



Explore the influence of French on English

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This essay will explore the French influence on the English language, taking one present day newspaper article from each language as a starting point for discussion. Examples from both texts will be used to illustrate the lexical fields of French loanwords in English during the Middle English (ME) and Early Modern English (EModE) periods, as well as the effects of French and English affixing of native and foreign words. The sociolinguistic factors that affected the changing language contact situation will also be taken into account. The wider impact of French will then be considered, in terms of its syntactic, morphological and semantic effects on English. Finally, by looking at contemporary language relating to journalism and the media, this essay will consider how French loans in the ME and EModE periods continue to affect the English language as it grows and evolves.

In 1042, the accession to the English throne of Edward the Confessor, who had spent time in exile in Normandy, brought French into early contact with English. However, it was the Norman Conquest of 1066 that saw the arrival of a new Anglo-Norman ruling class in England, and with it an Anglo-French (A-F) language. The new arrivals 'inevitably transferred their everyday tongue to their official offices' with the result that Anglo-French 'became established alongside the traditional Latin as the language of public state business and of the court'.¹ These elevated uses of French meant that there was an inequality of status between the two languages, so it was a case of superstrate borrowing: French influenced English from above.² In the Present Day English (PDE) newspaper article, the lexical fields of the French loanwords from the period immediately following the Conquest reflect this. *Prince*,³ for example, relates to the court, while the Anglo-Norman adjective *general* (*DT*, l.15) had early ecclesiastical applications.⁴ The French newspaper article points to words from similar lexical fields borrowed into English during the same period. We find *trône*,⁵ from which English gets *throne*, another example of courtly vocabulary; as well as *saint* (*FS*, l.14), an ecclesiastical loanword that came into English from Latin, via French.

It is thought that, after the initial post-Conquest period discussed above, there was a second wave of borrowing from French in the ME period, beginning around 1250. The second wave of loanwords tended to come from the Central, rather than Norman, dialect of French, reflecting the fact that Central French had become fashionable in European courts as a representation of 'chivalrous society in its most polished form'.⁶ Accordingly, Norman-

¹ Ishtla Singh, *The History of English*, (London: Hodder Arnold, 2005), p.107

² Andreas Fischer, 'Lexical Borrowing and the History of English: A Typology of Typologies' in *Language Contact in the History of English*, ed. by Dieter Kastovsky and Arthur Mettinger (Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 2003), pp.97-115 (p.107)

³ Anita Singh, 'Royal wedding: Huw Edwards to lead BBC's coverage', *Daily Telegraph*, 13 December 2010 (l.7). <<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/tvandradio/bbc/8197590/Royal-wedding-Huw-Edwards-to-lead-BBCs-coverage.html>> [Accessed 20 December 2010] See Appendix A. Henceforth *DT*.

⁴ *Oxford English Dictionary*, <<http://www.oed.com/>> [Accessed 20 December 2010] Henceforth *OED*.

⁵ Anonymous, 'Angleterre - Le prince William va enfin épouser Kate Middleton!', *France Soir*, 16 November 2010 (l.23). <<http://www.francesoir.fr/buzz-people/angleterre-le-prince-william-va-enfin-epouser-kate-middleton.55440>> [Accessed 20 December 2010] See Appendix B. Henceforth *FS*.

⁶ Albert C. Baugh and Thomas Cable, *A History of the English Language*, 5th ed. (London: Pearson Education, 2002), p.134

influenced Anglo-French was ‘increasingly seen as inferior to the French of the Parisian court’.⁷ In contrast to the immediate post-Conquest period, when ‘outside the highest level of the aristocracy and monasteries French made few inroads into everyday life’,⁸ French was no longer confined to the upper classes. Knowledge of the language became useful for the growing ‘aspirations of the middle class’⁹ in England, and this ‘opening up of French to those outside the aristocracy’¹⁰ led to a so-called ‘heyday of French’: a period, from 1258 to 1362, during which it was used ‘in the broadest spectrum of activities’.¹¹ Thus, in the PD articles, there is an increased number of French loanwords from the ME period after 1250, originating in both Anglo-Norman and French, and belonging to a wider range of lexical fields. As well as further examples of courtly vocabulary, including *coronation* (DT, 1.18); *princess* (DT, 1.10) and *royal* (DT, 1.1, 1.2, etc), there are also, for example, abstract nouns like *inspiration* (DT, 1.31). When the English ‘stopped using Latin for their legal language they turned not to English but to French’,¹² with the result that French words relating to the law began to be borrowed, including the verb to *cite*¹³ (DT, 1.41). The status of French as the language of law was significant as it meant that French ‘retain[ed] its appeal’¹⁴ even after the 1362 Statute of Pleading, which stated that all lawsuits must be conducted in English. The significantly later date that *cite* is first attested, 1483, supports this. Other lexical fields for borrowing include travel, the word *voyage* (FS, 1.11) possibly reflecting the increased trade between France and England during the later ME period. The borrowing of *university* (FS, 1.14) may well reflect ‘the fame of the University of Paris as the centre of Medieval scholarship’,¹⁵ which, like its prominence in the field of law, helped to enhance the status of the French language in England. This, in spite of factors like the Statute of Pleading and the Plague, which meant that throughout the ME period, English began to flourish again and French was little spoken in England. First reaching England in 1348, the ‘devastating disease struck the final blows against the French language, weakening the former strongholds of that language to the point where they could no longer resist the advance of English’.¹⁶ However, it seems that in the lexical areas identified above, French loanwords continued to come into English. Broadly speaking, scholars agree that there were two waves of borrowing in ME, although some dispute the idea. William Rothwell suggests that Anglo-French must have been more influential than Central French as it was already well-established in England.¹⁷ Indeed, several of the loanwords in the PDE article attested during the post-1250 period come from A-N, including *absence* (DT, 1.17) in 1384 and *voice* (DT, 1.4, 1.21) in 1300. Furthermore, Douglas Kibbee divides the phases of ME borrowing from French into not two but five different periods.

Borrowing from French persisted into the EModE period, as indicated by certain loanwords in the PDE article including the nouns *departure* (DT, 1.37) and *career* (DT, 1.19). The resurgence in popularity of Latinate style during this period led to restoration of Latin shape to certain French words. Some of these changes in orthography survive in PDE. *Ceremony* (DT, 1.22), for example, is first attested in 1380, and is probably OF in origin. In

⁷ Singh, p.110

⁸ Douglas A. Kibbee, *For to speke Frenche trewely: The French Language in England, 1000-1600: Its Status, Description and Instruction* (Amsterdam: Benjamins, 1991), p.3

⁹ Kibbee, p.28

¹⁰ Matthew Townend, ‘Contacts and Conflicts: Latin, Norse and French’ in Lynda Mugglestone (ed.), *The Oxford History of English* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), pp.61-85 (p.67)

¹¹ Kibbee, p.4

¹² Ibid, pp.27-8

¹³ Originally, ‘To summon officially to appear in court of law’ (OED)

¹⁴ Kibbee, p.93

¹⁵ Dieter Kastovsky, ‘Vocabulary’ in David Denison and Richard Hogg (eds.), *A History of the English Language* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), pp.199-270 (p.247)

¹⁶ Kibbee, p.58

¹⁷ Singh, p.125

ME and OF, its orthography varied, sometimes written as *serymony*, *cerimony* and so on. However, in Medieval Latin it was often spelt *cere-* and since the sixteenth century ‘this spelling has been established in French and English’ (*OED*). Similarly for *doubt* (*DT*, l. 47), attested in 1225, the ‘normal’ fourteenth century forms ‘in French and English were *douter*, *doute*; the influence of Latin [dubitāre] caused these to be artificially spelt *doubt*’, which in seventeenth century ‘was again abandoned in French, but retained in English’ (*OED*). The French loanword *coronation* (*DT*, l.18), first attested in 1388, was actually assimilated to *crown* during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, hence the by-form *crownation*, but this is now obsolete. The fact that *crownation* did not survive into PDE could again reflect the influence of Latinate spelling, as the Latin *corōna* more closely resembles French *coronation* than the ME form, *croun*. The Present Day French (PDF) article points to other failed attempts to change the language, in terms of unsuccessful lexical replacement relating to the seasons. The French text has *printemps* (*FS*, l.8), whereas PDE uses the OE word *spring*. In fact, *primetemps* was borrowed in the ME period and seemed to establish itself for a while, but disappeared again in the late fifteenth century.¹⁸ While *summer* and *winter* are both of OE origin, it is interesting to note that British English *autumn* comes from French, ‘having replaced the native *harvest* in the fourteenth century’,¹⁹ whereas American English *fall* is native English. A possible explanation for this is that British English is more susceptible to French than American English, because of Britain’s geographical proximity to France.²⁰

While lexical expansion is an important consequence of contact with French, there were others. That said there is some debate over ‘the nature of the contact situation between French and English’.²¹ Broadly speaking, these differing views can be divided into two positions. The first is that English and French operated in ‘the kind of context which allows for each language, or one language, to impact structurally on the other’; the second is that ‘the languages co-existed discretely but with the opportunity for limited lexical borrowings in certain domains’.²² So far this essay has mainly suggested the latter scenario. However, some factors do suggest that French had an impact on certain structural elements of English.

Aside from lexical borrowing, one of the strongest areas of French influence was derivational morphology. In OE, words were created by native-form affixation and compounding, but ‘one effect of the influx of French words into Middle English was that subsequently a recourse to foreign sources became quite normal’.²³ The result was that ‘the inventory of affixes underwent a big change, with the loss of some items productive in OE and the adoption of many affixes, for example *-ment* for abstract nouns and *-able* for adjectives, deduced from their presence in loanwords’.²⁴ French affixes were added to native, as well as Romance loan words. An example of French affixing of an English-origin word in the PDE article is *hindrance* (*DT*, l.29), formed from the OE verb *hinder*, plus the suffix *-ance*, which was deduced from ‘words of French origin such as *resistance*’ and ‘used to form similar nouns of action’ (*OED*) from native verbs. An example of same-origin affixation, that is, a French affix attached to a French loanword to form a new word in English, is *coverage* (*DT*, l.1, l.2 etc), which contrasts to the PDF equivalent *couverture*. *Coverage* is formed from the French loanword *cover*; plus *-age*, an OF suffix for forming abstract nouns. *Trainee* (*DT*, l.35) provides another example of same-origin affixation. It is formed from the French loanword *train* plus the suffix *-ee*, ‘an adaptation of the *-é* of certain Anglo-Norman’ past participles used as nouns and originally ‘used in technical terms of English law’ (*OED*). The

¹⁸ Fischer, p.103

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Ibid., p.101

²¹ Singh, p.127

²² Ibid.

²³ Denison and Hogg, p.17

²⁴ Ibid.

OED notes that ‘in a few words, as *bargee*, *devotee*, the suffix is employed app. arbitrarily’. This seems to be the case for *trainee*, as it is neither legal language; nor, like *refugee*, which comes from *réfugié*, an adaptation from modern French. Finally, there are cases of Romance plus Romance affixation, such as *involvement* (*DT*, 1.13), which combines the Latin *involve* and the abstract noun forming French suffix *-ment*, with the result that *involvement* constitutes a new formation in ME rather than a borrowing. In addition to French affixes, in the PDE article there are also examples of native affixes applied to French loanwords. One such example is *coveted* (*DT*, 1.19), which is first attested as an adjective in 1875. It is formed from the loanword *covet*, which came from Latin through French, plus the Germanic dental suffix *-ed*, which was ‘added to adapted forms of Latin pples., the intention being to assimilate these words in form to the native words which they resembled in function’ (*OED*), from the EModE period onwards. Further impact of French on English morphology can be seen in the verb to *choose*, which is derived from OE *céosan* and can be found in its strong form, *chosen*, in the PDE article (*DT*, 1.1). Previously, however, weak forms of the past tense like *chesed* and *chosed* had been used alongside this strong form (*OED*). The weak forms no longer exist in standard PDE, but the fact that some survive in the dialects could be ‘in some measure due to a tendency to identify the English verb with the French *choisir*’ (*OED*). Interestingly, while the verb to *choose* is of native origin, the related noun, *choice* (*DT*, 1.25) is a French loan. According to the *OED*, *choice* managed to supplant the OE *cyre* because, phonetically, it lay closer to the various inflections of *choose*.

French also had a limited impact on various features of English syntax. For instance, certain adjectives borrowed from French retain a post-adjectival position today, where we would normally expect the adjective to come before the noun in PDE. Although in the PDE article these adjectives follow the standard English pattern, ‘general election’ (*DT*, 1.15) and ‘royal wedding’ (*DT*, 1.1), hints of their French origin survive in certain titles, like *Princess Royal* and *Secretary General*. Contrasting the French and English newspaper articles, we can also see a difference in the usage of the definite article. While French uses the definite article for certain jobs and titles, ‘le Prince William’ (*FS*, 1.1), in English there is no article: ‘[Ø] Prince William’ (*DT*, 1.7). Although this use of the definite article is obsolete in PDE, it was present in some ME texts that were influenced by Norman French, for example ‘þe king Stephne’, which appeared in a text of 1154.²⁵

Although above we have seen examples of lexical replacement, like French *choice* replacing OE *cyre*, the semantic impact of language contact with French also led to the co-existence of native and foreign terms. To an extent, this can be seen in the above example of *autumn* and *harvest*, but the two terms have distinct meanings in PDE.²⁶ A better example of quasi-synonymy would be *colour* (*DT*, 1.21), a ME French loanword, existing alongside the native OE *hue*. According to the *OED*, *hue* was exactly synonymous with *colour* until around 1600, at which point it ‘appears to have become archaic in prose use’. In modern use *hue* is ‘either a poetic and rhetorical synonym of “colour”, or a vaguer term, including quality, shade or tinge of colour, tint, and applicable to any mixture of colours as well as to a primary or simple colour’ (*OED*). Interestingly, the French newspaper article also points to an example of the co-existence of synonymous foreign terms within English. *Serviette* (*FS*, 1.27) is a French loanword first attested in 1489, while the synonymous *napkin* is probably A-N, first attested in 1384. Their *OED* definitions, ‘a table-napkin’ in both cases, indicate synonymy, though it is suggested that *serviette* ‘latterly has come to be considered vulgar’. As well as synonymy, language contact with French has led to semantic specialization. This

²⁵ ‘Final Continuation (1154)’ in David Burnley, *The History of the English Language: A Source Book* (London and New York: Longman, 1992), pp.74-77 (p.74)

²⁶ Principally, ‘the third season of the year’ and ‘the reaping and gathering in of the ripened grain; the gathering in of other products’ respectively (*OED*).

can be illustrated with vocabulary relating to the court. We would expect heavy borrowing from French in this area, because of its status as a prestige language dating back to before the Norman Conquest, as ‘the Normans, whilst accommodating many Saxon words of status, largely defined themselves in their own terms’.²⁷ However, this was a ‘fluid situation’, with ‘several of the terms’ applied to ‘a confusing variety of people’.²⁸ This is reflected in the fact that *prince* (*DT*, 1.7 and *FS*, 1.1) is of French origin, but *king* is Anglo-Saxon. Originally, the words were synonymous: the *OED* gives the original definition of *prince* as ‘a (male) sovereign ruler; a monarch, a king’. Both terms survive in the language today because of a need for semantic specialisation, reflected in the definition of *prince*, from 1325 onwards as ‘a son or grandson of a monarch (also as a prefixed title)’ (*OED*).

While much of the language contact with French discussed above occurs in the ME and EModE periods, the effects of this earlier contact situation persist into ModE and PDE. As new lexical fields are developed, the language looks to existing words and develops new senses for old terms. This process is indicated in vocabulary that relates to journalism and the media. While the word *journalism* (*DT*, 1.33) is itself a ModE borrowing from French, first attested in 1833, some associated words are new applications of older French loans. The verb *host* (*DT*, 1.21) for example, first enters English from OF in c1290, as a noun. Having changed its grammatical categorisation (first attested as a transitive verb in 1485) it then evolves into other meanings, beyond the original ‘to receive (any one) into one’s house and entertain as a guest’ (*OED*), towards the twentieth-century sense of ‘to compère (a television show, etc.)’. This is a clear semantic difference from the French: in PDF the verb to *host* in this sense would be *animer*, and the noun *host* would be *animateur*, not *hôte*. Similarly, the word *editor* (*DT*, 1.3) was borrowed from French in 1649, originally meaning ‘the publisher of a book’ (*OED*). While this meaning persists in both languages, in English there is a newer sense, first attested in 1843, that applies to newspapers. *Editor* appears in the PDE article as ‘a person in charge of a particular section of a newspaper, e.g. of the financial news’, a sense not mirrored in French, which uses *rédacteur* rather than *éditeur*. Other words in the lexical field of journalism and the media that are borrowed from French, or that contain French elements include: *bulletin* (*DT*, 1.31, 138); *coverage* (*DT*, 1. 1, 1.2, etc) and *anchor* (*DT*, 1.11 etc).

From the examples above, it seems that French has had a negligible (though still discernible) impact on English syntax. However, its impact on English lexis and derivational morphology is much more significant. The continued status of French as the language of law in England, even after the 1362 Statute of Pleading, seems to have favourably affected its continued use as a source language for certain loanwords, as well as for certain affixes, like –*ee*. Most importantly, this status helped to retain the presence of French in English, in spite of historical factors like the Plague, which decimated the French-speaking population in England. Although the status of French has fluctuated throughout the history of English, the heavy borrowing and influence on twentieth-century terms relating to journalism and the media indicates French influence persists, evolving with the addition of fields of lexis.

²⁷ Geoffrey Hughes, *Words in Time: A Social History of the English Vocabulary* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1988), p.40

²⁸ *Ibid.*

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Appendix A

<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/tvandradio/bbc/8197590/Royal-wedding-Huw-Edwards-to-lead-BBCs-coverage.html>

Royal wedding: Huw Edwards to lead BBC's coverage

The BBC has chosen Huw Edwards to lead its coverage of the Royal wedding.

By Anita Singh, Showbusiness Editor 7:00AM GMT 13 Dec 2010

The newsreader was favoured over David Dimbleby, the voice of State occasions for several decades.

Edwards will anchor the BBC's coverage and broadcast to the nation in an event which is predicted to attract a worldwide audience of one billion. Prince William and Kate Middleton will marry at Westminster Abbey on April 29.

When the engagement was announced, it was widely expected that Dimbleby would play a prominent role in the BBC's plans. He commentated at the funeral of Diana, Princess of Wales in 2007, and in 2002 anchored coverage of the Queen Mother's funeral and the Queen's Golden Jubilee celebrations.

However, it is understood that he will have no involvement. BBC sources said the 72-year-old was not considered as he is now viewed primarily as a political anchor. He has presented the BBC's general election coverage since 1979 and chaired Question Time since 1994.

His absence from the Royal coverage will end a long family tradition. His father, the late Richard Dimbleby, commentated on the coronation in 1953 and the funeral of George VI.

Landing the coveted job will provide Edwards with the biggest stage of his career. He has never anchored a Royal wedding, although he has experience of Royal occasions as the voice of Trooping the Colour and the State Opening of Parliament. He also hosted coverage of the 60th anniversary of D-Day, the opening ceremony of the Beijing Olympics and Barack Obama's inauguration.

"Huw has presented so many of the big national moments of recent years and he is the natural choice for the Royal wedding," a BBC source said.

Edwards, 49, said last night: "I am delighted with the news and consider it a great honour to play a part in what I am sure will be a huge national celebration."

The vote of confidence from BBC bosses will delight the newsman because he once believed his Welsh accent to be a hindrance in his career.

"I felt something of an outsider for a long time. These days, the presence of a Welshman on the BBC's main evening news bulletin is not question. In 1984, when I joined the BBC, attitudes were rather different," he said.

Born in Llanelli, he studied journalism at Cardiff University and began his broadcasting career at Swansea Sound, a local radio station, reading the news in English and Welsh.

He won a place on the BBC news trainee scheme and after becoming parliamentary correspondent for BBC Wales, he transferred to Westminster and a job as political correspondent for BBC News, covering Lady Thatcher's departure from Downing Street.

In 1999, he was appointed presenter of BBC One's Six O'Clock News bulletin and became a household name - making headlines the following year when the studio was hit by a power cut and he disappeared from screens mid-way through the bulletin.

Edwards has cited Dimbleby as an inspiration in the world of live broadcasting, and has firm views on how the BBC should cover landmark occasions. "It is my firm belief that British viewers expect the BBC to maintain a certain formality when covering these occasions," he once said.

"Our job as broadcasters is to enhance the viewer's experience, not spoil it. Switch on the microphone only if you know exactly what you want to say. Speak if it helps the viewer's understanding. If in doubt, leave it out."

Appendix B

<http://www.francesoir.fr/buzz-people/angleterre-le-prince-william-va-enfin-epouser-kate-middleton.55440>

Angleterre - Le prince William va enfin épouser Kate Middleton !
E.C. 16/11/10 à 15h30

Huit ans après leur rencontre, le prince William et Kate Middleton vont finalement convoler. Le prince de Galles a en effet annoncé que leur union, déjà annoncée comme « le mariage du siècle », serait célébrée en 2011.

Kate Middleton sera bientôt élevée au rang de princesse. C'est le prince de Galles lui-même qui l'a annoncé par communiqué : William et Kate se marieront l'année prochaine. « *Le prince de Galles est ravi d'annoncer les fiançailles du prince William avec Mademoiselle Catherine Middleton.* » Pour l'heure aucune date ne semble avoir été fixée : « *Le mariage aura lieu au printemps ou à l'été 2011 à Londres* », poursuit le communiqué de Clarence House, qui abrite le secrétariat du prince Charles et de ses fils.

Les deux tourteraux, âgés de 28 ans, « *se sont fiancés en octobre lors de vacances privées au Kenya* ». A leur retour de ce voyage, William a demandé à monsieur Middleton l'autorisation de faire de sa fille la future reine des Britanniques.

Cela fait déjà huit ans que le fils aîné de la princesse Diana et Kate Middleton se connaissent. Ils se sont rencontrés sur les bancs de l'université Saint Andrew en 2002. En 2007, le couple avait fait un « break » de quelques mois, avant de mieux se retrouver.

Le mariage du siècle

Celle que les Britanniques ont surnommée Waity Katey (du verbe « wait » qui signifie attendre) a largement eu l'occasion de démontrer ses capacités à endosser ce rôle difficile. Elle est de la plupart des événement royaux, porte la robe princière à merveille – elle figure dans la liste des 10 femmes les mieux habillées du magazine People... Surtout, elle s'est toujours montrée patiente devant la horde de paparazzi qui la traquent quotidiennement. Un véritable exploit.

Mais d'où vient celle qui va passer la bague au doigt du deuxième héritier du trône d'Angleterre ? Ses parents ne font pourtant pas partie de la noblesse. Lorsque Kate est née, sa maman, Carole Elizabeth, était hôtesse de l'air. Son papa, Michael Francis Middleton, était aiguilleur du ciel. En 1987, le couple a fondé Party Pieces, société de vente à distance d'assiettes, de gobelets ou de serviettes jetables... C'est grâce à cette petite entreprise qu'ils sont devenus millionnaires. Et c'est grâce à leur fille qu'ils seront bientôt au premier rang de ce qui est déjà annoncé comme « le mariage du siècle ».