

Gloria Mambelli

## MANORIAL SOCIETY IN MULTILINGUAL MEDIEVAL ENGLAND

### An onomasiological approach

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The English language underwent an unprecedented lexical enrichment during the period of linguistic contact following the Norman Conquest, when a significant proportion of borrowings of French origin entered the lexicon (Durkin 2014). This is still often referred to as a phenomenon mainly affecting domains related to the aristocratic milieu (cf Baugh/Cable 2002; Barber/Beal/Shaw 2009), even though the investigation of non-literary mixed-language texts, prompted by recent interest in late medieval multilingualism (cf Trotter (ed.) 2000; Wright (ed.) 2020), demonstrates that language contact was likely to occur in everyday life activities carried out by sub-aristocratic classes as well (cf Sylvester/Marcus 2017; Ingham/Marcus 2016). In particular, contact-induced variation is found in business documents such as accounts and inventories, a “text type where a mixing of two or more languages is the norm” (Wright 2000). Notwithstanding the numerous instances of code-switching from Latin into English and French contained especially in manorial accounts, suggesting that manorial officials worked in a multilingual environment (Ingham 2009), lexical fields pertaining to rural life still play a marginal role in contact linguistic research.

By focusing on the multilingual lexis denoting post-Conquest manorial society, this paper illustrates how an onomasiological approach can be adopted for combining linguistic and sociolinguistic investigation. Making use of structures such as taxonomical hierarchies to explore the lexical items with which a concept can be expressed (Grondelaers et al. 2010), onomasiology provides an appropriate framework for studying lexical variation within a specific domain while taking the sociolinguistic context into account. In view of the difficulty of accessing the multilingual vocabulary to be investigated, scattered in semasiological dictionaries and thesauri, an onomasiological categorisation was carried out by semantically and chronologically arranging Anglo-French, Medieval Latin, and Middle English terms used to refer to the people living and working on manorial estates. Lexical items and dates of attestation were extracted from the online editions of the *Anglo-Norman Dictionary*, the *Dictionary of Medieval Latin from British Sources*, and the *Middle English Dictionary*. Only nouns, the most commonly borrowed word-class (Matras 2009, p. 167), were included.

This paper reports on the progress of an ongoing project whose output is a trilingual thesaurus assembling terms connected to people and locations of manorial estates of post-Conquest England, designed to carry out lexicological and lexicographical analyses. The mapping of this lexical domain allows for the tracking of the outcomes of language contact in rural contexts of late medieval England and shows how the presence of officials, whose profession required competence in three languages, contributed to spreading multilingualism in such areas notwithstanding the majority of English monolingual speakers.

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## Contact information

**Gloria Mambelli**

Università degli Studi di Verona  
gloria.mambelli@univr.it