

Percillier, Michael, Yela Schauwecker, Achim Stein, and Carola Trips. 2024. *Carrying Verbs Across the Channel: Modelling Change in Bilingual Medieval England*. New Approaches to English Historical Linguistics. Cham: Palgrave Macmillan. Pp. xxv + 305. ISBN 9783031508059.

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The effects of contact-induced linguistic change between English and French are long-lasting and diverse, and the present study makes an important contribution to the study of a situation of which the main lineaments have long been clear, although detailed work on this subfield has been less frequent. It is often assumed that language systems find it easier to absorb borrowed nominals than verbal forms; after examining this topic for four decades I would assert that examples of languages which seem to have borrowed more verbs than nouns are hard to find and are usually open to debate on this account. Verbs are certainly not immune to borrowing, as Wohlgemuth (2009) powerfully illustrates. Earlier stages of English borrowed verbs plentifully from earlier stages of French, and this book explores some aspects of problems raised when this took place.

Old English did not borrow many verbs (*sealtian* “to dance” from Latin *saltare*, which did not survive into Modern English, is one of rather few; its replacement in English, *dance*, is a loan from French which itself was taken from West Germanic). Looking at the book’s title, we can see two words, *carrying* and *change*, which are both rooted in borrowings from French into English but which are both also based on words with origins (via Late Latin) from Gaulish or at least Continental Celtic. French still has a verb *charrier* as the modern analogue of Norman French *carier/cARRIER*, but the Latin-derived *porter* is much more widespread in modern French.

Later Old English and especially Middle English were more open to borrowing verbs. French verbs faced few morphological obstacles coming into English because Middle English’s inflectional system was lighter than that of French; one major typological clash would have been the Middle English past participial prefix *y-/i-* which had no direct prefixal counterpart in French. The use of auxiliary *do* as a light verb was a structure available to speakers of Middle English, and a high proportion of verbs using auxiliary *do* in the first century or so that it is employed in English (after c. 1300) are verbs of French or Latin origin, but this

technique was never implemented as a wholesale means of assimilating loan verbs into English morphology in the way that we find light verbs being used for conjugating loan verbs in languages such as Urdu, for example (Bailey 1962), though light verb use in Middle English is, as this study shows, far from being unknown. English's scanty verbal inflectional morphology (which grew even more reduced as Middle English moved in stages towards Present-Day English) seems to have made it easier to absorb loan verbs, not just from French, but also from Norse, Low German and other sources, and to make the vast majority of them weak or regular. The French verbs which entered Middle English are not all of Latin origin; some derive ultimately from Greek or Celtic (though transmitted via Latin) or from Germanic. One may surmise that there were more loan verbs of various origins in French c. 1100 than were attested for English by that time. Etymological origin was no obstacle to verbs of non-Latin origin coming into English from French. The problems which they presented, which are at the heart of this book, were of a more abstract and structural nature.

The study under review sets the scene in a series of chapters of greatly varying lengths, each of which is provided with its own set of references. Chapter 1 (1–21) sets out the overall terminological and historical background, pointing out the expansion of Old French in the thirteenth century as a consequence of the information explosion of record-keeping even though it was losing ground as a first language in England. It also presents a general framework drawing on the code-copying work of the late Lars Johanson (e.g., Johanson 2002), a valuable approach because it disposes of the often artificial division into lexical and structural borrowing by recognising in global copying the fact that the structural framework of a word can be taken over into a language together with the word itself (Grant 2002 takes a not dissimilar approach examining transfers of fabric—actual morphs—and of pattern, the system into which they fit, recognising that the two kinds of transfer are not incompatible). In the case of verbal borrowings especially, this structural framework is concerned with “verb argumentation” and the examination of argument structure: what kinds of subjects, objects, adjuncts *et cetera* (if any) must or may accompany a verb (the authors cite Levin 1993 in this matter). L1 English learners of other languages often discover that verbs in the target language, not least weather verbs and psych verbs (those to do with dreaming and memory are notorious for this in throwing up typological surprises), have differing syntactic requirements from their English counterparts, and are best learned as functioning parts of phrases in the L2 language of choice.

Chapter 2 (22–166) takes up almost half the book, as the longest chapter in the work. Its findings are drawn from analysis of several syntactically parsed historical corpora of English, and from a study of verbs of French origin brought into Middle English and extracted from the Oxford English Dictionary Online, thanks to the good offices of Philip Durkin, principal etymologist of the OED.

Lemmata classified broadly as being of native and French origin are analysed according to a wide range of categories, for instance transitivity status, occurrence of tokens in active and passive constructions, and use in prose as opposed to verse. The overall conclusion is unsurprisingly that native verbs are both more numerous and more widely used than verbs of French origin, although there are some exceptions: among verbs employing an indirect object followed by a clausal complement, for instance, there are fewer verbs of French origin as types, but verbs of French origin are more frequently employed in this construction in terms of the number of tokens of their occurrence.

Separate sections in Chapter 2 examine the behaviour of borrowed psych verbs and of the assignment of case, whether structural or inherent, to verbs generally used in the passive voice or which attract the use of Recipient passive. Structural datives, it is shown from numerous examples, have been copied into Middle English through their use with borrowed French verbs, and it is not for about a century, until Late Middle English, they are then also used with verbs of native origin. The role of French in the spread of reflexives also receives attention from a careful analysis of corpus material, and the authors find that the use of reflexives has been increased with influence from French, although not all French uses of the reflexive are copied into Middle English (the use of reflexives with unaccusatives, for instance, is not taken over into Middle English though it is common in French). The spread of prefixed verbs of French origin, especially those whose unprefixed forms have already entered English, is examined: of the prefixes of French origin only *en-*, which is semantically rather colourless, makes the leap from French to English to the extent that it is then applied to some verbs of native origin. French influence is also discussed regarding the spread of prepositional secondary predicates of the kind “they made him into a president,” wherein zero-prepositional constructions are replaced by ones headed by *(in)to*, with *into* first appearing in this construction in Middle English. All these discussions are accompanied by plentiful tables, graphs and figures, and with examples including interlinear gloss and modern translations (and details of their location within the corpora) clearly provided. In this respect the work lavished on the illustrative examples is excellent: modern computational techniques are put in the service of fine-grained diachronic study of syntactic subsystems with great precision and clarity helped by the use of various visual means.

The fine quality of presentation of argument and evidence continues. In Chapter 3 (167–213) the polarities are reversed, and the topic of examination is the contact scenario in which Old French, specifically Anglo-French (not just Anglo-Norman) comes under the influence of Middle English. Here the concentration is on other topics: the copying of forms and syntactic strategies of speech act verbs, notably resultative complements which had been permissible in English but not previously in Old French, and on the expression of motion events.

In this case we see that the impact of English upon French is examinable from materials dealing with the law, which were written in French but were composed by people whose L1 was English but who used French for legal and record-keeping purposes even when French was more in use in England as L2 than as L1. By contrast, Middle English was generally written by L1 speakers of English who often knew French (and/or Latin) well. Anglo-French adopts some syntactic possibilities and strategies from Middle English, although these do not cross over into continental French usage. The distribution of Path against Manner verbs in Anglo-French supports the hypothesis that L1 speakers of English helped introduce such constructions into their Anglo-French where they were not known in continental French.

Chapter 4 (214–44) goes to the Dynamic model of contact developed by Edgar W. Schneider (notably Schneider 2007) for a sociolinguistically informed analysis of the findings from the contact situations. This model includes a diachronic dimension missing from more static (and by implication synchronic) models analysing contact situations. After discussing earlier models, the authors summarise the model presented in Schneider 2007 (foundation, then exonormative stabilisation, then nativisation, then endonormative stabilisation and finally differentiation) and apply it to an examination of speech act verbs and other constructions which have been examined so far in this monograph. The Dynamic model shows that copied constructions need to survive a selection process in which they are up against preexisting native means of expressing constructions with the same meaning. The authors also draw upon Kachru (1985) and his “circles” model, of inner, outer and expanding circles of English, and they further point out that the influence in the form of copying of forms from Anglo-French to Middle English only surged in number once Anglo-French had undergone stabilisation in England.

The picture is widened in Chapter 5 (245–88). Here the fuller structural picture of the adaptation of verb argument structure is presented. The main framework employed by the authors here makes extensive use of the Abstract Level Model (more specifically the 4-M model), designed for the analysis of composite codeswitching by Carol Myers Scotton and Janice Jake (Jake, Myers-Scotton, and Gross 2002), and here applied to philological materials in order to disentangle the results of complex interactions in case studies in historical sociolinguistics. Here embedded elements (from French) are seen to be made to adapt to the matrix language or basic code, here Middle English. The embedded language elements are seen in this model as resulting from the effects of codeswitching into a powerful basic code. Thus, for instance the Middle English verb *plesen* “to please,” which was taken over from French, has its Experiencer argument expressed as a prepositional phrase as in English rather than as a noun phrase, as French had required. This being said, we should remember that the

argumentation typology of each verb is open to further changes, and each verb's typological syntactic history needs to be analysed in isolation as well as exemplifying broader-brush models of contact and change.

Chapter 6 (289–300) presents and summarises the conclusions of the study, integrating the Dynamic model, the Myers Scotton/Jake model, and the contact scenarios which brought them into action. An index of subjects completes the volume.

This is a most impressive empirical and corpus-informed study, largely built out of (or at least inspired by) studies by individuals in the team, and deploying some well-chosen techniques from several branches of linguistics in order to elucidate an aspect of contact-induced change which has received little attention because of its inherent subtlety: borrowed structures and syntagms are less overt and better disguised than borrowed morphemes. The English of the text (English does not appear to be the L1 of any of the authors) is excellent, by the way. The authors, and furthermore Professors Louise Sylvester and Sara M. Pons-Sanz, general editors of the series, are to be congratulated on producing a composite study which unites philology, corpus linguistics, and sociohistorical linguistic theory in such a lucid and dynamic way.

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