

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.34069/AI/2022.58.10.14>

How to Cite:

Oliinyk, I., Petrovsky, M., Ruban, L., Shevchenko, L., & Sviatiuk, Y. (2022). French loan words in modern American fiction. *Amazonia Investiga*, 11(58), 134-139. <https://doi.org/10.34069/AI/2022.58.10.14>

French loan words in modern American fiction

Запозичення з французької у сучасній американській прозі

Received: November 1, 2022

Accepted: November 30, 2022

Written by:

Iryna Oliinyk⁵¹<https://orcid.org/0000-0001-5933-6818>**Mykola Petrovsky**⁵²<https://orcid.org/0000-0003-3267-7123>**Larysa Ruban**⁵³<https://orcid.org/0000-0001-5539-931X>**Liudmyla Shevchenko**⁵⁴<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-4543-3876>**Yulia Sviatiuk**⁵⁵<https://orcid.org/0000-0001-8343-1890>

Abstract

The paper deals with the origins of modern English vocabulary and shows the relevance of the influence of French on its modern state. The article makes a survey of scientific literature studying French heritage in English lexis. An overview of linguistic and historical data is provided to show the framework within which linguistic borrowing from French was made possible. A number of loanwords are mentioned that appeared under different historical circumstances. The article analyses borrowed words that kept their meaning they had in French, as well as those ones which experienced semantic transformation. The paper concentrates on the fact that frequency of English words having French roots is high enough in the novel by J. Grisham and they form a thick layer of common words. The article demonstrates, what kind of impact the change in culture-specific concepts had on the meaning of the words borrowed from French and highlights possible prospects of such kind of studies. The paper emphasizes semantic layers of loan words and shows that finance vocabulary, the vocabulary of law and politics and the vocabulary of health are closely connected with borrowings from French.

Анотація

У статті розглядається походження лексичного складу англійської мови, зокрема її французькі корені, та доводиться, що лексика, запозичена з французької, має великий вплив на стан сучасної англійської мови і широко використовується в англомовній прозі. Наведено огляд лінгвістичних та історичних умов, за яких подібні запозичення відбувалися. Розглянуто ряд запозичень, що з'явилися у різні історичні часи і зберегли своє значення на протязі століть, чи навпаки – зазнали істотних семантичних трансформацій. На прикладі роману Дж. Грішема доведено, що запозичення з французької складають істотну частину загальноживаної лексики, а також вокабуляру, який відноситься до окремих галузей знань. Доведено, що окремі семантичні шари англомовної лексики, що широко вживаються у сучасній американській прозі, зокрема фінансова, юридично-політична лексика та вокабуляр, що відноситься до охорони здоров'я, пов'язані з запозиченнями з французької мови. У статті наголошується, що вивчення лексики французького походження у складі сучасної англійської мови має перспективи як з точки зору діахронії, так і синхронії.

⁵¹ Ph.D. Phil, Taras Shevchenko National University of Kyiv, Ukraine.⁵² Ph.D. Phil, Taras Shevchenko National University of Kyiv, Ukraine.⁵³ Ph.D. Ped, Taras Shevchenko National University of Kyiv, Ukraine.⁵⁴ Ph.D. Phil, Taras Shevchenko National University of Kyiv, Ukraine.⁵⁵ Ph.D. Phil, Taras Shevchenko National University of Kyiv, Ukraine.

Keywords: linguistic borrowing, etymology, semantic transformation, synchrony, diachrony.

Ключові слова: етимологія, лінгвістичні запозичення, семантичні трансформації, діахронія, синхронія.

Introduction

If we take a closer look at the vocabulary of two widely spoken in Europe languages – English and French, even a person that is not an expert in linguistics, will easily find a lot of parallels. Without any problem we can identify a number of similar words and establish their origin: and we are speaking exactly about borrowings from French, which constitute from one fifth to one third from the whole lexical stock according to various estimates. Looking at all this array of words we are likely to ask ourselves a lot of different questions, and the most interesting of them are the following:

Why did such borrowings appear? Do loan words keep the signifier and the signified? What kind of changes can take place, if any? How often are loan words used? Is their frequency higher, than the frequency of their synonyms that have another origin? What parts of borrowed vocabulary were mostly affected by changes? What are the main sources of information about the current situation with borrowings?

We will try to touch upon everyone of these questions and we are going to view loan words through the lens of modern Anglophone fiction. Thus, the object of our study is the detective novel of a modern American writer John Grisham *the Whistler* (Grisham, 2017), the subject of our study represents the vocabulary of French origin which is used in this novel. The purpose of this study is to show whether the elements of French origin have taken root in the American variant of English and to what extent this layer of vocabulary is relevant for modern American prose.

With this in mind, we are going to make a review of literature on this topic, starting from the sources that assess the number of loan words having French origin, through those ones that consider different kinds of changes they have undergone, particular semantic features they have, historic background of loan words appearance etc. After this we are going to describe the way in which our research will be conducted. In the section dedicated to results and discussion we are going to stop at the main characteristics of borrowings from French, that can be found in *The Whistler* and the link that exists between historical milestones on the one hand, and phonetical and semantical evolution of

vocabulary, on the other. After we make sure loan words constitute a significant layer of vocabulary used by modern American prose, we are going to define the major areas of research and their perspectives in this field.

Theoretical Framework

We should highlight the existence of a great deal of studies that consider loan words having French origin in English.

The majority of them concentrate on defining the number of loan words, as for example T. Finkenstaedt and D. Wolff, based on the 80,000 words of the Shorter Oxford Dictionary (3rd edition), presented the following data: Old French and Norman provided English language with 28.3% of words, that constitute the wordstock of modern English (Finkenstaedt & Wolff, 1973). A French linguist H. Walter, for her part, claims that more than two-thirds of English words are of French origin, while the borrowings from French to English barely exceed 4% (Walter, 2012). Sometimes researchers concentrate on the frequency of use of French loanwords in modern English texts that refer to different fields of knowledge (Petрак, 2015) or examine borrowings from a few languages, their functions and semantic features (Muhammed, 2017), data confrontation; the study of French loan words in a few languages can also be of great interest (Tokdemir Demirel, 2013; Phuong, 2021).

The others make accent on the reasons why such borrowings appeared, on the changes borrowings underwent, on their semantic features etc. For instance J.B. Nadeau, P. Durkin and J. Coleman believe it is necessary to examine French loan words from different points of view and, first of all, it allows researchers to follow the evolution of words, starting from phonetic changes and finishing by semantic shifts that took place (Nadeau, 2006; Durkin, 2014; Coleman, 1995). L. Sylvester, M. Tiddeman, R. Ingham and J. Jurcic underline the motives that made appear a number of French loan words, such as an intention to name new objects and notions under changing cultural circumstances and the desire to become part of prestigious French culture, providing access to the highest levels of society (Sylvester, Tiddeman & Ingham, 2020; Jurcic,

2003). Sometimes researchers, such as S. Kemmer, P. Faure, de Jong consider different periods, when borrowings from various languages and especially from French took place and define the most important semantic fields, to which loan words correspond: law and government, church, nobility, military, cooking, culture, luxury goods etc. (Kemmer, 2019), or address exactly those layers of English vocabulary that, as they state, were particularly influenced by French (Faure, 2018; de Jong, 1996).

Methodology

First of all, we are going to look at the historical background that made the appearance of such an impressive layer of French borrowings possible, and on the basis of that information we will try to predict what linguistic phenomena we can encounter in the text of *The Whistler*. Afterwards, with the help of Online etymology dictionary (Harper, 2001), we are going to identify the lexical elements of French origin in the text of the Whistler and break them down into a few categories according to their semantic features, changes they underwent, time of borrowing etc. We will also pay a special attention to quantitative indicators that let us speak about the frequency of use of separate elements of language or particular linguistic phenomena.

Results and Discussion

The first borrowings date back to the time of the landing of Norman king William the Conqueror in England in 1066. At the time, the representatives of his court spoke a sort of French called today Franco-Norman (or Anglo-Norman), such kind of French that contained a number of Nordic words, coming from the Vikings who had conquered northern France a century earlier. After this the new meaning of Norman that originally counted for "man of the North" appeared: from then on, it was an "inhabitant of the Duchy of Normandy" (Bruneau, 1955). Consequently, Franco-Norman became the official language of England. Villagers and the poorest section of town dwellers, however, spoke Anglo-Saxon. Taking into account the fact that clergy, clerks and scholars wrote in Latin, the real state of things looked as follows: three languages were used in England in this period of time: Franco-Norman, Anglo-Saxon and Latin (Bragg, 2011).

On the other hand, the language of the King of France, French was adopted by aristocrats and high level representatives of the Church of

England (Baugh, 1935). Besides, it was largely used in cultural and artistic life and the nobility wanted their children to learn French, either in France itself or in specialized schools. In short, as ordinary people continued to use their Anglo-Saxon, until the 14th century four languages were used in the country. At the same time Anglo-Saxon was adopting elements from Latin, Franco-Norman and French. But it is necessary to mention that being a variety of French, Franco-Norman mixed with French, that is why it makes sense to speak in general about borrowings from French and not from Latin, as we will do later.

It was only during the reign of Henry IV (1399-1413) that the first king of England knew how to speak English as a mother tongue. The vocabulary of Middle English, for its part, had been radically transformed, mainly because of its borrowings from Franco-Norman and especially from the French of Paris. According to some researchers (Stehr, 2007; Rothwell, 2005), English nobility and clergy, who generally knew French and English, introduced French words relating to government, church, army, titles of English nobility and court life in general as well as the arts, the education and medicine. A century after the arrival of William the Conqueror, over 1,000 Norman words had been introduced into Middle English. Subsequently, it was French words, of the order of several thousand words (about 10,000). In reality, English and Franco-Norman merged to such an extent that they formed a lexical set characterized by great flexibility and a great abundance of terms. However, it is not always easy to distinguish in today's English elements coming from Franco-Norman and coming from French (Trotter, 2003).

Let us go deeper into the examples of French borrowings in *The Whistler*. First of all, we tried to determine the quantity of vocables of French origin in all in the novel. We have counted all the cases of their use, even those which indicate the multiple appearance of the same word. So we got a pretty impressive number – 5780 examples, where a word of French origin is used. These are mostly verbs, nouns and also adjectives. Our next step was to identify the most frequent terms, which were used more than 100 times. Let us consider them in details. It should be noted that in this article they are placed in the order in which we have encountered them in the text. These are 30 words, such as first of all *access*, *vehicle*, *employee*, *collection*, *rear*, *suit*, *size*, *delay*, *stuff*, *impression*, *authority*, *doubt*, *drug*, *store*, *purchase*, *average*, *depend*, *enjoy*. We can also

give examples of very common English vocables that are of French origin, which frequency is also very high in the Whistler – more than 50 uses of the same word in the text – *accept, arrive, to close, involve, serious, sure, prove, view, apartment, to move, question, describe, concern, touch, possible, continue, cover, require, divorce, marriage, reason, cancel, decide, sign, air, change, conversation, to assess, reply, to increase* etc.

If we try to break down the most commonly found French loan words that can be found in the *Whistler* into semantic groups according the area of knowledge where they are used, we will notice three large categories, to which some of them can refer. These are terms related to finance – *cost, transaction, luxury, to count, an account, wallet, purse, wallet, purse, salary, expense, amount, receipt, coin, assets, check*, those ones related to law and politics - *crime, plot, suspect, evidence, judge, prison, arrest, officer, suspicion, interrogate, charge, jail, confine, indictment, refuge, damage, conspiracy, complaint, court, declare* and at last the vocabulary concerning *health and medicine* – hospital, drug, disease, infection, aid, pill, treatment, fatigue.

Our next step is to take a closer look at the correlation between signifier and signified. According to the data from Online etymology dictionary (Harper, 2001), we can see a number of terms that were adopted by English without any changes in the signified. These are for example *question* (the first mention refers to XIVc.) from Old French *question* 'question, problem', *matter* (XIIIc.) from Old French *matere* 'subject, theme', *aid* (XVc.) from Old French *aide* 'aid, help', *expert* (XIVc.) from Old French *expert, espert* 'experienced, skilled', *opinion* (XIVc.) from Old French *opinion* 'view, judgement', *story* (XIIIc.) from Old French *estorie* 'story, history', *to push* (XIVc.) from Old French *poulsier* 'push', *testimony* (XVc.) from Old North French *testimonie* 'evidence, proof', *money* (XIIIc.) from Old French *manoeie* 'money, coin', *to marry* (XIVc.) from Old French *marier* 'to get married', *to return* (XIV c.) from Old French *retorner* 'turn back, return', *indictment* (XIVc.) from Old French *enditement* 'accusation', *margin* (XIVc.) from Old French *margin* 'edge, border', *authority* (XIIIc.) from Old French *autorite* 'right, permission', *to enjoy* (XIVc.) from Old French *en+joir* 'to give joy', *afraid* (XIV c.) from Old French *affrai, effrei, esfrei* meaning "disturbance, fright", *bargain* (XIV) from Old French *bargaine* 'business, trade', *choice* (XIVc.) from Old French *chois* 'one's choice', *mayor* (XIII c.) from Old

French *maire* 'head of a city or town government', *cause* (XIII c.) from Old French *cause* 'cause, reason; lawsuit, case in law', *cost* (XIII c.) from Old French *cost* 'cost, outlay, expenditure', *transaction* (XV c.) from Old French *transaccion* 'exchange, transaction', *peer* (XIVc.) Old French *per* 'equal', *city* (XIIIc.) from Old French *cite* 'town, city', *residence* (XIc.) from Old French *residence* 'residing', *government* (XIVc.) from Old French *gouvernement* 'control, direction' etc.

The others kept their signified with minor changes, such as the adjective *patient* (XIVc.) from Old French *pacient* 'bearing, suffering', *sure* (XIIIc.) from Old French *seur, sur* 'safe, secure', *inquiry* (XIVc.) from Old French *enquerre* 'ask', *familiar* (XIVc.) from Old French *famelier* 'related, friendly', *declare* (XIVc.) from Old French *declarer* 'explain, elucidate', *to grant* (XIIIc.) from Old French *granter* 'assure, promise, guarantee', *favor* (XIVc.) from Old French *favor* 'approval', *modest* (XVIc.) from French *modeste* 'moderate, gentle', *disease* (XIVc.) from Old French *desaise* 'lack, trouble', *to rehearse* (XIVc.) from Old French *rehercier* 'to repeat', *jail* (XIVc.) from Old French *jaiole* 'a cage' etc.

And at last, in much smaller number of cases we have observed significant shifts in meanings: *drug* (XIVc.) from Old French *droge* 'supply, stock', *humor* (XIVc.) from Old French *humour* 'liquid, dampness', *to sign* (XIIIc.) from Old French *signier* 'to make a sign to someone' (in these two cases we can state the expansion of the meaning of words, taking into account that the original meanings of 'liquid' and 'making a sign' also remain), *hospital* (XIIIc.) from Old French *hospital, ospital* 'hostel, shelter', *to surprise* (XIVc.) from Old French *sorprendere* 'overtake, invade', *to suit* (XIV c.) from Old French *suite, sieute* 'the action to follow someone', *size* (XIV s.) from Old French *sise* 'sitting' (past participle from *asseoir* – to sit down), *delay* (XIV s.) from Middle French *delai* 'down+leave', *stuff* (XIVc.) from Old French *estoffe* 'furniture, material', *impression* (XIVc.) from Middle French *impression* 'mark, stamp', *doubt* (XIIIc.) from Old French *doter* 'be afraid of', *store* (XIVc.) from Old French *estore* 'fleet, army', *purchase* (XIV s.) from Middle French *porchacier* 'look for, crave for', *average* (XV s.) from French *avarie* 'damage to ship', *to depend* (XVc.) from Middle French *dependre* 'to hang', *asset* (XVIc.) from Old French *assez* 'enough', a *check* (XIVc.) from Old French *eschec* 'the game of chess', *to arrest* (XIVc.) from Old French *arester* 'to stop', *to confine* (to imprison) (XVIc.)

from Old French *confiner* ‘to border’, *slot* (XIVc.) from Old French *esclot* ‘a print of horse’s hoof’, *mess* (XIVc.) from Old French *mes* ‘a dish in a meal’, *file* (XVIc.) from French *file* ‘line’, a *glance* (XVc.) from Old French *glacier* ‘to escape’, to *suppose* (XIVc.) from Old French *poser* ‘to put’, *engine* (XIVc.) from Old French *engine* ‘skill’ etc.

When it comes to the signifier, we can argue that in the majority of cases borrowed words kept it intact, as in such words, as *air*, *issue*, *favor*, *fatigue*, *face*. We can ascertain only slight modifications in *jacket* from *jacquet*, *collar* from *coler*, *vehicle* from *vehicule*, *employee* from *employe*, *voice* from *voiz*, *garden* from *jardin* etc.

If we try to look at those ones which signifier underwent changes, we will understand that they are really few, such as *rear* (XVIIc.) from Middle French *rieregarde* ‘a part of military troops, moving at the end’, to *spoil* (XIVc.) from Old French *espillier* ‘to cut into pieces’, *several* (XVc.) from Old French *seperalis* ‘distinct’, to *vanish* (XIVc.) from old French *esvanir* ‘disappear’ etc.

We can also highlight the appearance of multiple synonyms in the text of the novel, based on loan words from French on the one hand, and those ones that have purely Germanic origin, such as *aid* (French origin)/*help* (Germanic origin), *testimony*, *evidence* (French origin)/*witness* (Germanic origin), *fatigue* (French origin)/*tiredness* (Germanic origin), to *cease* (French origin)/to *stop* (Germanic origin), to *return* (French origin)/to *come back* (Germanic origin), *tax* (French origin)/*fee* (Germanic origin), *chief* (French origin)/*leader* (Germanic origin), *entire* (French origin)/*whole* (Germanic origin), *vessel* (French origin)/*ship* (Germanic origin), *opinion* (French origin)/*mind* (Germanic origin), *battle* (French origin)/*fight* (Germanic origin), *attorney* (French origin)/*lawyer* (Germanic origin). In a number of cases we can state the use of two or more synonyms, having French roots: *question/inquiry*, *problem/issue*, *vanish/disappear*, *trip/journey*, *lucrative/profitable*, *benefit/profit*, *occur/appear*, *counsel/attorney*. And at last a few examples of etymological doublets, i.e. words having the same French origin, but different signifiers and signified in Modern English, can be found in *the Whistler*: *report/rapport*, *hotel/hospital*, *imply/employ*, *legal/loyal*, *story/history* etc.

Looking at the data we found in Online etymology dictionary (Harper, 2001), we can

state that the most part of borrowings dates back to the period of Middle English, when aristocrats spoke French, but English with newly emerged French borrowings was recognized official language of the court, and all the official documents were written in it since then.

Conclusions

In conclusion, we note that in general we have identified more than 100 words of French origin which have been used in the text more than 50 times, among them – 30% are those which have undergone semantic shifts, but only 10% are made by those ones, where changes are really major, and 20% kept their signified with only slight changes. As we can see, in the vast majority of loan words the signified remained the same, as it was originally in French.

As for the signifier, the most part of vocables kept it without any changes, and only in 5% of loan words significant changes can be found.

Owing to the fact that *The Whistler* is a detective novel, it has a whole layer of lexicon that is related to law and politics. Such terms are, in most cases, of French origin. We have also identified the existence of two more vocabulary layers that can be mostly attributed to borrowings from French, these are finance and health. Besides, a large amount of common words we met in *The Whistler* are also of French origin. The study of synonyms having Germanic and French provenance enables us to say that Germanic ones mainly refer to neutral and colloquial vocabulary, and French ones – to neutral and scientific one. If we take a closer look at the synonyms that have purely French origin, we can state the existence of specialization of the meaning of words reflecting the same notions.

All of this gives us reason to suppose that the frequency of use of old French vocables in modern American fiction is quite high, and words of French origin are very common and even abundant in modern English. With this we see that the great part of the words in question passed into English at the time of Old and Middle French, rarely – at the time of Classical French.

Thus, we see that over time the vocabulary of French origin has survived in the English language and has existed in many cases without semantic changes. On the other hand, changes in everyday life, technological and scientific progress have conveyed some semantic shifts, which can be interesting in the long term. We also want to highlight the roots of polysemy of

terms of French origin and highlight the particularities of etymological doublets. All this constitutes the perspectives of research in the field of the lexicon of French origin in modern English prose.

Bibliographic references

- Baugh, A.C. (1935). The chronology of French loan-words in English, *Modern Language Notes*, 90-93. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2911956>
- Bragg, M. (2011) *The adventure of English: the biography of a language*. NY: Arcade Publishing.
- Bruneau, C. (1955) *A brief history of the French language*. Paris: French & European pubns. [In French]
- Coleman, J. (1995) The chronology of French and Latin Loan words in English. *Philological society*, 93(2), 95-124. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-968X.1995.tb00437.x>
- Durkin, P. (2014) *A history of loanwords in English*. Oxford: OUP Oxford.
- Faure, P. (2018) From accouchement to agony: a lexicological analysis of words of French origin in the modern English language of medicine. *Lexis*, 11. <https://doi.org/10.4000/lexis.1171>
- Finkenstaedt, T., & Wolff, D. (1973) *Ordered Profusion*. London: Heidelberg.
- Grisham, J. (2017) *The Whistler*. New York: Dell books.
- Harper, D.R. (2001) *Online etymology dictionary*. Etymonline. <https://www.etymonline.com/>
- de Jong, T. (1996) Anglo-French in the 13th and 14th centuries. The origins and development of emigrant languages, 17, 55-70. <https://doi.org/10.1075/nss.17.06jon>
- Jurcic, D. (2003) The influence of French on English in the early modern period. Terttu Nevalainen. <https://cperc.artsci.utoronto.ca/courses/6362Jurcic1.htm>
- Kemmer S. (2019) Loanwords. Major periods of borrowing in the history of English. Words in English public website. <https://www.ruf.rice.edu/~kemmer/Words/loanwords.html>
- Muhammed, S.J. (2017). French and German loanwords in English language during one decade. 8th International Visible Conference on Educational Studies & Applied Linguistics, 404-412. <https://conferences.tiu.edu.iq//vesal/wp-content/uploads/2018/01/30.pdf>
- Nadeau, J.B. (2006) If my language was counted to me. *News [L'Actualite]*. <https://lactualite.com/monde/si-ma-langue-metaite-contee/>
- Petrak, M. (2015) *French Loan-Words in English*. University of West Bohemia in Pilsen. <https://dspace5.zcu.cz/bitstream/11025/22842/1/Petrak%20Martin%20-%20French%20Loan-Words%20in%20English.pdf>
- Phuong, V.T. (2021). Comparing French borrowed words in English and those in Vietnamese. *Proceedings of the 18th International Conference of the Asia Association of Computer-Assisted Language Learning (AsiaCALL-2-2021)*. Atlantis Press, 325-337. <https://doi.org/10.2991/assehr.k.211224.031>
- Rothwell, W. (2005) "Sugar and spice and all things nice: From Oriental Bazar to English Cloister in Anglo-French" *Modern Language Review*, 100, 38-50.
- Stehr, C. (2007) *The influence on English in the early modern period*. Munich: GRIN Verlag
- Sylvester, L., Tiddeman, M., & Ingham, R. (2020) *An Analysis of French Borrowings at the Hypernymic and Hyponymic Levels of Middle English*. *Lexis*, 16. <https://doi.org/10.4000/lexis.4841>
- Tokdemir Demirel, E. (2013) A corpus analysis of western origin loanwords in Turkish media language: familiarity and preferences of readers. *Inonu University International Journal of Social Science Humanities*, 2(1). https://www.researchgate.net/publication/275348659_A_Corpus_Analysis_of_Western-Origin_Loanwords_in_Turkish_Media_Language_familiarity_and_Preferences_of_Readers
- Trotter, D. (2003) Anglo-Norman: island variety, or isolated variety? *Medieval*, 45, 43-54. <https://journals.openedition.org/medievaes/760>
- Walter, H. (2012) *Adventures and misadventures of the languages of France*. Paris: Honoré champion. [In French]