Westfälische Wilhelms-Universität Münster
Englisches Seminar
SW Proseminar: Historical Lexicology
Sommersemester 2005
Dozent: Dr. Oliver M. Traxel

Introduction

The Norman terms came into the English language with the Norman Conquest in 1066 (description in the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle).
The Norman claim to the throne may have seemed strange to the folk but not to the royal family because Edward the Confessor had been the son of a Norman mother. The Normans themselves hat Scandinavian roots.

The Conquest caused a shift of power, although the conquerors did not drive the Saxons out of their land as the Saxons had done with the Celts, but they took over all the positions of power. And with that they established their language as the ruling one.
Latin remained the language of church and scholarship.
English ceased as official language for almost three centuries.

Anglo-Saxon words were either replaced or changed in meaning, so the A-S *castel* meaning "a fortified village" was replaced by the Norman *castle* – " a stone-built fortress".

After the Conquest most A-S manuscripts diminished. In the annals of 1137, written by monks in Northamptonshire, you find French terms for the first time: *tresor, Canceler, prisun, justice, tenserie* – all having something to do with protecting money.

The French words formed a real enrichment of the English vocabulary because it that was a living Roman language coming to a folk that was used to two Germanic languages: A-S and Old Norse. The speakers of those language remained the majority, so that the language did not die out completely but got heavily mingled with Norman French.

The vocabulary of law was influenced at most. The key terms as *law* itself stayed Norse, but all adding words like *court, justice, suit, sue, plaintiff* etc. are French. Sometimes even the inverted French word order remains: *Attorney General, letter patent*. What is more, the Queen uses a French term in Parliament: "La Reyn le vault".
That does not imply that the Anglo-Saxons had no terms of law, but the whole topic was removed from the native population.

The division of titles

➞ see page 113

Some titles were left in A-S because there were problems of understanding and translation. A unique pair is the title *eorl* for the man but *countess* for the woman.

The dominance is also shown in
- terms of respect: *master, dame, command* etc.
- terms of finance: *account, balance, debt* etc.

➞ see table on page 115 for an overview

There are some words relating to the terms in the table which are also in French.
The difference with words of everyday life is that the Norman terms are always applied to a higher standard.

The culture of the horse

The Norman invaders brought horses in large numbers with them. They had developed the art of mounted warfare and they won the battle at Hastings simply because of their cavalry. The Saxons, who used to practice the shield wall were slaughtered in great numbers.
The Norman fighters on horseback soon established their own class known as knights, deriving the name from the Anglo-Saxon word *cniht*, meaning "a boy", comparable to the German *Knecht*. Other words in connection with the culture of the horse are *marshal* (the boy who looks after the mares) and *constable* (from Latin *comes stabuli*: the count of the stable).

The term *chivalry* comes from the French word *cheval*, simply meaning "horse". Beowulf, who is characterized as a model of honor, courtesy and courage and who himself is never seen on a horse, is the perfect example that a horse is not always necessary to be chivalrous. From the Norman culture of horses remain words like *tournament, list, stallion, charger, spur* etc. (The *saddle* is Anglo-Saxon.)

These words concerning horses entered the language because they were needed to explain everything about the animal that had gained a new status in society and brought their masters the reign over a country and a folk.

The sociology of food

One very striking sociolinguistic difference between Saxon and Norman occurs when the topic of food is concerned. Animals for example keep their Saxon name as long as they are slaughtered for the Norman masters' tables where they get Norman names:

<div align="center">

sheep > mutton
ox > beef
pig > pork
calf > veal
deer > venison
boar > brawn
fowl > poultry

</div>

From the many different French ways of cooking, from their dishes, spices and culinary refinements, one can conclude, that the Saxon cuisine must have been very poor before.

As we take into consideration any field of language that is less important for political and social life, the Norman terms have **not** outnumbered the Saxon ones at all.

Of 46 bird names, the Norman ones make up only a third. Some of them have obvious aristocratic associations as *eagle, falcon* and *osprey*, but most of them are quite common: *cuckoo, heron, pigeon, jay, robin, magpie* and some more.
Against these stand the far more numerous Saxon bird names: *swallow, sparrow, duck, goose, hawk, swan, owl, dove* and many more.

A similar division occurs when it comes to the names of very common trees. There are of course ones, who adopted Norman French names, but most of them are still known under their original Anglo Saxon term.
French: *chestnut (Kastanie), laurel (Loorbeer), plane (Platane), poplar (Pappel)*
Saxon*: alder (Erle), ash (Esche), aspen (Espe, Zitterpappel), beech (Buche), birch (Birke), box (Buchsbaum), fir (Tanne), hazel (Haselnuss), holly (Stechpalme), ivy (Efeu)…*

Lexical status and centrality

To get to the heart of it, the Norman language never became the one of the majority. It stayed the language of superiority, prestige and courtliness, while the Saxon became the

humbler general purpose words. It seems to go without saying that Norman French terms reflect cultural and political dominance for obvious reasons.

Quite surprisingly, the Norman French terms began to replace not only terms concerning power, status, food, horses, but also many common every day words for ordinary things. Many of them also entered the semantic core of the word stock. They completely lost their old associations of rank, their image, and became quite neutral. The most remarkable group of these basic borrowings is the one for family relationships: *Father, mother, brother, sister* derive from Saxon roots; *uncle, aunt, nephew, niece* and *cousin* are on the contrary French.

Conclusion

In the beginning, that is to say quite after the Norman Conquest, the adopted French words mainly reflected either things that had formally not existed in England or simply terms referring to power, superiority etc. But the French influence was so great, that many of the most common terms, having nothing to do with classes, are today of French origin. Such as: *country, river, forest, valley, lake, flower, coast, cloud, mountain, village.*

Middle English: Diversity and Richness

Introduction

The period of Middle English lasted from c. 1100 until c. 1500. In this time major influences from the Norman Conquest and Scandinavian Invasion were assimilated.

ME developed from Anglo-Norman, a class dialect that spread from London down the chain of authority and Norse, which was spoken in low classes (mainly in the North and East). The vocabulary of ME consisted of about 120,000 words; where in the beginning only a few words were foreign, the number increased over time. Lots of different dialects were spoken in the Middle English period, but at the end of the period the East Midland dialect had begun to become a standard.

When the press was invented (around the year 1450) the period of Middle English came to an end by the need for a real standard in writing.

The diversity of forms

With the new languages influencing Britain's speakers, old rules in grammar and writing were forgotten or became something new. The Anglo-Saxon infinitive verb ended in *-an* and the past tense plural in *-on*, in ME both ended in *-en.* The singular noun inflections in Old English *-u, -a* and *-e* dissolved into simply *-e*.

Not only endings but entire words were spelled differently, the lemma was spelled: *wæreon, uuaren, waren* by the same scriber in one manuscript.

The symbol þ (thorn) phased out in favour of 'th', scribers became unfamiliar with it and started to write it like a 'y', which today survives in the word 'ye'.

The article 'a' and words beginning with a vowel or a 'n' also caused some errors that today still survive:

A-S nædre	⇒	adder
ME norange	⇒	orange
A-S eft	⇒	newt

Some French words were borrowed twice from Norman-French and from Central or Parisian French: French doublets (etymological twins which have pursued different phonetic routes):

catch	chase
cattle	chattle
wage	gage
reward	regard

To familiarize oneself with the alien language a lot of glossing (pairing a French word with the native synonym) was used like: *'desperaunce þet is unhope', ingnoraunce þet is unwisdom'.*

End of Part I (pp. 109-125)