# The French Influence on Modern English Orthography A Historical and Linguistic Analysis

## Majed Alenezi[1] ID

**Cite this article as:**

Alenezi, M. (2024). The French Influence on Modern English Orthography A Historical and Linguistic Analysis. *Journal of Intercultural Communication*, *24*(4), 183-190. doi.org/10.36923/jicc.v24i4.914

**Corresponding Author:**

**Majed Alenezi**

College of Humanities and Social Sciences, Northern Borders University, Saudi Arabia. Email: majed.madhi@nbu.edu.sa

**Abstract:** Orthography is a critical component of the English language and serves as a repository for its linguistic and cultural heritage. The evolution of English orthography can be traced through three major stages: Old English, Middle English, and Modern English, each reflecting the socio-political circumstances of its time. Written records from the Old and Middle English periods reveal that the complexity of English spelling arises from the disconnection between spoken and written forms. This paper aims to explore the contributions of the French language to modern English orthography, offering a historical overview of the linguistic interplay between the two languages. It specifically investigates how the French language influenced modern English spelling through phonological, lexical, and orthographic changes. The findings demonstrate that historical events, particularly the Norman Conquest, had profound impacts on the linguistic evolution of English, shaping its orthographic system. This study underscores the significance of historical and sociopolitical contexts in understanding the development of English spelling and highlights the enduring influence of French on modern English orthography.

## 1. Introduction

Orthography, the systematic use of written symbols to represent the spoken language, is a fundamental and intricate feature of the English language. It serves not only as a bridge between spoken and written communication, but also as a repository of the linguistic and cultural heritage of the language. However, the complexity of English orthography stems from a fundamental disconnect between pronunciation and spelling, a phenomenon that has intrigued linguists and historians for centuries. As Crystal (2003) aptly highlighted, "English orthography is a mosaic of historical, cultural, and linguistic influences, reflecting the layers of history embedded within the language." This complexity is exemplified by words such as *knight* and *hour*, where the pronunciation deviates significantly from the written form.

Moreover, many scholars argue that English spelling transcends a simple letter-to-sound correspondence, emphasizing instead its historical and etymological underpinnings. For example, Carney (1994) asserts that English orthography is best understood as a 'compromise between phonetic representation and the preservation of etymological history'. Similarly, Venezky (2011) noted that the English writing system is "historically conditioned, encoding both pronunciation and the history of words." To support this perspective, Hanna et al. (1966) contend that "English orthography reflects the historical trajectory of the language more than phonetic regularity." In a complementary vein, Scragg (1974) and Upward & Davidson (2011) argue that the historical layers of English orthography, while contributing to its perceived irregularity, also serve as a valuable repository of linguistic evolution. Collectively, these points of view underscore that English spelling is not merely a matter of phonetics but is deeply rooted in historical and cultural legacy.

The transition from Old English to Middle and Modern English marked significant changes in the spelling system, many of which were influenced by external forces. In particular, Old English orthography, which was characterized by a closer relationship between sounds and symbols, lacked the silent letters and inconsistencies that plague Modern English spelling (Scragg, 1974). The Norman Conquest of 1066, however, marked a decisive turning point in the history of English orthography, introducing French linguistic features that reshaped both the phonetic and orthographic landscape. As Görlach (1991) explains, French influence was "not limited to vocabulary but extended to the orthographic and phonological structures of English."

Although previous studies have broadly examined the influence of French on English orthography, limited attention has been paid to regional variations in the integration of French linguistic elements across England. This study seeks to address this

[1] College of Humanities and Social Sciences, Northern Borders University, Saudi Arabia

gap by investigating how scribal practices and dialectal differences shaped the adaptation of French loanwords and orthographic conventions during the Middle English period. Furthermore, the bilingual dynamics of Norman England, where French and English coexisted, provided fertile ground for linguistic interplay. Despite this, the sociolinguistic aspects of such interactions remain underexplored and warrant further investigation.

The contributions of French to modern English orthography are particularly evident in three areas: the integration of loanwords, phonological modifications, and the influence of French scribes. For instance, loanwords such as *judge* and *genre* introduced new spelling patterns and phonetic complexities, while French scribes standardized spellings by incorporating new letters, such as *q* and *z* (Baugh & Cable, 2013; Howard-Hill, 20226). Furthermore, phonological changes driven by French influence disrupted the phonetic alignment of English spelling. Horobin and Smith (2009) highlights this phenomenon, noting that "phonological shifts introduced during the Middle English period contributed to the enduring irregularities in Modern English orthography."

By delving into these underexamined aspects, this study offers a deeper understanding of the dynamic interaction between historical, sociopolitical, and linguistic factors in shaping English orthography. In doing so, it also highlights how historical events, such as the Norman Conquest, catalyzed profound and lasting linguistic transformations. The enduring influence of French on English spelling has left an indelible mark on modern English orthography, a legacy that underscores the intricate connections between history and language. These insights not only enrich the field of historical linguistics, but also have practical implications for English language education, particularly in terms of spelling reform debates and pedagogical strategies.

Ultimately, this study aims to explore the profound impact of French on modern English orthography, shedding light on the historical, sociopolitical, and linguistic factors that have shaped the English spelling system. As Upward & Davidson (2011) observe, "The history of English spelling is a testament to the dynamic interplay between linguistic evolution and historical events, encapsulating the story of the language itself." Understanding these influences provides invaluable insights into the complexities of English orthography while also emphasizing the critical role historical contexts play in shaping modern languages.

## 2.    Literature Review

### 2.1. History of the English Language

Historically, the English language has evolved through three primary stages. Old English, Middle English, and Modern English. Many linguists further subdivide modern English into early modern and late modern English, each reflecting distinct political, cultural, and social influences. According to Nevalainen (2006), "Language change is no different from other historical developments in that it does not proceed in stages but rather by overlaps" (p. 3). This observation highlights that the transition between language stages is fluid and has overlapping features rather than abrupt shifts. Middle English, for example, diverged significantly from Old English due to the Norman invasion, a pivotal event that introduced linguistic interferences and contributed to spelling irregularities.

Throughout the history of the English language, there were periods when linguists and grammarians paid minimal attention to orthography. During Old and Middle English, there were no standardized rules for grammar, spelling, or dictionaries. As Bloomfield (1933) argued, writing was often perceived as a secondary and imperfect representation of speech. The primary focus of linguists and historians during these periods was on the letter-sound relationship, though many acknowledged that the Latin alphabet was not ideally suited for Old English writing. Grammarians sought to establish spelling rules based on spoken language. Venezky (2011) observed that "as spelling became regularized, linguists increasingly emphasized establishing spelling rules, but these retained a direct relationship between spelling and sound" (p. 17).

The rise of printing in the sixteenth century marked a turning point in English orthography. The printing press required the standardization of spelling, which had previously varied widely depending on regional dialects. As Upward and Davidson (2011) explain:

"*It was this new method of book-production that made both possible and necessary the fixing of the previously more fluid and varied spelling of Middle English, in that books were no longer written in the dialect spoken by a scribe or the scribe's patron but in the dialect of the printer, and most printers were established in or close to London" (p. 84).*

This shift toward standardization laid the groundwork for discussions on spelling rules, which became central to English orthography. Horobin et. al (2002) argued that middle English was "notoriously the time when linguistic variation is fully reflected in the written mode" (p. 33).

Changes in English writing systems are both natural and inevitable, as the language itself is dynamic and constantly evolving. However, alterations in spelling have not always matched the pace of other linguistic changes. As Vallins (1965) noted, "The sound may have changed slightly, but the symbol remained" (p. 13). This disconnection is exemplified by the word *bald*, where the pronunciation has evolved while the spelling remains unchanged. Such discrepancies have contributed to the inconsistencies in Modern English spelling, where changes in pronunciation were not accompanied by corresponding modifications in spelling. This widening gap between sound and symbol reflects broader linguistic shifts throughout the history of the English language.

## 2.2. English Lexicon

The English vocabulary has developed through contributions from several languages, including Germanic, Latin, Greek, and French. The influence of these languages varies depending on the historical stage of English, with Latin and French having particularly significant impacts during the Modern English period. French and Latin, in particular, account for a high percentage of loanwords compared to Germanic or Greek. Despite this, determining the precise origin of words is not always straightforward. Some word origins remain obscure. For instance, the New English Dictionary notes that the origin of the word *hoodlum* is unknown.

The alphabet itself demonstrates the integration of influences from various languages. Letters and combinations of letters often represent a range of sounds derived from different linguistic traditions. For example, the letter /e/ in English can represent different sounds, as seen in *eat* (/i:t/) and *ewe* (/ju:/). Additionally, English orthography includes numerous homophones, such as *write* and *right*, or *to* and *two*, where the same sounds are represented by different spellings. Moreover, English includes homonyms, where words share identical spellings and pronunciations but have different meanings, such as *lie* (to tell an untruth) and *lie* (to recline).

These complexities in the English lexicon highlight the language's multifaceted development, shaped by centuries of linguistic borrowing and adaptation. The irregularities in spelling and pronunciation, which often puzzle learners and native speakers alike, are rooted in this rich historical interplay of languages. The contributions of French, Latin, and other linguistic influences have left a profound mark on the structure and vocabulary of Modern English, making it a unique and dynamic language.

## 2.3. The Influence of French Language

The profound influence of the French language on Modern English began with the Norman Conquest in 1066. Many linguists agree that the Norman Conquest stands as one of the most significant events in the external history of the English language, catalyzing the transition from Old to Middle English. The Normans introduced not only a new ruling class but also a distinct language and culture, fundamentally altering the linguistic landscape of England. As Williams (1975) states, "The Norman Conquest has led to a language that is qualitatively different from what it was before 1066" (p. 65). By the mid-fifteenth century, the English language had undergone substantial changes, diverging markedly from its eleventh-century form. The Middle English period, spanning approximately from 1150 to 1450, represents this transformative stage between Old and Modern English. Linguists often describe this period as unique due to the social and political upheavals that reshaped the English language system during and after the Norman Conquest.

> *"As a result of the social and political upheaval caused by the Norman Conquest, the West Saxon standard system of spelling and punctuation was in time no longer used. Writers used spellings that tended to match the pronunciation of their spoken dialect. Scribes often changed the spelling of words they were copying to match their own dialectal pronunciation" (Freeborn, 1998, p. 76).*

During this period, a significant number of French speakers settled in England, with some occupying prominent roles in the court and government. Despite their dominance, the Normans made no deliberate attempts to eradicate English from the political landscape. This was largely because the majority of England's population continued to speak English, rendering its use unavoidable. However, the ruling class predominantly spoke French, elevating its status to that of the official language, while English remained the vernacular of the indigenous population. Consequently, for nearly two centuries, England was characterized by bilingualism, where the use of English and French varied across social classes. This bilingual coexistence did not create strict segregation between the two languages but fostered language contact and integration.

This interaction encouraged some lower-level French rulers to learn English for basic communication with the local populace. Similarly, many English speakers adopted French words and expressions to navigate the new sociopolitical reality. Linguists refer to this phenomenon as code-switching, where speakers alternated between languages in conversation. From a historical perspective, it is common for the language of the conquered population to be more significantly influenced by that of the conquerors, a pattern observed in various colonized regions, including Africa. The integration of French into English speech during this era exemplifies this dynamic. Through this process, English absorbed a considerable number of French loanwords, many of which became integral to the language.

As a result, English largely became a spoken language, used primarily for oral communication among rural communities. Vallins (1965) remarks, "English during the early Middle English period was a spoken language; writing was mainly in French and Latin" (p. 13). This shift led to a substantial decline in written English materials. Myers (1966) further observes, "English disappeared as an official language, and for the first few generations of this period it very nearly disappeared as a written one" (p. 119). French, by contrast, became the language of the elite, serving as the medium for governance, education, and literature. Scragg (1974) notes, "French became the language of the ruling class and remained important as the court language and the medium of parliament and the law until the fourteenth century" (p. 15).

With French firmly entrenched in positions of power, there was little incentive to produce written works in English. Most literature during the twelfth and thirteenth centuries was composed in French, catering to the literate

English elite. The established Old English writing system, once a standard, began to deteriorate and fade. During the early Norman rule, the English writing system was nearly eradicated, surviving only in limited and marginal use. This long hiatus in the written use of English explains the stark differences between the orthographic conventions of Old and Modern English. Since the language ceased to be written for almost two centuries, the evolution of Modern English orthography reflects the profound influence of French and the sociopolitical realities of the time.rs.

## 2.4. Final Settlement of Literature Review

Following the Norman Conquest, French emerged as the official language of England for nearly two centuries. It permeated many key societal domains, including governance, education, and religion. French became the language of schools and churches, shaping the linguistic and cultural fabric of the time. This influence was so pervasive that an entire generation became predominantly French-speaking. For example, Henry III, who ruled England from 1216 to 1272, spoke only French and relied on French officials to occupy the most critical positions in his administration.

However, this dominance of French did not persist indefinitely. By the late thirteenth century, French began to lose its prominence, gradually being supplanted by English. This shift accelerated during the fourteenth century as French forfeited much of its elevated status. Several factors contributed to this decline, including the growing sense of English national identity and the diminishing association of French with prestige and power. By 1350, English had reasserted itself as the primary language of schools and churches, reflecting a broader societal transition.

A landmark moment in this linguistic shift occurred in 1362, when English officially became the language of all legal proceedings, replacing French in lawsuits and courtroom settings. This development underscored the reemergence of English as the dominant language in England. Nevertheless, the complete transition of English into a national written and official language did not materialize until the early fifteenth century. By this time, English had regained its status as both a spoken and written language, reflecting its resilience and adaptability in the face of French linguistic dominance.

## 3.  Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative and historical linguistic approach to thoroughly examine the influence of the French language on Modern English spelling. Specifically, the research concentrates on three interconnected areas: loanwords, phonological changes, and orthographic innovations introduced through scribal practices during and after the Norman Conquest. The Middle English period, spanning from 1150 to 1450, serves as the central focus due to its pivotal role in facilitating the linguistic transformation of English under French influence. This period is particularly significant as it marks the transition from Old English orthography to a system increasingly shaped by external linguistic and sociopolitical factors.

To support the analysis, data were gathered from a combination of primary and secondary materials, ensuring a comprehensive and multidimensional investigation. Primary data were sourced from historical manuscripts and linguistic corpora, such as the Oxford English Dictionary and Middle English textual archives, which provide critical insights into the adoption and evolution of French loanwords and orthographic conventions. Additionally, secondary sources included seminal works by renowned linguistic scholars, such as Scragg (1974), Upward and Davidson (2011), and Williams (1975). These works offered robust theoretical frameworks and contextual analyses that underpinned the tracing of linguistic patterns and their subsequent impact on Modern English spelling.

The analytical process involved a meticulous examination of phonological shifts and orthographic practices, comparing texts from Old English and Middle English to identify significant changes introduced through French influence. Furthermore, the broader sociopolitical context—most notably, the Norman Conquest—was integrated into the analysis to illustrate how historical events facilitated the integration of French linguistic elements into English. To ensure a systematic and comprehensive investigation, loanwords were analyzed for their phonetic, morphological, and orthographic adaptations, with particular attention given to patterns in their adoption and standardization.

While the methodology provides a detailed and structured approach, certain limitations are acknowledged. For instance, the study relies partly on secondary interpretations of historical records, which may introduce biases or discrepancies due to differing scholarly perspectives. Additionally, the exclusion of non-linguistic cultural influences, such as art, music, and economic factors, narrows the analytical scope, potentially overlooking a more holistic understanding of the historical context. Despite these constraints, this methodological approach offers a nuanced and comprehensive understanding of the linguistic changes induced by French during a critical period in English history. Through this combination of historical and linguistic analysis, the study contributes valuable insights into the complex interplay between language contact, sociopolitical dynamics, and orthographic evolution.

## 4.  Discussions: French Lexical in the English Language

The arguments outlined above vividly illustrate the deep linguistic integration between English and French during a significant historical period. The Norman Conquest, far from being solely a military campaign, also functioned

as a linguistic invasion that profoundly shaped the English language. As Scragg (1974) aptly remarks, "The French linguistic invasion of England in the high Middle Age was a prolonged campaign" (p. 39). The linguistic consequences of this invasion were far-reaching and are evident across numerous aspects of Modern English. French emerged as a critical resource in the development of the modern standard of English, particularly as English gradually regained its status as the official language. This resurgence of English was accompanied by a substantial influx of French vocabulary, reflecting the enduring period of bilingualism and cultural integration.

During the nearly two centuries in which French served as the official language of England, its influence was most prominently felt in domains such as government, law, fashion, courtly life, and other facets of high culture. It is widely acknowledged among linguists that a significant portion of English vocabulary related to jurisprudence and administration originates from French. This extensive borrowing often displaced many Old English words, leading to a substantial lexical shift. As Williams (1975) observes, "Although certain grammatical and phonological changes may be attributed to the Norman Conquest, it is in vocabulary and semantics that the changes have been the greatest. The enormous influx in Middle English of not only French but also Latin words certainly would never have occurred without the conquest" (p. 67).

The sheer volume of French loanwords incorporated into English during this period is remarkable. Estimates suggest that approximately 10,000 French words entered the English lexicon, a phenomenon underscored by Scragg (1974), who notes, "The most obvious is that a large proportion of present-day English vocabulary is derived from French" (p. 40). These borrowed words not only transformed the English lexicon but also had a significant impact on the phonetic and phonological systems of the language. This linguistic transformation occurred as English adapted to accommodate both the phonological structures and vocabulary introduced by French.

Interestingly, the treatment of French loanwords in English varied considerably. While some retained their original pronunciation but underwent orthographic changes, as seen in *mirage* and *razor*, others experienced both phonological and orthographic modifications. These variations can be attributed to several interrelated factors.

Firstly, **phonological gaps** played a crucial role. Certain sounds present in French had no direct equivalent in Old English, necessitating adaptations. For example, the voiced fricative /v/ was introduced through French, as it was absent in Old English phonology. Secondly, **dialectal variation** between Norman French and Parisian French significantly influenced pronunciation and usage. The differences between these dialects contributed to the diverse ways in which French loanwords were integrated into English. Thirdly, the **lack of standardization** during the Middle English period resulted in inconsistencies in the adoption and pronunciation of French words. Lastly, **familiarity with French** among certain segments of the English population, particularly the educated and elite, facilitated the borrowing and incorporation of French vocabulary into English.

The introduction of French vocabulary not only enriched the English lexicon but also instigated subtle yet enduring changes in English phonology. These changes underscore the intricate interplay between language contact, social dynamics, and linguistic adaptation during the Norman period. By examining this transformative era, it becomes clear that the Norman Conquest had a lasting impact on the linguistic fabric of English, shaping the language into the dynamic and complex system we recognize today.

## 4.1. Sound Changes and Modifications

The history of the English language reflects a continuous evolution across its semantic, syntactic, and phonetic dimensions. These modifications frequently occurred in response to political and social circumstances, with the Middle English period standing out as a time of particularly significant phonological changes. Notably, many of these changes emerged as a result of the influx of French loanwords following the Norman Conquest. As Venezky (2011) highlights, "Foreign spellings have been retained in English orthography since the Middle English period" (p. 121). For instance, the diphthong /ɔɪ/, as found in the word *choice*, was introduced exclusively through loanwords, showcasing the influence of French spelling conventions on English phonology.

Williams (1975) further observed, "It was then that sound changes in the language began to lay the groundwork for our present orthographic confusions, so that today the way we spell words no longer accurately represents how we pronounce them" (p. 301). This observation underscores the enduring impact of French on English orthography. The revival of English as an official written language during the later Middle English period marked the introduction of a new spelling system distinct from Old English. However, this system was characterized by significant inconsistencies due to the absence of a standardized national orthography. Consequently, words were often spelled in multiple ways; for example, the Old English word *hwat* was rendered as *quat* or *quhat* in Middle English. Such inconsistencies, heavily influenced by French orthographic conventions, became a defining feature of the period.

The incorporation of French loanwords also prompted alterations in English spelling rules. A prominent example is the influence of French on words beginning with the letter *h*. In Old French, the /h/ sound was unaspirated, a feature later acquired from Latin. As a result, many French-derived words with silent *h* were adopted into English, manifesting in three distinct forms:

1. **Lost /h/:** In some cases, the /h/ sound was entirely dropped, as seen in *able* and *ability*.

2. **Silent /h/:** The /h/ remained in spelling but was not pronounced, as in *hour*, *honest*, and *honour*.

3. **Reintroduced /h/:** In certain instances, the /h/ sound was reintroduced and pronounced, as in *horrible*, *hospital*, and *host*.

Moreover, in Modern English, several French loanwords continue to retain their original French spellings and, in some cases, their pronunciations. Examples include *grace*, *amateurs*, and *fiancé*, which preserve their French orthographic forms while being pronounced similarly to their French counterparts. Similarly, words ending in *ee*, such as *matinee* and *soiree*, maintain their acute accents and French-derived pronunciations, further reflecting the lasting influence of French orthography on Modern English.

The influence of French loanwords on English orthography is distinct when compared to other languages, such as Latin and Greek. Several factors contribute to this uniqueness:

1. **Prolonged Influence:** French functioned as both a written and spoken language of administration, education, and culture in England for over two centuries, leaving an indelible mark on English orthography.

2. **Bilingualism:** During this period, many educated English speakers were bilingual, fluent in both spoken and written French. This bilingualism facilitated the integration of French linguistic features into English.

3. **Standardization Efforts:** The sociopolitical dominance of French played a crucial role in shaping the formulation of Modern English orthography. Efforts to standardize the language incorporated French vocabulary and spelling conventions.

## 4.2. French Scribes in English

The relationship between English and French extends beyond the borrowing of words. Loanwords are merely one dimension of the broader influence of French on Modern English spelling. French also reshaped certain aspects of the English phonological system, leading to changes in the pronunciation of some English words. Specifically, the place and manner of articulation of several English sounds were adjusted to align with their French counterparts. For example, during the Old English period, the letter *f* represented both voiced and voiceless sounds, while the voiced sound /v/ was introduced to English through French. The word *service*, for instance, originally appeared in English as *serfise* but was later modified to include the voiced /v/ instead of the voiceless /f/.

Mayer (1970) explains, "Possibly as a result of French influence, the two fricative sounds /f/ and /v/ became contrasting phonemes instead of allophones of the same phoneme; and so did the /s/ and /z/ sounds. It seems reasonable to suppose that /θ/ and /ð/ became differentiated at the same time" (p. 127). This phonemic distinction highlights the impact of French on the phonological evolution of English.

French influence also enhanced other phonetic aspects of English. The use of *ch* to represent the phoneme /tʃ/, as in *church*, is a notable example of this influence. According to Upward and Davidson (2011), "It is understandable that when Norman French offered the digraph CH to represent /tʃ/, it was rapidly adopted for French loanwords and native English vocabulary alike" (p. 100). Furthermore, French occasionally used *ch* to represent the /ʃ/ sound, as seen in the transformation of the French word *chok* into the English word *shock*. French also introduced the diphthong /ɔɪ/ into English, found in words like *employ* and *boy*. Another example is the French use of *c* to represent /s/ before the front vowels /e/ and /i/, as in words like *centre* and *city*.

Following the Norman Conquest, the shortening and lengthening of vowels also occurred. For example, in two-syllable words, the short vowel often lengthened, resulting in monosyllabic pronunciations. Many of these words retained their final *e* in spelling. For instance, the Old English word *bacan* evolved into *baken* in Middle English and later became *bake* in Modern English. However, there is no definitive evidence linking this vowel lengthening directly to French influence, even though it coincided with the Norman Conquest.

In addition to loanwords and sound changes, the French language introduced new scribal practices and letters to English, which significantly affected Modern English spelling. The letters *q* and *z*, for instance, were not part of Old English but were incorporated into English during the Middle English period through French. "Z and q appeared in many French loanwords from the twelfth century, and their use spread to native words during the Middle English period" (Vallins, 1965, p. 29). For example, the Old English words *cwellan* and *cwen* became *quell* and *queen* under the influence of French orthographic conventions. By the fourteenth century, the use of *qu* had become standardized in English, replacing the Old English *cw*, as noted by Upward and Davidson (2011).

Another significant addition to English from French was the letter *v*. In Old English, *f* was used for both voiced and voiceless sounds. Anglo-Saxon manuscripts show that *v* was initially used as a capital letter to represent the vowel *u*. The distinction between *u* as a vowel and *v* as a consonant did not emerge until the seventeenth century, when *v* became firmly established as a consonant. French also introduced the digraph *ou* to English, used to represent the long vowel /u:/ in words such as *mouse* (from Old English *mus*). Similarly, the Old English word *hus* evolved into the Modern English *house*, reflecting French influence on English vowel representation.

## 5.    Conclusion

The relationship between the French language and English is extensive and cannot be fully encapsulated within a limited scope. However, it is evident that French has significantly shaped Modern English spelling. English orthography is intrinsically linked to the contributions of French, which this paper has explored through three major elements: loanwords, sound changes, and the introduction of new scribes. These influences were firmly embedded into English society through government practices, religious discourse, and educational institutions.

Additionally, the research has highlighted the critical role of political circumstances in the development and transformation of a language. The Norman Conquest, as a pivotal political event, fundamentally altered the trajectory of Old English, reshaping it into what eventually became Modern English. This historical turning point not only introduced linguistic innovations but also underscored the interconnectedness of sociopolitical events and linguistic evolution. The legacy of French influence remains an enduring feature of English, reflected in its orthographic complexities and linguistic richness.

## 6.    Limitations and Implications

The study acknowledges several limitations that may influence its findings and simultaneously provide valuable opportunities for further exploration. One notable limitation is the reliance on secondary interpretations from previous scholarly works, which could introduce biases or inconsistencies stemming from differing methodologies and theoretical frameworks. Although primary manuscripts were directly analyzed, expanding access to less-studied or unpublished primary materials could significantly enrich the study's depth and reliability. Moreover, the focus on standard Middle English texts constrains the analysis of regional dialectal variations, potentially leading to an underrepresentation of the diversity in French influence across different geographic areas in England.

In addition to these challenges, temporal boundaries further restrict the scope of the research. By concentrating solely on the Middle English period (1150–1450), the study excludes both earlier and later developments that might provide a more comprehensive understanding of the continuity and evolution of French linguistic impact. Furthermore, the exclusion of non-linguistic cultural influences, such as those related to art, music, and socioeconomic factors, narrows the analytical lens, potentially overlooking a more integrated and holistic perspective of the historical context.

Addressing these limitations in future research could significantly enhance the scope and depth of insights into the French influence on English orthography. By broadening the temporal range, incorporating regional and dialectal diversity, and integrating cultural dimensions, future studies could offer a more nuanced and multifaceted understanding of this pivotal period in linguistic history.

Understanding the French influence on English spelling carries broader implications, spanning both linguistic studies and educational practices. From a linguistic perspective, this research offers valuable insights into the ways language contact and historical events intersect to shape phonological and orthographic systems. Moreover, for educators, the findings emphasize the need to approach English spelling not merely as a collection of arbitrary rules but as a rich historical and cultural phenomenon. By adopting this perspective, educators can enhance the learning experience, fostering a deeper appreciation among learners for the historical context and evolution of English orthography. This dual focus bridges the gap between theoretical linguistics and practical pedagogy, demonstrating the interconnectedness of language history and education.

## 7.    Future Research

This study establishes a foundation for further exploration into the intricate relationship between French and English, particularly within the domain of historical linguistics. To build on this groundwork, future research could focus on comparative studies, analyzing how the French influence on English contrasts with contributions from other languages such as Latin, Norse, or Greek. Such comparisons would offer a broader perspective on linguistic interactions and enrich our understanding of language evolution. Furthermore, regional variations in the extent of French influence during the Middle English period merit closer examination, as these variations likely played a significant role in shaping modern English dialects.

In addition to these historical analyses, another promising avenue involves investigating cross-language orthographic influences. For instance, exploring whether English, as a global language, has influenced modern French or other languages in terms of spelling conventions or phonological structures could reveal reciprocal linguistic dynamics. Moreover, applying historical insights to address contemporary challenges, such as debates on spelling reform or enhancing the teaching of English as a second language (ESL), could yield practical benefits for educators and policymakers alike.

Finally, delving into cultural linguistics offers the potential to explore how bilingualism and language contact during the Norman period influenced cultural identity and shaped English speakers' attitudes toward their language. Together, these areas of inquiry would significantly deepen our understanding of the evolution of English orthography while underscoring its enduring relevance in modern linguistic studies.

**Disclaimer:** The views and opinions expressed in this article are those of the author(s) and contributor(s) and do not necessarily reflect JICC's or editors' official policy or position. All liability for harm done to individuals or property as a result of any ideas, methods, instructions, or products mentioned in the content is expressly disclaimed.

## References

Bloomfield, L. (1933) *Language.* New York: Holt.

Carney, Edward. 1994. *A survey of English spelling*. London: Routledge.

Crystal, D. (2003). *The Cambridge Encyclopedia of the English Language*. Cambridge University Press.

Cable, T. (2013). *A Companion to Baugh and Cable's A History of the English Language.* Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203995181

Freeborn, D. (1998). *From Old English to Standard English: A course book in language variation across time*. University of Ottawa Press. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-349-26665-4

Görlach, M. (1991). Wörterbücher. Dictionaries. Dictionnaires. Dictionaries: *Journal of the Dictionary Society of North America*, 13(1), 127-135. https://doi.org/10.1353/dic.1991.0000

Horobin, S., & Smith, J. J. (2002). *An Introduction to Middle English*. Oxford University Press. https://doi.org/10.1515/9780748673124

Mayer, F. (1970). *History of English Sounds and Spelling.* Academic Press.

Howard-Hill, T. H. (2006). Early modern printers and the standardization of English spelling. *Modern Language Review*, *101*(1), 16-29. https://doi.org/10.1353/mlr.2006.0060

Myers, L. M. (1966). *The Roots of Modern English*.

Nevalainen, T. (2006). *Introduction to Early Modern English*. Edinburgh University Press. https://doi.org/10.1515/9780748626366

Scragg, D. G. (1974). *A history of English spelling*. Manchester University Press.

Upward, C., & Davidson, G. (2011). *The history of English spelling.* John Wiley & Sons. https://doi.org/10.1002/9781444342994

Vallins, G. H. (1965). *Spelling*. Penguin Books.

Venezky, R. L. (2011). *The structure of English orthography*. Walter de Gruyter.

Williams, J. M. (1975). *Origins of the English language*. Simon & Schuster.

## About the Author(s)

**Majed Alenezi** is an Associate Professor of English Studies at the Department of Language and Translation, at Northern Borders University. He earned his Ph.D. in English at Middle Tennessee State University. His research and teaching interests include African Literature, Postcolonial Theory, and Modern British Literature.