchet, morsel, desire, power, chamber, liberty, demand, respond, commence, conceal, avoid*, etc [15]. It is easy to notice that the difference between them is stylistic: French loans are of a more literary, formal character.

Apart from individual words, the origin of a few prepositions and conjunctions can be tracked to French e.g. *because of, despite, in case*. According to C. M. Millward [11, p.196], they came into the language as separate nouns and verbs and began to perform new functions after they had been completely naturalized. For instance, the preposition *despite* was originally a noun (< OF *despit*), first recorded in the 13th c.; the phrase *in despite of*, a loan-translation of Old French *en despit de* “in contempt of” appeared in the late 13th c., and the preposition itself did not appear until the early 15th c. Obviously, some collocations and expressions, such as *beforehand* (Fr. *avant la main*), *condemn to death* (Fr. *condemner à mort*), *without fail* (Fr. *sans faille*), *the hue and cry* (Fr. *le cri et le hu*) [9, p. 57], were likewise borrowed as separate words and then joined to form phrases on the French model.

When the French loanwords first entered the English language, they retained their original stress on the ultimate or penultimate syllable, e.g. ME *coráge, natúre, vertú, comfórtáble* (MoE *courage, nature, virtue, comfortable*). In the course of time the word stress in most cases was shifted closer to the beginning of the word according to the characteristic features of the native English accentuation [2, p. 189]; but the shift was not immediate. In the works of poetry the French stress was preserved up to the 15th century [1, p. 190].

French words were quickly assimilated into English vocabulary and used for coining new words (merging with English elements as well), e.g. the adjective *gentle* was borrowed from French in 1225 and added to the English noun to make *gentlewoman* (1230), and then *gentleman, gentleness* and *gently* [4, p. 166]. Similarly the noun *faith* (1250) within a century produced the derivatives *faithless, faithful, faithfully*, and *faithfulness* [4, p. 166]. French affixes – prefixes (*dis-, re-, en-*) and suffixes (*-able, -ible, -ance, -ence, -ment, -let, -age, -ee*) that forced their way into the English language, also contributed to the formation of new words, e.g. *peerage, avoidance, grantee* (French root plus French suffix). Later on they came to be used with native Germanic roots, such as the word *hindrance* (1400-1450), formed from the OE verb *hinder* plus the suffix *-ance* that was taken from the words of French origin and used to form similar nouns from native verbs [12, p. 257]. The native affixes were joined to foreign roots as well, e.g. *charming* (1250-1300) (French root plus the native English suffix).

Considering the number of borrowed words and the overall changes in the vocabulary, we cannot deny the enormous influence of French on the Middle English vocabulary. This great influx of French words certainly would never have occurred without the Conquest. But to come to the right conclusions, we have to consider some more points. According to the Russian linguists Tatyana Rastorgueva and Boris Khaimovich, about 80 or 85% of the native OE vocabulary went out of use over the centuries due to the borrowings from French and Latin [2, 8]. They were either lost or replaced as a result of the rivalry of synonyms. However, according to another source, namely *The Cambridge History of the English Language*, the lexicon of Early Middle English still consisted of 91.5% of English origin; in later Middle English this figure had fallen to 78.8% [5, p.432]. The core of the matter probably lies in the extent of penetration of French words into different semantic areas of the vocabulary. The closer we come to lower social ranks, the fewer French words we have [1, p. 190]. Some aspects of English life remained practically untouched by French loanwords, such as shipping and seafaring, farming and agriculture, e.g. the words *acre, field, hedge, furrow, sow, reap, harvest, plough, shovel, spade, rake, seed, wheat, barley, corn,*

beans, oats, grass, hay duck, sheep, hen, goose, etc. are derived from Old English [11, p. 196]. Besides, a number of French borrowings in ME were words that French originally borrowed from Germanic, e.g. ME *werre* "war" < Gc. *werra*; ME *waiten* "to wait" < Gc. *wahten*; ME *gardin* "garden" < Gc. *garto*, etc [1, p. 189]. French *soup* is a doublet of native English *sop*, and *grape* is a doublet of native *grapple* [11, p. 197]; more doublets include *catch* and *chase*, *warden* and *guardian*, *wage* and *gage*. Similarly, some proper names adopted by the English from French are of Germanic origin, e.g. *Geoffrey* < Gc. *Gaufrid*; *Richard* < Gc. *Rikhard*; *William* < Gc. *Wilihelm*; *Henry* < Gc. *Heinric* [1, p. 190], and others. Finally, it is worth noting that new words coined on the British soil out of native roots and the morphemes of foreign origin should not be treated as borrowings, but as specifically English words [2, p. 298]. Therefore, though transference of French words was very considerable, it does not mean, however, that we should look at the native element in English as insignificant. The views of the Russian linguists should obviously be taken into consideration when we refer to semantic spheres related to the domains of government, law, religion, military service, etc., as probably more than half of the native OE vocabulary was ousted from there. As for the words frequently used by common people, most of them continued to be those of Germanic origin. So taking everything into account, we shall agree with the opinion given in *The Cambridge History of the English Language*.

2.2. MIDDLE ENGLISH SPELLING

Concerning Middle English spelling, it underwent a fair amount of changes as well. Many of them are to be attributed to the activities of Anglo-Norman scribes, trained in France and accustomed to French orthography. When they copied texts in English, they transferred some of French spelling features into an English spelling system. Initially, alterations in spelling did not necessarily mean changes at a spoken level, but the contact between French- and English speakers and later bilingualism obviously led to changes in pronunciation as well [5, p. 10]. According to the sources [1, 5, 11], the changes were as follows:

- the Old English letters *æ*, *þ*, *ð*, *ȝ* were gradually ousted as they were not employed by the French; instead new letters such as *g*, *j*, *k*, *v* and *q* were introduced due to the imitation of French manuscripts, e.g. ME *corage* (< OF *corage*), ME *joye* (< OF *joie*), ME *king* (<OE *cyninȝ*) (MoE *courage*, *joy*, *king*).

- the letter *v* (sometimes *u*) was employed to denote [v] which occurred in Old English only in intervocalic position and was represented in spelling by *f*: ME *over*, *ouer* (OE *ofer*), *love*, *loue* (OE *lufu*);

- the digraphs *ou*, *ie*, and *ch*, which occurred in many French borrowings were adopted to indicate the sounds [u:], [e:], and [tʃ]: ME *double* ['duble] < OF *double*, ME *chief* [tʃe:f] < OF *chef*. Apart from the loanwords such spelling was transferred to the native English words, e.g. ME *hous* [hu:s] (<OE *hūs*), ME *field* [fe:ld] (<OE *feld*), ME *child* (<OE *cild*);

- the *sh* spelling (or sometimes *s*, *ss* and *sch*) for the sound [ʃ] was an innovation of Anglo-Norman scribes: ME *ship*, *schip* (<OE *scip*);

- due to the activities of scribes *qu* replaced Old English *cw* as in *quellen* "to kill" (<OE *cwellan*);

- the digraph *gg* was used for [dʒ] instead of Old English *cg*, as in *brigge*, *egge* "bridge", "edge" (<OE *brycȝ*, *ecȝ*);

- under French influence *g* and *c* gained their twofold usage: they stood for [dʒ] and [s] before front vowels and for [g] and [k] before back vowels, cf. *gentil* [dʒen'til] and *good* [go:d], *mercy* [mer'si] and *cours* [ku:rs];

- the letter *u*, which had denoted the sound [u] in OE, began to signify after the French fashion also the labial front vowel [ü], formerly expressed by *y*, e.g. OE *bysiȝ*, ME *busy*; ME *vertu* [ver'tju:] < OF *vertu* (MoE *virtue*);

- the vowel *o* was employed not only for [o] but also to denote short [u], probably to facilitate the distinction between the resembling letters made up of vertical strokes [1, p. 178], such as *u*, *v*, *n*, *m*, e.g. ME *monk* [mun:k] < OE *munuc* (the letter *o* was similarly used in Anglo-Norman);

–among the new diphthongs that were formed during the Middle English period, it is necessary to mention the diphthong [oi] mostly found in French borrowings and represented by the digraphs *oi* and *oy* in ME, e.g. ME *poynt(e)* < OF *point*, ME *vois* < OF *vois* (MoE *point*, *voice*).

The above examples distinctly show the influence of French on Middle English spelling and pronunciation. Even the only example of how OE *cwæð* (pret. sg. of *cweðan* “to speak”) looked like in ME – *quath* [5, p. 10] – can demonstrate how considerable it was.

2.3. MIDDLE ENGLISH GRAMMAR

French influence on English grammar was not as profound as on vocabulary and pronunciation, yet, some parts of it were remodelled under French fashion. For instance, *qui* was used in French both as an interrogative and a relative pronoun, whereas Old English used *hwa* “who” in interrogative and *þe* in relative clauses. Middle English began to use *who* as a relative pronoun on the model of French *qui*, [9, p. 57] e.g. «...*There myght men se who can best sytte and ryde*» [6].

The OE use of *weorþan* “to become” to form passive constructions became more rare after the 11th century in favour of the verb *to be*, commonly employed by the French [9, p. 57].

At the beginning of the 15th century the second person pronoun *ye*, used to address more than one person, gradually took over the functions of *thou*, used for one person. On the model of French *vous* it came to be used to show respect for people of higher standing and *thou* – to address intimates or people of lower social class, e.g. Margery Kempe, an English Christian mystic and pilgrim, uses *ye* to address the archbishop of York: «*Ser, so I her seyn that ye arn a wikkyd man*» [9, p. 57-58] («*Sir, I also hear it said that you are a wicked man*»).

Other grammatical changes cannot be directly attributed to coexistence of two languages; we can only assume, in support of some views, that the French language could have played a more significant role in the ME grammatical changes than Old Scandinavian for the reason that it had a greater influence on English in general, particularly on the vocabulary [2, p. 292]. For instance, it might have favoured spreading of analytical forms in ME because at that time French had a more analytical grammatical structure than English [2, p. 292]. The question about the role of French influence in simplification of the noun and adjective morphology and the rapid growth of the *-(e)s* plural inflexion also remains controversial. It should be mentioned that in Anglo Norman the oblique plural ending *-s* replaced the nominative plural ending and became dominant in the 12th c. for the reason that the Old French system of declension, derived from Latin, began to decline [1, p. 213-214]. Considering the dominance of Anglo-Norman at that time it might have accelerated the process of similar changes in ME grammar. This view should not be exaggerated, though, if we take into account the fact that the extension of *-s* ending took place most quickly in the north, where French influence was comparatively less strong [1, p. 214]. In terms of syntax, there is an assumption, for instance, that Middle English word order became more rigid due to French influence, as subject-verb-object word order first appears in southern texts [10, p. 185], however, this idea is much argued.

3. CONCLUSIONS

From this brief analysis, we can conclude that the long-term dominance of French affected the structure of Middle English to a certain extent at all its levels. French influence was especially observable on ME vocabulary and spelling, though certain grammatical alternations may be also tracked. The impact of French on Middle English, on the whole, cannot be compared with any other language. In view of this, it might be logical to refer to Middle English as “Frenglish”, pointing out a fair amount of French elements in English. But, in fact, we are not supposed to think that French turned Middle English into something different from English. Although spelling was changed in that period and a great number of words were borrowed, the basic elements of ME grammar and vocabulary remained virtually untouched by French. The French language neither absorbed nor ruined English, but helped to equip and enrich the latter. At the end of the ME period, the language remained English and its predominant features were still those of Germanic origin.

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Address: L.M. Ikalyuk, U.T. Tatsakovych, Vasyl Stefanyk Precarpathian National University, 57, Shevchenko Str., Ivano-Frankivsk, 76000, Ukraine.

E-mail: lesiushka@yahoo.com.

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Стаття представляє загальний опис середньоанглійської мови, фокусуючи увагу на вплив французької мови на її розвиток під час цього періоду. Не зважаючи на велику кількість французьких запозичень у різні системи англійської мови, вона залишалася англійською, а її домінантні ознаки були германського походження.

Ключові слова: глобалізація, міжкультурна комунікація, середньоанглійська мова, французькі запозичення, Нормандське завоювання.