Workshop: English, French and the French of England: Late medieval encounters
9th September 2019 – Pavilion, University of Westminster

ABSTRACTS

Jocelyn Wogan-Browne, *"Cherchant toute Egypte pour les bons homes": French as a World Language for Women in Late Medieval England*".

French remained an important language in a number of domains for elite and meritocratic women in fourteenth- and fifteenth-century England, especially in laywomen's and professed religious women's devotional and doctrinal reading (some women also continued to use French in other domains, e.g. in their wills, their royal and parliamentary petitions, and ecclesiastical correspondence, as well as in the copying and recompilation of French texts). Much French-language practice in late medieval England continues long established insular usage, but French texts from Europe also circulated. I am currently concerned with three large collections of continental French prose doctrinal and devotional texts in England, which provide evidence, I would argue, of a transregional tradition of women's spiritual management of large households. One is a manuscript made in England in the later fifteenth century, probably with a continental model, and most likely a copy of a compilation originally made for Marie de St Pol, countess of Pembroke (d. 1360). The other two are fourteenth-century manuscripts acquired by Barking Abbey in the fifteenth century, one by bequest from Elizabeth de Vere, countess of Oxford, in 1474, one obtained by Sibyl de Felton, Abbess of Barking, from the estate of Philippa de Vere (d. 1411). In this paper I am particularly concerned with Philippa de Vere's book. The conjunction of this book and its various owners, I argue, shows French functioning as not merely a transregional but a world language for women in late medieval England. It also raises questions about the interrelations of francophone and English language culture in the entangled literary and socio-cultural worlds of late medieval England's multilingualism.

Thomas Hinton, *Diglossia and Multilingualism in Medieval England*

The relationship between English and French in medieval England has been subject to productive re-evaluation in recent years, with new attention paid to non-literary sources revealing a more complex and multifarious role for French than hitherto appreciated, in contexts from the literary to the everyday. Meanwhile, discussion of the conceptual models used by medieval writers and thinkers of language in England has tended to fragment into two separate directions, often with the common goal of tracking English's rise against either the literary prestige of French or the intellectual prestige of Latin. The notion of diglossia is often invoked here to clarify the questions of cultural capital involved in use of one or other language, but this model can too easily fall prey to easy assumptions about natural versus artificial language, or to the tendency to see linguistic exchange and interaction as an adversarial, zero-sum game. Moreover, the inherent binarism of the diglossic model is problematic if the aim is to capture the complexity of medieval English multilingualism, where many French-speakers in practice spoke three or more languages.

The present paper explores how the three major languages of medieval England were conceptually mapped, beginning from consideration of French's own relationship to Latin in England as elsewhere in Europe. Indeed, Latin emerges as a crucial conceptual model for the relationship between English and French, owing both to its dominance of the intellectual landscape and to its likely presence within the educational environment in which Anglo-French was

learned by many. By examining both explicit statements about language and linguistic decisions made by authors of prestige literature in this period, I hope to contribute to clarifying how the theory and practice of multilingualism interrelate in medieval England.

Louise Sylvester, *Categorising bilingual lexis*

Classifying bilingual lexis (as I have done in projects such as the Lexis of Cloth and Clothing in Britain c. 700-1450 and the Bilingual Thesaurus of Everyday Life in Medieval England) has led me to the question of how the various levels of the semantic hierarchy were populated in the Middle English period. What was the impact of the lexical borrowing so extensive that it has been described by scholars as the 'partial relexification of English from French and Latin sources' (Schendl 2000: 78) or 'lexical transfer' (Trotter 2012: 1789) on the native lexis at the different levels of the semantic hierarchy?

Answers to these questions may be framed in various ways. Lexis and semantics are sometimes understood as a system: in this case scholars focus on the counter-balancing forces of the need for maximal precision and the functional need for comprehensibility that constrains the extension of meaning (see Samuels 1972). Frequently, the processes of semantic shift and lexical obsolescence are understood as the outcome of a competition; here, an early instance is provided by Cottle's (1969) notion of the 'triumph' of English, with recent examples found in Timofeeva 2018a; 2018b.

In this paper I make use of work currently underway in the Technical language and semantic shift in Middle English project to examine the distribution of French- and English-origin terms at different levels of the semantic hierarchy. In contrast to the frameworks mentioned above, I suggest that the multilingual context of the period offered the availability of a set of variants for the expression of different levels of specificity within the same conceptual space, allowing for the emergence of a technical register and perhaps not necessitating a death-struggle between the two sources of lexis.

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Jane Roberts, *Reconsidering Laȝamon's loanwords from French*

The early Middle English Laȝamon's Brut is extant in two substantially different versions: the longer 'Caligula' version, generally thought nearer to the author's text; and the shorter 'Otho' version, reflecting an exemplar that must have resembled Caligula. In recent years, detailed attention has been given to those words inherited from Old English and to Scandinavian borrowings. The significantly greater infiltration of French loanwords into Otho is well known, but there may still be insights to be gained from taking a fresh look at the French words that appear in the Caligula manuscript. The paper will reassess the evidence, arguing against the view that Laȝamon was an archaizing writer who 'shunned French'.

Catherine Batt, *The Language of Fourteenth-century Prayer*

This paper examines some examples of fourteenth-century insular prayers and meditations in their manuscript contexts. An insular French paraphrase of the Penitential Psalms appears in the compendium trilingual manuscript, Cambridge University Library MS G.1.1, which also contains a Latin account and illustration of the functioning of the human brain and memory. Where the original Psalm figures spiritual affliction as physical wounds, the French text's elaboration of how the wounds of sin 'trouble the memory' arguably demonstrates how medieval scientific ideas about physical brain function inform an understanding of spiritual formation and practice. This paper further looks at English and insular French appropriations of extracts of John of Fécamp's eleventh-century Latin Meditations, in the 'Woman's Prayer' recently identified in Oxford, Bodleian Library MS Douce 282, in the Seven-Part Meditation on the Passion, evidently composed primarily for a male monastic audience (Dublin, Trinity College MS 374), and in the translation of the latter into Middle English in Eleanor Hull's Meditations upon the Seven days of the Week. The inquiry asks how, and to what extent, gender and vernacularity inflect the nature and reception of these devotional texts. Some of these instantiations of the devotional name the petitioner (a further example is the 'auncele Alisoun' whose prayer to the Virgin appears uniquely in BL Royal MS 16 E ii). These examples of the contingency, immediacy, openness and personalising of prayer emerge as strategies whereby the manuscript text acknowledges, and invites, the full realisation of the devotional self in oral performance.

Catherine Léglu, *'Consuming biblical texts: food and beasts in late-medieval insular French translation-adaptations of the Vulgate'*

The translation known as the 'Bible anglo-normande' survives in two copies from the first half of the fourteenth century. Code-switching is one of its many interesting linguistic features, which have been studied in detail in studies and partial editions by Pierre Nobel and Brent Pitts. The text also provides some useful insights into the processes of translating unfamiliar expressions and vocabulary into a register that aims to be clear for the intended audience. This paper analyses a small number of examples of the complex network of familiar, material and cultural associations that were known and used by the translators of the 'Bible anglo-normande', specifically referring to cookery, animals, body parts and clothing. My paper focuses on manuscript British Library Royal 1 C III (c.1350), which belonged to Reading Abbey by the 15th century.

This copy survived in a monastic context and may have been created within, or for, the abbey. The translator(s) used English words to fill gaps that had already been left in their exemplar by the previous translator(s). As a result, it is argued that the hesitations and compromises made in Royal 1 C III offer an insight into a very specific sociocultural milieu for this book. In particular, this copy preserves serious attempts to render food vocabulary into credible terminology and foodstuffs, using both French and English.

Marianne Ailes, *Transnational textual transmission: Anglo-Norman and continental France*

In 2009 the late David trotter wrote of the continuing transfer from France to England of literary texts copied into insular manuscripts'. That is, however, only half the story. This paper will explore the reception and dissemination on the continent of texts originating in England, with a particular focus on texts which we might expect to have a more insular interest; the various Brut texts, Bueves de Haumtonne and Gui de Warewic. How far does their dissemination spread beyond lands of Angevin interest? Are the texts altered, appropriated for their new context?

Liam Lewis, *Language Contact with the Non-human and the Formation of Audience Subjectivity in the Tretiz by Walter de Bibbesworth*

My research on Bibbesworth considers those passages of the Tretiz that deal with the words used to describe different birds and beasts in English and French, and how these are incorporated into an ostensibly pedagogical setting for the formation of young, aristocratic identity. This includes a discursive analysis of some of the ways that lists of animal nouns and nonhuman noises are presented in the French verse and the glosses as part of a programme of learning French (and consequently, English), and thus practising the ability to assert control and authority over the fictional estate.