INTRODUCTION

The English is a language which has undergone some foreign influences being the most important ones those influences of Latin, Scandinavian, and French. This contact of English with languages of other countries gave, as a consequence, an enrichment of English. Through this language we can analyse in which way every language influenced. Taking French into account, it is notable the great influence on English, due to the crown of Britain was ruled by Norman French for two centuries, so it is conceivable how important was that change in the English language. Still nowadays, we find many Norman French words in present-day English. This essay is going to focus on that French influence upon Middle English showing the main loans taken in that age. Later on, some examples from a Middle English text will be analysed in detail to see in what extent French words were used in that time.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Normans were just Vikings settled in Normandy, in the North of France, during the early 10th century. As a consequence of living in French lands, Vikings adopted the French language and culture. The Norman Conquest in England started in 1066, when, in the battle of Hastings, William, duke of Normandy, defeated the English army. This Norman leader was a second cousin of the previous king, Edward the Confessor, who died childless, and expected to succeed him. However, there was another rival, Harold, also wanting the throne to
the crown of England, and then the battle broke out. From this moment, French, or specifically Norman French, will have a paramount importance since it will be the new language of the country and especially that of the court. This language will be imposed to English in matters of literature, court, law, for example, by the Norman crown and the Norman aristocracy.

THE NORMAN FRENCH IN ENGLAND

One of the most relevant influences on Middle English was French, strictly, Norman French, the language introduced in Britain by the invader. This influence that English underwent “cannot be comparable with that which led to the majority of Scandinavian additions to the vocabulary” *. This was because the relation between English and Scandinavian people was mere oral contact. In the case of French, the process of influence on the English language was more complex and affected in many areas of life. Differently to the Scandinavian language, French was a technical written language and so learned by those who were not Normans. Consequently, French became the first language of the English monarchs and aristocracy until the end of the 14th century and was used as a learned language in law, education, and as a class dialect of the aristocracy considered in this way the language of the privilege. This language was very important in the conversation of gentlemen and education, for example, and was an alternative to Latin in the administrative sphere since the early 13th century, but French was not present in all matters. For instance, the Church preferred Latin for any formal contact or discussion and royal letters were mainly in Latin, although French would replace it as the language of royal letters. Due to this new situation for England, English people saw themselves forced to learn to speak, to write, and to read French in order to be in contact with the ruling elite. For this, it is important the presence of the Latimier or interpreter because not many people spoke English and French as a mother tongue. This was a relevant fact for the necessary relationship between the English and the French, or, better said, the “employee” and the “employer”. It seems that, when we talk about Normans, they were all of them aristocrats. It is true that many Normans belonged to the privileged classes but there were others.

who did not, for example, that important figure of the mediator between the overlord and land-labourers who was bilingual in both languages, French and English. The rest were mainly adventurers, craftsmen, merchants, and soldiers. After having read this section, one can realise that England was found in a trilingual linguistic situation: Latin was mainly the language of the Church (although English would replace it later), French was that of government and aristocracy, and, finally, English as the language of the common people and illiterate people.

THE INFLUENCE OF NORMAN FRENCH ON ENGLISH

In this section, we will deal with the influence of the Norman language upon the English one presenting the most notable changes which, most of them, will last till nowadays. It is important to bear in mind that French influenced on English more in vocabulary rather than in grammar or phonology. These changes are the following:

- Loss of endings and, as a consequence, the massive use of prepositions. This led to the strict order of words in the sentence.

- New terms appear for the new literary works known as “romance”. This vocabulary is related to those themes of courtly love and adventurers of knights, for example.

- That vocabulary referred to the activities of the middle-class and aristocratic society: government (reign, power, parliament); activities of nobility (related to war: soldier, guard, officer, arms; related to hunting: falcon, chase, forest; related to legal matters: judge, court, crime, justice; related to fashion: collar, chemise, chair, adorn); art and culture (art, music, cathedral, palace, poet, romance, melody); education (lessons, chapter, paper, grammar); business (profitable, partner, travail).

- In the 14th and 15th centuries, abstract terms were borrowed with suffixes in –ance, -ence, -ant, -ent, -tion, -ity, -ment, and prefixes in con-, de-, dis-, en-, ex-, pre-, pro-, and trans-.
Another borrowing was that related to ecclesiastical matters: *pashes 'Easter', miracle, canonie 'canon', messe 'mass', capitele 'chapter', clerk 'scholar'.*

An important change in English by the French influence was that of the orthographic system: *u* was substituted by *ou* (*hus > hous > house, mus > mous > mouse*); use of *y* in place of *i* (*hyt, ys, tyme, Inglysh*); use of *qu* in place of *cw* (*queen vs. cwen, quick vs. cwicu*); *gh* replaces *h* (*nigt, enough*); *ch* (palatal sound) used in place of *c* (*church*); *u* replaced by *o* because of the difficulty of reading a sequence containing *v, u, n, m* which were written in a very similar way (*love, come, one, son*); one pair of letters came to be used in complementary ways (*v* at the beginning of a word- *vnder-* and *u* in the middle –whether consonant or vowel, as in *'haue'*); use of *u* after *g* to represent the velar sound [*g*] in contact with vowel [*e*] (*tongue*- *OE tungê*); it is also evident the increasing use of *k, z, and j*.

**ANALYSIS OF A MIDDLE ENGLISH TEXT**

In order to see in detail those French influences on English mentioned in the previous section, the Middle English text *The Pearl* *has been taken into analysis as an example.*

Fro spot my spyryt þer sprang in space;
My body on balke þer bod in sweuen.
My goste is gon in Gode3 grace
In auenture þer meruayle3 meuen.
I ne wyste in þis worlde quere þat hit wace

Bot I knew me keste þer klyfe3 cleuen;
Towarde a foreste I bere þe face,
Where rych rokke3 wer to dyscreuen.
Þe ly3t of hem my3t no mon leuen,
Þe glemande glory þat of hem glent;

* This text has been taken from David Burnley's *The History of the English Language*, London: Pearson Education, 2000 (2nd edition), pages 152-158.
For wern neuer webbe þat wy3e weuene
Of half so dere adubbemente.
Dubbed wern alle þo downe syde
Wyth crystal klyffe so cler of kynde.
Holtewode bry3t aboute hem byde3

Of bolle3 as blwe as ble of Ynde;
As bornyst syluer þe lef on slyde3,
Þat þike con trylle on vch a tynde.

Quen glem of glode3 agayn3 hem glyde3,
Wyth schymeryng schene ful schrylle þay schynde.

Þe grauayl þat on grounde con grynde
Wern precious perle3 of oryente:
Þe sunnebeme3 bot blo and blynde
In respecte of þat adubbement.
The adubbemente of þo downe3 dere

Garten my goste al greffe for3ete.
So frech flauore3 of fryte3 were,
As fode hit con me fayre refete.
Fowle3 þer flowen in fryth in fere,
Of flaumbande hwe3, boþe smale and grete;

Bot sytole-stryng and gyternere
Her reken myrþe mo3t not retrete;
For quen þose brydde3 her wynge3 bete,
Þay songen wyth a swete asent.
So gracios gle couþe no mon gete

As here and se her adubbement.
So al wat3 dubbet on dere asyse
Þat fryth þer fortwne forth me fere3.
Þat derþe þerof for to deuyse
Nis no wy3 worþé þat tonge bere3.

I welke ay forth in wely wyse;
No bonk so byg þat did me dere3.
Þe fyrre in þe fryth, þe feier con ryse
Þe playn, þe plonte3, þe spyme, þe
And rawe3 and rande3 and rych reuere3,

As fyldor fyn her bonkes Brent.
I wan to a water by shore þat schere3 --
Lorde, dere wat3 hit adubbement!
The dubemente of þo derworth depe
Wern bonke3 bene of beryl bry3t.
Swangeande swete þe water con swepe,
Wyth a rownande rourde raykande any3t.
In þe founce þer stonden stone3 stepe,
As glente þur3 glas þat glowed and gly3t,
As stremande sterne3, quen stroþe-men slepe,

Staren in welkyn in wynter ny3t;
For vche a pobbel in pole þer py3t
Wat3 emerad, saffer, òper gemme gente,
þat alle þe lo3e lemed of ly3t,
So dere wat3 hit adubbement.

The dubbement dere of doun and dale3,
Of wod and water and wlonk playne3,
Bylde in me blys, abated my bale3,
Fordidden my stresse, dystryed my payne3.
Doun after a streem þat dry3ly hale3

I bowed in blys, bredful my brayne3;
þe fyrre I fol3ed þose floty vale3,
þe more strenghþe of ioye myn herte strayne3.
As fortune fares þer as ho frayne3,
Wheþer solace ho sende òper elle3 sore,

Þe wy3 to wham her wylle ho wayne3
Hytte3 to haue ay more and more.
More of wele wat3 in þat wyle3
þen I cowþe telle þa3 I tom hade,
For vrþely herte my3t not suffyse

To þe tenþe dole of þo gladne3 glade;
Forþy I þo3t þat Paradyse
Wat3 per ouer gayn þo bonke3 brade.
I hoped þe water were a deuyse
Bytwene myrþe3 by mere3 made;

By3onde þe broke, by slente òper slade,
I hoped þat mote merked wore.
Bot þe water wat3 depe, I dorst not wade,
And euer me longed ay more and more.
More and more, and 3et wel mare,

Me lyste to se þe broke by3onde;
For if hit wat3 fayr þer I con fare,
Wel loueloker wat3 þe fyrre londe.
Abowte me con I stote and stare;
To fynde a forþe faste con I fonde.
To begin with, we find several lexical loan-words from French. As examples, we have grace (line 3), auenture (4), glory (10), crystal (14), glas (54), emergad (58), ioye (68), fortune (69), Paradyse (77), etc. The group of words fyldor fyn (46) and debonere (102) both represent the reinterpretation of a French phrase as a single word. In the first case, we see that it is from fil d’or ‘golden thread’. In the second one, it is from the French words de bon aire ‘of good breeding’. As regards the use of the new orthographical feature qu introduced into English, we have in this text quen (19, 33) and quere (5). On the other hand, it is very notable the presence of the use of y
in place of i, for example in: spyryt (1), crystal (14), rych (8), fyldor (46), bylde (63), Paradyse (77), fynde (90), hyr (113), fygure (110). It is also present the use of the palatal ch in place of c such as rych (45), frech (27), vch (18), and enchace (113). Moreover, we find in this text the French convention of using v at the beginning of a word (vch, 18) and using u in the middle of a word (sweuen-2; auenture-4; meuen-4; cleuen-6; leuen-9; neuer-11; reuerez-45; naue-72; euer-84). Another important French feature found in this text is the use of the z word-ending which suggests the voiced pronunciation. As examples, we have the following: fraynez (69), merez (80), bonkez (78), perlez (22), frytez (27), hwez (30), downez (13), slydez (17). Finally, few abstract terms with suffix in –ent appear in this text: adubbement ‘splendour’ (48,61,25,18) and baysment ‘amazement’ (114).

CONCLUSION

French played a very important role on English in the extent that those French borrowings adopted in the Middle English period still remain in the language. This fact was due to the direct contact with the French country, since the British Island was first reigned by kings of Norman origin, and later conquered by William, Duke of Normandy in 1066. After having read the analysis of this work, we realize the great range of examples that we can find in a written text. This was the result of that relevance of French as a first language in Britain and its presence in the most important matters such as literature, administration, or law. Finally, it is worthy to mention that English has become a rich language thanks to the contact with other ones and especially transmitted by people of different origins living in English speaking countries.

BIBLIOGRAPHY


