Language, law and loanwords in early medieval Gaul: language contact and studies in Gallo-Romance phonology

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Citation

Kerkhof, P. A. (2018, October 9). *Language, law and loanwords in early medieval Gaul: language contact and studies in Gallo-Romance phonology*. Retrieved from https://hdl.handle.net/1887/66116

Cover Page

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Issue Date: 2018-10-09

Introduction

Once upon a time in the north of Merovingian Gaul, a farmer went to market to sell his produce and meet up with friends and family. On his way to town, he may have driven a cart along a cobblestone road and greeted his neighbors as he drove by. When he arrived at the market, he may have talked to the vendors he knew, joked with his friends and nephews and haggled with the customers. He may have visited the law assembly and spoken his mind about justice. He may have paid his respects to the count and repeated any oaths he had taken. Finally, he would have returned to his homestead and went to bed in the living quarters of the family farm.

From a scholarly perspective, there is very little that we know for certain about this average Merovingian farmer. The average Merovingian farmer is only encountered in the historical sources if by some small chance he became relevant to the limited group of people who controlled the means of literacy. In many cases, this only happened if he witnessed the signing of a charter and the local scribe deemed him important enough to add to the witness list. In the archaeological record, the average Merovingian farmer is only encountered through the shape of his field, the floor plan of his farm, and the refuse that he left behind. Once he had passed away, also the grave goods with which he was buried would preserve some information about his life. On many counts, however, almost everything about his everyday experience would be lost to us. Both historians and archaeologists are well aware of this.

But what is relatively unknown to either discipline, is that there is a small part of his human experience that has not vanished but remains buried. Not in stories, nor in the soil. This part is buried in the words that the farmer passed on to his children and his children to their children and so on, until they were written down in Old French, Old High German and Middle Dutch. Historical linguists can use these words to reconstruct the vernacular Germanic and Romance language that this countryman would have spoken. The historical significance of this linguistic achievement cannot not be overstated. It means that we have a limited but still pretty substantial overview of the words, the sounds and the grammar that the average Merovingian countryman used when he greeted his neighbors, joked with his friends, sold his wares and paid respects to his betters. Although the farmer passed away, parts of his speech survived. These linguistic artefacts constitute valuable traces of his everyday life and contain information that should be integrated into our interpretative models on culture and society in Merovingian Gaul.

This dissertation is dedicated to this average Merovingian farmer and all those who never made it into the elite discourse of Early Medieval Latinity. Through the investigations in this book, I will try to make them speak again.

Aim and structure

In this monograph, I will review the historical and sociolinguistic implications of some of the linguistic data that have been preserved from Merovingian Gaul. The data that will be investigated here mainly consist of Romance and Germanic lexis. More precisely, Romance and Germanic lexis that is the outcome of earlier lexical exchange (borrowing) between Germanic, Romance and Celtic. The central aim of this dissertation is to provide an overview of the linguistic and extra-linguistic factors that were involved in this lexical exchange, and thereby contribute to our knowledge of the Merovingian vernaculars in particular and Merovingian society in general.

The study of lexical exchange between Early Germanic and Early Romance has a long tradition, both within Old Germanic studies and Old Romance studies. Pioneering work has been done by Gamillscheg (1933, 1970) in his *Romania Germanica,* Wartburg (1928-1982) in his *Französisches Etymologisches Wörterbuch,* and Müller and Frings (1968) in their *Germania Romana.* Later research by scholars such as Pfister (1972, 1974), Guinet (1982), and Wollmann (1990) has added to our body of knowledge about the lexical items involved, their chronology and the substitution processes that affected them. What has become clear from all of these studies, is that the contact language on the side of the Roman Empire was in many cases not Classical Latin, but rather an evolved version of Late Latin. This linguistic stage was in the early twentieth century commonly called Vulgar Latin, but is now often referred to as Early Romance. This dissertation builds on these conclusions and will highlight the role of reconstructed Romance as a donor language in Romance–Germanic lexical exchange.

The lexical material that will be investigated in this dissertation comes from two significantly different types of sources:

- Germanic and Romance lexis that is found in contemporary Merovingian sources, that is, vernacular fragments that are featured in Merovingian Latinity.
- Germanic and Romance lexis that can be reconstructed from the linguistic stages of Old French, Old High German and Middle Dutch.

Both types of evidence come with their own problems and challenges, which require a solid philological and linguistic framework in order to interpret them correctly. Because of these requirements, the structure of this dissertation is divided into two interdependent sections.

The first part aims to provide a historical, linguistic and sociolinguistic background to the contact between Germanic and Romance in the northern parts of Merovingian Gaul. This section covers the largest part of the dissertation and consists of four chapters. These chapters will provide a framework, which I will draw upon in later parts of the dissertation.

The first chapter will provide a historical background to the linguistic encounter between Germanic-speakers and Romance-speakers in Migration Age Gaul. It will review the historical and archaeological approaches to the period, and then confront these approaches with the most recent perspectives from historical linguistics. In this chapter, most attention will be paid to the Merovingian Franks since they are the Germanic-speaking group, whose language I am mainly concerned with in this dissertation. An important objective of this chapter is to highlight some relevant pieces of linguistic evidence that are rarely featured in discussions on the transformation of the Roman world.

The second chapter will investigate the problems posed by the concept of reconstructed Romance. In this chapter, the 'regularist' approach to Early Romance will be expounded, and an overview of the debate on Latin-Romance diglossia and the break-up of the Romance dialect continuum will be given. This chapter will also explore the relationship of Merovingian Latinity to the spoken Romance vernacular and provide commentary to some of the Merovingian text genres that may be used to gauge the evolution of the Romance vernacular in Early Medieval Gaul. The main objective of this chapter is to provide a defense of the concept of reconstructed Romance as a possible donor language in Romance–Germanic lexical exchange.

Chapter three provides a survey of the phonological developments that transformed the Latin language of Republican Rome into the Early Old French of Carolingian Francia. In this survey, the literature on some long standing problems in the prehistory of French will be reviewed. The main objective of this chapter is to explore the linguistic problems of Merovingian Gallo-Romance with the methodology of comparative linguistics. This chapter does not aim to solve all problems in Gallo-Romance historical phonology, but merely to provide an overview of the linguistic facts that I can refer to in the in-depth studies of the second part of the dissertation. By attempting to link Pre-French sound changes directly to Merovingian Latin, this present investigation distinguishes itself from recent overviews of French historical phonology, such as provided by Taddei (2000), Léonard (2004) and Englebert (2015).

Chapter four will investigate the issue of Germanic linguistic interference in the prehistory of French. It will introduce the concepts and theory of language contact and contact-induced change and explore the issue of the Germanic-like features in French that have alternatively been explained as contact-induced, inter genus drift, and mere coincidence. In this chapter, I will aim to bypass some of the traditional complications to the problem and put a new focus on the role that the northeastern border dialects of French may have played in the prehistory of the French language.

In-depth Studies

The second part of this dissertation will feature several in-depth studies on lexical transfer between Germanic and Romance in the Early Middle Ages. These studies will exemplify some of the principles and observations that were made in the in the first section. This part of the dissertation also consists of four chapters and the evaluation of the lexical transfers will rely on the background that is provided in the preceding four chapters.

Chapter five will investigate a vernacular word for sparrow hawk that is featured in the Merovingian redactions of the Salic Law. This word will be provided with an etymology, and its occurrence in the law code will be connected to the diffusion of hawking and falconry terminology in Late Antique Eurasia.

Chapter six will investigate the lexical evidence for the Merovingian use of the heavy plough and thereby provide an attempt on bringing lexical evidence into the our historical knowledge on Merovingian material culture.

Chapter seven will investigate a vernacular gloss from the Salic Law that is associated with insults and slander. This word will be provided with a Gaulish etymology. A side objective of this chapter is to explore the circumstances under which Gaulish lexis may have entered the vernaculars of Merovingian Gaul.

Chapter eight will investigate the etymology of a Dutch landscape word and connect the problem with the lexical exchange between Germanic and Romance in Early Medieval Flanders. It will show how after the dissolution of the Roman empire, newly arrived Germanic-speaking peoples became part of a multilingual realm that involved the Romance-speaking elites of Early Medieval Francia.

Chapter nine will highlight a Migration Age ethnonym that is reflected in several French place-names. In this chapter, I will attempt to solve some of the phonological issues

that complicate the connection of the ethnonym to the French place-names, and thereby touch upon some interesting problems of Gallo-Romance historical phonology.

By approaching the topic of Merovingian language contact on these two levels, the dissertation aims to straddle the gap between a macro perspective and a micro perspective. It is my contention that these perspectives complement each other, and that a better overview of the factors that were involved on the macro level and an in-depth study of some of the factors that were involved on the micro level, will lead us to a better understanding of the sociolinguistic context in which Romance-Germanic language contact in the Merovingian period took place.

Relevance

This way, the present investigation intends to contribute to an ongoing debate in historical linguistics and an ongoing debate in medieval studies. The debate in historical linguistics concerns the Germanic contribution to the French language, and the possibility that Merovingian language contact is responsible for the structural similarities between French and the Germanic languages. This dissertation will contribute to this linguistic debate by highlighting neglected or unconsidered sociocultural factors that contextualized the linguistic encounter between Germanic and Romance in Merovingian Gaul.

The debate in medieval studies that this dissertation intends to contribute to, concerns the continuity or discontinuity in the transition from Roman to Merovingian Gaul. This dissertation will do so by shedding light on a different dimension of the historical transformation than is usually considered by historians and archaeologists. I will show that the linguistic data provide a narrative that is complementary to the archaeological record, but is often at odds with a historical paradigm that is mainly informed by the literary sources.

Linguistic sources and terminology

In the present investigation, many etymologies are discussed that required the consultation of numerous etymological dictionaries and online resources. Here I want to give a closer overview of the digital and non-digital resources that I used for the main languages that are under investigation in this dissertation, that is, Old Frankish, Gallo-Romance and Gaulish. I will also comment on the terminological considerations that informed my use of these linguistic terms.

<u>Old Frankish</u>

The West Germanic language, that is the most important to this dissertation, is the ancestral language of the Merovingian Franks. In this dissertation, the term **Old Frankish** will be used in reference to the Early Franconian variety that was spoken by the Franks in Merovingian Gaul. I will not associate this linguistic stage with the term Old Dutch, since I believe that the term Dutch is only meaningful when it is used as a linguistic criterion that distinguishes Dutch from the other Germanic dialect areas such as German, English, and Frisian. For most of the Merovingian period, this criterion does not apply since both the German and the Dutch dialect areas still had to acquire their defining features.

If we choose to apply the term Old Dutch for its geographical dimensions, a better case can be made for its applicability to Merovingian Frankish; after all, the language of the Merovingian Franks is historically tied to Belgium and the southern Netherlands, as is clear from the diffusion patterns of place-names and loanword studies (Weijnen 1999: 39-50). Still, in my opinion, the terms Old Frankish, West Frankish or Merovingian Frankish would serve this descriptive purpose equally well and would avoid the anachronism implied by the term Dutch.

For the etymological investigations in this dissertation, I used a number of Dutch etymological dictionaries, whose contents are accessible through the online portal of *etymologiebank.nl*[1]; especially useful were the new *Etymologisch woordenboek van het Nederlands* edited by M. Philippa, F. Debrabandere, A.Quak, T. Schoonheim and N. van der Sijs (2003-2009), and the older etymological dictionary by J. De Vries and F. De Tollenaere *Nederlands etymologisch woordenboek* (1971). Additionally, I have often consulted the historical dictionaries of Dutch that are included in the online database of the *Grote Taalbank* (GTB).[2] The most important of these is the *Oudnederlands Woordenboek,* a project of the Dutch Lexicographic Institute (INL) whose final editing was done by professor A. Quak. The ONW was invaluable to the present investigation, since it includes many Old Frankish lemmata from the Salic Law and Merovingian Latin. For the investigation of the Germanic loanwords in French, I made extensive use of the digital version of Wartburg's *Französisches Etymologisches Wörterbuch* (FEW 1948-2002[3]), which was made publicly accessible by the AFTIL project of the University of Lorraine. Gamillscheg's *Romania Germanica* (1970) and Guinet's *Les emprunts gallo-romans au Germanique* (1982) provided a useful overview of the relevant loanwords.

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[1] Can be consulted online at URL: http://www.etymologiebank.nl

[2] Can be consulted online at URL: htttp://gtb.inl.nl

[3] Can be consulted online at URL: https://apps.atilf.fr/lecteurFEW/

The Romance language, that is the most important to this dissertation, is the Romance variety that was spoken by the Gallo-Romans who lived in the northern part of Merovingian Gaul. We may assume that in large parts of the Merovingian realm, this Romance language was also the most important language for the Merovingian Franks, either as a communication language or as their new native language. In this dissertation, the <u>spoken</u> Romance language of Merovingian Gaul will be called **Gallo-Romance**, thereby avoiding the use of the terms Vulgar Latin and Medieval Latin for any spoken variety of Romance in Merovingian Gaul (see chapter 2 for a discussion). For the <u>written</u> language of Merovingian Gaul, the term **Merovingian Latin** will be used. This variety of written Latin might reflect elements of the spoken variety through interference with an evolved reading tradition, but essentially aspires to be the same language as that of Republican Rome.

However, since I occasionally refer to Latin words, which represent the oldest Latin stage of Gallo-Roman lexis and are limited to Roman Gaul, I was in need of an additional term that singles this material out as being regional and relatively late; I have opted to call the material that belongs to this stage, both attested forms and reconstructed lexical items, **Gallo-Latin**. I am, however, aware that this might be confusing in regards to my otherwise strict separation of the terms Latin and Romance, namely the application of Romance for spoken varieties and Latin for written varieties.

For the etymological investigations of the French and Romance material, I often consulted the aforementioned digital version of the FEW and other etymological dictionaries such as Dauzat's *Dictionnaire étymologique de la langue française* (Dauzat 1948)*,* Meyer-Lübke's *Romanisches Etymologisches Wörterbuch* (1935) and Corominas' *Diccionario Etimológico de la lengua Castellana* (1954). The collection and discussion of Germanic-Romance lexical transfers, which is included in Müller and Frings' *Germania Romana* (1968) was also a useful resource. For Merovingian Latin lexis, I made ample use of the search function of the digital version of the *Monumenta Germaniae Historica* (URL: http://www.mgh.de), which give access to almost the entire Merovingian Latin corpus.

In many parts of this dissertation, the continental Celtic language of Late Roman Gaul is referenced. As this dissertation is mainly concerned with language contact of the Late Roman period, I can stay away from such controversial issues as the hypothesized presence of a non-

Celtic Indo-European language in northwestern Europe (Nordwestblock or Belgic, cf. Kuhn 1959, 1962; Gysseling 1975, 1992; see also Weijnen 1999: 8-10).

Another issue, that is also not pertinent to this dissertation, but which should still be mentioned here, is the possibility that the continental Celtic language of the North Sea coast shared innovations with Lowland British (cf. Schrijver 1995). This would also provide a different background to the proposed bilingualism of the Batavians and the Frisians and the occurrence of Celtic theonyms in the Dutch river area, such as Magosenus, Viradecthis and Nehalennia (Toorians 2003; Bernardo Stempel 2004). In this dissertation, any Celtic language spoken in the north of Roman Gaul will be subsumed under the term **Gaulish**, irrespective of any dialectal isoglosses that may have differentiated the Celtic language of the North Sea coast from that of Wallonia and the rest of Gaul.

For the etymological investigation of the Gaulish material, I often consulted the etymological dictionary of Proto-Celtic by Matasović (2009), the Gaulish dictionary of Delamarre (2003) and the historical dictionaries of Welsh (*Geiriadur Prifysgol Cymru*[4]) and Irish (*Electronic dictionary of the Irish language*[5]). The online version of the FEW provided valuable etymological commentaries to the Celtic loanwords in the Gallo-Romance dialects. An additional resource that proved useful was the collection of Celtic material included in Grzega's *Romania Gallica Cisalpina* (2001).

Methodology

This monograph is written in the positivist tradition of historical linguistics, and closely connects to similar approaches to historical lexicology, in which language is studied in conjunction with history (e.g. Green 1998; Kelly 1998). In this dissertation,

Figure 1 triangle model based on Schmidt-Wiegand 1975

linguistic data from Merovingian Gaul will be investigated in the context of diachronic semasiology and onomasiology, namely under the assumption that historical words provide a window on the concepts and materiality of a historical society (Schmidt-Wiegand 1975). It
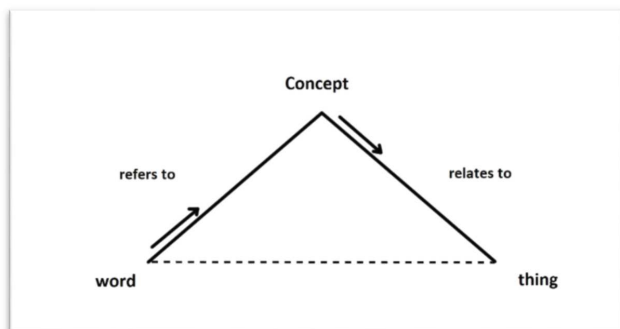
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[4] Can be consulted online at URL: http://welsh-dictionary.ac.uk/gpc/gpc.html
[5] Can be consulted online at URL: http://www.dil.ie

therefore stands to reason that this dissertation has a less skeptical view on our access to the past than is common to postmodernist approaches to history (see chapter 1).

Despite this decidedly linguistic outlook, in this dissertation I also want to discuss how the linguistic data relates to the evidence of the literary sources and the archaeological record; in the first chapter, I will therefore comment on the theoretical perspectives that inform the interpretative models of historians and archaeologists. I am aware that my reduction of these theoretical perspectives into several general trends does not do justice to the diversity of opinions in the field. I still deemed this generalization to be useful, since it underlines the considerable distance of the perspective of the historian and the archaeologist to the perspective of Old Germanicist philology. Also, I have attempted to respect some conventions of the other disciplines, thereby avoiding the use of the term 'tribe' because of its theoretical implications and the use of the overly-broad ethnonyms 'Gauls' or 'Germans' because of their anachronistic quality. However, the term Migration Age will not be avoided, because of its usefulness as a chronological shorthand and in consideration of its traditional use in Old Germanicist scholarship.

If I have ignored important historical or archaeological publications, this should not be taken as a sin of omission, but rather as a sign of my limited view, as a linguist, on the recent developments in those fields. In the end, I still hope to have provided a reasonably representative overview of the exegetic frameworks that mark our historical interpretation of the transition from Late Antiquity to the Early Middle Ages.