

Term Paper

Content:

Write an 8-10-page paper (undergraduates 5-6 pages), plus a works cited, dealing with some aspect of Middle English language study. You may choose a) to research a historical or socio-linguistic topic, or b) to investigate a linguistic issue connected with a specific text. Any of the texts in *A Book of Middle English* will do (though you may need to look at the complete text or at least larger selections of some of them), or you may choose a text not represented there (browse through the TEAMS texts online; links is on the class website). You might need to use the *LALME* for some of your inquiries.

Format: Please follow the guidelines outlined in the online *Guide to Style* containing the format guidelines of the *MLA*, plus instructions on writing papers, sample introductory paragraphs with developed theses, frequent errors in critical writing, and a list of tools for the literature student. Failure to provide the correct format will result in lower grades.

Structure: I would like to reiterate that you are writing a **formal** paper, both in content and in style. Thus, your paper needs an introduction providing a context and a precisely phrased thesis at the end of the first paragraph (see especially #2-3 in *Guide to Style*). I encourage you to edit, revise, and proofread your papers, striving for coherence, grammatical correctness, and good transitions. First drafts rarely hold up to critical scrutiny. I am available in office hours or via email to discuss ideas, outlines, and drafts of your paper with you before it is due.

Due Date: Tuesday, December 9, 2008

Suggestions for Paper Topics

Suggestions for a): Some aspect of the linguistic situation in England after the Norman Conquest.

- the tension between the French and English vernaculars.
- the reasons for the reestablishment of English (social, political, etc.)
- the role of Latin in the Middle English period. (This has become particularly interesting in connection with Gower, who not only wrote in three languages but also included Latin verses and marginal commentary in his English verse work *Confessio Amantis*.)
- the influence of French on the vocabulary or morphology of English (e.g., the development of phrasal verbs).
- the Scandinavian influence (e.g. on pronouns).

Diachronic study: the development of a particular aspect of morphology or syntax from EME (Early Middle English) to Late ME.

The issue of translation, especially of religious texts. This had become quite problematic in the fourteenth century (see the Trevisa extract in BT and the Wycliffite Bible). This is a socio-historical topic rather than a linguistic one, but is still possible. Discuss with me first.

Suggestions for b):

1. *The Peterborough Chronicle*. This is a transitional text: in what way is it transitional? Compare selected features with an earlier Old English entry in the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*.

2. *The Owl and the Nightingale*. Burrow & Turville-Petre say this is Southeastern dialect overlaid with Southern; Mossé says Southern, “localization varying between Dorsetshire and Surrey.” Investigate and disentangle some of these elements. Or argue for one or the other. Facsimiles of the two manuscripts exist, which might also help identification.

3. Laȝamon's *Brut*. Another transitional, and hybrid, text. Investigate its debt to OE alliterative verse or its occasional use of rhyme (presumably learned from French).

- Or, again, disentangle the Worcestershire features from the Southern that overlay it.

4. *Ancrene Wisse*. SW Midland dialect. This MS and the Katherine-group "represent an early example of a literary standard." Look at the Katherine group and investigate this standard. Or look at the "significantly high proportion of French words." Or compare with one of the translations into French or Latin.

7. *Piers Plowman*. Investigate through *LALME* why this is identified with SW Worcestershire.

- The poem is peppered with Latin quotations, and could almost be called a macaronic poem. (John Alford's "*Piers Plowman*": *A Guide to the Quotations* came out in 1992.) Study the relationship of Latin to the vernacular in a selected section of the work.

8, 9, 10. poems of the *Pearl* MS. Investigate the linguistic evidence for common authorship. (This has been done, of course; but you may be able to find a new slant on it.) Or compare with no. 11, *St. Erkenwald*, to decide whether the same poet was responsible for this poem. Or investigate the Scandinavian elements that give this dialect its North-West Midland flavor.

12. Trevisa: see the selection in Mossé (on Reserve) rather than BT for a diachronic comparison: compare Trevisa's translation of Higden's *Polychronicon* (early 14C) to Caxton's (15C).

13. Gower's *Confessio Amantis*. "Gower's English reflects in some details his early connections with Kent and Suffolk." Disentangle those details. Or, compare selections with his London contemporary, Chaucer. (This has probably been done to death already.)

- Some new work is being done on the relationship of the vernacular and Latin in Gower's English poetry (see above). There are still interesting aspects to explore.

14. Lyrics. Look at l-r, the Grimestone Lyrics. "Grimestone was a Norfolk man." Investigate this further.

15. The York *Crucifixion*. A great deal to examine in the language here: the Northern dialect, the skilful verse form, the use of alliteration. Focus on this play alone, or compare with another from the York cycle. (Or look at the Wakefield *Second Shepherd's Play*—especially the language of the shepherds, or of Mak the sheep-stealer when he pretends to be a Southerner.)

16, 17, 18: Chaucer. Do a study of the lexicon and/or register (e.g. second-person pronouns) in a selected Tale or Tales. Does Chaucer differentiate character through language?

19. Other possible texts: the *Alliterative Morte Arthure*, the Harley lyrics, *Havelok the Dane*, the *South English Legendary*, the Paston Letters. The *Book of Margery Kempe* and Julian of Norwich's *Showings* would both lend themselves to investigations of syntax; rhetorical analyses have been done, but not syntactical. Some study has already been done comparing the syntax of the Winchester MS of Malory's *Morte Darthur* with Caxton's printing in 1485, but there is still room for more, or for lexical studies.

With some texts whose geographical location is established, you could simply investigate in further detail why that identification has been made.

20. A topic of your choosing, discussed with me first.