THE HISTORY OF ENGLISH PODCAST TRANSCRIPTS

EPISODE 65:
NORMAN DUKES AND DIALECTS

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Welcome to the History of English Podcast – a podcast about the history of the English language. This is Episode 65: Norman Dukes and Dialects. In this episode, we're going to continue our look at the rise of Normandy. We'll cover a period of about a century from Rollo's grandson all the way up to William the Conqueror. Along the way, we'll look at the evolution of the Norman language. What began as an Old Norse dialect from Scandinavia quickly gave way to a northern French dialect. And that northern French dialect was later exported to England in 1066. And that process ultimately led to the development of Middle English.

But before we begin, let me remind you that the website for the podcast is historyofenglishpodcast.com. And you can always reach me directly at kevin@historyofenglishpodcast.com.

So let's continue our look at the rise of Normandy. And let's begin with a quick review of where we left off last time. In the last episode, we explored how the feudal system developed in northern France. We also looked at the first two Norman rulers, Rollo and his son William Longsword. Both of them expanded Normandy across northern France. Even though they had a great deal of independence, they were also vassals of the French kings, specifically the Carolingian kings. But the Carolingians had a rival family in the Robertians. And as we'll see, the Normans would play a key role in deciding the ultimate balance of power between those two families.

We also looked at how the Scandinavian language of the Normans was quickly abandoned once they were settled in France. And that's where I want to pick up this episode – with the rapid decline of Old Norse among the Normans.

I concluded last time with the story of the Norman leader William Longsword and his desire to have his young son Richard learn the ancestral language of the Normans. Apparently, so few people spoke Old Norse around the capital at Rouen, that he had to send his son to the northwestern coast where there were still a few people speaking Old Norse. This is a fascinating story because we're only about thirty years from the founding of Normandy. Yet we already have evidence that Old Norse was on its way out.

Now this particular story comes to us from one of the few contemporary histories of Normandy. It was written in the late 900s by a man named Dudo. And while we can't treat every word as gospel, it is still an important source. It is certainly possible that Dudo exaggerated a bit here and there. But in an era when the Normans weren't keeping written records, and when most of the literate monks had fled elsewhere, his account is one of the few sources we have from Normandy during this period.

Dudo tells us that William thought long and hard about where his son Richard should be brought up and fostered. He writes that the people in the city of Rouen – the Norman capital – spoke the 'Roman' language, in other words Romance or Old French. He says they didn't speak the Norse language of their ancestors with any regularity.

But Dudo then tells us that in Bayeux, in the northwestern part of Normandy, the Norse language was still being spoken, and in fact it was more common than French in that region. So William decided to send young Richard there to be brought up in the Norse language and Norse culture. We're told that William wanted to expose his son to Norse culture so that one day, when he became king, he would be able to speak fluently with the Danish kings and other Viking rulers in Scandinavia. And that suggests that William still considered himself to be a Scandinavian, and he saw Normandy as an extension of Scandinavia.

But it appears that his subjects didn't share that opinion. Many of them were native Franks. And apparently, even the newly-settled Normans were soaking up the Frankish culture. And if Dudo's account is accurate, they had largely abandoned Old Norse within a couple of generations.

As this process continued, most of that original Scandinavian vocabulary disappeared from northern France. Only a small handful of Norse words survived within the emerging French language. Today, there are somewhere between 200 and 300 of those Scandinavian loanwords in Modern French. Now I say, somewhere between 200 and 300 because it is actually very difficult to pinpoint the words which came specifically from the Normans. And that's because French has so many Frankish words from the Franks. And as we know, both the Franks and the Normans spoke Germanic languages. So those two languages were very similar.

It's the same problem we have when we try to identify Norse words in Britain. Sometimes the Norse words stand out, but very often then resemble Old English words so much so that it is difficult to say whether the word actually came from the Danes or the Anglo-Saxons.

Well, the same thing goes for Old Norse and the original Frankish language. It can be difficult to distinguish the Frankish words from the Norse words. And that's why scholars sometimes disagree on the exact number of those surviving Scandinavian words in Modern French.

Among those Scandinavian words which are generally accepted within French, most relate to shipping, coastal features and other nautical items. The early French weren't exactly known for the their naval prowess. And Old French had largely developed within the interior parts of the country. So the early French speakers didn't have as many nautical terms as the Vikings did. So when they encountered the Vikings, they apparently borrowed quite a few of those nautical terms.

For example, Old Norse has the word *höfn* which meant a 'port.' And that word entered French as *havre*. That same Norse word also entered Old English thanks to the Vikings in Britain. It came into late Old English as *haven*. We often think of it today as a 'safe haven' or you might find a 'tax haven.' But that word *haven* was originally a nautical term, and both French and English picked it up from the Vikings.

A similar word was the Old Norse word *ras*, which meant a water flow or current. It entered French as the word *raz* thanks to the Normans. But it was also taken to Britain by other groups of Vikings, and it produced the English word *race*. Today, English uses that word in a more general sense to refer the act of running or moving quickly. So it has lost the original nautical sense. But again, both French and English picked up that word from the Vikings.

So as you can see, Norse words filtered into both languages, but they had a much greater impact on English. And just to put some numbers on that for you, I noted that Modern French has somewhere around 200 or 300 words from Old Norse. And in an earlier episode, I noted that Modern English has somewhere between 600 to 900 words from Old Norse. Again, the numbers vary because scholars don't always agree about certain words, but those numbers tell us that English has about three times more Scandinavian words than French does.

Now, the explanations for this fact vary. Some scholars note that Old Norse was spoken for a much longer time in the Danelaw in Britain, and that increased the number of Scandinavian words borrowed into English. Some scholars also point to the similarities between the Old English and Old Norse, and they suggest that that may have allowed Norse words to flow into English a litter more easily.

Maybe English speakers just liked to borrow words and French speakers didn't. That's been a recurring theme throughout the history of both languages. So maybe we can find the roots of those differing attitudes here in the tenth century.

Whatever the reason, Norse words had a much greater impact on English than French. And of the words which did survive into French, very few made their way across the channel to English after 1066. So for the most part, the Old Norse words found in English came from the Vikings who invaded Britain. And the Old Norse words found in French came from the Normans or other Vikings who invaded France. So that isn't really surprising.

But if we look very closely and allow for a little bit of uncertainty, we can actually find Old Norse words in English which came from France – not Britain. In other words, a tiny part of our vocabulary can be traced back to Rollo and the first Norman Vikings who settled in France. Those Norse words were among the few which survived into French, and then they passed in English after 1066. So they made their way from Scandinavia to England, but they did so after taking a detour in France.

Again, we have to allow for a little bit of uncertainty here because these words came in with all of those Norse words coming into English from the Danelaw around the same time. So the source isn't always clear. But a few can be specifically traced back through early French.

One of those words is the word *creek* meaning 'a narrow stream or inlet.' The Old Norse word was *kriki*, and it meant 'a corner or nook.' It passed from the Vikings into the northern French dialects, and the Normans brought it to England. So when we use the word *creek* today, we're using a version of the same word used by Rollo's Norman Vikings in tenth century.

Now the Vikings had another word which was very similar to *kriki*, and that was *krokr*. And *krokr* gave us the word *crook*. And many linguists think *kriki* meaning 'creek' and *krokr* meaning 'crook' were once cognate in Old Norse. *Kriki* was a corner or nook, and *krokr* was a 'hook or corner,' so they were very similar. And a *kriki* or *creek* may have been called that because it was crooked. It was a winding stream with a lot of bends and turns.

Now I've mentioned the word *crook* before. The Anglo-Saxons had actually borrowed that word directly from the Danish Vikings in the Danelaw. And the original meaning in English was the same as the Norse meaning. It meant a 'hook,' and it could also mean a hooked-shaped tool or weapon. The word *crook* later evolved into the adjective *crooked* meaning something bent or curved. So again, all of that was borrowed directly from the Vikings on the ground in Britain.

But the Norman Vikings took that same word to northern France. It produced an Old Northern French word which was *croche*. And in Northern France the word had a similar meaning. It could also refer to a hook-shaped tool, and it was specifically used to refer to a shepherd's staff. A shepherd's staff was curved on the end so the shepherd could grab the hind legs of the sheep. So Old English and Old French both had the Scandinavian word *crook* – or *croche*. But over time, the French version of that word also passed into English. And it came in as several different words.

One early development was the Old French word *encrochier*, which meant 'to snag, or seize or hang onto something.' And that word entered English shortly after 1066 as *encroach*. But again, *encroach* goes back to the Norman word for a hook used to grab something.

The word *croche* later evolved into the Old French word *crochir*, which meant 'to become bent.' And many English scholars think this French word *crochir* was the origin of the English word *crouch* meaning 'to bend one's knees in a squatting position.'

Another variation of the word *croche* was the word *crochet*, which meant 'a small hook.' And small hooks or *crochets* were used in certain types of knitting. And thanks to some later sound changes, that produced the French word *crochet*.

The word *crochet* was also used to describe a hooked-shaped stick that was used to play a sport which became popular in Northern France in later centuries. That sport was eventually named after that hooked-shaped stick. It was called *croquet* from the same Norman root.

So that word *crochet* gave us words like *crochet* and *croquet*. All of those words having to do with something hook-shaped.

Well, in the 1100s, that word *crochet* developed a slightly different meaning. A 'hook' is a variation from a straight line. And by analogy, this same meaning was applied to an idea or belief that was unusual or weird. It had deviated from the mainstream. So it was peculiar or perverse. This type of notion was called a *crotchet*. And that word also passed into English.

Shakespeare even used the word from time to time in his plays. For example, in 'The Merry Wives of Windsor,' one of the characters Mistress Ford says, "Faith, thou hast some crotchets in thy head now." So it referred to strange ideas. Around the same time, English had the word *crotchet-monger* which meant a person who deliberately spread odd or perverse opinions. So it was the type of person who liked to say provocative things to get people riled up.

By the 1800s, the word *crotchet* had developed into the word *crotchety* meaning 'contrary, cross or irritable.' So today we might refer to a 'crotchety old man.' But again, *crotchety* goes back to that French word *crochet* meaning 'a hooked-shaped tool.'

And by the way, many English scholars also think the word *crotch* comes from the same root. It originally meant the junction where a single road or river splits into two separate roads or branches. So that is another kind of bend. By analogy, the point in the body where the legs split from the torso came to be called the *crotch*.

So, the key point here is that words like *encroach*, *crochet*, *croquet*, *crotchety* and probably *crotch* all come from an Old Norse word via French. And that original Norse word was likely brought to France with the early Normans. And again, all of those French words are cognate with the word *crook*, which English borrowed directly from the Vikings in Britain.

So we just identified a few words which can be traced back to the original Scandinavian language of the Normans. Here are a few others. Keeping with the nautical theme, the word *flounder* may have taken the same linguistic route into English. The Old Norse word was *flydhra*. It literally meant 'flat fish,' presumably because flounder tend to lie flat on the ocean floor. The word was retained into the Norman French dialect, and then passed into Middle English as *flounder*.

Another Norse word which the Normans preserved and ultimately gave to English was the word *skipa*. As we saw back in our discussion about the Danelaw, English had the word *scip* (/ship/) where Norse had *skip*. Well, *skipa* was a variation of the Norse word *skip*, and it meant 'to fit out a ship' – in other words 'to load and arrange a ship for a voyage.' *Skipa* became Old French *esquiper* meaning basically the same thing. French then shortened it to *équiper*, and it then passed into English as *equip*. So *equip* comes to us via the early French Vikings. And of course, the things that you gather when you *equip* something are your *equipment*. So *equip* and *equipment* can both be traced back to a Scandinavian word meaning 'to ready a ship for sail.'

The word *bait* may also have Norman origins. It is definitely an Old Norse word, but scholars are divided over whether it came from the Danes in the Danelaw or the Normans in Normandy. It could have come from both.

Another possible Scandinavian word from Normandy which has survived into English is the word *brisket*. That word is actually cognate with the English word *breast*. *Breast* comes from Old English, and Old Norse had a similar word which meant the same thing. The Old Norse version of the word eventually produced the word *brjosk* which meant 'gristle or cartilage.' The Norman Vikings took that word with them to France where it later became *brûquet*. And from there it passed into Middle English as *brisket*. Again there is some uncertainty here as to whether

brisket came from the Vikings in Normandy or the Vikings in the Danelaw. But some scholars attribute it to the Normans.

Another possible Norse borrowing from the Normans is the word *harness* which you put on a horse. Again, it's etymology is a little unclear, but some scholars think it is also a Scandinavian relic from Normandy.

Beyond those examples, it becomes very difficult to pinpoint Scandinavian words in English which came directly from the Normans. However, there are a couple of personal names which came from the Norman Vikings. One of those is the name *Gary*. The root of *Gary* is *gar*, which was the Germanic word for 'spear.' We've seen that word before in a word like *garlic*, which was a 'spear leek.' The Norman Vikings had a name for a warrior which was derived from that word *gar*. It passed into Norman French and then into English as *Gary*.

Another common personal name which many scholars attribute to the Normans is the name *Bruce*. It is believed that the name originated with a family who lived near the city of Brix in Normandy. That family name was introduced to England after the Norman Conquest, and it became a very prominent name in Scotland in the later Middle Ages. Now, again, that etymology is disputed by some scholars who argue that the name *Bruce* developed within Britain. So once again, we see a lot of uncertainty when it comes to these Scandinavian names and words which may have come from France. And that just reflects the fact that the original Scandinavian vocabulary of the Normans disappeared very quickly, and it had a very limited impact on French. So very few remnants made it to English.

So as the early Normans abandoned their native Scandinavian language, they quickly adopted the emerging French language. And while their original Scandinavian words didn't have much of an impact on English, their new French vocabulary certainly did.

So given that the Normans made a quick transition to French, I'm going to do the same thing here. I want to move the story forward and shift our focus from the original Scandinavian words used by the Normans to their new French vocabulary. And the story of William Longsword sending his young son to Bayeaux to learn Old Norse reflects this basic shift. At a time when the Normans were choosing to speak French rather than their ancestral language, William Longsword apparently wanted his son to have a deeper connection to his Scandinavian roots. He must have realized that the Scandinavian legacy was being eroded in the face of the overwhelming French influence. So he sent young Richard out to the hinterlands of northwestern Normandy where Viking culture still existed.

But Richard's time in Bayeux was cut short by the death of his father in the year 942. William had successfully expanded Normandy to the west, but he met his match which he tried to expand to the northeast into Flanders. The Count of Flanders repelled the Normans. And a short time later, the Count arranged an ambush in which William was killed. Richard was the presumptive heir, but he was still a young child – only about 10 years old.

It was at this point that the Carolingian king Louis – specifically Louis IV – decided to take advantage of the situation. Normandy was growing threat to the north, and here was a good opportunity to eliminate that threat. Up to this point, the Carolingian kings and the Norman rulers had generally honored their lord-vassal relationship. But young Richard wasn't technically a vassal yet. That didn't happen until his affirmed his father's oath of allegiance to the king. So seizing upon the opportunity in front of him, Louis invaded Normandy with the support of the Count of Flanders.

The details here are unclear. And in fact, there are several different and contradictory accounts of why Louis invaded and what exactly happened next. It is generally agreed that Louis seized control of Normandy, and he had young Richard imprisoned, but Richard soon escaped. Again, the details vary, but it appears that Louis eventually had a falling out with the Count of Flanders. Meanwhile, young Richard was able to secure the support of the Norman nobles. And the Normans were eventually able to kick Louis out of Normandy, which allowed Richard to take the throne.

One version of the story reports that Harold Bluetooth came over from Denmark to restore Richard to the Norman throne. If so, it would suggest that there was still a close link between the Normans and the other Viking rulers. But whatever the details, we know that Richard was ultimately able to fend off Louis's challenge. By the year 947, at the young age of 15, Richard had finally been recognized as the legitimate ruler of Normandy. And he would rule for nearly 50 years becoming one of the most important rulers in Norman history. He was technically Richard I, but he is known to history as Richard the Fearless. And under Richard's rule, Normandy experienced an extended period of relative peace and security, and this was actually in contrast to much of the rest of France where infighting raged on.

During Richard's reign, the Carolingian Dynasty which had descended from Charlemagne finally came to an end. And based on Richard's early experience with Louis, he probably didn't shed any tears for the loss of the dynasty.

As we saw last time, the Carolingian kings already had a rival family – the Robertians. These were the descendants of Odo – the former Count of Paris who briefly served as king back in the 800s. The French nobles increasingly looked to that family when the serving Carolingian king was particularly weak or ineffective.

The leader of the Robertians was named Hugh. And Hugh was such an important figure during this period that he became known to history as Hugh the Great. He was a prominent noble with enough of his own vassals to rival the Carolingian king. And after that attempted coup by Louis, Richard of Normandy had decided to throw his support to Hugh as well. So that meant that Normandy was no longer supporting the Carolingian king. Richard sealed his alliance with Hugh by marrying Hugh's sister. And when Hugh died, Richard became a vassal of the Hugh's son, thereby maintaining his alliance with the Robertians. Hugh's son was also named Hugh, and he is known to history as Hugh Capet.

And all of this was very important, because the Carolingians continued to fight with each other and with their various nobles. The Carolingian king Louis IV died and was succeed by a son and then a grandson. But by the time that grandson died a year later in a hunting accident, the French nobles had had enough. That grandson, also named Louis – Louis V – would be the last Carolingian. And with Louis's death in the year 987, it fell to the nobles to select a new king. The Robertian, Hugh Capet, had the support of most of the prominent nobles. And he also had the support of Richard of Normandy.

So in that year – 987 – Hugh Capet was selected as the new king of France. He was technically the fourth member of the Robertian family to become king, but there would be no turning back after Hugh. His descendants would reign over France until the French Revolution in the year 1789. And in fact, when the French monarchy was abolished and Louis the XVI went on trial as an ordinary citizen, he did so bearing the name Louis Capet with the same surname as his distant ancestor Hugh.

Speaking of that surname, it may seem somewhat familiar. We've actually seen the word *capet* before. In fact, we saw it in the last episode. *Capet* meant 'cape or cloak.' And Hugh was known as Hugh Capet because he was somewhat famous for wearing a wearing a short cape. Based on that surname, his direct descendants are known as the Capetians. So the Carolingian Dynasty was succeeded by the Capetian Dynasty.

Now the selection of Hugh Capet as King of France brought about a subtle shift in the title of the Norman ruler. Before being selected a king, Hugh Capet was titled the 'Duke of the Franks.' With his upgrade, Hugh now became king. That meant he wasn't using the title of *Duke* anymore. So, that title was just lying there with no one to use it. And that's when Richard in Normandy picked it up. After Hugh Capet became king, Richard began to style himself *Duke* of Normandy. The old titles of *Count* and *Marquis* were dropped. From that point on, the Norman rulers were generally recognized as *Dukes* with that upgraded title. And that also illustrates how important Normandy had become.

France now had a new king, and a new burgeoning dynasty. But much like his predecessors, Hugh Capet actually had very little control over most of France. His capital was Paris, and the area he controlled was a relatively small region around Paris. Beyond that tiny realm, most of the French nobles retained their castles, and knights and relative independence. In fact, Hugh's authority was generally ignored by the nobles in southern France and Brittany in the northwest. And the various local lords continued to fight amongst themselves. So at this very early point in the Capetian Dynasty, the outlook was anything but certain.

But Hugh Capet did one thing which helped to stabilize the French monarchy over the long term. As I noted in earlier episodes, the Frankish kings had a tendency to divide their kingdoms among their children and grandchildren when they died. But Hugh avoided that type of division by having his son crowned as his successor while he was still alive. That prevented anyone from contesting the throne at his death. That established a precedent which continued for two centuries, and it helped make France a stable country over the long run. Under Hugh Capet, the

French kingship evolved from an elective kingship similar to that of Anglo-Saxon England into a strict hereditary monarchy.

So as we've seen, Richard of Normandy played an important role during the transition from the old Carolingian Dynasty to the new Capetian Dynasty. His support of the Capetians gave them some much needed stability in the north. But while Richard supported the Capetians, he wasn't controlled by them.

Like many of the regional provinces, Normandy enjoyed a great deal of autonomy. Richard minted his own coins. He enforced his own laws. And he embraced the feudal system. He established his own vassals throughout Normandy. And he never allowed lesser nobles to become strong enough to challenge his authority. Normandy was well-administered, and it maintained centralized control. It never became fractured, and that was a big key to its long-term success.

The growing power of Normandy is reflected in the fact that Richard also pursued an independent foreign policy which owed nothing to the king of France. Late in his reign, Richard negotiated that treaty with Aethelred the Unready which I discussed in earlier episodes. Aethelred had accused Richard of providing safe haven to the Viking raiders who had renewed their attacks on England. So Richard and Aethelred entered into a treaty in 991. But note that it was a treaty between England and Normandy. The king of France wasn't even a party to the agreement.

And it is here, in this treaty with England, that we see Richard's important role in our overall story. If we want to trace the ultimate origins of the Norman Conquest from the Norman perspective, it all begins with Richard because Richard was the common link in the chain. His great-grandson was William the Conqueror. And his daughter was Emma – the same Emma whose story we followed in England. Remember that she married Aethelred the Unready. And then she married Canute. And she was the mother of Edward the Confessor. And when we left the story of England in 1050s, Edward was still sitting on the throne as an old man with no children. And everyone around him was wondering who was going to succeed him. So when Edward the Confessor died in England in 1066, William's claim to the English throne was based on the fact that he and Edward were cousins through the same common ancestor – Richard.

Five years after that treaty with England, Richard died. He had ruled for nearly 50 years. And Normandy had emerged as a formidable power in its own right in northern Europe. Richard was succeeded by his son also named Richard. So he is known as Richard II. In French, he was known as Richard le Bon – literally Richard the Good.

Richard II is important to our story because he a was very effective diplomat. In the same year that Richard II succeeded his father as Duke of Normandy, Hugh Capet died as King of France. So Normandy had a new duke and France had new king in the same year. Duke Richard and the new French king inherited their respective thrones at the same time. And they maintained the feudal alliance which their fathers had sustained. Richard even supported the French king's military campaigns in Burgundy.

With a strong French ally to the south, Richard turned to the troublesome region of Brittany to the west. He formed an alliance with Brittany. The Breton leader was Duke Geoffrey. And the best way to seal an alliance was with a marriage alliance. As it turned out, Richard and Geoffrey each had sisters, so they sealed their new alliance by marrying each other's sister.

These alliances helped to establish and define Normandy's borders with its neighbors. And for the first time, those borders started to become more or less fixed.

Richard's alliance with Brittany is noteworthy, and it will have long-term implications when we get to the Norman Conquest in the next episode, but it was Richard's other marriage alliance that is more important to the story of English.

That earlier treaty between Richard's father and Aethelred the Unready had already fallen part. Aethelred accused the younger Richard of violating his father's agreement. He claimed that Richard was continuing to give refuge to the Vikings who were invading England. Aethered even launched an attack on the Norman coast which was promptly repelled. But Richard was ultimately a good diplomat. So he solved the problem with England by negotiating a new treaty with Aethelred. And that treaty was sealed with a marriage between Aethelred and another of Richard's sisters. Of course, that sister was Emma. And that marriage in the year 1002 permanently linked the Norman ruling family with the Wessex ruling family of England.

As we know, Emma and Aethelred had two sons together, Alfred and Edward. And in 1013, Aethelred and Emma and the two children were forced to flee England by the invading Danish king, Swein Forkbeard. So that brought the Wessex royal family to Normandy. Aethelred and Emma soon returned to England. But the two sons were left behind in the care of their uncle Richard.

They would grow up in the Norman Court. They would be raised immersed in French culture. And they would speak French as their primary language.

Thirteen years later, Richard died. The year was 1026. Richard was immediately succeeded by his son Richard III. But the younger Richard died a few months later. And that paved the way for his younger brother Robert to become Duke of Normandy in the year 1027.

By the time Robert emerged as Duke, we have more evidence that French was now spoken almost exclusively throughout Normandy. In the year after he became Duke, a French monk and historian wrote a history of the Frankish kingdom. His name was Adhemar of Chabannes, and he wrote in the year 1028 that the Normans had been totally assimilated into Frankish culture, and that they now spoke the French dialects which were common throughout Northern France.

So let's stop here and look at little more closely at that language. As we know, that emerging French language had evolved out of Classical Latin. We traced the overall process in an earlier episode from Vulgar Latin, into Romance, and then into several northern French dialects which became known as Old French. What's so interesting about the evolution of French is that it had so many parallels to the evolution of English. Just as Old English was gradually losing its

complicated system of inflectional endings, French was doing the same thing. In Latin, nouns had six different endings or inflections depending on how they were used in the sentence. By the 900s, early French had reduced those noun inflections down to just two – one when used as the subject and one when used as the object. So this loss of inflectional endings parallels what was happening across the channel with English.

And there was another parallel. In an earlier episode, I noted that English had to find a new way to convey meaning with the loss of those inflectional endings. And the way that it did that was to settle on a more or less fixed word order – subject-verb-object. Well, guess what, early French did the same thing. As those inflectional endings eroded, French also began to adopt a more fixed word order, and it turned out to be the same word order as English – subject-verb-object.   So even before the Norman Conquest, English and French were showing a lot of similarities.

Another similarity was the gradual adoption of articles. Neither Latin nor Old English used articles. And by articles, I mean words like *a*, *an* or *the* in English and *un*, *une*, *le*, *la* and *les* in French. Those words weren't necessary because those inflectional endings indicated things like number and gender. So those endings conveyed that information, but with the decline of those endings, both English and French developed a new system of articles to precede the noun to tell you things like 'how many' and 'which one.' And in the case of French, those articles also told you whether the noun was masculine of feminine. And at this point in history, both languages were still making that masculine-feminine distinction – what English majors call 'grammatical gender.' It's the idea that every noun is either masculine or feminine for purposes of grammar. So in French, for example, a house or *maison* is feminine. So it requires a feminine article – 'la maison' – not 'le maison.' Well, as we know, English got rid of those distinctions. But it hadn't dropped them yet. Both languages were still distinguishing masculine and feminine nouns in the eleventh century.

So again, we see some very basic similarities between Old French and Old English on the eve of the Norman Conquest. And that may account for some of the blending which took place in the following centuries in England.

Now even though we can speak of Old French as an early form of Modern French, it was actually a variety of dialects. Ultimately the dialect spoken around Paris was the most influential in the evolution of Modern French. But just to the north of Paris was Normandy. And Normandy had developed its own unique dialect of Old French. This particular dialect was known as Norman French. And of course, that was the dialect which was brought to England in 1066.

Now all of these northern French dialects were very similar, but there were also some subtle differences. And since English borrowed French words from both the Norman dialect and the other French dialects, we can actually see some of those differences in Modern English.

Now I touched on this issue a little bit in the last episode, but I want to explore it in more detail this time. In general, what was happening was a softening of the early French language. French was replacing a lot of its hard consonant sounds with softer and smoother sibilant sounds. So the hard G sound (/g/) and the hard K sound (/k/) were shifting to sibilant sounds like /j/, or /dʒ/ or

/ch/. We've seen this process before. It's call assibilation. Another linguistic term for it is palatalization. It basically makes the language softer and smoother. This process can happen within any language, and we've seen that it happened within English as well, but it really happened a lot in early French. And that process is part of what gave French its distinctive sound.

But the Normans had been Vikings who spoke a North Germanic language with lots of those hard consonants. So when the Normans adopted French, they sometimes retained those Old Norse consonant sounds. So their French dialect was a little rougher, not quite as soft or smooth.

And when English borrowed the Norman version of those words, we ended up with words which have a hard 'K' or hard 'G' sound where French has a softer sibilant sound.

So let me begin by comparing a few words in Modern English and Modern French so you can hear that difference.

As I have noted in prior episodes that French tended to convert the hard 'K' sound into a 'CH' sound (/ch/). And they tended to do this before the front vowels, especially before the 'A' sound. And in later centuries, that sound evolved again within French to an 'SH' sound (/sh/). And I've given the example of words like *cape*, *chapel* and *chapeau* to illustrate that evolution. All of those words come from the same root word – the Latin word *caput* meaning 'head.' *Cape* came in first with its original 'K' sound. Then *chapel* came in after that first sound change. Then *chapeau* came in after the second sound change. So English has preserved those sounds.

So when we look at Modern English words which came from Norman French, we should expect the English words to have a hard 'K' sound where Modern French has an 'SH' sound. And in fact, that's what we find.

So, for example, English has the word *case* where Modern French has *chasse*. Same root word, but thanks to the Normans, English uses that hard 'K' sound at the beginning. *Case - chasse*.

English has *camel* where French has *chameau*. Again, same root word.
English has *carpenter* where French *charpentier*.
English has *decay* where French has *déchoir*.
English has *task* where French has *tâche*.
English has *market* where French has *marché*.
English has *cabbage* where French as *chou*.

And I could go on and on. But in all of those pairs, English uses a hard 'K' sound inherited from the Normans, whereas Modern French uses an 'SH' sound which evolved within standard French.

Now sometimes, we can see this distinction by comparing two or more English words. And that happens in cases where English borrowed words from both Norman French and standard Old French dialects. So English preserved both versions of a word. And both words survived because they took on distinct meanings over time.

So last time I gave the example of *cattle* and *chattel*. They both came from the Late Latin word *capitale*. The Normans gave us *cattle*, and standard Old French gave us *chattel*. The words became distinct over time so they both survived.

I also gave the example of the Latin word *castellum* which produced Norman *castel* and Old French *chastel*. *Chastel* later evolved into *chateau* within Modern French. So English has both versions today. Norman *castle* and Modern French *chateau*.

Another good example of this process can be found in the connection between the words *chase* and *catch*. You might think of those as two different things. First, you 'chase' something, then you 'catch' it. But both words come from the same Latin root. And the reason why *chase* and *catch* are distinct words in Modern English is because the Normans held onto the initial 'K' sound, whereas Old French changed it to a 'CH' sound. The Latin word was *captare* which meant to 'take or hold.' And in *captare*, you can hear the connection to words like *capture* and *captive* which also come from the same root.

Well, within Old French, two different versions of the word evolved – *cachier* and *chacier*. *Cachier* was the Norman version with its hard 'K' sound. And *chacier* was the standard Old French version with the 'CH' sound. The Norman version *cachier* became *catch* meaning to 'take hold of something.' The standard French version *chacier* became *chase* meaning to 'pursue something.' So those words – *chase* and *catch* – reflect the influence of the Normans on Modern English.

Here's another one for you. The Latin word *carrus* was a type of wagon. The Normans gave us the word as *car* with its hard 'K' sound. And from the same root, Old French gave us *chariot* with a 'CH' sound.

Well, 'to load a wagon' was *cargier* in Norman French and *chargier* in Old French. Now Norman *cargier* died out. But the Old French verison *chargier* eventually made its way into English as the word *charge*. But if the Norman verison had held on, we would have *carge* today instead of *charge*. Which would have sounded a little awkward if you have an electric car. You would have to *carge* your car. But thanks to standard Old French, today you *charge* your car instead. *Charge* comes from standard Old French, and *car* come from Norman French. But they have the same common root.

Along the same lines, Norman French had the word *carité*, where standard Old French had the word *charité*. Once again, the Norman version died out. And the standard Old French version survives as the word *charity*.

Now, I've focused on the 'K' sound (/k/), but we also know by now that the hard G' sound (/g/) is a closely related sound. The 'G' sound is voiced, where as the 'K' sound is unvoiced. But otherwise, it is mechanically the same sound. So when one of those sounds changes within a given language, we often find similar changes to the other sound. And that is the case here as well.

Standard Old French tended to soften that hard 'G' sound into a soft 'G' sound (/j/). Of course, that is also a 'J' sound. But that soft sound later evolved into the Modern French 'J' sound (/dʒ/) as in *Jacques* or *bonjour*. But again, the Normans didn't tend to make these changes. They tended to hold onto that hard G sound before the front vowels, especially before the 'A' sound.

So if we compare Modern English to Modern French, we find that English has the word *garter* where French has the word *jarretière*. English has *garden* where French as *jardin*. And compare English *gardener* to French *jardinier*.

An old word for ham is the word *gammon*. It goes back to the Norman French word *gambon* for ham. And the original meaning of the word was 'leg.' And it comes from the same root as the Modern French word for 'leg' which is *jambe*. So between English *gammon* and French *jambe*, we can hear that same sound change.

So words like *garter*, *garden* and *gammon* came with the Normans, and they retained that hard 'G' sound, whereas standard French softened that sound over time.

Now with respect to the evolution this particular 'G' sound, it is very difficult to find any cases where English has retained both a Norman version and a standard Old French version with the two different sounds. We usually have one or the other.

We may have an example in the words *gavel* and *javelin*, but the etymology of *gavel* is very uncertain. Some scholars link *gavel* to *javelin*, and if that is accurate, *gavel* may preserve the Norman 'hard G' sound and *javelin* may preserve the standard French 'soft G' sound. The best source I have for that link is 'The Dictionary of Early English' by Joseph T. Shipley. But again, that link is very 'iffy.'

Another example which has disappeared from English is the word *jail*. The Normans had the word as *gaiole* (/guy-ole/), but standard Old French had it as *jaole* (/ja-ole/). And of course, the standard Old French verison *jail* eventually won out. But in Britain, you can still find the word spelled as 'g-a-o-l,' even in some official documents. And that spelling reflects an older spelling of the word which goes back to the Normans when they still pronounced the hard 'G' at the beginning of the word.

So we've looked at how the Normans sometimes preserved hard Germanic consonants where standard French tended to soften those sounds. Another situation where Norman French was unique was the retention of the Germanic 'W' sound. And again, we've seen this before. But let me go back through it again so we can put all of these pieces together.

Both Old Norse and Old English had the 'W' sound. It was a common Germanic consonant. And it had once been a common sound in Latin as well. But the sound began to disappear at the beginning of words in Late Latin. So as an initial sound, it was very rare in early French. It was usually preceded by a consonant. So for example, they had the /kw/ sound at the beginning of words which they represented with the letter combination <QU>. So words like *qualify*, *quality*, *quarrel*, *quail*. They came close to an initial 'W' sound, but it had that 'K' sound before it.

But Old French also had a lot of those Frankish words within it. And of course, the Frankish language was a Germanic language with that initial 'W' sound. So early French had to deal with that sound. And it dealt with it by putting a hard 'G' in front of it. So once again, we see a connection between the 'K' sound and the 'G' sound – those guttural back consonants. Just like with words like *quality* and *quail*, French could stick a hard consonant in front of the 'W' sound to help them get to the 'W' sound.

So in those cases, they converted /w/ to /gw/, but they barely pronounced the 'G' part. Again, they just needed that 'G' consonant in there to help them get to the 'W' sound at the front of the word. But over time, that initial G became more pronounced – literally. And French actually ended up with a lot of words which were pronounced with an initial hard 'G' sound through this process.

But the Normans didn't have these French pronunciation issues. They had no problem pronouncing an initial 'W' sound. So the Normans tended to retain that sound at the beginning of words where standard Old French eventually shifted it to a 'G' sound.

And we have lots of surviving examples of this in Modern English. We've seen a lot of these before. So the Normans, for example, had the name *William* as in William the Conqueror, but Old French had *Guillaume*.

Along the same lines, the Normans had *wardein* where standard Old French had *gardien*. And that gave us the words *warden* and *guardian*.

The Normans had *wagier*, and Old French had *gagier*. The Norman word gave us *wage*, and the Old French word gave us *gage* – found in words like *engage* and *mortgage*.

This process also gave us Norman *warranty* and Old French *guaranty*. It also gave us Norman *wallop* and Old French *gallop*.

It is also the reason why we have *war* in English and *guerre* in French.

And English has *wait* where French had *guetter* from the same root.

And if you use the very British expression 'sticky wicket' to refer to a difficult circumstance, you can thank the Normans. The Normans brought the word *wicket* meaning 'a small door or gate.' It was later used to describe the stumps used on the pitch or playing field in cricket because they resembled a small gate. French has the same basic word, but in French it is *guichet*, and it means a counter or window like a ticket window.

So I hope you found all of that interesting. The main point here is that the Normans had fully embraced French by the early eleventh century. They may have pronounced a few words a little bit differently than their French neighbors, but it was the same basic language.

Now I noted earlier that in the year 1028, the historian Adhemar of Chabannes wrote that the Normans had been fully converted to Frankish language and culture. And that was the year after Robert of Normandy succeeded his younger brother as Duke of Normandy. We're now less than forty years away from the Norman Conquest.

The biggest political development early in Robert's reign was his conflict with Brittany in the northwest. The Duke of Brittany was Robert's cousin. Remember that Robert's father Richard and the Breton duke had entered into a marriage alliance a few year's earlier where they married each other's sisters. So now their respective sons were the Dukes of Normandy and Brittany. So they were first cousins. The Breton duke Alan III had succeeded his father in Brittany while he was still a minor. So his uncle Richard, the Duke of Normandy, became his guardian. And when Richard died in Normandy, Alan saw it as an opportunity to break free from Norman control and establish his independence.

But Richard's son Robert was having none of it. Robert launched an attack on his cousin in Brittany. And Alan was soon forced to submit. And he acknowledged himself as Robert's vassal. So through this war, Robert was able to re-establish and even strengthen his influence over Brittany. And again, this is going to be very important when we get to 1066. The so-called 'Norman Conquest' was really a combined Norman-Breton Conquest.

Robert's relationship with Brittany shows that he was willing to invade his neighbor if he felt the need to assert his power and authority over that neighbor. And that was a characteristic inherited by his son. Robert never actually married. So his children were illegitimate in the eyes of the church. At one time, it was quite common in Normandy for an illegitimate child to his inherit his father's lands or title. In fact, Rollo's three successors – William Longsword, Richard I and Richard II – were all illegitimate. But by this point, the Church was playing a much greater role in Norman life and culture. And legitimacy was more of an issue.

For Robert, this was not really a problem. His young son William was the apple of his eye. And when Robert made plans for a pilgrimage to Jerusalem in the year 1035, he decided to name William as his heir if anything happened on the trip and he didn't return alive. Young William was only 7 or 8 years old.

Robert held an assembly before the Norman barons to announce his departure. He formally announced William as his heir, and he demanded that the barons pledge an oath of loyalty to William, which they did. So a feudal bond was established between young William and the barons. A group of regents was selected to look after William while Robert was gone, and Robert soon left for Jerusalem.

That type of journey was fraught with danger. Sickness, disease, and attacks were constant threats. Many people never made it back home alive. And Robert was one of those victims. On his way back from the Near East, he fell sick and died in northern Anatolia – modern-day Turkey.

That left 8-year old William as the new Duke of Normandy. Despite all of those pledges and oaths, many of the Norman barons were not at all happy at the prospect of an 8-year old Duke. And this is where William's legitimacy became an issue. For those barons who contested the young boy's rule, William was not the legitimate heir. He was merely 'William the Bastard.'

Next time, we'll see how William survived – BARELY survived – those early challenges. We'll also explore his relationship with his cousin Edward the Confessor who had become an old king on the English throne – and an old king without an heir. And we'll finally get to the big event – the Norman Conquest of England.

So until then, thanks for listening to the History of English Podcast.