

THE EVOLUTION OF EARLY STANDARD ENGLISH:
THE CREOLIZATION HYPOTHESIS*

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The great unsolved problem in English philology has always been the uncovering of the mechanism which initiated the development of OE into early Modern English. During the 1970's it has appeared more and more likely that pidgin and creole studies may shed further light on the problem. Bailey and Maroldt (1975) boldly grasp the nettle: "It cannot be doubted that it [ME] is a mixed language, or creole" (1977:22), and, "the mixed character of modern English... strongly indicates a decisive share of French" (1977:24). The authors pay more attention to the Scandinavian influence on OE than did Bailey (1973), but relegate it to a softening-up role: "The Nordic creolization of Anglo-Saxon, which was of course more significant in the North than in the South, created an essentially unstable situation" (1973:36), and, "Old Norse contributed anticipatorily to the creation of Middle English. Especially, the infusion of Old Norse elements led to that kind of linguistic instability which linguistic mixture generally creates, and thus prepared the ground for even more substantial foreign creolization afterwards" (1973:26).

Before going further, some definition of the terms *creolization* and *pidginization* are needed. Briefly, a pidginized language is a language which has been drastically simplified in structure and vocabulary, in order to serve restricted communication needs. A pidgin is no-one's native language. Pidgins may arise when two language communities come into sudden direct contact, e.g. in military invasion or trade contact. In certain exceptional sociolinguistic cir-

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cumstances, a pidgin may be adopted as the first language of a community. In this case it undergoes elaboration, i.e. creolization. It seems that not all creoles have developed from a stable pidgin, however. According to Hymes (1971:84) "the starting point of creolization need not be a pidgin, but may be a pre-pidgin continuum, or a subordinated language-variety of some other sort".

It should be noted that a creole language is not linguistically "inferior" to "normal" languages. The problem with the word *creole* is that it carries overtones of social prejudice, and creoles are often denied the status of true languages. It is true, as Whinnom (1971) points out, that a recently-evolved or evolving creole may well be a less adequate means of expression than a "normal" language, but on the other hand, given the social status of a standard language, a fully developed creole could become just as adequate as "pure" languages. In fact, as Decamp (1971) remarks: "we can never know how many of the 'normal' languages of the world originated via this pidgin-creole process".

In this paper I shall use the term *creolization* to cover the pidginization-creolization processes which take place in the *spoken* form when two language hybridize to form a creole as a result of direct contact between two speech communities. I would not like to extend the term to include language influence via the *written* form, as Bailey and Maroldt seem to do. Nor do I consider the presence of loanwords and translation calques, however numerous, as sufficient proof of creolization in the narrow sense. Before we call ME a creole we must have evidence of more fundamental systemic change. As Bailey and Maroldt put it:

a creole is the result of mixing which is substantial enough to result in a new system, a system that is separate from its antecedent parent systems (1977:21).

Though I am inclined to agree that Modern English may be a creole, in my opinion Bailey and Maroldt have not produced sufficient evidence that the decisive influence was French, rather than Scandinavian. If we compare OE (late West Saxon literary standard) with early Modern English (Chancery Standard, mid 15th century), the features which most clearly resemble creolization are: a) loss of grammatical gender; b) extreme simplification of inflexions; c) borrowing of common lexical words, and form-words.

These three features are also the main points in which the development of English differs from all its West and North Germanic cognates. The most crucial of these changes is loss of grammatical gender, which seems to be a universal feature of modern French-based pidgins (Reinecke 1971:51, Decamp 1971:21). In English-based pidgins, the natural gender distinction carried by the *he/she* pronoun tends to be levelled.

If we hypothesize that these three features of Modern English were caused by contact with an invading language, rather than by a normal, slow process of

dialect mixing, the suspects are Old Scandinavian, from the mid-9th to mid-11th centuries, and French, from the mid-11th. Though the mixing with French in the ME period was quantitatively very great, yet an examination of linguistic change in the ME period in respect of our three features reveals that the direction of change is consistently from the central and east Midlands towards the capital (see Samuels (1963:82) for isoglosses showing the distribution of *they* and *though* in early 15th century texts). This seems to be a continuation of a trend which had already begun in the OE period. Against this trend, the French mixing which spreads out from the capital looks like a less fundamental, though highly conspicuous, eddy against the main current of linguistic change. Bailey and Maroldt's assumption in the case of new creoles:

one expects the language of the dominant class to dominate the linguistic situation (1977:22).

does not seem to fit here. We need to re-examine the linguistic and historical evidence for French and Scandinavian influence.

The French Influence

In considering the French influence, it is essential to separate the media of speech and writing. Bailey's suggestion that English "creolized" with French after the Norman Conquest is a highly misleading use of the term, as pidginization and creolization proper are processes which take place in the spoken language, whereas most of the French influence which goes beyond the lexical level may well have come into English via the written medium. As for loanwords, though the absolute number of French loans in ModE is colossal, yet a frequency count of their use in informal varieties of Present English speech, e.g. the caretaker talk¹ of mothers to children, would probably rate French loans rather infrequent. French loans tend to cluster around certain fields of activity: warfare, law, building, manners, literature, etc.

This clustering of loanwords is explained by the structure of society in Norman-governed England, which did not provide the type of language contact situation which normally produces a creole. Firstly, the monolingual French speakers were comparatively few in number, and insulated from the mass of English speakers by a larger group of bilinguals. Thus the Normans themselves were highly motivated to learn to speak English. The Conqueror himself is said to have tried to learn English, in his forties. Fisiak summarizes the situation as follows:

French was spoken by the nobility, some representatives of the middle classes (tradesmen), part of the clergy and a certain number of clerks and administrators of castles, manors, etc. It seems that throughout the Middle English period no more than 10% of the population used both English and French (1977:252).

¹ sometimes called *motherese*

Most of these bilinguals must have been English-dominant in speech, using English in the home, though with a sufficient command of French for their professional needs. The bulk of the population had no need to use French at all. As Robert of Gloucester says: "Ac lowe men holdeþ to Engliss, and to her owe speche zete". Writers, on the other hand, being educated men, would be particularly likely to use French loans and calques in their English.

It would appear that many well-known studies of this period have seriously overestimated the French influence on the language. The evidence is admirably reviewed by Berndt (1965).

The Scandinavian Influence

The Scandinavian loanwords in Modern Standard English would seem to have been adopted in a different kind of contact situation than the French. Most surviving Scandinavian loans do not cluster around special fields of activity, but are mostly very common words, still frequent today in everyday informal speech. They are not readily recognizable as loans: in fact they are among the first vocabulary acquired by English children. Some examples: *neck, leg, skin, want, take, kill*. Baugh comments painedly:

Often a good Old English word was lost, since it expressed the same idea as the foreign word. Thus the verb *take* replaced the OE *niman* (1978:100).

Language historians seem to disagree on how far PE and Old Danish had diverged by 866. Strang states:

At the time of the early Scandinavian settlements in England the period of separation had only been slightly longer than between British and American English today, and the two communities had been in touch with one another for much of the time (1970:282).

I think myself that a closer analogy would be the divergence of the spoken forms of the modern standard Scandinavian languages. In this case, as we see in pan-Scandinavian conferences, communication between speakers of the different languages is possible, but not easy. Listening comprehension is the main problem, as there is less divergence in the written form.

The three to four centuries which elapsed between the settlement of England by the Angles and Saxons and the first Scandinavian invasions provide ample time for the languages to diverge far enough to cause considerable difficulties of communication between ordinary speakers, if we consider that there was no widespread literary and educational tradition to slow down language change in either country. Therefore by the 9th century we are justified in talking in terms of languages, rather than dialects of North-West Germanic.

Distance in time and lack of written records has obscured the origins of many everyday verbs which may well be of Scandinavian origin, e.g. *cut, bet* and the taboo *fuck*. Other words of known Scandinavian origin are not quite

acceptable in formal written English, e.g. *lug, muck* (plus *up, about* etc.). This category of word, tagged as vulgar or dialectal by the OED, is within the competence of all native speakers of Standard English, though they would not be used on formal occasions, e.g. speaking to foreigners. The tendency of English to form phrasal verbs of the *muck up* type may be the result of Danish influence (Longman 1906, quoted by Baugh 1978:103). Again, these forms are more favoured by informal spoken than by formal written varieties, and will be underestimated in studies based on the written word. The frequency of the phrasal verb in Present English is reflected faithfully in the writing of young English schoolchildren, however. They acquire alternative expressions during the education process.

More reliable indications of creolization are provided by the form-word loans *same, though, and till*, and the adoption of the Scandinavian pronoun forms *they, their, them* in place of OE forms in *h-*. *She* (derivation debatable) appeared in the ME period in the Danelaw region, and spread rapidly.

The Danish-English Contact Situation

I shall concentrate on the situation in the central and east Midlands, as this area holds the key to the development of Modern Standard English.

The Danish conquest of the Midlands took place very rapidly, between 866 and c875. The Danish army had been in two groups. One, under Halfdan, formed the Kingdom of York, while Guthrum's army continued fighting in Wessex. Guthrum's army was finally pushed back by Alfred into Mercia, half of which remained in Danish hands by the subsequent treaty. The treaty explicitly stated that no slave or freeman was to cross the border without permission. The Parker Chronicle annal for the year 894 shows us that the East Anglian border was closed to Alfred's army then. Wessex did not reconquer eastern Mercia until 916-18, and then it seems that the social structure of the Danelaw remained undisturbed.

The mingling of the Danish soldiery with the Mercian English trapped between the two Danish armies provides a likely setting for the formation of a creole. We do not need to postulate an intermediate pidgin, though, according to Todd (1974:5), pidgins have been observed in similar situations of military occupation in modern times in Korea and Vietnam.

Given a sufficiently close contact situation, Whinnom (1971:92-7) lists three barriers to linguistic hybridization: the ethological barrier (emotional attitudes), the mechanical barrier (differences of phonological or grammatical structure) and the conceptual barrier (semantic and syntactic differences). In the case of English and Danish, the mechanical and conceptual barriers would be minimal. The emotional attitude is primary:

There are well known sociolinguistic situations... in which a population of speakers will be particularly tenacious of their language, concerned for its 'purity' and so

on... and at the other extreme, *situations of cultural shock* in which populations are unresistant to, and even eager to accept, the most sweeping linguistic innovations (my italics).

The civilian population of the East Midlands, caught between two Danish armies, consisting largely of women and children and men too old to have served in the levy, must have been in complete disarray. The settlement of the area by the Danish army and later arrivals must have involved intermarriage with the local women on a large scale. The children of such unions would be compound bilinguals, hearing both languages in the home. In this kind of bilingual society, language mixing and switching is normal behaviour. Some families and villages would have maintained their "pure" Danish or English longer than others, but separation from both parent speech-communities would favour the development of a hybrid language, a creole.

An essential question for our argument is: how many creole speakers could there have been? This obviously depends on the size of the Danish settlement. Historians' opinions on this have altered over the last thirty years, owing to studies of placenames, field-names, personal names, coins and legal documents. Dorothy Whitelock (1958:6) speaks of "a revolutionary reassessment of the density and nature of the Scandinavian settlement, proving that it 'had the dimensions of a migration'". Kenneth Cameron's Grimston-hybrids article (1971:152-5) throws some light on the Scandinavian pattern of settlement in the Five Boroughs, and shows that mixing of language in village names took place in the early 10th century.

Would it have been possible for such a creole to have survived after the southern border of the Danelaw was reopened in 1918? The situation is similar to that of present-day Jamaica: a post-creole continuum, with the education system attempting to reimpose a "pure" norm. In this situation the local prestige of the creole would be a decisive factor.

Stenton writes:

The local nomenclature of this country is intensely Scandinavian and, like that of Yorkshire, contains many Danish personal names not found again in England. The oldest document which illustrates its social organisation — a code of Aethelred II — shows that in language and legal custom it was then a Danish rather than an English land. As late as the thirteenth century it contained a large number of independent peasant landowners who were still giving Danish personal names to their children and Danish nicknames to one another (1947:251).

Naturally, an Anglo-Danish creole would at first have had very low status in the eyes of monolingual speakers of English. They would probably have regarded it as an ugly and debased local dialect of English. It would not be used in writing. Given high local prestige, however, there is no reason why the Danish-English creole should die out in the Midlands after 918. It may even have expanded southwards. There is a record of Aethelred selling land in

Oxfordshire to a "Dane" (Finberg 1974:183), and the Place-Names survey shows a good sprinkling of Scandinavian parish names in the central Midlands well south of the Danelaw border.

But more important than local dialect prestige was the geopolitical situation of the east Midland area, between London and the North. There the Scandinavian-governed Kingdom of York remained independent until 954. The easy sea-route to Denmark allowed continual contact and peaceful migration via the east coast. New Norwegian settlement via the north-west coast also took place in the first half of the 10th century. Anyone travelling between London and York in the reign of Aethelred II would have discovered that the east Midland dialect was more widely understood among ordinary people than the speech of London or York. Trevisa's remark:

...perefere it is at Mercii, þat beþ men of myddel Engeland, as it were parteners of þe endes, understondeþ bettre þe side languages, norþerne and souþerne, þan norþerne and souþerne understondeþ eiper oþer

though written of the ME period, was probably even truer during the reign of Aethelred II.

The Reign of Knut: third-party intervention

The main change in the linguistic situation from the early 11th century to c.1430 is the change of the relative status of the regional dialects. Whereas at the end of Aethelred's reign a form of south-western dialect was the literary standard, by the early Modern period the written standard was a somewhat mixed, Midland-type dialect. The Norman Conquest alone seems insufficient to account for this shift of status. Possibly the answer lies in the influence of the second Danish intervention in English history, which began with Swein's invasion in 1013, followed by the highly successful reign of Knut 1017-35.

It seems probable that the intervention of Swein, Knut and the large numbers of Scandinavian followers that they brought with them would have had the effect of crystallising the unstable Midland dialect and raising its status to that of a supra-regional spoken koiné, equally useful for communication in north and south England.

There are some examples of this kind of process in the pidgin-creole literature:

Where such [hybrid] languages are known to have crystallized in approximately a generation — Fanagalo in Africa (from about 1860), Hawaiian Pidgin (from 1876), Lumumbashi Swahili (from about 1900?), Chinook Jargon (from about 1800?) and Sranan (from 1667) — the cause seems very likely the intrusion of third parties who learn and stabilize a form of the existing mixture without access to the norms of its source(s): Indians in Africa, immigrant labourers of many origins in Hawaii, immigrant labourers in Katanga, European traders and missionaries in the Pacific North-west, perhaps new slaves (or children) in seventeenth-century Surinam (Hymes 1971:67).

We do not know how many Scandinavians settled in England during the reigns of the Danish kings. Stenton (1947:406—8) warns of the "serious risk" of underestimating their numbers, and states that "the Domesday book shows in 1066 landowners bearing Scandinavian names in every part of England". At court the Danish housecarles formed a large group. To govern England, a lingua franca was necessary, and the Midland dialect would have been the most natural choice. It was widely understood, and was easy for the conquerors to learn because it was historically a Danish-English interlanguage. It would be a natural language for the children of mixed marriages, e.g. the children of Knut, or Godwine. Politically, it was a diplomatic compromise between the rival lobbies of Aethelred's reign, the English and Scandinavian factions.

Diplomacy was a marked feature of Knut's reign. Stenton states: "From the beginning of his reign he was careful to emphasize the continuity of his government with that of earlier English kings" (1947:403). He had a high respect for the traditions of the English church, and the "teachers who had introduced him to the mysteries of a civilization higher than his own". Thus it is not surprising that Knut did not interfere with the status of the late West Saxon *written* language, but continued to use it for his laws and proclamations. Of course, the language of law is always conservative, but Stenton states:

Reappearance of ... words and phrases in charters written for Knut shows that the clerks who staffed his writing offices had learnt their business in Aethelred's reign (1947:390).

I suggest that the reign of Knut stabilized a situation of *diglossia* in which IWS served as the language of written documents and formal educated speech, whereas the Midland koiné gained ground for everyday spoken communication at court and between people of different regional dialects. It would naturally be adopted by immigrants to London. It is not unusual for big-city dialects to develop a simpler inflectional system than the literary language. The best-known example is probably Demotic Greek, based on the "low" dialect of Athens, versus the "high" Katharévusa, literary Greek. Ferguson (1959) argues that the low, spoken form has a tendency to become the standard language in the end, though the diglossic situation may remain stable for centuries in cases where literacy is confined to only a small section of the community. Religious communities are particularly conservative of the high form.

Once stabilized in the reign of Knut, diglossia would naturally have continued until the Norman Conquest. Edward the Confessor's court was very Scandinavian in character (Stenton 1947:419). Godwine and his five sons and daughters were powerful enough to frustrate Edward's attempts to install Normans into key posts in Church and State.

In the dearth of evidence as to the spoken language(s) and language var-

ieties of England prior to the Norman Conquest, it is worth quoting the comment in the Icelandic monk Gunnlaug's *Saga*: "in those days was the same language in England as in Norway and Denmark; but the speech changed when William the Bastard conquered England" (quoted in Leach 1921:3). Gunnlaug died in 1218, and according to Leach (1921:138) probably wrote his verse translation from Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Libellus Merlini* "a good while before 1200". Certainly the Icelandic bishop Thorlak studied at Lincoln about 1160, and information about the linguistic situation in England would have been brought back by other students. Could Gunnlaug's "same language" refer to an Anglo-Danish lingua franca understood all over England, or is he referring merely to the dialect of Lincoln, an area of heavy Scandinavian settlement?

Sociolinguistic effects of the Norman Conquest

The effect of the Norman Conquest was to weaken the position of the High IWS language by sweeping away the Anglo-Danish nobility and the church leadership. Harold Godwineson and his two younger brothers were killed at Hastings, together with most of their housecarles. (Harold had not waited long enough for other levies to come up.) His other surviving brother, Tostig, had died at the battle of Stamford Bridge. William's exceptionally efficient establishment of the feudal system meant loss of power for the Anglo-Danish landowners. Confiscations of land and fines on those who had resisted the invasion drove many into exile in Denmark (Stenton 1947:591), and large numbers became mercenaries for the Eastern Emperor (1947:671). It was certainly in William's best interests to suppress the Anglo-Danish thanes, as right up to the end of his reign the main threat of invasion of England came from Denmark.

A similar process took place in the upper levels of the clergy. William replaced Archbishop Stigand of Canterbury by Lanfranc, who reformed the church and imported French-speaking clergy. William appointed no English bishops. At his death, Worcester and Wells were the only sees where English bishops survived. This would partly explain why the High language survived longer in western scriptoria, whereas the functions of the High were taken over by French or Latin elsewhere.

Thus French became the language of court, government, education and literature.

Though many of the functions of the High had been taken over by French, the functions of the Low would have remained largely unaffected. The spoken koiné was still required by the intermediate civil servants, the middlemen between rulers and ruled. It was still required by travellers, and immigrants into the big cities. And it was this Low language that, after the loss of the French territories, gradually took over the functions of the High Norman-French language.

Evidence of OE texts: influence of IWS literary standard

In a diglossic situation, one is unlikely to get reliable information about the use of the Low language except by direct observation. According to Ferguson

... the speakers regard H as superior to L in a number of respects. Sometimes the feeling is so strong that H alone is regarded as real and L is reported 'not to exist'... Very often, educated Arabs will maintain that they never use L at all, in spite of the fact that direct observation shows that they use it constantly in all ordinary conversations. Similarly, educated speakers of Haitian Creole frequently deny its existence, insisting that they always speak French (1959: 329–30).

A diglossic situation must have prevailed in the five Midland counties of the Danelaw after their re-annexation in 918. The Danish settlers had not reached the level of literary culture of the West Saxons, so literacy spread into the Danelaw from Wessex. From the very beginning, learning to read in the Danelaw would probably have involved learning a new dialect. The Benedictine Revival in the second half of the 10th century saw a great increase in literary production and the establishment of a Winchester-type dialect as the literary standard. According to Gneuss (1972) the establishment of this standard was the work of Bishop Aethelwold of Winchester, an active educationalist, and his pupils, among them Aelfric and Wulfstan. This late West Saxon literary standard extended beyond the borders of the spoken WS dialect area.

Since the language of the church and the language of education were one, there would be little reason to write in the local dialect, or to preserve such writing. The low social status of creoles normally ensures that they produce no literature. (Yiddish is a notable exception). This is largely a matter of self-censorship: when one writes on a religious or lofty topic, one automatically selects a formal variety of the written standard. Even the 10th century Mercian wills, which purport to be representations of speech, are records of solemn occasions on which the testator, usually an old man of the upper classes, may be expected to be on his best linguistic behaviour. If he is bi-dialectal, he will naturally choose the more prestigious variety when dictating his will to a scribe. Labov (1966), in his study of social and stylistic variation in New York English, has commented on the difficulty of eliciting casual speech and non-standard varieties from informants who, consciously or unconsciously, tend to raise their style when they feel they are being observed. In the case of OE texts we must also take into account the linguistic preferences of the scribe, and subsequent copyists trained in the IWS tradition.

Evidence of early ME texts

In the west of England, the influence of the IWS literary standard language continued to be felt in the early ME period. In some monasteries OE texts

were still being copied in the mid 12th century. Certain early ME texts composed during the 12th century indicate that at this time a conservative south-western dialect was considered a more suitable vehicle for literature than northern or eastern dialects.

The language of *Ancrene Wisse* (MS Corpus) and the *Katherine Group* (MS Bodley 34), dated to the first third of the 13th century, is a literary form of ME developed in the Hereford region. It has a traditional system of spelling, which retains distinctions which had probably already been levelled in the spoken dialect of the region at the time of writing. According to E. J. Dobson (1976: 121), "the men who wrote and copied in this language did not do so unthinkingly, but had been well trained in its use".

In the First Continuation of the *Peterborough Chronicle* 1122–31, Cecily Clark finds signs of hypercorrection, e.g. of *pe* to *se*. She concludes that the scribe is consciously correcting his East Midland dialect towards the IWS standard. In her opinion the spoken dialect of Peterborough must have been very much like that described in the *Ormmulum*, c. 1200. The *Ormmulum* was presumed to have been written in Lincolnshire, but McIntosh and Samuels now place it in the region of Stamford (McIntosh 1963:11).

Orm is our most reliable witness to the state of the east Midland dialect in the early ME period. He had to develop his own orthography and his own versions of the lessons, because his congregation presumably was incapable of comprehending texts read aloud from manuscripts in the traditional literary dialect. It is unlikely that the language of the *Ormmulum* reflects the actual speech of his congregation, however. It is more likely a compromise between the written form and the Midland creole. Orm would wish to improve the intelligibility of the text without losing its dignity. Religious language is never advanced, and Orm may be a very conservative language user: witness his use of the dual, and Clark's suggestion that his handwriting looks like that of an old man.

The text of *Havelok the Dane* (c1200–72) is too corrupt to tell us much. At some point it has been transcribed into a western dialect. It still has a very high proportion of Danish words, and indicates that ethnic consciousness was still high at this period.

Owing to the distorting influence of the OE literary standard, we cannot form a true picture of the dialects of the Danelaw regions in the early ME period. By the later ME period, however, many dialects were recorded. Among these dialects a central Midland dialect, that of the Wycliffite texts, Samuels' Type I, emerges as a literary standard, which was copied even in south-western areas (Samuels 1963:85). It does not seem unreasonable to suppose that these Wycliffite texts may be the first appearance in literature of a widespread spoken koiné. Missionaries usually do translate into the vernacular.

London English: written and spoken

The changes between Samuels' Type II (pre-1370), Type III (represented by Chaucer) and Type IV (post-1430, Chancery Standard) introduce more Midland dialect features into the written language. McIntosh's and Samuels' isoglosses for *they* and *though* in early 15th century texts support the interpretation that London writers are beginning to follow Midland written trends. We do not necessarily have to infer, as Samuels (1963:88) does, that the London *spoken* dialect had "changed suddenly and radically in the fourteenth century" as a result of the influx of immigrants from the Midlands described by Ekwall (1956). I do not believe that gradual immigration from one dialect area will necessarily have much effect on an established town dialect. What normally happens is that the children of the immigrants simply adopt the town dialect as their own.

So immigration alone is insufficient to account for the change from Type II to Type III. However, if we take the view that the English speech of London, had, since the time of Knut, been a continuum of regional and social varieties of which the Midland koiné was one, then it is easier to explain the changes in the written language as jerky adjustments to a gradual rise in social status of the spoken Midland variety.

The rise in social status of the Midland variety is easily explained by the feelings of nationalism associated with the erosion of the position of French as the language of administration and literature. Labov's studies of phonological change in New York (1966) and Aushen's in Hillsboro (1973) show how young, socially rising individuals are quick to adopt newly prestigious forms. The adoption of the plosive /g/ in words like *give* and *get*, indicated by orthographic changes between Type III and IV, is parallel to the adoption of post-vocalic /r/ in previously /r/-less varieties of American English. It would be natural for the Midland variety to be regarded as purer English and therefore more correct than the French-influenced southern-Midland hybrid accent of the older upper-class speakers of the capital. The working class would be more likely to preserve its local (Cockney) dialect. Old courtiers like Chaucer would be more resistant than Bolingbroke's new men. It is worth noting that Chaucer's written language seems to be more conservative in poetry than in prose, however.

The influence of Chancery written standard English

The work of John H. Fisher has already thrown much new light on the rise of the Chancery standard written form. Fisher (1977) argues that Chancery Standard was a written form developed by bureaucrats at the end of the 14th century and during the first three decades of the 15th, and that it was not based on the London regional dialect.

They looked to the country at large — indeed to all of Europe — for the recruitment of staff and transaction of their business. Their primary concern in language, whether

Latin, French, or English, must have been to maintain a comprehensible official idiom for communication throughout the kingdom (1977:871-2).

The influence of the Chancery copyists on the development of the standard written language was immense, because the vast bulk of documents concerned with national administration and legal matters passed through Chancery and were copied in the Chancery hand and language. Standardisation took place in handwriting, orthography and morphology. The uniformity was greater in morphology than orthography (884).

The preferred Chancery forms do not necessarily represent spoken pronunciations. This may be seen from the invariable *-d* spelling for the past tense (not Northern *-t*), the preference for *gh* spellings in *high*, *through*, *ig* spellings in French words such as *reign*, *foreign*. Chancery preferred *they*, *them*, *their* over Southern *h*-forms, though *h*-forms continued to appear sporadically. Chancery language differs from that of non-Chancery scribes (e.g. clerks working for the Guilds, or the king's university-educated private secretaries) in its non-regional character.

Chancery English had assumed its mature form by 1430 (881), and the written form spread throughout the country for official and business correspondence by the 1460's. This influence was possible because there was no pre-existing norm of written English. School education continued reading and writing in Latin until well into the 16th century (891). Writing was still confined to a small class of educated men and professionals, and the ordinary person would most likely see written English only in bureaucratic, legal or business documents. (Vernacular devotional writing is an additional category.) Most of the surviving 15th century letter collections are business letters of various kinds (895).

From the point of view of the creolization argument, the most interesting point here is that the Chancery clerks who created the official written English language in the late 14th and early 15th century had been trained on Latin and French. These trilingual clerks continued to copy and compose documents in Latin and French during the formative period of Chancery Standard English. According to Fisher

... the more modern tone and appearance of Chancery English is due not only to its accidence and orthography but also to its style and idiom. This style and idiom are based on the written documents which the trilingual clerks in Chancery continued to copy in Latin and French at the same time that they were creating a corresponding official language in English (1977:885).

Here, surely, lies a major source of French grammatical and word-formation constructions in modern English.

A similar point is made by John Taylor (1956), who considers the role of the Religious Orders in developing English as a written language. Though (131) monasteries tended to resist the advance of English in their libraries, by the

15th century they were compelled to use English in their correspondence with lay families, as can be seen in the *Plumpton Correspondence* and the *Stonor Papers*. Taylor considers that "in the 14th century, correspondence such as this would undoubtedly have been in French".

At the changeover point, then, a clerk who had learnt his business on French and Latin documents would be obliged to express himself instead in written English. In this situation it would seem that translation calques and loanwords would be inevitable, perhaps even favoured, as Latinisms and Gallicisms would be the mark of the educated writer. This attitude would also favour the retention of French and Latin spellings. Interestingly enough, the writer of *Ancrene Wisse* had been faced with the same situation two centuries earlier. His language has 10.7% French loans (Dobson 1976:157).

According to Taylor, devotional works in English by members of the Religious Orders were influential in the 14th and 15th centuries:

"In an age when reading was largely religious in nature, it is probable that many of these writings played an important part in familiarising ordinary men with written English" (1956:130). These writings are often bequeathed in wills of the period. Much of this writing would have been in Samuels' Type I, a standard literary language based on the dialects of the central Midland counties, the same language as was spread by the Lollards in the Wycliffite texts.

Fisher suggests that Chancery English was possibly a combination of "two earlier written standards", Wycliffite plus London writing (1977:885).

Whatever the final verdict here, it seems clear that a lot of compromising went on in the late 14th and early 15th centuries in the forging of the national written standard, and that we are now moving in the realm of linguistic engineering rather than natural creolization.

Another important point made by Taylor is that the replacement of parchment by paper from the 1420's onwards spread the practice of letter writing (and preservation) among laymen, so that it was no longer confined to the very rich and powerful (1956:132). This new class of letter-writing (or dictating) laymen and women used English. Any family with social pretensions or ambitions in the 15th century would surely be careful to employ an amanuensis who wrote the King's English, whatever variety they themselves spoke.

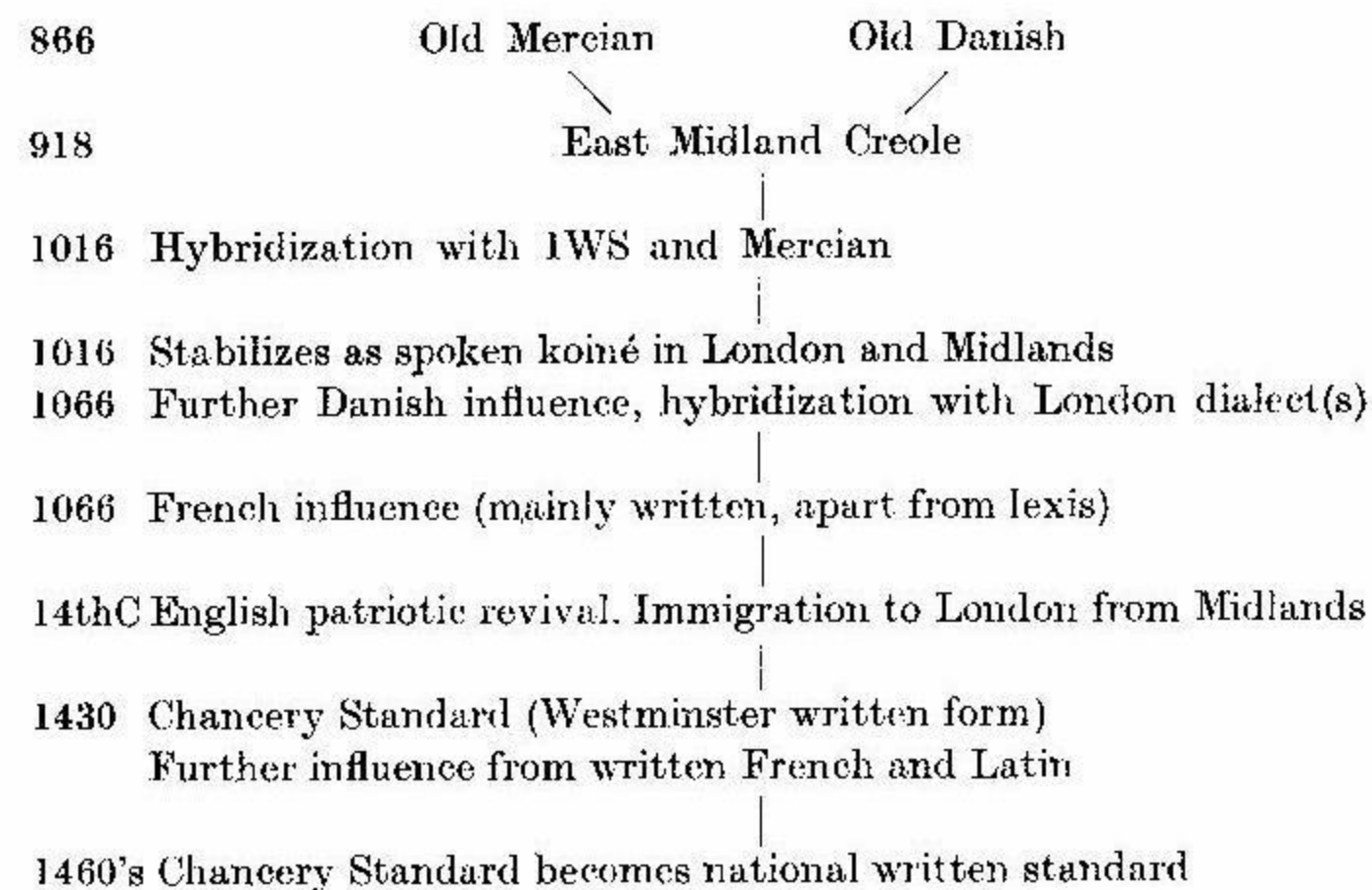
The struggle for the spoken standard

Since correctness in speech is a highly emotional issue, one would expect that the struggle for the London and national spoken standard would have been especially fierce. A few sayings survive in Present English which must have originated as sociolinguistic comments on the advance of the Midland dialect. Examples are "as sure as eggs is eggs" (i.e. not *eyren*), and "I call a spade a spade, and not a bloody shovel". (I have heard this from a working-class Lancashire man, though most people know only the first half.) "Who's *She*,

the cat's mother?"², common in the speech of working-class mothers in the South East (and maybe elsewhere, too), looks like a forlorn relic of the battle for the nominative form of the feminine singular third person pronoun. In all these cases the Danelaw form has finally been accepted.

Conclusion

The development of Chancery English may be summarized in the following, very simplified, diagram:



Though in so long a chain of argument I may have taken some false steps, I have done my best to avoid the pitfalls so many standard textbooks fall into. The first is that of believing the (Norman) conqueror's view of history. The second is to believe that the prevailing literary language or dialect is necessarily the same as the spoken language(s) or dialect(s). The third is to under-use the evidence provided by present-day non-standard varieties of English.

² Compton Mackenzie, *Sinister Street* (1969:21) has a typical example:

Mrs Fane paused for a moment doubtfully; then she waved beautiful slim gloves and glided from the room. Michael listened to delicate footsteps on the stairs, and the tinkle of small ornaments. A bleak silence followed the banging of the front door.

'She's gone away. I know she's gone away,' he moaned.

'Who's She?' demanded Nurse. 'She's the cat's Mother.'

'Mother! Mother!' he wailed. 'She always goes away from Michael.'

I set out to provide a historical explanation for three characteristics which Modern English shares with pidginized and creolized languages: loss of grammatical gender, extreme inflectional simplification, certain types of loanwords. The foregoing is the simplest explanation that I can find to fit the facts.

Summary

It is argued that the fundamental changes which took place between standard literary OE and Chancery Standard English: loss of grammatical gender, extreme simplification of inflexions and borrowing of form-words and common lexical words, may be ascribed to a creolization with Old Scandinavian during the OE period. The Midland creole dialect could have stabilized as a spoken lingua franca in the reign of Knut. Its non-appearance in literature was due initially to the prestige of the OE literary standard. The influence of French to be seen in ME texts is less fundamental: mainly loanwords. Most of the French influence on syntax and word-formation probably came in during the standardization of the English written language, through the habits of scribes who were accustomed to writing standard Latin and French.

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