

Language contact in medieval England: A study of the impact of Latin, Norse, and French on the twelfth-century English lexicon

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Throughout the history of English, speakers have borrowed words from a number of different languages; and the medieval period is especially interesting as the setting in which Latin, French, and Old Norse all influenced English to varying degrees. While many studies have investigated the foreign element in English overall throughout its history, the twelfth century has rarely been the focus of study and remains relatively underexplored. Straddling the transition between Old and Middle English, the twelfth century is a period in which Old Norse influence surfaces in the written record, and French begins to show significant influence following the Norman Conquest of 1066 CE. This study contributes to the field of language contact studies with analysis of a new set of data from the medieval period and provide insight into the vocabulary that was available to twelfth-century writers. Loanwords identified in three twelfth-century texts—*Poema Morale*, *The Proverbs of Alfred*, and *The Owl and the Nightingale*—are investigated and analysed according to their etymology morphosyntactic properties, and semantic distribution. The majority of these loanwords show influence or borrowing from (or via) Latin and/or French, with over 50% of loanword tokens in the texts being Latin-influenced or -derived. This is indicative of the prominence of Latinate vocabulary in the semantic field of RELIGION, as *Poema Morale* and *The Proverbs of Alfred* are didactic in nature. There are also a substantial number of Norse-influenced or -derived loans, some of which belong to grammatical categories (e.g. pronouns) or lexico-semantic fields (e.g. LAW AND ORDER) that do not show evidence of Latin or French influence. The Norse-influenced pronoun *boþe*, for example, may highlight the borrowing of closed-class function words from Norse facilitated by close typological similarities between Old Norse and Old English; but there is also argument for the native origins of *boþe* and so its origins cannot be declared with certainty. Despite differences in the sociohistorical context of Anglo-Norse and -French language contact, French and Norse appear to show largely similar effects on the vocabulary of the twelfth-century texts studied and the results presented in this study may have implications for study of loanword integration in the history of English.