The French influence on the English vocabulary

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Introduction

For but a man know French men count of him little.  
But low men hold to English and to their own speech yet.

(Robert of Gloucester)

This quotation of the contemporary glossary Robert of Gloucester brilliantly sums up the linguistic situation of the English society in the centuries after the Norman Conquest. While French became the language of power and prestige and left its mark on the English language English remained the means of communication among the greatest part of the population.

This essay deals with the French influence on the English language which began in the 11th century and to a certain extent continued into modern times. However, the main focus will be on the first 500 years. The first part will have to do with the Norman Conquest and its social and linguistic consequences. The second part treats the loss of Normandy and the social and linguistic developments following it. In the last part the French linguistic influence on the English language will be analysed in more detail. This part will concentrate on vocabulary as it was here that French exerted its main influence.

I. The Norman Conquest (1066-1070)

I.1 External History

The year 1066 is well known as the year in which William the Conqueror succeeded to the English throne and thus created a political situation in which the French should have a strong and lasting influence on the English culture and language. But certain less known events preceding this date were crucial for William in order to put a claim on the English throne.

William of Normandy was a second cousin of Edward the Confessor, the former English king. Edward, son of a former Anglo-Saxon king and a Norman noblewoman, had grown up in Normandy. After his succession to the English throne in 1042 Edward used to gather French relatives and friends around him a the Royal English Court. One of those visitors was William, the later Conqueror. After Edward had died childless in 1066 William claimed that on one of his visits Edward had designated him as his successor to the English throne. With this argument William
legitimaztec the quest, sought support of his vassals, appealed for papal sanction (which was granted) and with the blessing of the church set off for England.

After Edward’s death Harold, the Earl of Godwin, was made King of England. He and his father had been close advisors of Edward. But Harold remained a “virtual ruler”, as Baugh put it, and his enthronement was not only opposed by William of Normandy. When William and his troops reached English ground in September 1066 Harold was occupied in the North fighting against other invaders which made it easier for William to succeed in his conquest. In the famous battle near Hastings Harold and his brothers were killed which left the English troops deprived of their leaders. After Williams troops had pillaged the Southeast of England the citizens of London gave up their resistance and William was crowned on Christmas day 1066.

It took William another four years to achieve recognition all over England. He faced several rebellions and “as William’s succession was a matter of conquest, the consequences were those of a conquest of one people by another.” The old English aristocracy was nearly wiped out and replaced by a new Norman nobility. In 1072 one of twelve Earls was of English origin which should be characteristic for several generations to come. Similarly to the nobility all important positions in the church were held by Norman prelates. As all these Normans brought with them Norman followers to assist them in taking over their new offices an influx of Norman immigrants set in. This reached even down to the lower circles of society as e.g. some of William’s soldiers settled down and took to farming or builders travelled over the Channel to work on William’s building sites. Also merchants and craftsmen from the continent settled in England “in considerable numbers”. In the Doomsday survey of 1086 there are several entries that tell of the nationality of the registered people and not a few of them are designated as French-born. But the survey also reveals that the influx of Normans was not even in different regions and on different levels of society. Berndt notes that e.g. in the Midland shires only 0.35% of the

1 McCrum et al., p. 58
2 Baugh, p. 129
3 ib., p. 132
4 ib., compare p. 132ff
5 ib., p. 134
6 Berndt (1969), compare p. 372
whole population were registered as “francigenæ” whereas there is a concentration of Norman settlers in other places such as Norwich, London or York. Likewise, the new nobility was almost exclusively made up of French-born aristocrats while Normans in the lower ranks of society constituted only a small minority. As the distribution of Normans among the English society is important for the impact the French culture and language did have on the English the demographic situation after the Conquest will be analysed in more detail.

I.2 The demographic situation after the Conquest

The Norman Conquest did not lead to a large scale immigration as the former Scandinavian invasions did. At the end of the 11th century the English population consisted of about 1½ million people of which probably much less than 10% were French speaking foreigners. Brunner assumes that between 20,000 and 200,000 Normans came to England. At first sight it seems to be paradox that the number of immigrants is amazingly small in comparison to the influence they should have. This is due to William’s policy and to the fact that in post-conquest England the economic power was concentrated in the hands of Normans who also held all major political and ecclesiastical offices.

After the Conquest William rewarded his vassals for their support and loyalty by providing them with grounds and titles in the conquered country. At the time of the Doomsday survey the feudal aristocracy consisted almost entirely of French-born foreigners. Most of their English predecessors had been killed while fighting against the Norman intruders. This social group did not intermingle at all with the original English population but kept to themselves in the first few centuries after the Conquest. Most of them had possessions on the continent as well and habitually they married French partners.

The situation among the high clergy was similar to that of the high aristocracy. William gave most of the 15 bishoprics to Norman friends. As Baugh proves he also introduced more and more abbots of French descent to English abbeys: in 1075 13 out of 21 abbots who signed the decrees of the Council of

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7 Berndt (1969), compare p. 372
8 Berndt (1984), compare p. 24
9 Brunner, p. 115
10 Berndt (1984), compare p. 24
London were English. In 1087 this number had been reduced to three.\textsuperscript{12} This brought a strong “French element”\textsuperscript{13} into English ecclesiastical and monastic life even more so as the French prelates were joined by groups of Norman monks. The influence of French-speaking foreigners in the church was especially strong in the first century after the conquest.

In comparison to their secular and ecclesiastical landlords the peasantry was hardly affected by Norman immigration. The peasants comprised more than 80% of the whole population and the largest part of them were of Anglo-Saxon or Scandinavian stock.\textsuperscript{14} Even though several immigrants moved into rural England such as farmers, merchants and craftsmen (see above) they represented mere minorities and the dominance of English-speakers in this community was never challenged. Berndt supposes that, for the smallness of their number, it did not take more than one or two generations for the Norman peasants to merge with their English-born neighbours.\textsuperscript{15}

The situation in urban or semi-urban communities was not fundamentally different. Even if some towns attracted a concentration of immigrants their number never exceeded that of the native population\textsuperscript{16} and so it did not take them long to become entirely absorbed by the original population.

A peculiar situation emerged among the lesser nobility (landlords of smaller estates) which consisted of not more than 10,000 people, including wives and children.\textsuperscript{17} As William had rewarded his kinsmen and retainers with English land there was a considerable number of French-born foreigners in the lower ranks of the ruling class as well as in the high aristocracy. But in contrast to the latter the lesser native Anglo-Saxon landowners were not driven off their lands but existed side by side with the French intruders. Consequently, this social group was not entirely French but constituted an ethnically mixed community which probably favoured intermarriage at an earlier stage than in the high aristocracy.\textsuperscript{18}

\textsuperscript{11} Berndt (1969), compare p. 376
\textsuperscript{12} Baugh, compare p. 133
\textsuperscript{13} Berndt (1969), p. 373
\textsuperscript{14} ib., compare p. 371
\textsuperscript{15} ib., compare p. 372
\textsuperscript{16} ib., compare p. 373
\textsuperscript{17} ib., compare p. 374
\textsuperscript{18} ib., compare p. 374ff
The influx of French immigrants after the conquest had various consequences on the different groups of the English society: while political and ecclesiastical life was dominated by the Norman intruders, their culture and their language the peasantry was hardly affected at all by the Norman conquest and its effects (if one disregards the immediate consequences as pillaging and burning which undoubtedly affected the population strongly). The Norman aristocrats and their native subjects hardly came into contact with each other. The lesser nobility lived in comparison to the rest of the society in a somewhat peculiar situation between those two social groups: on the one hand they comprised people of French and English descent, on the other hand they came into contact or even had family relations to both nobility and peasantry.

I.3 The relation between England and France after the Conquest

With his succession to the English throne William initiated a period in which the King of England was at the same time Duke of Normandy and thus a vassal of the French king. Just like him many great landowners came into the exceptional political position to have possessions in France and in England and to swear allegiance to two different kings. In the reign of Henry II the English possessions in France were even enlarged so that the English king controlled about two thirds of France. This condition lead to a strong bond between England and France which should last for ½ centuries until Normandy was lost to the French king in 1204. The new English nobility kept their relations to France, spent a lot of time there rather than on their English territory (a lot of them were probably “absentee landlords”\(^{19}\)) and usually married continental partners. They also had an interest in French politics and affairs. This continuous contact between France and England also maintained the influx of Normans to England and thus secured the Norman cultural influence. Brunner put forward that Williams enthronement did not only introduce a new dynasty but brought along a drastic change of the cultural and intellectual life of England.\(^{20}\) For these reasons the term ‘Anglo-Norman’ rather than ‘English’

\(^{19}\) Berndt (1969), p. 377

\(^{20}\) Brunner, compare p. 112
aristocracy seems to be more adequate because the nobility in England clearly did not identify itself as English in the decades after 1066. 21

1.4 The linguistic situation after the Conquest

The Conquest changed the linguistic situation in England and turned the English society into a trilingual society (English, Norman-French and Latin as scholarly language). The Norman intruders brought with them their language and due to their dominance in the areas of administration, religion, military, law and culture Norman-French became the main means of communication in these spheres.

The feudal aristocracy maintained their native tongue well into the 13th century. In the situation described as above there was no reason for them to give up French, on the contrary it was vital to retain their language because they preserved their ties to France in every respect: they spent a lot of their time on their French territories, were engaged in French affairs and they did not intermingle with the native population of England. All of this did not favour the acquisition of English and there is reason to believe that in the generations following the Conquest and even for some time after the loss of Normandy and the severance of the continent French remained the mother tongue of most Anglo-Norman aristocrats (even though they were born in England). 22 After 300 years Henry IV (1399-1413) was the first English King whose mother tongue was English. 23

Likewise, Norman-French gained an important status in the church and its institutions. Not only French-speaking prelates or monks came to England but they also turned “monastic establishments of England [...] and the monastic schools into places devoted, among other things, to the cultivation of the French language and French culture” 24. Therefore knowledge of French (beside Latin) became a characteristic of better educated clerics (also when their mother tongue was English). Beside their ecclesiastical duties the clergy in those days was often engaged in the administrative services of kings or other aristocrats. They were employed as the king’s judges, as clerks in the royal law courts or in the royal Chancery, in other institutions of the central or local governments, as stewards or bailiffs etc. In these

21 Baugh, compare p. 137
22 Berndt (1984), compare p. 27
23 Bryson, compare p. 46
24 Berndt (1984), p. 28
positions they were responsible for most of the administration and for most of the written communication connected with it. The language of administration, of the courts and of Parliament was French and remained so for several centuries. In October 1362 the English Parliament was opened for the first time in English, nevertheless French persisted much longer in the jurisdiction where it was finally abolished in 1731. It is still maintained in the royal assent or refusal to a parliamentary bill (le roi le veult or le roi s’avisera) or in the court crier’s call for silence (oyez – ‘give hearing’).

Thus French became the language of the ruling class and therefore of the most influential part of society. Due to the economically powerful position of the feudal aristocracy, which after all constituted only a small minority of the population, French achieved its prestige and influence. Even so for the common people, the peasants or the craftsmen and traders in urban communities, nothing had changed. They continued to speak English. “They were certainly not alarmed that their rulers spoke a foreign tongue. It was commonplace in the past.”

Canute was Danish and even Edward the Confessor, though of Anglo-Saxon descent, had spoken French. The few Norman peasants, craftsmen or merchants who settled in England quickly merged and intermarried with the native population and in this process also gave up their native language. Berndt believes that as early as the beginning of the 12th century the peasantry had again become “an entirely and exclusively English-speaking class.” Moreover, the status of English “as the means of communication of the vast majority of the population was never challenged.” Nevertheless, religion, law, science etc. were conducted in French which excluded those who had no knowledge of it. Therefore “the overwhelming majority of English people experienced the humiliations of a linguistic apartheid.”

According to their demographic composition the lower ranks of the ruling class again were in an exceptional linguistic situation. This social group comprised English and Norman land lords and because of this there was probably an early rise

25 Berndt (1984), compare p. 28  
26 Potter, compare p. 35ff  
27 Bryson, p. 46  
28 Berndt (1984), p. 26  
29 ib., p. 26  
30 McCrum et al., p. 58
of bilingualism. On the one hand those of Norman descent probably acquired knowledge of English at an early stage because they had to deal with English speaking peasants. On the other hand those whose native tongue was English made efforts to learn French to be able to communicate with the high aristocracy. Berndt (1984) believes that the lesser nobility of Norman or Anglo-Norman descent adopted English as mother tongue at a certain stage in the 12th century, but retained French as second language for social reasons because it had become associated with the governing class.

After the Norman Conquest and the introduction of a new nobility to the English Royal court French became the language of power and prestige. The main areas of Norman influence were administration, jurisdiction, the church, fashion and arts which were conducted in French. The influence of French was out of all proportion to the number of people that spoke French. English on the other hand became the language of peasants and other lower circles in society. The Normans were not hostile towards English, it was simply the language of an inferior class.

II. The loss of Normandy (1204) and its consequences

II.1 External History

By marrying a French noblewoman who was promised to someone else King John of England (1199-1216) launched in 1200 a conflict that should result in the loss of the duchy of Normandy to the French king in 1204. Likewise most of the other English possessions in France, though not all, were lost. The loss drastically changed the situation between England and France and dissolved the bond that had existed between the two countries. Most of the Anglo-Norman aristocrats had sworn a double-allegiance to the French and English king and were now forced to decide between their possessions on the continent and in England. Some of them gave up their lands in one or the other country, others split their family into two branches. However, the loss of Normandy did not interrupt the contact between England and France. Englishmen still travelled back and forth in the service of the king, the

31 Berndt (1969), compare p. 375 and (1984), compare p. 27
32 Baugh, compare p. 143
33 ib., compare p. 138ff: Baugh believes that the attitude of kings and upper class towards English up to 1200 could be characterised as simple indifference rather than hostility.
relations between English and French priories were preserved and there were a lot of English students at French universities.  

Nevertheless, the new situation was not comparable to that directly after the Conquest. In the course of the 13th century and especially in Edward I reign (1272-1307) the English people became conscious of their unity and a national feeling developed.  

Whereas nationality had not been an issue before the 13th century now “the baronial upper class, or at least the majority of its members, had obviously come to regard themselves as ‘Englishmen’".  

II.2 Linguistic Consequences

The changed political situation and the new self-esteem of the English ruling class had linguistic consequences as well. With the development of an English national feeling the English language acquired a better reputation among the upper levels of society. After the loss of their properties on the continent the feudal aristocracy had turned into a class of “purely English landowners” which also favoured the use of English. Berndt (1984) supposes that a language shift occurred among the feudal aristocracy in the latter half of the 13th century in which English was adopted as mother tongue. When a new wave of Frenchmen immigrated to England in the reigns of John and Henry III (1216-1272) knowledge of English even became a mark of distinction: English was regarded as “proper mark of an Englishman” and those who could not speak it were met with a refusal by the ‘genuine’ Englishmen (who in the case of the nobility often had French ancestors).

In spite of all this the upper class did by no means turn into a unilingual community. For several reasons French was retained as a second language among the members of the aristocracy. Quite a few of the English magnates still spent some of their time in France or were married to French partners. In any case the contact to French-speaking foreigners had not terminated with the severance of Normandy. But much more decisive was the fact that French had become associated with the idea of

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34 Berndt (1984), compare p. 26  
35 Baugh, compare p. 157ff  
36 Berndt (1984), p. 26  
37 ib., p. 29  
38 ib., compare p. 29  
39 Baugh, p. 159  
40 Berndt (1984), compare p. 26
social distinction. For over 1½ centuries French had been the language of the upper circles of society, especially of the royal house. Therefore knowledge of French was a prestigious characteristic of those belonging to these circles and those trying to climb the social ladder. The status of French as social marker found expression in the saying “Jacke would be a gentleman, if he could speak Frenche”41. These factors coincided with a so-called ‘gallomania’ that swept all over Europe in the second half of the 13th century. France was idealised as representing a chivalrous society “in its most polished form”42. Hence the French language continued to be cultivated at the English royal court just as at most other European courts.

But in contrast to the time before 1204 Central French replaced Norman-French as main source of influence. As immediate consequence of the Norman Conquest the French spoken in England was the Norman dialect because most of the intruders came from Normandy.43 Therefore the early loans from the period before 1204 show Norman-French characteristics. After the loss of Normandy, when the ties between England and Normandy were loosened, Central French gained more influence and the later loans have Central French characteristics (a later Chapter deals with the differences between Norman French and Central French loans).

Another major difference to the period before 1204 was the fact that French turned into a cultivated tongue “supported by social custom and by business and administrative convention”44 whereas it had formerly been mother tongue inherited from the parents. The occurrence of teaching material serves as evidence that some children of the nobility needed to be taught French.45 Naturally, the quality of the French spoken in England declined due to its artificial retention. When French lost its position as mother tongue among the nobility it changed under the influence of English linguistic tendencies into a dialect quite different from any of the continental dialects. The so-called Anglo-French was often ridiculed by continental speakers and became subject of humorous literary comments, such as in The Canterbury Tales where Chaucer derides the wife of Bath because of her inferior command of French:


41 Berndt (1984), p. 29
42 Baugh, p. 159
43 Brunner, compare p. 122
44 Baugh, p. 160
45 ib., compare p. 160
French remained the “language of preference” well into the 14th century when it began to lose its prestige. Towards the end of the century English found its way back into the law courts (although French was still known among lawyers and government officials and remained the language of law until it was finally abolished in 1731) and into the schools where it was generally used again by 1385. According to contemporary comments the ability to speak French seems to have been regarded as an accomplishment in the 15th century which points out that French was on its decline.

III. French Influence on the English language

III.1 Loans

The influence of French on the English language can be seen most clearly in its vocabulary. In an analysis cited by Berndt (1984) (Horn list of 1926) the results show that 45% of the 10,000 most frequently used Modern English words are of French origin. This proportion is by far larger than that of Old English words (31.8%). According to calculations based on the Oxford English Dictionary about 10,000 French loans entered the English language of which about 75% are still in use today.

A small number of loans existed already before 1066 such as prud (proud), sot (foolish), tur (tower) or capun (capon). After the Norman Conquest more and more French words entered English but the number of loans remained quite modest. According to Strang borrowing of words needs more than simple contact between two speech communities. It requires bilingualism, at least to a certain extent. But bilingualism did not emerge until after the loss of Normandy when the nobility

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All citations are from the following sources:

47 Berndt (1984), p. 29
48 Baugh, compare p. 174
49 Potter, compare p. 35 or Berndt (1984), compare p. 30
50 Baugh, compare p. 179
51 ib., compare p. 180
52 Berndt (1984), p. 69
53 ib., compare p. 61
54 Strang, p. 316
55 ib., compare p. 250
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Adopted English as mother tongue. In the 13th century ‘the flood’ of French loanwords set in when former French-speakers tried to express themselves in English. When they lacked a word they borrowed the French synonym.\(^{56}\)

The influx of French loans had far reaching effects on the English language, according to Baugh it “changed the whole course of the English language”\(^{57}\). Due to the huge number of new words the old habits of word-formation atrophied and the emphasis shifted from word-formation to borrowing as source of new words.\(^{58}\) For this reason the meaning of a lot of English words has to be learned separately because they cannot be easily derived. Other languages, such as German, have a lot of derivatives or compounds and therefore are more transparent to those who know the common elements and patterns.

Furthermore, the vast numbers of French loans led to a new quality of English: it is wrong to suppose that English borrowed words it lacked. Instead most of the loans were synonyms of already existing words\(^{59}\). For this reason “the capacity to express three or four different shades of meaning and to make fine distinctions is one of the hallmarks of the language after the Conquest [...].”\(^{60}\) Old English had, for example, only one word for the concept ‘kingly’. With the Normans three synonyms entered the language, namely ‘royal’, ‘regal’ and ‘sovereign’. Likewise other word groups such as ‘ask-question-interrogate’ or ‘time-age-epoch’ emerged. Thus French loans enriched the English language\(^{61}\) and they did so not because they were imposed on it but, as Bryson put it, because “they were welcomed”\(^{62}\).

The words of English and French origin have similar denotations but there are often slightly different connotations and associations. The French loans are usually more refined, formal and abstract and less emotional while the original English words are more primitive, popular and fundamental. The latter are “always nearer the nation’s heart”\(^{63}\) and one feels usually more at ease after getting a “hearty welcome

\(^{56}\) Baugh, compare p. 160
\(^{57}\) ib., p. 127
\(^{58}\) Strang, compare p. 250ff
\(^{59}\) ib., compare p. 251
\(^{60}\) McCrum et al., p. 58ff
\(^{61}\) ib., compare p. 59
\(^{62}\) Bryson, p. 51
\(^{63}\) Jespersen, p. 91.
[...][than after a] cordial reception”\textsuperscript{64}. Other word-pairs are ‘freedom-liberty’ or ‘lonely-solitary’. In other cases the native word is simply more colloquial while the French loan is more literary, e.g. ‘begin-commence’ or ‘feed-nourish’.\textsuperscript{65}

French words were borrowed in all spheres of life (Berndt (1984), Jespersen, et al. give extensive word lists). In the realm of ruling and governmental power words such as ‘parliament’, ‘governor’ and ‘empire’ entered the English language to give just a few examples. In the realm of law ‘justice’, ‘prison’ or ‘defendant’ were borrowed. Likewise, vast numbers of loans in the area of military (‘artillery’, ‘battle’ or ‘defend’) or church and Christian doctrine (‘abbey’, ‘prayer’, ‘baptise’ or ‘innocence’) were borrowed. Also words concerning emotional or mental states were introduced (‘delight’, ‘envy’ or ‘passion’). Other realms of borrowing were medieval science, philosophy and arts (‘anatomy’, ‘philosophy’ or ‘poet’), trade (‘carpenter’, ‘value’ or ‘measure’), clothing and ornaments (‘coat’, ‘robe’, ‘jewel’ or ‘brooch’), food and cooking (‘fry’, ‘appetite’ or ‘gravy’) and others. There are also hundreds of words which belong to other groups or are difficult to classify but are part of the common lexicon of English, such as ‘cattle’, ‘damage’, ‘departure’, ‘labour’, ‘pencil’, ‘clear’, ‘cruel’, ‘blame’, ‘cease’ etc.

In spite of the vast numbers of French loans in various spheres of life which (together with Latin) comprise about half of the Modern English vocabulary\textsuperscript{66} it is interesting to note the French influence did not modify the common core of the English lexicon. According to the Horn analysis cited above 83% of the thousand most frequently used words in Modern English are of Old English origin. In an analysis of newspaper reports which counted every occurrence of a word 66.4% of all words were of Old English origin (and only 31.5% of French and Latin origin).\textsuperscript{67} To the common core of English belong such fundamental words of Old English origin as ‘birth’, ‘life’, ‘man’, ‘woman’, ‘father’, ‘mother’, ‘child’, ‘friend’, ‘house’, ‘water’, ‘hunger’, ‘thirst’, ‘cold’, ‘warm’, ‘high’, ‘deep’, ‘white’, ‘black’, ‘hear’, ‘see’, ‘feel’, ‘think’, ‘speak’, ‘eat’.\textsuperscript{68}

\textsuperscript{64} Potter, p. 37ff
\textsuperscript{65} Jespersen, compare p. 93
\textsuperscript{66} Potter, compare p. 36
\textsuperscript{67} Berndt (1984), compare p. 70
\textsuperscript{68} All examples are taken from Berndt (1984). The spelling is Modern English.
III.2 Distinction between Anglo-Norman and Central French loans

The influx of French words into the English language was a gradual process and spread over a period of more than four centuries. As has been described in the preceding chapters there were two major periods of French influence, namely the Norman influence, roughly from the time of the Conquest until the loss of Normandy, and the Central French influence, beginning after the loss of Normandy.

In order to determine when a particular loan entered the English language (whether it is a Norman or a Central French borrowing) it is necessary to look for certain Norman or Central French characteristics in spelling and pronunciation. Early loans usually have distinctive phonological attributes of the contemporary Norman accent while later loans reflect typical marks or evolutions of Central French phonology which took place after the Conquest and the emergence of Anglo-Norman. In the following a few examples of differentiation concerning consonants will be outlined.

Typical examples of Norman loanwords are ‘war’, ‘ward’ or ‘wicket’. They reflect the Norman retention of /w/ while Central French shifted to /gw/ and later /g/, as e.g. in Modern French geurre, garder or guiche. Typical Central French loans which were borrowed after the shift from /w/ to /g/ are ‘guard’, ‘guile’, ‘guide’ or ‘guise’. Another group of Norman and Central French loanwords which reflect a French language shift are e.g. ‘catch’, ‘cattle’, ‘carpenter’ (Norman) and ‘chase’, ‘chair’, ‘chapter’ (Central French). Whereas the Norman loans retain initial /k/ the Central French loans reflect the shift to initial /t/, as e.g. in Modern French chasser or charpentier. More examples of Norman loans are ‘catch’, ‘cherry’ or ‘chisel’. They show the Norman retention of /t/ while French shifted to /ts/ and later /s/ (thus Modern French cerise and ciseau). Examples of corresponding Central French loans are ‘chase’, ‘wince’ or ‘cerise’. Similarly, Norman French loans such as ‘punish’, ‘usher’ or ‘cushion’ have / / as against Central French ‘rejoice’ (/s/). Likewise ‘garden’ is a Norman borrowing while ‘joy’ or ‘jest’ reflect the shift from Norman French /g/ to Central French /df/.

Obviously, some words were borrowed twice into the English language, once in the Norman period of influence and once in the Central French period. In certain cases both survive side by side with a differentiation in sense. There are doublets for
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‘wile/guile’ or ‘ward(en)/guard(ian)’. Other doublets are ‘cattle/chattel’ or ‘catch/chase’. 69

**Conclusion**

The Norman Conquest was not only an important event in the history of the English people it also changed the course of their language. Due to the thousands of Norman invaders which swept away and replaced the former Anglo-Saxon rulers the French language gained a strong and lasting influence in numerous spheres of life and contributed a great deal to the shape of Modern English. It especially donated innumerable words to the English vocabulary. However, the French language itself never found its way down to the lower layers of society but remained property of the ruling circles. Eventually, it succumbed to the English language in the 15th century.

69 All examples are taken from Brunner, p. 124ff and Strang, p. 253ff. The spelling is Modern English or Modern French.
Bibliography and References


Brunner, Karl, *Die Englische Sprache. Ihre geschichtliche Entwicklung*, Bd. 1, Tübingen, 1960


