TEMA

42

The Norman Conquest. The Influence of French on the English Language. Borrowings and Calques

La conquista normanda. Influencia del francés en la lengua inglesa. Préstamos y calcos.

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Material de elaboración propia a partir de las fuentes oficiales que se citan al final del tema. No es un temario oficial ni sustituye a la normativa publicada.

Índice

1. INTRODUCTION

2. THE NORMAN CONQUEST

- 2.1. The crisis of 1066
- 2.2. From victory to conquest
- 2.3. A three-language country

3. FROM FRENCH TO ENGLISH: THE RECOVERY OF A LANGUAGE

- 3.1. The separation from Normandy
- 3.2. The Hundred Years' War and the status of English
- 3.3. English returns to writing

4. THE INFLUENCE OF FRENCH ON THE ENGLISH LEXICON

- 4.1. How much and when
- 4.2. Semantic fields
- 4.3. Replacement, coexistence and levels of style

5. BORROWINGS AND CALQUES

- 5.1. Definition and classification
- 5.2. Calques or loan translations
- 5.3. Hybrids and word formation

6. SPELLING, PRONUNCIATION AND GRAMMAR

7. PEDAGOGICAL AND DIDACTIC IMPLICATIONS

8. CONCLUSION

Fuentes

1. INTRODUCTION

Every time an English speaker orders beef, pork or mutton, he or she is quoting the Norman Conquest. The animal in the field keeps its English name, the cow, the pig and the sheep, but once it reaches the table it takes a French one. A whole social history lies hidden in that menu: a Germanic-speaking peasantry that tended the animals and a French-speaking aristocracy that ate them. This small linguistic fossil is a good way into the topic, because it shows that the events of 1066 were not only military and political; they changed the vocabulary, the spelling and even the sounds of English for good.

This topic covers about four centuries, from 1066 to the late fifteenth century, so selection is essential. I will first examine the Norman Conquest itself, its causes, its course and its consolidation. Secondly, I will describe the linguistic situation of Norman England and the slow recovery of English, which explains why French influence was so large and so late. Thirdly, I will study the influence of French on the English lexicon, the periods of borrowing, the semantic fields and the pairs of words that coexist. Fourthly, I will define and classify borrowings and calques with examples, and I will add a brief section on the effects of French on spelling, pronunciation and word formation. Finally, I will consider the pedagogical and didactic implications of this content in Secondary Education and Bachillerato.

Before moving on, I would like to mention the sources consulted for this topic. Among reference works, I have used Albert C. Baugh and Thomas Cable's A History of the English Language, published by Routledge; Charles Barber, Joan C. Beal and Philip A. Shaw's The English Language: A Historical Introduction, published by Cambridge University Press; and David Crystal's The Cambridge Encyclopedia of the English Language, also from Cambridge University Press. I have also checked dates and data in institutional sources such as English Heritage, the National Archives, Westminster Abbey, the Royal Family website, Encyclopaedia Britannica and the Oxford English Dictionary. As for the legal framework, I will refer to Organic Law 3/2020 (LOMLOE), which modifies Organic Law 2/2006 on Education; Royal Decrees 217/2022 and 243/2022, which set the minimum teaching content for ESO and Bachillerato; and the Extremaduran Decrees 110/2022 and 109/2022 of 22 August, modified in 2023.