

Germanic prosody and French loanwords

After the Norman Conquest and Norman rule around 10 000 French loanwords with foreign phonemic and prosodic patterns were introduced into the English language during the years 1250-1500.

On the phonemic level new distinctions developed, e.g. the Old English allophones [s] - [z] and [f] - [v] became different phonemes in Middle English (cf Lass 1992, Labov 1994).

On the prosodic level two conflicting stress systems clashed, the French pattern with the stress on the last heavy syllable and the Germanic and Old English root-initial stress pattern.

Originally the French stress was kept in the French loans, which can be seen in rhymes in Middle English poetry (cf Blake 1996, Minkova 1997, Svensson 2001), but they gradually adopted the English stress pattern, and as early as 1570 Levins gives a fairly large number of French nouns, e.g. *colour*, *courage*, with first-syllable stress.

French words kept coming in after 1500 but not in such large numbers. In today's English the great majority of the French loans have been adapted to the English prosodic pattern, but there are also words, especially late loans, with fluctuating stress and on-going stress-shifting, and the stressing of the following categories and numbers of loanwords have been examined in the dictionaries of Johnson (1755), Walker (1826), Jones (1917) and Wells (2000).

Introduced into English	Disyllabic nouns	Trisyllabic nouns
before 1500	200	200
1500-1700	100	100
after 1700	100	100

Also, as a comparison, the stressing of 200 trisyllabic French loanwords in German, like English a stress-timed language, will be examined in the pronunciation dictionaries of Viëtor (1912) and Duden (2000), and the following questions will be discussed:

- Is the stress-shifting a uniquely English phenomenon that can be ascribed to the massive introduction of loanwords in a short period of time, or can a similar adaptation to the Germanic stress pattern be seen in other Germanic languages too?
- Is the adaptation to the Germanic prosodic pattern a shift towards the first syllable or is it rather a movement away from the last syllable?

While the early loans have changed very little from Johnson (1755) to Wells (2000), several of the words introduced after 1500 and especially after 1700 display variation today. Minkova (1997) points to non-finality as an important factor in the Middle English stress-shifting, and stress-shifting in Present-Day English indicates that this is still the case. No less than 47 out of 200 nouns introduced after 1700 moved the stress from the final syllable during the 20th century.

In German a stress shift in French loanwords is also going on. Curme (1905, 1922) points to the tendency to stress-shifting "in accordance with German fashion" and to occasional shifts "for rhythmical reasons". Today trisyllables with initial and non-final stress account for 58 per cent of the 200 examined loanwords, and 19 of them shifted the stress during the 20th century (Viëtor 1912 to Duden 2000). In German, as in English, stress-shifting is an on-going process, another indication of non-finality as an important factor in Germanic prosody.

Keywords: prosody loanwords stress shift

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