

# English and French as L1 and L2 in Renaissance England: a consequence of medieval nationalism

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## 1. THE NATIONALIST PHENOMENON

During the Middle Ages the natural tendency of Latin was to replace vernacular languages and their literatures, but this tendency was little by little cut off by ecclesiastical politics. The Church, which accepted and even fostered religious conflicts among culturally different peoples through the Crusades was, in fact, promoting national wars. A feeling of differentiation and separate cultural interests favours the use of the word nation, “found in the fourteenth century with something of a modern sense” (Galbraith 1941, 117). Although other terms of the same lexical field (national, nationalism, nationality) are not traced until much later, the occurrence of the word nation proves the awareness of ethnocultural different communities as it was admitted in the Council of Constance<sup>1</sup> (1414) where “the right of each nation to be counted as the equal of every other” (Fishman 1973, 4) called for general acceptance.

A nationalist ideology embraces “the more inclusive organization and the elaborated beliefs, values and behaviors which nationalities develop on behalf of their avowed ethnocultural self-interest” (Fishman 1973, 4). But, for the recognition of these common characteristics to have practical consequences two circumstances are to take place:

### *1. The existence of an elite*

It is necessary the establishment of a powerful social group which can carry out political actions to defend its culture and territories at the same time that it transmits the nationalist feeling to members of lower social strata. These groups:

form an increasingly coherent intellectual community activated by the idea of a culturally united and socially solidary national society, which should include all the people whose folk cultures are presumed to be essentially alike, and who are supposed to share the same historical background ... (and) who should be equally separated from peoples with different cultures. (Fishman 1973, 16)

In England the loss of Normandy in 1204 marks the beginning of the nationalist movement. The English nobility progressively breaks its bonds with France and concentrates upon its own land. English is gradually turning into the nobility L<sub>1</sub>. Henry III's (1216-72) incessant importation of French favourites (1233, 1236, 1246) joined English upper and middle classes in a common cause: the expulsion of all these aliens which resulted in *The Provisions of Oxford* (1258) and more practically, in *The Baron's War* (1258-1267). This can be considered as the first step towards the strengthening of nationalism since the protoelites make the lower classes be involved in this anti-foreign feeling. Almost twenty years later, in 1295, constant conflicts with France lead Edward I (1272-1307) to use the vernacular in order to move his people against the rival country and his king who “not satisfied with his wickedness, (he) has beset our realm with a mighty fleet

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<sup>1</sup> To study ecclesiastical implications in nationalism see Hayes, Carlton J.H. 1942: The Church and Nationalism: A Plea for Further Study of a Major Issue. *Catholic Historical Review* 28: 1-12.

and army and proposes, if his power equal, his detestable purpose, which God forbid, to wipe out the English tongue altogether from the face of the earth" (Tout 1922, 94). The vernacular is being used as an instrument since English is not Edward I's native tongue, but this sign of patriotism will exert a great influence on the people around him. The subsequent problem of the *Cinque Ports* with France that ended in war (1297-1299) will add another reason for this growing self-esteem.

## 2. Social and economic changes

Social and economic changes are closely related. The feudal system is dying out: *the Black Death* (1348-1350) and the ongoing outbreaks of the epidemy throughout the century bring about a shortage of labourers that will change medieval social relations. The increasing number of free tenants producing a stock beyond the levels of subsistence together with an incipient textile manufacturing make possible the creation of a market. The development of trade in an urban environment runs parallel to the rise of a new social class: the bourgeoisie, an ascendant middle class which seeks in the support of vernacular culture a symbol of distinction.

The most representative example of an external event showing a nationalist attitude is *The Hundred Years' War* (1337-1453). Other internal actions all over the 14th century to foster the rise of the English language largely derive from it. Not only victories but also defeats strengthen English patriotism ultimately resulting in the decay of French in England and all things French. The *Petitions of the Commons*, first in 1346, and later in 1377 asking for the expulsion of foreigners illustrate this general concern. At the same time there is evidence of the use of English in the Court of London and Middlessex in 1356, just six years before the official recognition of the vernacular in Parliament. National pride will also turn English into the vehicle of instruction in schools as Trevisa points out in his translation of the *Polychronicon* (1360) in the last quarter of the century:

For Iohan Cornwall, a mayster of gramere chayngede the lore in gramer-scole, and construccion of Freynsch into Enlysch; and Richard Pencrych lurnede that manere of techyng of hym, and other men of Pencrych. So that now, in the yer of our lord a thousand three hondred foure score and fyve, of the seconde kyng Richard after the conquest nyne, in al the gramer-scoles of Engelond children leveth Frensch and construeth and lurneth an Englisch, and habbeth therby avauntage in on syde and desavauntage yn another. (Kibbee 1991, 56)<sup>1</sup>

Meanwhile, Wycliffe (1328-1384) becomes the first famous English heretic by challenging the whole ecclesiastical system and by defending the rights of his king against France. Religiously speaking, he will back up the purest Christian principles trying to approach the Church to the population. The translation of the Bible into the vernacular is the most obvious way of doing it. His interests will be followed by learned men of Oxford, but also by the lower clergy, the gentry, or, even, by laymen. That is how religion becomes an integrative force, a common belief ready to create a national church side by side with the emergence of a nation.

A conspicuous moment in the defence of the vernacular took place when Henry IV (1399-1413) was crowned in 1399 and in the Deposition Parliament "challenged the realm and made declaration of his right in English and after his election returned thanks in the same language" (Bernt 1970, 363)<sup>2</sup>. This was the first king, after the Conquest, for whom English was definitively

<sup>1</sup> See also Stevenson, W.H. 1901: *The Introduction of English as a Vehicle of Instruction in English Schools*. In Skeat, Walter W., Napier, S. Arthur & Ker, William P. eds. 1901: *An English Miscellany Presented to F.J. Furnivall*. Oxford, Clarendon: 421-429

<sup>2</sup> Henry V's strong determination to hoist the English flag and to defend fiercely his native tongue is recorded in *The Brewers' First Book* (1422): «Cum nostra lingua materna, videlicet lingua Anglicana, modernis diebus cepit in honoris incrementum ampliari et decorari, eo quod excellentissimus dominus noster Rex henricus quintus, in literis suis missiuis, et diuersis negociis personam suam propiam tangentibus, secreta sue voluntatis libencius voluit declarare, et ob meliorem plebis sue intelligentiam communem, aliis ydiomatibus pretermisissis, animo diligenti scripturarum exercicio comendari procurauit; Et quam plures sunt nostre Artis Braciatorum qui in dicto ydiomate anglicano habent scienciam, illud idem scribendi atque legendii in aliis ydiomatibus videlicet latino et Franco ante hec tempora vsitatis minime senciunt et intelligunt; Quibus de Causis cum pluribus aliis

his mother tongue. The consolidation of England's national identity begins with his son Henry V (1413-1422) and the defeat of the French military dominance at the *Battle of Agincourt* in 1415. This country, poorer in population and resources, had been beating the enemy once and again. These victories were mainly due to a shift in military tactics: giving yeomen or townsmen, representatives of a diffused middle class, a more prominent role in war. From now on victories will be not only of the king but of the whole nation.

As a result of these social events, the mother tongue changes its status. Its growing importance in the oral field during the fourteenth century crystallizes now in a rapid progress in writing. Thus, from the first quarter of the 15th century, English becomes the language of records in Parliament and of general writing for wills, indentures, deeds and other documents, even for written laws. Caxton's introduction of printing in 1476 also contributes to the diffusion of the national tongue. At the end of the century almost all statutes are written in English<sup>1</sup>.

The social and economic changes that took place in the Late Middle Ages guaranteed the recognition of English as the vehicle of expression of the whole nation. External events were slowly generating internal changes in favour of this tongue until it was socially settled and was admitted in learning circles as a symbol of Englishness. This is the situation at the beginning of the 16th century. Once the nation has selected her own code with the acceptance and support of the official policy, a step forward in the development of the language has to be faced: the selected code needs regularization due to the existing variability. It requires a codification through dictionaries, grammars and guides on spelling, punctuation and pronunciation. Renaissance scholars will deal with this issue.

## 2. ENGLISH IN TRANSITION

I love Rome, but London better. I favor Italie but England more. I honor the Latin but I worship the English. (Mulcaster 1582, 254).

Passion and pride in Englishness is easily deduced from Mulcaster's statement. This nationalistic spirit is going to pervade the whole Renaissance in all levels of life. This is an intellectual age interested in classical literature, geographical explorations, scientific advances. The educational goals embedded in the humanist trend together with the Protestant Reformation (1509-1547) spread this knowledge through vernacular translations. The defeat of the Spanish Armada in 1588 and the foundation of Jamestown in 1607 as symbol of the British Empire will enhance English pride based on national achievement. In the 16th century English is England L<sub>1</sub> par excellence and while Latin and French are still used in the learning process or in administrative writings, these two are secondary languages, artificially learnt, but not the language of ordinary intercourse transmitted from one generation to another. Knowledge of Latin was important for those intending to become clerks, who were asked to have a good command of this language. Hence, the publishing of the *Vulgaria* (1519), a collection of sentences in Latin and English about everyday life. This learning method was superseded by Roger Ascham in his *Scholemaster* (1570) who proposed the study of Latin through double translations. The supremacy of Latin over, even,

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consideratis in presenti quemadmodum maior pars ducum et Communum fidedignorum facere ceperunt in nostra materna lingua suas materias annotari, Sic et nos in arte nostra, predicta eorum vestigia quodammodo sequentes que nos tangunt necessaria decreuimus memorie infuturum commendare vt patet in sequentibus ... » (Chambers 1931, preface). Comments on the general linguistic situation of common people (he chooses English "for the better understanding of his people") and the language of writing used by Lords and Commons (they use it "to make their matters be noted down") are good indicators of the code switching which was progressively transforming English into England L1 at a national level. However paradoxical the fact of writing this text in Latin and its content may seem, it just mirrors the sociolinguistic situation at that particular moment.

<sup>1</sup> For further information see Bernt, R. 1972: The Period of Final Decline of French in Medieval England (Fourteenth and Early Fifteenth Centuries). *Zeitschrift für Anglistik und Amerikanistik* 20: 341-369; and Sugget, H. 1945. The Use of French in England in the later Middle Ages. *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society* 28: 61-83.

Greek, neglected the study of modern languages, excluding English. It was Richard Mulcaster that posed the inclusion of the vernacular as subject in school curricula.

The rise of the English nation in the 16th century paves the way for a conscious effort in the study of the mother tongue. It makes possible a sort of planning on the language that will cover mainly:

- a) Lexicography and grammar in writing.
- b) Pronunciation in the oral field.

The increasing number of terms required to cover and spread all knowledge reveals a lack of vocabulary which has to be urgently overcome. On the whole, Renaissance scholars offer two ways of vocabulary enlargement:

a) Borrowing: it consists in the transference of words from ancient and modern languages to represent new ideas or conceptions. These borrowed words have to adapt to the vernacular and are to be accompanied by an explanation of their meaning when first introduced. Finally, it is necessary to create the adequate environment to make sure people familiarize with this term. Among these innovators we find Sir Thomas Elyot's (1533) *The Knowledge that Maketh a Wise Man*, Richard Eden (1562) and George Pettie (1581), who in the preface of Guazzo's *Civile Conversation* asserted that:

for my part I use those woords as litle as any, yet I know no reason why I should not use them, and I finde it a fault in my selfe that I do not use them: for it is in deed the ready way to inrich our tongue, and make it copious, and it is the way which all tongues have taken to inrich them selves ... (Baugh 1991, 220)

b) Use of native sources: the main opponents to the tendency above mentioned regard borrowing as an obstacle to expand knowledge among the unlearned. New terms, so called "inkhorn terms", from other languages are not easy to understand and the plainness and purity of the mother tongue can be destroyed. These defenders of native sources are imbued with a patriotic appeal. They do not believe in enrichment through foreign words, but in the possibilities of their language. This trend encompasses revivalists and compounders. The former advocate the use of old terms as capable of expressing any content. The latter attempt to make up self-explanatory words out of native material. Sir John Cheke in a letter to Sir Thomas Hoby wrote: "I am of this opinion that our tongue should be written clean and pure, unmixed and unmangled with borrowing from other tongues" (Baugh 1991, 216). Cheke's defence of purity is echoed by Wilson, Nash, Samuel Daniel and others.

The problem of lexical enrichment constitutes the first purely linguistic step which will launch the native tongue into a corpus planning process. In the following step scholars will attempt to codify the language in dictionaries, grammars and other manuals. The first dictionaries were bilingual and their purpose was mainly didactic, to make easier the learning of Latin. Hence, we find English-Latin lexicons such as:

- ca. 1440. A Dominican Friar in Norfolk. *Promptorium Parvulorum, sive Clericorum*.
- 1483. Anonymous. *Catholicon Anglicum*.
- 1552. Richard Huloet's *Abcedarium Anglico Latinum*.
- 1553. John Withals' *Shorte Dictionarie for Younge Begynners*.
- 1573. John Baret's *Alvearie*
- 1589. John Rider's *Bibliotheca Scholastica*.

There are also other lexicons containing Latin-English wordlists:

- 1460. *Medulla Grammaticae*.
- 1500. Wynkyn de Worde's *Ortus Vocabulorum*.
- 1538. Thomas Elyot's *The Dictionary of Sir Thomas Elyot*.
- 1545. Thomas Elyot's *Bibliotheca Eliotae*.
- 1548. Thomas Cooper's revision of the *Bibliotheca*.

- 1565. Thomas Cooper's *Thesaurus Linguae Romanae et Britannicae*.
- 1587. Thomas Thomas' *Dictionarium linguae Latinae et Anglicanae*.

There was not a fixed rule to order the entries in a dictionary, only the last one has been arranged in today's alphabetical order. The rest follow different ordering principles: grouping according to topics, etymology, or, even, by alphabetical cross-references. The increasing number of reading public and the expansion of vocabulary require the creation of lists of words with their meanings. Mulcaster admits this need in a passage of his *Elementarie*. He demands a work which "wold gather all the words which we use in our English tung, whether naturall or incorporate, out of all professions, as well learned as not, into one dictionary, and besides the right writing, which is incident to the Alphabete, wold open into us therein both their naturall force and their proper use" (Mulcaster 1582, 166). Following the example of the medieval glossaries we now find "lists of hard words" that can be seen as the origin of later dictionaries. Robert Cawdrey's *A Table Alphabeticall* (1604), John Bullokar's *An English Expositor* (1616), Henry Cockeram's *The English Dictionarie* (1623), Thomas Blunt's *Glossographia* (1656), Edward Phillips' *The New World of English Words* (1658) and Elisha Coles' *An English Dictionary* (1676) can be included in this tradition. There is not an essential difference among them since, as Burchfield points out "copyright rules did not exist and wholesale lifting of material from one dictionary to another was commonplace" (Burchfield 1985, 82). Cawdrey's explanation on the content of his lexicon summarizes the practical aim of these wordbooks:

A Table Alphabetical, conteyning and teaching the true writing, and understanding of hard usuall English wordes, borrowed from Hebrew, Greeke, Latine, or French & c. With the interpretation thereof by plaine English words, gathered for the benefit & helpe of Ladies, Gentlewomen, or any other unskilfull persons. (Wells 1973, 17)

English lexicography begins to change in the 18th century with the publication of John Kersey's *A New English Dictionary*. The difference lies in his attempt to include not only difficult but also common words in a comprehensive way. This takes place around fifty years before Samuel Johnson's *Dictionary* (1747) is published. The authoritarian tradition starts with it.

Grammar seems to be for scholars a matter of later concern. It was generally thought that grammatical features did not require instruction. In fact, authors like Hart, Bullokar or Mulcaster confine to writings on spelling and orthography. Nevertheless, towards the end of the period, the prevailing educational bias of humanism highlights the validity of grammatical knowledge. It is useful to teach the structure of English to foreigners and to help children to learn Latin. In 1586 Bullokar publishes his *Bref Grammar for English*, a work highly influenced by Latin. Ten years later, Edmund Coote's *The Englishe Scolemaister* comes out. It contains a "miscellany of chronology, syllabification, numbers, spelling, catechism, psalms, grammar and a table of difficult words with glosses" (Peters 1968, 283). During the 17th century some grammarians tried to account for differences between English and Latin but the mirror of the classical tongues was always present. John Brinsley in 1612 stated that the main aim of studying grammar was "to attaine to the puritie and perfection of the Latine tongue" (Burchfield 1985, 94). We will have to wait until the second half of the 18th century to see the improvement of grammatical studies.

As for pronunciation, the primary concern on correct speaking and the relationship between letters and sounds evolves into a scientific description of sounds and speech organs. In an effort to set up the standards of speech, scholars of the age advance in their works the idea that the speech of the "learned and literate" is "the nearest (we) can follow", or that the best English is "the usual speech of the court, and that of London and the shires lying about London within IX miles and not much above" (Dobson 1955, 28)<sup>1</sup>. Edmund Coote stands by these comments when he characterizes country people's way of talking as "barbarous". Charles Butler in his *English Grammar* (1633) defines the oral standard as that "of the Universities and Citties" (Dobson 1955,

<sup>1</sup> These quotations were originally taken from Hart's *Orthography* (1569) and *Method* (1570), and Puttenham's *The Arte of English Poesy* (1589).

29). This 16th and 17th century position will also be supported by Alexander Gill, Wallis, Owen Price, Elisha Coles, Cooper and, even, by the anonymous writer of *Right Spelling* (1704) for whom the speech of a common Londoner is inferior to that of educated people<sup>1</sup>. The implication is that the emergent standard English can be largely defined by two features: place and social class. The first one refers to London and his surroundings. The second one relates the standard language to that of the highest classes of the Court, the administration in general and to that of University men. At the same time this normalization issue is discussed, some authors such as Palsgrave and Salesbury prepare comparative works on sounds. Other kind of studies constitute a mixture of orthography and pronunciation with the aim of achieving some consistency between writing and speaking. Thus, we find Thomas Smith's *De recta et emendata linguae anglicae scriptione* (1568) and Hart's *Orthographie* (1569) which also deal with the description of sounds and some aspects of modern articulatory phonetics. Nevertheless, a more scientific and technical interest in speech and language is found in 17th century authors such as John Wallis, Bishop Wilkins<sup>2</sup> and Christopher Cooper. This one is specially analytical in his descriptions and offers specific information about sounds and the way they are produced with illustrative examples.

### 3. FRENCH IN RENAISSANCE ENGLAND: AN L2

The emergence of nationalism in medieval England runs parallel to the decline of the French language. As Rothwell points out,

from the French version of Magna Carta (1215) to the threshold of the fifteenth century, French was the principal vehicle of recording the life of England, its law on land and sea, its government and administration at all levels, all the correspondence - both national and international - between kings, sheriffs, mayors, bishops and merchants. (Rothwell 1993, 314-5)

However, at the turn of the 15th century we can state that French gradually gave way to English in most legal writings: deeds, wills, Parliamentary petitions and other documents. Even correspondence between noblemen, ladies or religious institutions changed to English. In private letters the use of either of the languages ended by being a matter of individual preference.

The fact that French was denied official recognition in 16th century England can be put down to the linguistic pride of the period. This is no longer the mother tongue of any of the inhabitants of the Isles. On the contrary, it will be a sort of complementary knowledge in learning apart from the language of the law.

Some scholars regard English as “barbarous and rude”, lacking in eloquence, as a result of the comparison they establish with the classical tongues. This debate about the state of the language, its characteristics and peculiarities, and the fact of using it as a vehicle of popular instruction is, in fact, promoting the adherence of the nobility to French as a sign of class distinction. Therefore, in spite of not being native speakers of French, “the majority of the English nobility and gentry spoke and understood French at least tolerably well” (Lambley 1920, 62).

French will be important as an L2 in the field of education, especially for those intending to hold any kind of official post for which it was compulsory. Despite the fact that French was not integrated in either grammar school or university curricula, it could be learnt by other means. There were private schools directed by Englishmen or Frenchmen where this language, Latin, writing and counting were taught. They were especially strict with the learning of French. In one of them placed in Southampton: “anyone who used English, though only a word, was obliged to

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<sup>1</sup> These authors supported this theory in Alexander Gill's *Logonomia Anglica* (1619, 1621), Wallis' *Grammatica Linguae Anglicanae* (1653), Owen Price's *Vocal Organ* (1655), Elisha Coles' *The Schoolemaster* (1674) and Christopher Cooper's *Grammatica Linguae Anglicanae* (1685).

<sup>2</sup> In 1668, Bishop Wilkins, a member of the Royal Society, published an *Essay towards a Real Character and a Philosophical Language*. He describes the functions of the speech organs and gives a general classification of sounds.

wear a fool's cap at meals, and continue to wear it until he caught another in the same fault" (Lambley 1920, 150-1). The Londoner John Palsgrave, author of *L'Esclaircissement de la langue françoise* (1530) was, at first, one of them. Peter Du Ploich, a French refugee is another private schoolmaster who also published *A Treatise in English and Frenche right necessary and profitable for al young children* (1553). Schools connected with the French churches were also founded. The subjects taught were the same as in other private French schools. On denying the learning of French as a social requirement, both schools and universities fail in providing scholars with the necessary knowledge to work in everyday life. So, a competitor at University level springs up: they are the Inns of Court. Black tells us that there all the aspirants after knowledge of the common law received an education rivalling that provided by Oxford and Cambridge, where the canon and civil law formed the backbone of culture, and had for a long time opened the way to high office in church and state. (Black 1969, 321-2)

Other authors do not value so high this institution stating that gentlemen's sons attending the Inns could learn music, dancing and other accomplishments such as French to form their manners. In this sense it would be a kind of academy and as such, a complement to university studies. French was necessary in diplomatic affairs and to travel abroad. This is the main reason why certain social classes other than the aristocracy chose to study the foreign language. These are merchants, soldiers and travellers who are instrumentally motivated. In many cases learning French was not limited to private schools. Private tuition at home or in France was also common. In fact, the education of a nobleman required the study of Greek and Latin at Universities, to spend a time at the Inns of Court and, finally, to travel abroad in order to practise French.

As for the production of manuals to learn this L2, many are the scholars engaged in this task and many as well the works published. From the 16th century onwards there is a proliferation of Dialogues in French and English, grammars, pronunciation manuals and dictionaries, all written by English and French scholars indistinctively. Holyband's *The French Schoolemaister* or *The French Littleton*, Baret's *Alvearie*, Bellot's *Le Jardin de Vertu*, De la Mothe's *French Alphabet* or Cotgrave's *Dictionary* are some of the examples. All this proves how French is treated in England as an L2. Although social needs demand its knowledge, it is no longer a dominant language in the British Isles.

#### 4. CONCLUSION

To sum up, after a struggle for official acceptance, English consolidates as England L<sub>1</sub> par excellence in the 16th century. Medieval nationalism is responsible for it. Many historical events have taken place for English society to regard its language as the most valuable symbol of cultural distinctiveness. The richness of Elizabethan literature speaks for it. From the emergence of the nationalist movement in the 13th century through the beginning of national consciousness (14th) and its consolidation (15th), we get to the national linguistic consciousness of the 16th century which considers the vernacular as a medium of expression. Discussions about the state of the native tongue in this transitional moment neglect the treatment of French which has never been the language of the majority of the population. Its use has been socially restricted to the high classes and those middle classes that by mimetism try to ascend in the social scale. French is not taught for everybody in grammar schools, and, although, it is useful for legal matters and for any kind of international relations, it will be just privately learnt as an L2 of culture.

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