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(Socio)linguistic Realities of Cross-Channel Communication in the Thirteenth Century

David Trotter

The purpose of this article is to investigate how communication across the English Channel functioned during (at least mainly) the thirteenth century. I shall inevitably go a little beyond this chronological limit, since there is often better evidence from later on. Within this fairly broad field of investigation, I will be concerned principally with communication and contact between England and France. Part of the reason for this is simply linguistic: once other countries, whether the Low Countries or Spain, Portugal, Gascony, or Italy, are involved, then clearly different languages come into play. A second reason for restricting myself to England and France is that it fits more readily into the focus of this collection; and finally, it corresponds to the area in which I have some competence.

Those familiar with standard treatments of the history of the French language in England will have encountered the conventional outline of how things developed. This broad picture goes back to late nineteenth-century French philology, and to the origins of the study of Anglo-Norman at or shortly after the beginning of the twentieth century. The emerging disciplines of French medieval studies and of French historical linguistics were deeply imbued, from the outset, with a nationalist agenda within which, amongst other things, it was considered imperative to stress the continuity and purity of standard French. Anglo-Norman, as a visibly aberrant and indeed manifestly non-French variety in terms of geography, was, or would have been, problematic, had it not been marginalized and treated (to quote Gaston Paris) as simply 'une manière imparfaite de parler français'.¹

Within the history of Anglo-Norman, the traditional approach was always (and until remarkably recently) to subdivide the history of the variety into two main phases: from the Conquest (1066) to 1204 (the loss of Normandy) was phase one. Phase two after the loss of Normandy (or its recapture from a French perspective) is typically characterized as a period of decline, degeneracy, barbarousness, wholesale contamination by and of English, and so forth.² This perspective owes more than a little to the parallel development within English philology of English nationalism, and is influenced by the narrative of the emergence of the heroic English language from under the tyrannical Norman yoke. It also reflects, in many ways, considerable ignorance by the so-called specialists of later Anglo-Norman documents, together with tangible distaste not only for the forms of the language, but for the types of document within which it was predominantly to be found. These are overwhelmingly not strictly literary, and thus, it seems, did not appeal to the founding fathers

¹ G. Paris and A. Bos, eds, *La Vie de Saint Gilles par Guillaume de Berneville* (Paris, 1881), p. xxxv.

² The history of this type of comment is reviewed in D.A. Trotter, 'Mossenhor, fet metre aquesta letra en bon francés: Anglo-French in Gascony', in *De mot en mot: Essays in honour of William Rothwell*, ed. S. Gregory and D.A. Trotter (Cardiff, 1997), 199–222 (at 199–200).

(and especially mothers) of the discipline of Anglo-Norman studies, brought up as they were on an overwhelmingly literary perception of language and culture. But the important point for my purposes is that the so-called decline of later Anglo-Norman is linked to the loss of Normandy in 1204.

Nowadays, this view of the history of Anglo-Norman looks increasingly out of date and inaccurate.³ That does not stop it continuing to exert considerable influence within histories of English and of English literature, a fact which is all the more surprising when we recall that the most important figure in the history of English medieval literature, Geoffrey Chaucer, was clearly fully conversant with French, and travelled extensively on the continent, often on royal business.⁴ It goes without saying, too, that such a perception of Anglo-Norman, cut off from the continent, or more accurately, if in still more insular manner, presented as found on an island from which the continent was cut off,⁵ is at variance with extensive historical records of all sorts, right the way through the Middle Ages and beyond. There simply was not a separation of England and France after 1204 and other contributions to this volume make that point extensively. Contact and communication across the Channel was extensive, constant, and probably increased throughout the period I am concerned with. Moreover, this involved people from very different walks of life, and was by no means the preserve of the aristocracy or of an educated elite. It took the form of diplomacy, war, trade, education, science and theology, continuing dynastic interests and connections. It is extensively recorded in treaties, private letters, diplomatic documents, military records, chronicles; in the continuing transfer from France to England of literary texts copied into insular manuscripts; and in the constant traffic of scholars and clerics to and from Paris and the various centres of learning of northern France. Trade in wine, woad, cloth, wool, tin, lead,

³ There is an abundance of evidence now available which supports the argument that linguistic contact across the Channel was real and persistent: Gilles Roques, 'Des interférences picardes dans l'*Anglo-Norman Dictionary*', in *'De mot en mot'*, ed. Gregory and Trotter, 191–8; and 'Les régionalismes dans quelques textes anglo-normands', in *Actes du XXIVe Congrès International de Linguistique et de Philologie Romanes, Aberystwyth 2004*, ed. D.A. Trotter (Tübingen, 2007), iv, 279–92; William Rothwell, 'Arrivals and Departures: The Adoption of French Terminology into Middle English', *English Studies* 79 (1998), 144–65; 'Sugar and Spice and All Things Nice: From Oriental Bazar to English Cloister in Anglo-French', *Modern Language Review* 94 (1999), 647–59; D.A. Trotter, 'L'anglo-normand: variété insulaire, ou variété isolée?', *Médiévaux* 45 (2003), 43–54; 'Not as Eccentric as it Looks: Anglo-French and French French', *Forum for Modern Language Studies* 39 (2003), 427–38; 'Language Contact, Multilingualism, and the Evidence Problem', in *The Beginnings of Standardization: Language and Culture in Fourteenth-Century England*, ed. U. Schaefer (Frankfurt, 2006), 73–90; 'Oceanic Vox: You Never Know Where a Ship Comes From. On Multilingualism and Language-Mixing in Medieval Britain', in *Aspects of Multilingualism in European Language History*, ed. Kurt Braunmüller and Gisella Ferraresi (Amsterdam/Philadelphia, 2003), 15–33; 'Pur meuz acorder en parlance E descorder en variance: convergence et divergence dans l'évolution de l'anglo-normand', in *Sprachwandel und (Dis-)Kontinuität in der Romania*, ed. Sabine Heinemann and Paul Videsott (Tübingen, 2008), 87–95; Richard Ingham, 'Syntactic Change in Anglo-Norman and Continental French Chronicles: Was there a 'Middle' Anglo-Norman?', *Journal of French Language Studies* 16 (2006), 26–49; 'The Status of French in Medieval England: Evidence from the Use of Object Pronoun Syntax', *Vox Romanica* 65 (2006), 1–22; 'Mixing Languages on the Manor', *Medium Aevum* 78 (2009), 80–97; 'The Grammar of Later Medieval French: An Initial Exploration of the Anglo-Norman Dictionary Textbase', *Corpus 7* (novembre 2008): *Constitution et exploitation des corpus d'ancien et de moyen français*, <http://corpus.revues.org/index1506.html>

⁴ M.M. Crow and C.C. Olson, *Chaucer Life-Records* (Oxford, 1966).

⁵ Frankwalt Möhren, 'Unité et diversité du champ sémasiologique – l'exemple de l'*Anglo-Norman Dictionary*', in *'De mot en mot'*, ed. Gregory and Trotter, 127–46; also Thera De Jong, 'L'anglo-normand des 13e et 14e siècles: un dialecte continental ou insulaire?', in *The Origins and Development of Emigrant Languages*, ed. H.-F. Nielsen and L. Schøsler (Odense, 1996), 55–70.

and more exotic materials all entailed cross-channel traffic and hence communication.⁶ None of this is remotely compatible with the thesis that Anglo-Norman was cut off from its continental roots, or that England itself was isolated.

Within the confines of this study, it will not, of course, be possible to consider all of this. I shall concentrate on two aspects: **diplomacy**, above all, and to a much lesser degree, **trade**. Diplomacy was alive and well in England and France throughout the thirteenth century, even if, in the fullness of time, politics was to give way to warfare. Diplomatic materials are readily available, and (because language is so important in diplomacy) particularly instructive. Trade documentation, on the other hand, is not as extensive as we might wish it to be for the thirteenth century: customs systems at a national level did not emerge until the 1270s,⁷ and some of the more important trading partnerships (conspicuously, with Italian firms) date from that period too. In some respects the thirteenth century is probably not typical of the Middle Ages as a whole: there is more trade in this period with Picardy and Flanders, less than there was to be later with southern Europe and especially Italy. Documents are relatively scarce, probably simply because there was less documentation overall before 1300, and possibly also because its chances of having survived are that much smaller than is the case for material from later periods.

What, then, were (both technically and theoretically) the linguistic possibilities for cross-Channel communication? Obviously, several individual languages are candidates: Latin, as the overarching language of correspondence, ecclesiastical and state business, and scholarship, throughout Western Europe; French, as the second most international language of the time; some (as yet undocumented, and indeed unattested) form of trading *lingua franca*,⁸ a type of 'semicomcommunication' which has been identified in Scandinavia (medieval and modern), whereby the close proximity of genetically-related but distinct languages makes possible communication using more than one language, 'the use of the respective mother tongue together with the willingness to accept and understand the neighbouring standard languages'.⁹ A final possibility, and one which other types of documentary record make more plausible than might immediately appear to be the case, is some form of mixed-language

⁶ See, for discussion of cross-Channel trade, for example: C.M. Barron, *London in the Later Middle Ages: Government and People 1200-1500* (Oxford, 2004), 84-117; M. Bateson, 'A London Municipal Collection of the Reign of John', *EHR* 17 (1902), 480-511; E. Carus-Wilson, 'La guilde française en Angleterre: un grand commerce du Moyen Âge', *Revue du Nord* 35 (1953), 91-105; 'The Medieval Trade of the Ports of the Wash', *Medieval Archaeology* 6-7 (1962), 182-201; *The Overseas Trade of Bristol in the Later Middle Ages* (Bristol, 1937); P. Chorley, 'English Cloth Exports during the Thirteenth and Early Fourteenth Centuries: The Continental Evidence', *Historical Research* 61 (1988), 1-10; 'The Cloth Exports of Flanders and Northern France during the Thirteenth Century: A Luxury Trade?', *ECHR* new ser. 40 (1987), 349-79; E.B. Fryde, 'Italian Maritime Trade with Medieval England (c.1270-c.1530)', *Les Grandes Escales: Recueil de la Société Jean Bodin* 32 (1974), 291-337; 'The English Cloth Industry and the Trade with the Mediterranean c.1370-c.1480', in *Produzione, commercio et consumo dei panni di lana. Atti della 'Seconda settimana di studio' (10-16 aprile 1970)*, Istituto Internazionale di Storia Economica 'F. Datini' Prato (Florence, 1976), 343-366; *Peasants and Landlords in Later Medieval England* (Stroud, 1996).

⁷ N.S.B. Gras, *The Early English Customs System* (Cambridge, MA, 1918).

⁸ By this I mean a *lingua franca* in the sense in which historical linguists (e.g. J.E. Wansbrough, *Lingua Franca in the Mediterranean* (Richmond, 1996)) use the word, i.e. typically a hybrid/creole/pidgin of some sort, based on but not synonymous with extant and identifiable language(s).

⁹ See K. Braunmüller, 'Semicommunication and Accommodation: Observations from the Linguistic Situation in Scandinavia', *International Journal of Applied Linguistics* 12 (2002), 1-23.

communication of a type widespread in administrative and business use, and not unique to England.¹⁰

In considering the language choices open to medieval traders and diplomats, we need to bear in mind certain realities concerning both our knowledge of the situation and the limits of the evidence available. In the first place, however much we might wish it to be otherwise, we simply do not have direct, unmediated access to the spoken language or languages. As has been pointed out,¹¹ multilingualism was

a necessary precondition for mastering the various tasks in everyday life [...] there is little evidence to be found in (written) sources which stresses the fact that a certain person was multilingual or that the command of a *lingua franca* like Latin or any other language for a specific purpose, was mandatory for a certain job. A lack of such linguistic skills would, by contrast, have been worth mentioning.

The Middle Ages were not encumbered by modern ideologies of nation-state and national language and we may assume that the boundaries between languages were more fluid (and porous) than they are now. This may explain why so little is said in medieval sources about linguistic problems. This absence of comment persists in situations far more complex (and for which Westerners were far less prepared) such as, for example, journeys to the Far East. Amongst accounts either of missionaries or of merchants, almost nothing is ever said regarding the linguistic difficulties which they must have encountered and which must have been very real. Thus, perhaps, it is hardly surprising, when dealing with the relatively straightforward situation of cross-Channel communication, that this should not be uppermost in the minds of those involved. The linguistic hierarchy of medieval Europe placed Latin firmly at the top, but Latin was not necessarily a language which was accessible to all those concerned in (for example) trade. The next language down, as it were, would have been French, 'douce francés, qu'est la plus beale et la plus gracios langage et la plus noble parlere après latyn de scole que soit en monde et de toutz gentz melx preysé et amee que nulle autre' (sweet French, the most beautiful and the most graceful language and after the Latin of the schools, the most noble form of speech in the world, and more prized and loved by all people than any other), as the *Manière de langage* of 1396 calls it.¹² I shall return below to some of the potential problems of different forms of French, and of the intercomprehensibility of different French dialects. Here, again, we have to be careful to remember that all our evidence is written, and that the bulk of the communication must have been spoken. English, I think, may probably be excluded as a possible language of communication between England and France, although the possibility remains that some form of Low German *lingua franca* was in the use between England and (say) the Netherlands. It has been convincingly argued that French operated as the normal maritime language in the Channel, with the proviso that in both London and Southampton, there must have been a considerable amount of activity (even more as the

¹⁰ See e.g. G. Lüdi, 'Mehrsprachige Rede in Freiburger Ratsmanualen des 15. Jahrhunderts', *Vox Romanica* 44 (1985), 163–88; D. A. Trotter, 'Oceano vox'; D. Vitali, 'Interférences entre le latin et la langue vernaculaire dans les chartes latines de Suisse occidentale', in *The Dawn of the Written Vernacular in Western Europe*, ed. M. Goyens and W. Verbeke (Leuven, 2003), 127–45; L. Wright, 'Code-Intermediate Phenomena in Medieval Mixed-Language Business Texts', *Language Sciences* 24 (2002), 471–89; 'The Records of Hanseatic Merchants: Ignorant, Sleepy, or Degenerate?', *Multilingua* 16 (1997), 337–49.

¹¹ Braunmüller and Ferraresi, *Aspects of Multilingualism*, 3.

¹² A. Kristol, ed., *Manières de langage (1396, 1399, 1415)* (London, 1995), 3.

fourteenth century advanced) in Italian, perhaps more precisely Genoese.¹³ But that lies chronologically outside the scope of this study. Finally, it is hard to imagine that given the distance between English and French, any form of semicommunication on the Scandinavian model would have been a workable solution. Mixed language documents are a possibility (and customs accounts, port books, and other texts show considerable evidence of language mixing, particularly at the level of individual words), but it seems unlikely that this would have been a viable means of spoken communication (although we can probably assume that there was a fair amount of code-switching).

We are, then, almost certainly left with communication in French. This at once reinforces, and is supported by, the argument that Anglo-Norman, as a form of French, remained perfectly comprehensible in France, just as continental French (although perhaps by the thirteenth century recognizably different) would have been comprehensible in England. Hence the statement at the beginning of the (early fifteenth-century) All Souls 182 version of Donatus: 'les bones gens du roiaume d'Engleterre sont enbrasez a sçavoir lire et escrire, entendre et parler droit François, a fin qu'ils puissent entrecmuner bonement ové leur voisins, c'est a dire les bones gens du roiaume de France' (the good people of the kingdom of England are aflame with the urge to know how to read, write, understand and speak correct French, so that they can communicate well with their neighbours, that is to say the good people of the kingdom of France). The author, John Barton, calls himself 'escolier de Paris, nee et nourie toutez voies d'Engleterre en la conté de Cestre' (scholar of Paris, born and brought up however in England in the county of Chester) and explains that he is anxious to teach Englishmen 'la droit language du Paris et de pais la d'entour, la quelle language en Engleterre on appelle "doulce France" [i.e., Francé?]' (the correct language of Paris and the surrounding region, which language is in England called "sweet French" [if my emendation is correct; or possibly: (of) sweet France?]).¹⁴ Despite this, his text, or manuscript, is clearly written in resolutely Anglo-Norman graphies. This is not without significance, precisely, I would suggest, because the differences would have been differences of pronunciation and accent, and experience confirms that very substantial differences of pronunciation can be accommodated by the majority of speakers. It is only when vocabulary diverges strikingly in either form or meaning that significant communication problems tend to arise. Finally, to quote Braunnüller and Ferraresi¹⁵ again:

Mastering two or more languages, however, does not mean that the persons in question were 'perfect' bilinguals who could manage all situations in their lives in any of the languages they knew. Receptive bilingualism, functionally restricted multilingualism or the command of a foreign linguistic variety as a *lingua franca* were absolutely normal. Nobody would ever have expected to know other languages 'perfectly' (whatever that may mean in detail). [...] The command of an academic language [i.e., the 'high' language, Latin] was a natural part of everyday life and guaranteed that one could master the various domains

¹³ Rothwell, 'Sugar and Spice and All Things Nice'; M. Kowaleski, 'The French of England: A Maritime *lingua franca*?' in *Language and Culture in Medieval Britain: The French of England c.1100-c.1500*, ed. J. Wogan-Browne et al. (York, 2009), 103-17.

¹⁴ T. Sädler, *Zu den Anfängen der französischen Grammatiksprache. Textausgaben und Wortschatzstudien* (Tübingen, 1988).

¹⁵ Braunnüller and Ferraresi, *Aspects of Multilingualism*, 3.

of work, trade and religion without greater problems. The main point was to achieve effective communication e.g. at the workplace and not a 'perfect' multilingualism in every respect.

We are, in short, in the world of practical reality, not academic perfectionism. This was about communication, not grammatical elegance. One of those practicalities was of course quite simply what the legal status of the English Channel itself was.¹⁶ To this question there were, it seems, several answers in the era prior to the establishment of the English Court of Admiralty in the mid-fourteenth century. Three admittedly fourteenth-century documents gathered together by Chaplais in his invaluable *English Medieval Diplomatic Practice*¹⁷ present no fewer than three versions. The first, a petition presented by the proctors of the kings of England and of the prelates to the English and also French commissioners at Montreuil-sur-Mer in 1306, asserts that the 'English sea' comes under the exclusive jurisdiction of English kings:

Come les roys d'Engleterre par raison du dit roialme, du temps q'il n'y ad memoire du contraire, avoient esté en paisible possession de la souveraigne seigneurie de la meer d'Engleterre et des isles esteans en ycele ... (I.i, no. 206)

(as the kings of England on account of the said kingdom, as there is no contrary view since time immemorial, should have been in peaceful possession of the sovereign lordship of the English Sea and of the islands lying therein ...)

An alternative view is expressed twenty-five years later by the people of Guernsey and Jersey in a petition enrolled in the *Coram Rege* rolls:

pur ce q'ils [sc. the people of Guernsey and Jersey] sont enclos de la grant mer en la marche de toutes nacions (I.i, no. 207)

(because they [sc. the people of Guernsey and Jersey] are surrounded by the great sea [ocean?] in the march of all nations)

Chaplais compares this in a note (*ibid.*) to the view (dating back to Justinian) that seas are common ('naturali iure communia sunt illa: aer, aqua profuens, et mare, et per hoc litora maris') (by natural law these are held in common: the air, flowing waters, and the sea, and because of the sea, the shores of the sea); but this is not the only possible reading of 'enclos de la grant mer en la marche de toutes nacions'. Thirty years later, in a 1359 case brought before the admiral in London, it is asserted that the sea (in the event, the Channel off Winchelsea) is a *marche*: 'la meer, q'est marche entre les deux roialmes [sc. of England and France]' ('the sea, which forms the march between the two kingdoms [sc. of England and France]') (I.i, no. 208). *Marche* is not unambiguous in Anglo-Norman or for that matter in any Romance language (FEW 16,522b–524a).¹⁸ John of Garland uses it to gloss *meta* ('boundary')

¹⁶ See also R. Ward, *The World of the Medieval Shipmaster: Law, Business and the Sea, c.1350–1450* (Woodbridge, 2009) (although dealing with a slightly later period).

¹⁷ P. Chaplais, *English Medieval Diplomatic Practice: Part I, Plates; Part II, Documents and Interpretation* (London, 1975, 1982).

¹⁸ During the course of this article, the following dictionaries are referred to by their conventional abbreviated titles: AND = *Anglo-Norman Dictionary*, ed. W. Rothwell et al. (London, 1977–92), and now (together with a second edition A–L) online at www.anglo-norman.net; FEW = *Französisches Etymologisches Wörterbuch*, ed. W. von Wartburg (Bonn/Leipzig/Basel, 1922–2002); Gdf = F. Gode-

(AND marche') and a case in the reign of Edward II observes (of a dispute between two counties in south-east England) that 'le fil del ewe de Thamyse si est marche' entre les ij countez' (the line of the river Thames is the boundary between the two counties) (YBB Ed II xxii 225). *Marche*, a derivative of Germanic *mark*, can mean (in the case of the Thames) '(line of a) boundary', or (probably in the case of the English Channel) 'boundary region'. What is particularly important here is that the claim (no. 208) that the sea is a 'march' between the two kingdoms of England and France is made by a Frenchman, as part of his defence against the accusation that he unlawfully captured a ship belonging to two Englishmen during the Anglo-French truce in March–June 1359. The document is more than likely to have been written down in the language of the proceedings. For that matter, and in just the same way, the document (no. 206) presented by the English proctors to English and French commissioners in France in 1306 would have been perfectly comprehensible to both parties, with the conceivable exception of the expression 'time immemorial' ('du temps q'il n'y ad memoire'), a particularly English formulation. These diplomatic documents, for that is what they are, demonstrate, in other words, the use of French as the obvious diplomatic language of both high- and low-level communication between England and France: state documents and local cases alike use it. They support, without a doubt, the argument that there was a linguistic continuum across the English Channel. In the same vein, the very first letter printed by Chapple in his unfortunately unpublished collection of London correspondence¹⁹ is from the mayor of London to the Picard towns of Amiens, Corbie, and Nesle, encouraging them (in 1298) to resume their normal trading arrangements with London, despite the problems that the Anglo-Picard trade had experienced in the last quarter of the thirteenth century.²⁰ Here, too, the letter only makes sense if it made sense to its recipients. These documents, then, allegedly in degenerate later Anglo-Norman, were perfectly comprehensible on the other side of the Channel. No historian, I hasten to add, would ever imagine that they were not; but the implication (however absurd) of the orthodox position of historical linguistics is that they might not have been. In the same way, I have shown elsewhere²¹ that diplomatic documents could perfectly well exist in different versions, with some element of local colour in the form of spelling variation, and that such spelling variation was not seen as problematic but was sometimes consciously used in order to make a political point. Thus, for example, an Anglo-Flemish agreement of 1296/1297 gave rise to at least six different documents: a draft (of English origin) in 1296, corrected by a Flemish scribe; an English version of the agreement with limited Anglo-Norman scribal features; letters patent sealed at Walsingham but written by a Fleming and heavily Picardized; a confirmation of the agreement, by Edward I, written by an Englishman but using Flemish diplomatic. This range of documents demonstrates (as Serge Lusignan has already done) that scribes were quite capable of varying their usage for particular political reasons, and

froy, ed., *Dictionnaire de l'ancienne langue française et de tous ses dialectes du IXe au XVe siècle* (Paris, 1880–1902); GdfC = *ibid.*, *Complément*, in vols 8–10; TL = A. Tobler and E. Lommatzsch, eds, *Altfranzösisches Wörterbuch* (Berlin/Wiesbaden, 1925–2002).

¹⁹ G.F. Chapple, 'Correspondence of the City of London 1298–1370' (unpublished thesis, University of London, 1938).

²⁰ These three Picard towns were the key locations for woad-trading in the thirteenth century: see Carus-Wilson, 'Guède française', 93. Two-thirds of the 77 identifiable merchants bringing woad to England during the same century were from Amiens (*ibid.*, 97) and substantial numbers of them were established, apparently more or less permanently, in English towns (*ibid.*, 99–100).

²¹ D.A. Trotter, 'Auxi bien dela come deca: l'anglo-normand en France', in *Srvdia Lingvistica in honorem Mariae Manoliu*, ed. S. Reinheimer Ripeanu (Bucharest, 2009), 360–69.

that such variation cannot have been an impediment to communication.²² In the case of these Anglo-Flemish documents, Picard scribal features seem to have been used to support the territorial claims of the English monarchy to land in Flanders. Language, in other words, as always, is not only a means of supposedly simple communication, but a political instrument: denotational meaning (in the form of the words of a document) is accompanied by connotations (in these cases, spellings characteristic of one variety of French or another). Similar practices are evident in two versions of the Treaty of Paris document itself, where a document dated in London is written (according to Chaplais) 'in a French hand from beginning to end – including the dating clause – without apparent interruption'.²³ It is possible that the work²⁴ was copied by a Frenchman residing in England, and there are spellings which imply that his native dialect may not have been Anglo-Norman (although here too there may be a deliberate disguise). The ratification of the document follows the French pattern, and in all probability directly and deliberately emulates Louis IX's ratification of the parallel French version. Again, what we seem to be dealing with here is a conscious attempt to model language features and diplomatic style on those of a document produced by the 'other side'. A peace treaty from Amiens in 1279²⁵ likewise displays French diplomatic, but written in an English hand. A prerequisite for practices of this sort is clearly a high level of scribal and diplomatic competence, but also what we might now regard as a stylistic or even sociolinguistic awareness of the relevance of such external features in the conduct of diplomatic affairs.

Another document in the Chaplais collection²⁶ makes the point in a different way. This is a confidential letter (?1330) by Edward III to Pope John XXII (Jacques Duèze of Cahors, who had studied in Paris), in French.²⁷ The king says that in future he will write with his own hand the words 'pater sancte' (holy father) at the end of letters to authenticate them, which indeed someone duly does on this letter. In the text itself, this formulation is written with the Anglo-Norman graphy *-aun-* ('pater *sauncte*'), but that presumably is of no importance. More intriguing is that John XXII wrote in 1323 to the king of France, Charles IV, to say that a letter, also in French, had caused him problems and that his reply was delayed by the need to have it translated into Latin 'ut earum valeremus percipere plenius intellectum' (in order that we should be able to perceive the meaning of it more fully).²⁸ Edward II of England had letters translated, conversely, from Latin to French in 1317, and Pope Innocent VI (Étienne Aubert from the diocese of Limoges) arranged in 1359 for an English notary available in Avignon to write to Edward III in French. Edward himself wrote in that language to Innocent VI in the following year. There was, in other words, a conscious decision to use these languages, even if it occasionally misfired because of wrong assumptions made about linguistic competence (although, in the case of John XXII and the king of France, there may also have been a political motive for the pope's claim to an implausible inability to understand the meaning of letters in French).²⁹

²² Trotter, 'Auxi bien dela come decea', 362–3; S. Lusignan, *La langue des rois au Moyen Âge. Le français en France et en Angleterre* (Paris, 2004), 225–31.

²³ Chaplais, *English Medieval Diplomatic Practice*, II, 8 notes to pl. 4.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, I, no. 289c.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, I, no. 289.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, I, no. 18.

²⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁸ *Ibid.*, I, 21 n. 126, for all this section.

²⁹ For Anglo-papal relations during the Avignon papacy, see K. Plöger, *England and the Avignon Popes: The Practice of Diplomacy in Late Medieval Europe* (London, 2005), esp. 179–96 ('Means of Commu-

Material of this type further underlines the elementary point that those engaged in the drafting, copying, reading, and deciphering of diplomatic correspondence needed to be able to function in several languages, and clearly, in at least some cases, were conscious of the salience of language choices. That, in itself, does not necessarily tell us all that much about the reality of language use in non-written communication. However, throughout the section of Chaplais' collection which is concerned with embassies and similar processes,³⁰ there is substantial and quite consistent evidence that the documents which are preserved were guides for what was to be orally delivered, and in some cases, contain speeches which were to be read verbatim. This is important for a number of reasons. One, of course, is that there are (admittedly not very frequently) sections of documents, and in isolated cases virtually entire documents, which are thought to transcribe direct speech as a record of discussion, and which thus preserve the written version of the verbal account of events, rather than as being the starting-point of an embassy. Thus, for example, a 1300 document³¹ appears to be what we would now describe as a *procès-verbal* of a meeting between Pierre Aimeri, the envoy of Edward I, and Pope Boniface VIII. The entirety of the document is in French, with substantial portions, much of it attributed to the pope, in direct speech. Boniface VIII was not a Frenchman: born Benedetto Caetani at Anagni, fifty kilometres south-east of Rome, he had nonetheless travelled to France as a papal legate and as a cardinal, and had been to England as secretary to Cardinal Ottoboni Fieschi in 1265-68 (to which visit he alludes in the document recording the discussions in 1300). It is not unreasonable to imagine that he spoke French, and to judge by the sections of the document claiming to reproduce his speech, he seems to have had a good command of the language, even if he gives free rein (perhaps for political reasons when faced with an English delegation) to anti-French prejudices:³²

E pensames la grant covetise des Fraunceys et ne veismes q'en altre manere ne poet estre mieultz fait au profit le roi d'Engleterre qe cele terre de Gascoigne ne fust mise en nostre main, qar souveraine covoitise est es Fraunceis. Ceo q'ils tiegnent une fois jamés ne volount lesser. Et pur ceo deit mult prendre garde qi ad affaire od Franceis, qar qi ad affaire ové Fraunceis ad affaire ové deable. A l'autre foitz, quant les ditz messages de France feurent cy, nous lor reprismes mult de lor covetise et lor deismes: 'Merveillouse est vostre covetise, car ceo qe vous tenez une foiz, ou en bone manere ou en malvese manere, jamés ne voletz lesser. Et ne vous devroit il trop suffire qe vous avez tollu au roi d'Engleterre Normandie, q'est si grande chose, semble qe vostre entencioun est de forclore le roi d'Engleterre de quanque il a decea la mier'

(And we thought [that this was] the great covetousness of the French and we could not see any other way to ensure that it would be more profitable to the king of England, other than for the land of Gascony to

nication'), and also B. Bombi, 'Petitioning between England and Avignon in the First Half of the Fourteenth Century', in *Medieval Petitions: Grace and Grievance*, ed. W.M. Ormrod, G. Dodd and A. Musson (York, 2009), 64-81 and P. Zutshi, 'Petitions to the Pope in the Fourteenth Century', in *ibid.*, 82-98.

³⁰ Chaplais, *English Medieval Diplomatic Practice*, I, 46-141.

³¹ *Ibid.*, I, 1, no. 149.

³² Chaplais notes that contemporaries found Boniface particularly sharp-tongued, an Italian cardinal going as far as to observe that 'cum dyabolo enim habemus facere' (we have to deal with a/the devil) (I, 271 n. 80); ironically, the formula is virtually identical to that used by the pope of the French. The text is on pp. 270-1.

be in our hands, for the French are royally covetous. That which they ever hold once, they never wish to let go of. And for this reason anyone who has dealings with the French should be careful, for he who deals with the French, deals with a/the devil. On another occasion, when the said French messengers were here, we reproached them greatly for their covetousness and said to them: 'Your covetousness is astonishing, for that which you once hold, rightly or wrongfully, you never wish to let go of. And should it not be sufficient for you that you have taken Normandy from the king of England, which is a great thing, it seems that your intention is to get the king of England out of all which he has overseas.'

This has the ring of a reliable and authentic reproduction if not of the pope's *ipsissima verba*, at any rate of what would have been to readers, a plausible reconstruction. Graphics are Anglo-Norman but there is nothing in this which is otherwise specifically insular or linguistically problematic from a French perspective. Elsewhere, the documents preserve the verbatim text of a speech which the envoys are to make to the pope in 1311 ('les paroles que mons Henry Spigurnel et mons' Johan de Benstede doivent dire', from 1307) 'les paroles que l'evesque de Wyncestre et mons' Thomas de Berkle dirront a l'apostle de par nostre seignour le roi' (the words which my lord Henry Spigurnel and my lord John of Bensted should say; the words which the Bishop of Winchester and my lord Thomas of Berkeley will say to the Pope on behalf of our lord the king).³³ In both cases, the pope was Clement V, born Raymond Bertrand de Got from Vilandraut in the present-day Gironde. He, too, we may perhaps assume, would have understood French, and the directions to the envoys do seem to suggest that they should actually use these texts for their speeches. Perhaps more problematic is the summary in French of a credence entrusted to Pierre Galicien for exposition to James II of Aragon in 1321,³⁴ but it may be that the formula adopted (wittingly or unwittingly) reveals that the language choice here is less straightforward: 'Pierres Galicien [...] est chargé de retourner a meisme le roi od lettres de creauce et de lui dire de par nostre seigneur le roi *qe* ...' (Pierre Galicien is instructed to return to the king himself with letters of credence and to say to him on behalf of the king that ...) (my emphasis).

Diplomacy needed documents, either as an aid to oral negotiations, in advance of them, or to record the results, once agreement had been reached. Typically, therefore, it is well-documented, at least relative to other activities (it is probably no accident that the first 'French' document, the Strasbourg Oaths, is a diplomatic text). Diplomacy deals in words and thus it leaves documentary traces. Commerce, on the other hand, deals in numbers, and numbers are, alas, less eloquent about the language in which the negotiations took place. As a result, and also of course because much of it is more ephemeral, trade, particularly at a fairly basic and local level, is less dependent on written documents and is correspondingly less well recorded.

Throughout the thirteenth century, and well beyond, by far the most important trade was in wool and cloth, with a number of additional commodities (notably woad and alum) directly related to and essential for these two central elements in the English economy. From the early twelfth century at the latest, there was a thriving cloth industry throughout England, with thirteenth-century documentation,

³³ *Ibid.*, I, no. 43c, and I, no. 41b.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, I, no. 47b.

in particular of cloth exports to Italy and Spain.³⁵ The pipe rolls for 1210/1211 show that most southern and south-eastern ports were by then importing woad, and it was being traded in towns (not only ports) all over England by 1225–50.³⁶ It has been estimated³⁷ that the manpower required to produce all the cloth made in England in 1400 would have amounted to about 15,000 people, or 0.65% of the population; to this, presumably, needs to be added those involved in import and export trade, and also in agriculture. At the same time, Flanders and northern France constituted significant rivals throughout Europe and beyond. Wool and finished cloth went to France, Spain, and Italy; England imported woad from Picardy in the thirteenth century, and from Toulouse in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries.³⁸ English international commerce revolved around wool and cloth. The question then is what traces it has left, ideally in a form which will allow us to comment on the language in which the trade was carried out.

Sources reveal the geographical diversity from which merchants came. To take just one example, the ancient custom of 1275 from Hull lists in the first few pages Lübeck, Ghent, Saint-Valéry, Amiens, Corbie, Abbeville, Bordeaux, Cahors, Bruges, Ypres, Gravelinge, Dieppe, Cologne, Provence, and Pourville in northern France.³⁹ Men are identified as being companions of the Cerchi, Frescobaldi, and the Bardi. The account (like, for example, the *Port Books* of Southampton, or parts of the Little Red Book of Bristol, including the oath sworn by woad-merchants⁴⁰) is written in French, but that does not really tell us very much, because the information provided is so sparse. Elsewhere, in a pattern identified previously,⁴¹ ships' names are quoted in French, even in documents otherwise compiled in Latin. For example, the 1323 accounts for wool, woollfells and hides exported from ports along the south coast of England between Weymouth and Plymouth mention a 'navis que vocatur La Gaynghebie de Teyngthemutha exivit xx die Januarii ...' (a ship called La Gaynghebie of Teignmouth left port on 20th January).⁴² Later Latin documents amongst those assembled by Gras⁴³ often display the language mixing which has been found to be a characteristic of later medieval business documents in a variety of different countries.⁴⁴ Typically, and predictably, names of merchandise are given in languages other than the matrix language of the document, a practice evident in Flanders, in the *Port Books* of Southampton (with English and Italian words) and throughout the type of mercantile document (for purely English or international purposes) which has been so fruitfully analysed by Laura Wright.⁴⁵

³⁵ Chorley, 'English Cloth Exports', 9.

³⁶ Carus-Wilson, 'Guède française', 92.

³⁷ E. Miller, 'The Fortunes of the English Textile Industry during the Thirteenth Century', *ECHR* new ser. 18 (1965), 64–82.

³⁸ Chorley, 'Cloth Exports of Flanders and Northern France'; Carus-Wilson, 'Guède française'.

³⁹ Gras, *Early English Customs System*, 225ff.

⁴⁰ Fryde, 'Italian Maritime Trade', 221.

⁴¹ Trotter, 'Oceano vox', 16; Kowaleski, 'Maritime lingua franca', 114.

⁴² Gras, *Early English Customs System*, 253.

⁴³ *Ibid.*

⁴⁴ Examples include: M.C. Davidson, 'Code-Switching and Authority in Late Medieval England', *Neophilologus* 87 (2003), 473–86; T. Hunt, 'Code-Switching in Medical Texts', in *Multilingualism in Later Medieval Britain*, ed. D.A. Trotter (Cambridge, 2000), 131–47; H. Schendl, 'Linguistic Aspects of Code-Switching in Medieval English Texts', in *ibid.*, 77–92; D.A. Trotter, 'Si le français n'y peut aller: Villers-Cotterêts and Mixed-Language Documents from the Pyrenees', in *Conceptions of Europe in Renaissance France: A Festschrift for Keith Cameron*, ed. D.J. Cowling (Amsterdam, 2006), 77–97; Vitali, 'Interférences entre le latin et la langue vernaculaire'.

⁴⁵ Wright, 'Hanseatic Merchants'; 'Code-Intermediate Phenomena'.

The obvious language for communication regarding trade in wool, or cloth, or woad, between England and France and possibly also between England and Italy or Spain, was French. The international status and role of French is demonstrated not only by its deployment in high-level diplomatic documents and in literature, but also in 'international' (by modern standards) correspondence such as that in the letters and petitions in All Souls 182, whose recipients are by no means all French or English.⁴⁶ Thus the collection contains (for example) a letter (no. 217) from the duke of Milan to his brother-in-law, in French (or in what may be scribal Anglo-Norman). So, too, diplomacy and trade come together in discussions about merchants' rights and in attempts to resolve trade disputes. I conclude this short survey with three examples of material of this type, taken from the online National Archives (TNA) Ancient Petitions collection, all concerning north-eastern France and England.⁴⁷

(A) TNA SC 8/312/E3 (c. 1280–96?)⁴⁸

Driu Malerbe of Amiens and Southampton seeks to repossess his goods in Lincolnshire

[1] A nostre seignor le Rey moustrent les vallez Driu Malerbe bourgeois d'Amiens et de Norhampton com les biens l'avauntdit Driu fussent ares[2]tuz en Engleterre et les avauntdiz vallés eussent requis les biens a leur maistre par mainprise. E, Sire, de vostre grace et par la priere Sire Edmont [3] vostre frere comaundastes la delivrance et ensivaunt leur bosoigne [4] furent venduez totes leur marchaundises fors .xvii. sacs de laine et [4] quatre toneus et .ij. quartiers de waide qe sont en le counté de Nicole et la unt trové les vallés .xxiiij. meinperours obligés par escrit [...]⁴⁹ [5] le visconte de Nicole d'avoir la delivrance. Et ad le visconte en sa garde les escriz et les biens et les vallés nient le plus que des biens, et sont⁵⁰ [6] les biens en perissaunt par defaute de garde; et ceo unt il moustré au Tresorier par plusours foyz, et nule remedie n'en voet faire. Par quei [7], Sire, il vous prient par Dieu remedie, et q'il puissent avoir ceus biens qe sont demourés par la mainprise avaunt dite.

(The servants of Driu Malerbe, burgess of Amiens and Northampton show to our lord the King how the goods of the said Driu were seized in England and the said servants had requested their master's goods as bail. And, Sire, of your grace and by the prayers of Sir Edmond your brother you commanded their release according to their needs; all the merchandise was sold except for seventeen sacks of wool and four barrels and two quarters of woad which are in the county of Lincolnshire and there the servants found twenty-four men who would guarantee in writing that they would stand as surety [...] the sheriff of Lincoln would take delivery. And the sheriff has in his keeping the documents and the goods and the servants do not have the goods either, and the goods are perishing for want of being kept [properly]; and this they have shown to the Treasurer several times, and he does not wish to offer any

⁴⁶ M.D. Legge, ed., *Anglo-Norman Letters and Petitions* (Oxford, 1941).

⁴⁷ Documents are transcribed using the following conventions: line-numbers in the original are indicated by numerals in square brackets; manuscript contractions are expanded, and indicated by underlining; cedilla and acute accent (only) are used to indicate ç as in modern French, and tonic e (as opposed to mute e), whether it would bear a grave or an acute accent in modern French; word-division, capitalization, use of apostrophes and punctuation have been modernized.

⁴⁸ Dated in part by the mention of Edmond Crouchback, the king's brother, who died in 1296. See TNA online catalogue.

⁴⁹ The right-hand side of the document is dark and I cannot read the final word.

⁵⁰ Here too I have difficulty reading the document.

remedy for it. For which reason, Sire, they ask you in God's name for a remedy, and that they can have those goods which have remained as bail.)

(B) TNA SC 8/285/14241 (1300-30?)⁵¹

Amiens merchants petition the king for redress regarding goods in King's Lynn

[1] A nostre seigneur le Roi e a son conseil mustrent les marchantz de Amyens qe amenant diverses marchan[2]dises en la ville de Lenne sicome marchaundises de wadde, les queles q'i covent q'i y soint [3] assaez par teintures e qu'eles y⁵² covent q'i çocent⁵³ mesurés venduz et tavernez⁵⁴ par mie leur [4] meyns e autrement nul homme les achateroit en gros e pur les queles y donnent leur custumes [5] deues e usueles au Roi; e pur les queles le meir e la communalte de Lenne leur maudent [6] tounu e ount destreint pur tounu doner; paront les ditz marchantz⁵⁵ [prirent]⁵⁶ a nostre seigneur le Roi q'il [7] voille commander as ditz meir e communalte par soen bref qe eux soient quites de tounu doner, [8] fesaunz au Roi ceo qe de dreit deyvent faire. E qe⁵⁷ la destresce qe sur eux est faite, leur [9] soit releseé qar il sount aliens e n'ount terres ne tenementz en Engleterre.

(To our lord the King and to his council: the merchants of Amiens show that they bring diverse merchandises to the town of King's Lynn such as quantities of woad; which it is necessary to assay for colour and and that it is also necessary that [the cloths] be measured, sold, and sold by them personally, and otherwise no-one would buy them in bulk, and for these goods they there pay the usual customs which are due to the King; and for which the mayor and town of King's Lynn demand taxes and have distrained their goods to oblige them to pay the taxes; by which the said merchants [ask] our lord the King that he will command by writ the mayor and town to exempt them from paying taxes, doing to the King what they should by law do. And that the distrained goods should be released, for they are aliens and have neither land nor property in England.)

(C) TNA SC 8/283/14137 (c. 1300-1325?)⁵⁸

Spanish merchants petition the king regarding alleged mistreatment in Abbeville

[1] A tres excellent et tres poissant no seigneur le roy d'Engleterre. Supplient les marchaans [2] d'Espagne. Tres chiers sires, comme les dis marcaans ont use de lonc tans de venir [3] en vostre vile d'Abbeville a tout leur marcaandises. Et puis .v. ans ennecha⁵⁹ nous funt [4] choses de coi nous sommes en damache: ch'est assavoir que li maires et li eskevin d'Abbeville nous [5] avoient otrié prejurement que nous arions vij couratiers⁶⁰ de nos marcaandises tex que [6] seroient loiaux et a no volenté

⁵¹ The TNA online catalogue suggests this: 'tentatively dated on the basis of the hand and language'.

⁵² Written above the line with an insertion mark.

⁵³ I.e., *soient*.

⁵⁴ The verb can mean 'vendre en général', see Gdf 7,659a.

⁵⁵ MS appears to read 'maunchantz'.

⁵⁶ There is no verb in the MS.

⁵⁷ Written above the line with an insertion mark.

⁵⁸ The dating in the online TNA catalogue is based on a close rolls document (November 1313), a safe-conduct for Spanish merchants in Abbeville, to the circumstances of which this petition may refer (CPR 1313-17, 34).

⁵⁹ Picard form of 'ença', Gdf 3,85b.

⁶⁰ The word is in Gdf 2,312b in various quotations sub *correterie*; and cf. GdfC 9,228a; TL 2,845.

a droit. Et seur che⁶¹ en nous a mis .vij. couratiers outre no vo[7]lenté dont il nous vient grant damache. Et encore nous font⁶² plus d'outrage li couratier que se [8] nous vendons nos denrées a Arras ou a Amiens ou en le vile d'Abbeville et il n'i sont. Si le nous font il pai[9]er le couratage⁶³ maugré nous ausi bien que s'il y fussent, che qu'il n'est point acoustumé ne ainques ne fu en [10] nul pais lau⁶⁴ marcaans repairent. Et le jour des frankes festes⁶⁵ que on nous souloit [11] doner le pois le premier jour puis miedi en avant pour peser nos denrees, il le nous ont rete[12]nu⁶⁶ et mis au secont jour dont nous y avons grant damage. Et se nous alongs pour ches choses⁶⁷ [13] ou pour autres outrages ou desonnors qu'il nous faichent par devant le maire et les eschevins et le plus [14] mauvais ribaut de le vile nous fiert ou nous fait autre vilenie, il sera crut et en sen dit [15] et nous serons mis en prison pour faire nous couster du nostre. Chiers sires, si vous rekeurons par Dieu qu'il [16] plaise a vostre haute nobleche de quomander au maire et as eskevins de le vile d'Abbeville qu'il [17] nous ostent ches usages et qu'il nous tiegnent a droit et a raison, et que vous nous fachies metre en vostre [18] sauvegarde car autrement li dit marchaant ne pourroient durer en le dite vile [19] d'Abbeville.

(To our very excellent and very powerful lord the king of England. The merchants of Spain supplicate [as follows:]. Dearest Sire, as the said merchants have for a long time been used to come to our town of Abbeville with all their merchandise. And for five years they do to us things which have been damaging to us: that is to say, the mayor and the aldermen of Abbeville allowed a prior judgement that we would have seven agents for our merchandise who would be loyal and rightly act according to our wishes. And thereafter they imposed on us seven agents against our wishes, which has caused us considerable damage. And moreover, the agents commit a further outrage against us if we sell our goods in Arras or Amiens, or in Abbeville when they are not there. They then make us pay the agent's fees against our wishes as though they had been there, which is not the custom and never was in any country which merchants visit. And on the day of the annual market, when we would normally take our goods to the balance on the first day, from noon onwards, so that we can weigh our goods, they refused us it, and provided it on the second day, which was greatly damaging to us. And if we go to the mayor and aldermen regarding these matters or because of other outrages or disrespect that they show us, and then the lowest ruffian of the town strikes us or does something similarly base, he will be believed on the strength of what he says and we will be put in prison in order to occasion us expense. Dear Sire, we have recourse to you in God's name, that it might please your high nobility to instruct the mayor and aldermen of the town of Abbeville to desist from these practices and treat us legally and resonably, and that you should take us under your protection, for otherwise the said merchants will be unable to continue in the said town of Abbeville.)

The word appears most frequently in north-eastern texts; the sense is 'agent', 'handling agent' (mod. Fr. *courtier*).

⁶¹ 'che' written above the line with an insertion mark.

⁶² 'font' written above the line with an insertion mark.

⁶³ 'Le couratage' written above the line with an insertion mark.

⁶⁴ I.e., 'la ou'.

⁶⁵ *Feste* in TL 3, 1773 has the sense 'Jahmarkt', seemingly restricted to north-eastern France/Flanders. Cf. FEW 3, 483b, and n. 1: 'An diese wortzone schliesst nördlich an fläm. *feest*, "jahmarkt"'.
⁶⁶ MS rete-lu.

⁶⁷ After 'choses', at the end of the line, crossed out and expunctuated, 'par devant' (the words are instead used later in the same sentence, line 13).

What can we conclude from these three specimens, and more generally, about cross-Channel communication? The first document (A) is principally important in that it identifies a merchant as being simultaneously 'bourgoys d'Amiens et de Norhampton'. It is written with fairly consistent Anglo-Norman forms (notably *-aun-* for continental French *-an-*⁶⁸). The second document (B) is intermittently but not consistently Anglo-Norman in its graphics: so, *marchaundises* but then *marchandises* in lines 1–2, *ount* and *sount* for continental *ont* and *sont* in line 9, Anglo-Norman *ceo* in line 8, but in a document the point of which is to emphasize that the merchants concerned 'sount aliens e n'ount terres ne tenementz en Engleterre'. It is of course perfectly normal for spellings to vary in medieval French and here (as is usually the case) the inconsistency extends to the variable use of 'dialectal' forms. (In fact, even decisively 'Anglo-Norman' documents, in terms of origin and language, never display absolutely consistent 'Anglo-Norman' spellings.⁶⁹) The third document (C) is linguistically quite different from the other two and is strongly Picardized. Picard forms include *c* instead of central French *ch* (*marcaans* line 2, *eskeviins* line 16), *ch* instead of central *c* (*ennecha* line 3; *ch'est* line 4; *faichent* line 13, *nobleche* line 16), *le* instead of *la* for the feminine definite article (lines 8, 16, 18) and lexical items such as *frankes festes* (line 10), *couratiers* (line 5) and *couratage* (line 9). But, again, these forms are not consistent: next to *marcaans* (line 2) is *marchaans* (line 1), the same word is spelt *damache* (line 4) and *damage* (line 12), Picard *ches* ('ces') qualifies non-Picard *choses* (line 12: Picard would spell it *cases*), the *eskeviin* (line 4) are *escheviins* ten lines later (line 13). These are not differences that matter, and unless we are to imagine that one person would have pronounced the word differently in two or three places in the same short document, they cannot possibly reflect pronunciation: they are simply spelling differences of no importance whatever to the communication process.

Extrapolating from this, it might be argued on a more general level that the differences between Anglo-Norman (insular) and continental French (whether central or Picard) are unimportant. Petitions like these were read out loud,⁷⁰ so spellings which we now assiduously label as 'dialectal' would not really have mattered in the slightest, and this may have been true, too, of some of the more formal, higher-level diplomatic documents, where there is evidence that these too were variously the basis for, or the record of, oral exchanges. Purely orthographic differences like this are patently far less significant than the overwhelming similarities between the different forms of medieval French, and do not detract from the point that this is basically one language found on both sides of the Channel, right the way through the Middle Ages, and indeed long after.

⁶⁸ A. Kristol, 'Le début du rayonnement parisien et l'unité du français au Moyen Âge : le témoignage des manuels d'enseignement du français publiés en Angleterre entre le XIIIe et le début du XVe siècle', *Revue de linguistique romane* 53 (1989), 335–67; Trotter, 'Pur meuz acorder en parlance E descorder en variance'.

⁶⁹ Trotter, *ibid.*, 88–92.

⁷⁰ G. Dodd, *Justice and Grace: Private Petitioning and the English Parliament in the Late Middle Ages* (Oxford, 2007), 292.