



Did Charlemagne know Carolingian kingship theory?

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Front cover illustration: “Can we see, behind the well-ordered patterns Latin letters, the medieval kings and emperors at work?” Hrabanus Maurus, *De laudibus Sanctae Crucis*, Codex Vaticanus Reginensis latinus 124, fol. 4v (Fulda, ca. second quarter of 9th century), detail.

Back cover illustration: Denier (struck c. 812–814, found in a grave at Birka, Sweden), with the image of Charlemagne. Text: KAROLVS IMP AVG (Karolus Imperator Augustus). Photo Kungliga myntkabinettet, Stockholm.

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Introduction

Some time around 1100, Duke William IX of Aquitaine, VII as Count of Poitiers, undisputed top actor in South-Western Gaul and prominent Hispanic crusader, put into one of his highly stylish songs that, in days to come, would earn him the epitheton ‘the first troubadour’, the verses: *Et il prec En Jezu del tron en romans et en son lati* – ‘may he pray to the enthroned Christ in Romance and his Latin’.¹ While the Almighty might be pleased to be addressed in both languages, on other occasions the use of the vernacular for religious purposes was not without danger, as, two generations later, a compatriot of the Duke found out to his detriment when he was suspected, in the course of a religious dispute with a papal legate, to use his lack of Latin as a smokescreen for his heretic tendencies – ‘we had to meet them half-way’, says the legate, ‘and, though that is quite absurd, talk about the sacraments in the vernacular’.² It is doubtful whether the legate himself, who maintained that ‘it is well-known that the Gospel and the Epistles are written in Latin’, was so vague about church history that he did not know that the Vulgate had been a translation in the first place. What he meant was that for practical purposes, the one version there was in the West – the one with which Saint Jerome was credited – ought not to be superseded by the efforts of any populist *idiota*.

¹ Guilhem IX: *Pos de chantar m'es pres talenz* (PC 183,10), v. 24, in: de Riquer 1975, I p. 140.

² Henry of Marcy, Abbot of Clairvaux: *De rebus a se et sociis suis tempore legationis eorum adversus Albigenses gestis*, in: PL 204, col. 240 f.: *Evangelia et Epistolae... Latino eloquii noscuntur esse scripta... necesse fuit nos illis condescendere et de ecclesiasticis sacramentis... quamvis satis esset absurdum, vulgarem habere sermonem*. – I discuss most of the episodes quoted here in more detail in Rüdiger 2001.

Many contemporaries would have shared the sentiment that languages ought not to be used interchangeably. And not all of them did so out of hostility to popular preaching. Indeed, the new, formally educated service personnel – the ‘men raised from the dust’³ – who were making their way into the princely milieux at about the same time met with disapproval, among other things, because of the way their Latinate ‘cold learning’⁴ contrasted with the highly formalised aristocratic vernacular orality we know, fragmentally, as ‘courtly culture’. That art of the spoken word had its less refined sides to it. ‘You don’t think that with all that learning you brought home from Bologna you are going to lose the count his county, do you?’ thundered an irate Catalan magnate against the lawyer speaking up for his adversary, a young orphaned heiress, in a succession dispute in 1228.⁵ Versed in his peers’ political discourse as well as in the concomitant art of mustering armed support, that magnate was nonetheless going to lose his quarrel – not, however, because of the finer points of the *Codex Iuris* but because the King came down in his disfavour. That king, James I of Aragon (d. 1276), later known as ‘the Conqueror’, decided about ten years later that his unprecedented exploits in the formerly Muslim territories of the Balearic Isles and Valencia warranted an unprecedented kind of historiography. He set about to recast the epic tales of his conquests already current at the time into an autobiographical chronicle, incorporating into it the story of his life from his conception onwards (including the above incident), lending narrative cohesion to the story of his own turbulent reign and changing contingency into providence. The result was a first-person prose chronicle in the ver-

³ To quote the title, itself derived from Psalm 113, of Ralph V. Turner’s classic study: *Men Raised from the Dust* (1988).

⁴ The phrase is from Raimon Vidal de Besalú’s short Occitan verse narrative *Abril issia*, v. 958–961 (late 12th century; in: Huchet 1992, p. 92): *Mas er venon freg en saber us malvatx fols desconoissen que’s cujan far, ses autruy sen, ab sol lur pec saber doptar* ‘But an evil uncouth fools are coming, cold in learning, hoping to strike terror in people for no other reason but their silly knowledge...’

⁵ Jaume I: *Crònica o Llibre dels Feits*, p. 78: ‘*Cuidatz que per vostra pledesia que havetz aduita de Bohunya que el comte perda son comtat?*’ The magnate was Guillem de Cardona, speaking up for his ally Guerau de Cabrera who had preferred to stay away from the court.

naacular: a challenge to contemporary Latin historiography (including kings’ Lives) as well as to contemporary vernacular formal speech.

At the other end of Latin Christendom, literate Norsemen issued a similar challenge to the art of grammar. If the people of the Old Covenant, the Greeks and the Romans all had their own alphabet and orthography, if even the English were using a kind of Latin alphabet adapted to their purposes, then the very least their own Norse tongue could lay claim to was an equally intricate writing system, ‘using the Latin letters that fit our language well’, discarding the unnecessary ones and introducing a fine-tuned system of diacritics to indicate vowel quantity and quality if phonematically relevant.⁶ This was the literary language that would soon relegate Latin to a minor position in historiographical production, at least in the Atlantic part of the Norse world. Notably genealogical narrative and kings’ Lives were now preferentially written (as well as told) in the vernacular – betraying their stylistic debt to clerical-Latinate story-telling at every juncture, and consciously so.

‘Political’

All these cases have to do with political language. The duke using a highly polished metrical sociolect of his vernacular to probe the linguistic boundary within the contested sphere of religious expression, – the papal envoy refusing to accept the viability of vernacular exegesis, – the irate magnate thundering off against the trained lawyer his adversaries were trying to use in a power struggle he knew he was losing, – the adventurous conqueror king re-inventing kingship by telling it, – the Icelandic grammarian claiming high stakes for his emergent regional literacy in the sempiternal question of language superiority – they all make statements about language, and both the claims they make and the very fact they are making those claims are political. Meaning the use of language within the sphere of ‘the political’, as opposed to a narrower acceptance of the term ‘political language’ as

⁶ *Fyrsta Málfræðiritgerðin*/First Grammatical Treatise, p. 12: *látinustöfum öllum þeim er mér þótti gegna til várs máls vel...*

denoting only explicit utterances about political concepts. That latter stricture is not uncommon in historical studies. It corresponds to what is known as the history of political thought (*Politische Ideengeschichte*), a specialisation as well-established as it is influential. According to this strict acceptation of the term, there is no properly 'political' thought in the West between the Rome of Cicero and his peers, and the return of Aristotelian concepts in the West in the 13th century. Thomas Aquinas, Marsilius of Padua and William of Ockham – or, at a stretch, John of Salisbury – take up, as it were, where their predecessors in the Hellenistic and Roman worlds had left off. The first Christian millennium, from Augustine to Abelard, is supposed to be a time when theology and ecclesiology are all-embracing. The watershed around 1200–1250 marks the passage, to use Ernst Kantorowicz' famous binomy, from 'Christ-centered' to 'law-centered' kingship, or, differently phrased, from transcendental to contractual legitimation of rule – or indeed what is often referred to as 'the emancipation of political thought from theology'.

This strict view has met with some discontent on the part of historians of the earlier Middle Ages, who claim that it distinguishes too sharply between one specific way of political reasoning – the modern Western one, including its purported Greek and Roman origins – and other ways developed by societies past and present. With the advent of political anthropology, boosted by the post-colonialist challenges of the 1960s but soon embraced also by historians, a viable counter model of defining 'politics' in a medieval setting has emerged. We are now less ready to dismiss Carolingian ecclesiology or 11th-century tractates as 'pre-political'. Attempts at a new, broadened definition of 'the political' include the one proposed by the Sonderforschungsbe- reich (research school) «Das Politische als Kommunikationsraum in der Geschichte» at Bielefeld. It is hardly surprising that an academic milieu marked by the legacy, indeed the one-time active involvement, of Reinhard Koselleck, should propose a definition of 'the political' based not on institutional prerequisites but on communicative form.⁷

⁷ There are as yet no publications expounding on what is still a working hypothesis (but see www.uni-bielefeld.de/geschichte/forschung/sfb584/research_program/conception.html), establishing three main criteria for political discourse: (attempt

'The political' is not confined to the corridors of power; indeed, any place or space can under given circumstances become a 'political arena': from the much-quoted kitchen table to the town park where a spontaneous gathering occurs. More to the point, this definition allows for modern mass-media forms of political discourse to be included along with the classical arenas such as legislation and diplomacy. Admittedly, the definition makes it a little difficult to say what communicative situation would *not* be political, and therefore tends to apply the term rather broadly, with a danger of underrating the fact that some situations are certainly more political than others. But this criticism has more bearing on the use of the definition in modern contexts than it has for medieval history. Sources being what they are, medievalists have at any rate only a selection of situations to start with, pre-selected by contemporaries who have, as a rule, recorded things they found worth recording, and therefore, by the very fact, worthy of special attention. So we can safely assume that, in the words of anthropologist Kirsten Hastrup, the 'grey murmur'⁸ of everyday practice is already to a large extent filtered out of the faint sound of medieval language that we hear.

'Language'

How, then, do we approach medieval political language? Perhaps the difficulty arises, contrary to what one would spontaneously assume, not from the word 'political' but from 'language'. Historical semantics, *Begriffsgeschichte*/conceptual history, as well as its younger siblings such as discourse analysis, have of course focused on language: the spoken and/or written word. While semantics is indisputably about non-verbal 'signs' (images, objects, gestures) as much as about language, the very fact that scientific terminology – 'grammar', 'vocabulary' and the like – are commonly borrowed from linguistics by other disciplines such as art history shows that language proper has more or less constantly been at the centre of the field. There is, however, an-

at) broad impact; (attempt at) sustained effect; (pretence at) formulating compulsory and mandatory rules.

⁸ Hastrup 1989, p. 17.

other such bias that is less obvious, and perhaps less readily acknowledged. Since most of the most influential work in the field has been done about the time from, roughly speaking, 1750 to the present, the very premises of historical semantics are inevitably marked by the predominant uses of language characteristic of modern Europe. To name a few:

— the existence of a limited number of standard literary languages functioning as the spoken languages of the educated élites (French, English, Castilian, High German, Swedish etc.)

— the basic similarity of all these languages to one another, a product of a long common history and a shared indelible mark from Latin, which makes it easy to switch between them, model one on the other, translate from one to the other (*faux amis* and ‘untranslatable terms’ are the exception rather than the rule)

— hence the idea of a basic equality of all these languages: while one may at times be more fashionable (like 18th-century French) or credited with some special qualities (like early 20th-century German), by and large they all are considered to fulfill the same requirements within their respective areas of dominance: all educated Europeans of the bourgeois era would have agreed that Swedish was in Sweden and Finland what Castilian was in Spain and (most of) Latin America

— a sharp divisional line between those twelve or fifteen languages of education and erudition on the one hand and the multitude of local vernaculars on the other, considered either unworthy of attention or at the most worthy of condescending amusement by the élites, unless they came to be considered veritable enemies of enlightenment and human progress. The French Revolution introduced a series of measures to achieve ‘the exclusive and invariable use of the language of freedom’ (meaning educated Parisian French), among which the *Rapport sur la Nécessité et les Moyens d’anéantir les Patois et d’universaliser l’usage de la Langue française*, submitted to the Convent in 1794 by Henri Grégoire. The use of local varieties of French as well as languages other than French was associated with ‘federalism’, ‘superstition’, and

‘emigration’ (meaning political and religious opposition) and could become quite hazardous. The association of French with the republican ‘Nation’ became one of the most constant features of French political culture to this day, but the new distinction between good and evil languages was not confined to France. In the 1830s, in the Grand Duchy of Oldenburg (now a part of Lower Saxony within the German Federal Republic), the young Liberal publicist Ludolf Wienburg argued for the ‘eradication’ of Low German because only the exclusive (and enforced) use of Literary High German would enable the population to participate in politics in an enlightened fashion.⁹ This view was, and basically still is, so pervasive that it was held even by the advocates of the many vernaculars which, in the course of the 19th century, became the objects of attempts at ‘elevation’ to the level of a ‘national’ (meaning literary standard) language. Some of these attempts were quite successful (Estonian, Latvian, Catalan), some have so far had less or varying success (Irish, Occitan, Breton), and some have on the whole failed (for instance, Low German – today all but ‘eradicated’, to quote Wienburg, from public use). In all cases, political and social circumstances were the decisive factors, but success or failure were in each case linked to the establishment of (or failure to establish) a commonly accepted literary standard language at the expense of local variation. Social variation has attracted some attention in the course especially of the last forty years or so but remains linked to the same idea of deficiency: non-standard forms of speech were subject either to attempts at correction (‘compensatory teaching’) or to claims for acceptance, meaning inclusion into the standard (for example, inclusion into mass media). The underlying concept of standard vs. non-standard remains untouched.

In the words of Uffe Østergaard, the Århus political scientist, the definition of ‘language’ is ‘a dialect with an army, a fleet, and a dictionary’.¹⁰ Most regional languages in present-day Europe now have their dictionaries (but lack the army and the fleet... and, more to the point

⁹ Wienburg 1834.

¹⁰ Østergård 1992, p. 6.

perhaps, the TV channels). The dictionary to end all dictionaries, of course, is d'Alembert's and Diderot's *Encyclopédie ou Dictionnaire raisonné des sciences, des arts et des métiers*. The idea that everything and anything, and especially the words denoting it, is susceptible to precise definition is a very 18th-century one. Our own culture, including its scientific and academic sectors, still holds it. Koselleck and his collaborators based that massive foundational act of historical semantics, *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe* (its subtitle includes the word *Lexikon*, dictionary¹¹), on single lexemes, expanding them into semantic fields but preserving the assumption that they are somehow reducible to a core term. Indeed, the whole idea of *Begriffsgeschichte*/conceptual history is of course that *Begriffe*/concepts are the organising units of political discourse. When it comes to applying its methodology to pre-modern or non-European societies, one may wish to bear in mind that it reflects a cultural peculiarity of modern Europe.

Before turning to the Middle Ages, let us sum up: Modern Europe is characterised, linguistically, by the existence of a number of literary standard languages, serving as the only written and predominant oral language form in their respective areas of prevalence (notionally coinciding with nations and their states). Between them, these languages are considered as equal and basically interchangeable – code-switching, translation and similar practices are considered masterable skills. (You can learn a foreign language, and assume that a book you read in translation says the same things in the original.) All non-standard forms of expression are considered deficient. (Advocates of non-standard varieties will attempt to improve the situation for their respective variety, e.g. establish an orthographic norm for a regional language or campaign for the inclusion of dialectal speakers in news broadcasts.) Most Europeans today will either adhere to the linguistic norm in everyday situations, i.e. speak and write a standard language, or will master both the standard and a local or social variant – a situation known in linguistics as ‘diglossia’: bilingualism with different uses, proprieties and values attached to the two speech forms used.

¹¹ Brunner et al. 1972–1997.

Latinity and the vernaculars

In a historical perspective, it is easy to see that this is a fairly recent development. The Ancient world – meaning the Graeco-Roman *oikoumene* – did have diglossia but of a quite similar kind: Two educated languages were universally acknowledged (even by those who had a bare smattering of them), while all the other forms of speech, from Celtic to Nabataean, were met with a complete lack of interest on the part of the élites – a disregard that surpasses by far even the most disdainful 18th-century revolutionary or 20th-century education minister. These languages simply did not count. Even formidable enemies like the Persians were expected to aspire to Greek learning, and only taken into account in as far as they did.

Remote as this linguistic universe is to us, the medieval West is, I think, even further removed. This may come as a surprise. After all, ‘the linguistic origins of Western Europe’, to quote the title of an excellent overview by Philippe Wolff¹², are to be found in the first Christian millennium, 300–1300. It is indeed a paradox: What hampers our understanding of the linguistic peculiarities of the medieval West is precisely the fact that they are so well-known, *too* well-known in fact. We simply take it for granted that the Middle Ages is the period with most sources written in a language no one had as his or her native language, full stop. If we stop and think for a moment, we remember that the Middle Ages is the period when most of the languages that are around and about today originated. We then link both ideas together and fuse them into the ‘process’ of ‘the emancipation of the vernaculars’. And that is, more or less, the story.

I should like to invite you to lean back and look at things more leisurely, so as to appreciate the peculiarity of things a little better. For the more one looks at it, that story – the master narrative of linguistic Europe – takes on a strange kind of improbability.

First point: the Latin West is actually unique in its main linguistic traits. No other part of the world insisted for roughly a thousand years on using for most prestigious purposes a highly developed formal language which had an ever diminishing oral side to it. Learned

¹² Wolff 1970.

Latin was to be sure a minority spoken language already in 1st-century Rome, actually a sociolect, but it was a spoken language. It continued to be a spoken sociolect for several centuries. 5th-century urban élites in Gaul must still have practised it, possibly alongside popular Latin and maybe a little Gothic or Frankish, as would have highly educated Italians under Byzantine rule and 7th-century Hispanians. It must have disappeared from almost all kinds of everyday oral use in secular élites by about AD 700, becoming an acquired second language (or again sociolect) within the confines of monastic and clerical education and the few secular schools that may have continued in Hispania and Italy. The main point, of course, is that Learned Latin ceased to be a native language, and at the same time became more or less equally accessible to all its 'secondary' users. A Gallic senator's son in AD 450 found it easier to acquire spoken Learned Latin than an Irish chieftain's or Greek official's son. By AD 750 such differences no more applied.¹³

There is no need to go into Carolingian latinity and its sequels¹⁴ to make this point: More or less all written sources from the early Middle Ages – vernacular literacy is a completely marginal phenomenon up until about 1250, as Lars Boje Mortensen has repeatedly emphasised¹⁵ – are written in a language that all its users had acquired, and was only used for everyday oral communication in very limited circles.

For the study of political language, this poses several questions. It is, of course, quite possible to extend the basic methodology used by Koselleck on the political and social language in Germany, or Rolf Reichardt in France, to research into the Middle Ages. They are all confined to written sources, and though there is of course more material available for later periods, a dearth of sources certainly is not a general problem of medieval historiography. The *Patrologia Latina* alone, a collection of ecclesiastical texts from late Antiquity to 1215, runs to 217 volumes. The Royal Chancellery within the Archives of the Crown of

¹³ For an overview of recent research, cf. Hägermann 2004.

¹⁴ A useful overview is provided by McKitterick 1994. Cf. McKitterick 1989; McKitterick 1990; Banniard 1992; Brown 1996; Stotz 2002–2004.

¹⁵ Mortensen 2003.

Aragon at Barcelona holds more than eighty registers and more than 7,000 unregistered charters, most of them never edited, from before 1300 alone. So there is no basic problem whatever in examining the 'high spots' (the *Höhenkamm*, a famous Bielefeld term) of political writing, Augustine to Ockham, and setting them against the huge background sound of language use – in order to check for originality, influentiality, or failure to impress. Technical developments have put tools at the hands of researchers that facilitate, and improve, quantifying studies. One such tool, the 'Historical Semantics Corpus Management', is being developed within the framework of the research project 'Political Language in the Middle Ages. Semantic Approaches', which I am co-heading with Professor Bernhard Jussen at the University of Frankfurt am Main.¹⁶ The results of such studies are a valuable check on some of the basic assumptions of the history of political thought, whether they challenge or confirm those assumptions.¹⁷ In a word, there is no problem about viability.

However, given the uses of Latin as sketched above, there is one specifically medieval problem: the status of the Latin written word within 'political language' as a whole. The problem is twofold: it is about Latin, and about the written word. After all, language is a tongue job. What we, for the sake of convenience, label 'political' (without undue worry about the appropriateness of the term in a non-Aristotelian world) is in fact a matter of communication, of interaction. A lot of this interaction is conducted, even today, in non-written forms: orally/aurally, gestically, mimically... The same certainly applies to a much larger extent to early or pre-modern times. Now the classic studies of 18th–20th century political language in France and Germany as launched by Rolf Reichardt and Reinhart Koselleck, or Quentin Skinner's work on the Early Modern period are concerned with the written word. They can confidently claim that their sources, all the way from *l'Encyclopédie* to broadsheets, had a considerable

¹⁶ The project began in 2008 and comprises, at the time of writing, seven historians and two software specialists; cf. the project website of «Politische Sprache im Mittelalter. Semantische Zugänge» at web.uni-frankfurt.de/fbo8/HS/jussen/semantik/index.html

¹⁷ Cf. Jussen 2006; Schwandt 2010.

bearing on political discourse. More to the point, they can assume that the languages they were written in – Early Modern French, English, or High German – were also spoken. They may have been minoritarian, elite sociolects, but they were the sociolects of the participants in the political arena. A speaker of Welsh (or even Northumbrian English), Occitan, or Low Saxon would have had to acquire fluency in spoken upper-class South-Eastern English, bourgeois Paris French (including its courtly intricacies), and literary High German before he could ever aspire to membership in the leading circles. Therefore, the underlying assumption of works on the ‘political language’ of the last three centuries or so, namely that the language of the written works they discuss must have been in constant close interaction with the spoken discourse, is a sound one.

Obviously, this does not apply to the Middle Ages. Both the status of the written word in the everyday experience of the leading circles and the status of the written language (Latin) itself were vastly different. Messages were men who spoke up. Confidential talks and public parleys were not minuted (at best, they passed into historiography). Issues relating to legitimacy were framed in tales of ancestry. *Aide-mémoires* were not bits of paper but eminent witnesses from the princely entourage. Written evidence did not play a conclusive role even in the establishment of contractual obligations – actors preferred to rely on other ways of establishing some degree of permanence, such as the Duke of Normandy who had two young boys brought to the place where a settlement was just being concluded and then had them beaten up thoroughly so that the event would last in their memories, arranging thereby for as much memorial longevity as was possible (and necessary). The passage ‘from memory to written record’¹⁸ was a halting one indeed.

So the link between the written word and actual political communication is much more tenuous than in modern periods. This alone would make any attempt to deal with medieval political language from the written sources only (and they are all we have), following established models of research, extremely difficult. Add to this the lan-

¹⁸ Cf. Clanchy 1979.



Fig. Central terms of medieval political language in its Latinate guise circle on the homepage of the ‘Political Language in the Middle Ages’ project at the University of Frankfurt.

guage divide – the fact that any link between written record and actual oral communication necessarily implied translation of some kind – and the question becomes twofold. If all those key words that circle on the homepage of our project were linguistically secondary – what relation, if any, did they have to the respective first languages in each of their medieval users’ minds? And how did bilingual speakers – as all Latin speakers were – tackle situations of interaction with non-Latin speakers?

It will be obvious that the answer will have much to do with two major notional divides: clerical vs. secular and oral vs. written. This is not to say that Latin, or writing, was the exclusive domain of clerics – of course it was not, since every Christian was quite clear about the importance of Scripture and its language, and early medieval laymen’s culture was by no means ‘oral’. At the most it was ‘semi-oral’: people knew about writing but did not use it much.¹⁹ A lot of unnecessary

¹⁹ A thorough study of how the existence of writing affects ‘illiterate’ groups is Stock 1983.

argument about the 'degree of literacy' of given medieval individuals or milieux can be avoided by privileging questions of actual usage over questions of competence. For example, a Carolingian aristocrat may (as Rosamund McKitterick argues²⁰) well have had a certain knowledge of written Latin, but it need not have affected much of his everyday life.

Then that leaves us with a vast part of linguistic practice that must remain invisible. Of course it is a truism to say that spoken language is not in our written sources; and of course we know that most vernaculars are not recorded either, or if so, marginally – in several meanings of the word. But for an inquiry into political language, this does pose a problem: Most of the people whom we would normally credit with being political agents – kings, counts, their retinue, armed roughnecks, high-born women – hardly ever got in touch with spoken Latin outside Mass, and were in no position to understand the writings which for us are the main body of sources for medieval political language. To put it bluntly: Charlemagne would have remained all but untouched by Carolingian kingship theory.

The king-emperor himself may appear to be ill-chosen as an example, if we take Eginhard's *Vita Caroli Magni*, which credits Charlemagne with fluency in spoken Latin as well as with St Augustine as a favourite author²¹, at face value. But given that Eginhard had Emperor Augustus in mind when he wrote about his own lord, we should not make too much of the factual information (quite apart from the question whether 'Latin' here means Literate Latin or the Romance vernacular of West Frankland). However, it is indisputable that Charlemagne, like other Frankish kings before him, put great store by literacy. My point is that its ornate use does not necessarily imply thorough familiarity with all its contents. It is far from certain that Charlemagne the day-to-day ruler constantly had in mind what ecclesiologists were writing about the two swords. I do not rule out that he did, especially when dealing with the Pope or Byzantium perhaps; in other situations it may have been safer for him to forget about kingship theory and get on with power-brokering. What I do wish to emphasise is

²⁰ McKitterick 1989.

²¹ Eginhard, *Vita Caroli Magni*, chs. 22 and 25.

that he, and the élite in general, had other modes of discourse of more widespread use and more immediate relevance at their disposal. These people were perfectly able to speak about matters political, and act accordingly, in Frankish, Saxon, Irish, Norse, and all kinds of Romance. They *did* have political language; it was probably well developed by continuous and widespread usage and as such open to semantical analysis.

What do we do about this? As for orality, there is almost a century of awareness of the field in the humanities, the received opinion being that it was Milman Parry, working on formulaic language in Homer in the 1920s, and Albert Lord in his 1960 study on contemporary (if residual) Yugoslav epics which he had been collecting together with Parry, who alerted historians and philologists to the specificities of oral discourse, as highlighted by Walter Ong in his 1982 essay *Orality and Literacy*.²² Prompted by these influences as well as the growing interest in historical anthropology, there has now been more than thirty years' research in medieval orality.²³ Thus there are methodological tools with which to approach the matter, and which allow us some limited confidence here.

As for specific vernaculars, the attention they have received is considerable, maybe disproportionate considering the ascent Latin continued to have over the later 'national languages'. All scraps of evidence for them have been turned over and over again in the attempt to show each vernacular's interaction with, and ultimately 'process of emancipation' from, Latin. So we have recourse to a vast body of scholarship in linguistics and literary history wherever we look, and can afford the luxury of asking questions more to the point. I should like to suggest three :

- what zones of vernacular literacy?
- what zones of vernacular *political* literacy?
- what can *diglossia* mean in this context?

²² Cf. Parry 1971; Lord 1960; Ong 1982.

²³ Cf. Richter 1994a. The Sonderforschungsbereich 321 'Übergänge und Spannungsfelder zwischen Mündlichkeit und Schriftlichkeit' at Freiburg (Baden), with its series *ScriptOralia* now being well beyond 130 titles, has had a strong medieval side to it.

Mapping vernacular literacy

The first question, surprisingly enough, has rarely been addressed even in its customary form, which reads: 'How and why did some but not all parts of Europe develop vernacular literacy alongside Latin?' Answers have for the most part been given for individual regions rather than from an overall comparative perspective. All too easily, then, the 'birth' or 'growth' of vernacular literacy acquires a certain inevitability, as though its development was only a question of time. There is sometimes a lack of emphasis on, if not awareness of, the fact that wherever it occurred, vernacular literacy in Latin script constituted both a novelty and a considerable extra effort. It was never the easy option to write in the vernacular. All who did could have written in Latin instead. And in many regions, they never did otherwise. The question has to be, why?

If we map vernacular literacy – excluding isolated scraps and confining the search to zones with well-established practice – in the medieval West, a rough pattern emerges: zones of early (i.e. pre-1200 century) literacy coincide, roughly, with the overlap of three zones: Christianisation, hence Latinity + non-Romance + outside Frankland/Carolingia.

The first is obvious. So is the second – it was just about possible to switch between the written and the spoken word in a Romance surrounding but not in Ireland or England – but it needs consideration. If Latin is *the* written language, in fact is more or less synonymous with literacy – then why should anyone want to write the vernacular at all? Since Western Christendom has for a variety of reasons decided to detach mission from language – contrary to Byzantine practice (think of Gothic and Church Slavonic) –, since Latin is supposed to be universal, there is no need to translate, and texts are not normally translated. The famed translations under King Alfred in 9th-century England are indeed an exception, but no more than that (at any rate, they did establish Anglo-Saxon vernacular literacy with a capacity to expand). In many instances, the written vernacular is a marker of orality. It is one of several ways to slip the spoken word into a written text.²⁴

²⁴ Cf. Zink 1992; Richter 1994b; Haubrichs 1995.

There are other ways. A highly skilled Latinate author may put spoken words into his chronicle in literary Latin, which would imply a calque either on classical Latin historical writing, on the Old Testament, on earlier medieval chroniclers, probably on all of them in some degree. A less skilled Latinate author may put them into writing in a form that mirrors the vernacular in syntax and semantics to some extent. A skilled Latinate author may still use a Latin marked by the vernacular. This was common practice in Romance-speaking regions, such as Southern Gaul where 10th- and 11th-century Latin is notoriously 'bad' from a normative perspective. But in the words of Philippe Martel, 'the Latin is bad for reasons of communicative commodity'.²⁵ It was easier for everyone to use the written Latin if it was 'bad': people with some limited knowledge of Latin would be able to understand it if read, and more importantly, it would have been easier to retranslate it into the vernacular when reading out if required.

Or again, the writer might take the full step and attempt to write in the vernacular with Latin characters. Depending on the region, more or less stable traditions were developed on the continent from the 11th century onwards, not earlier than that, which may want explaining. I believe that the fact that there is no tradition, no expansive practice of writing the vernacular – as opposed to single instances – anywhere in Europe under Frankish sway, including its non-Romance parts, is part of what I like to term 'Carolingian Exceptionalism'. It is never easy to argue *ex negativo*, but the distribution of areas of vernacular literacy is conspicuous enough to call for an explanation. Contributing factors would have been

- (i) the need to integrate a vast and plurilingual empire with heavy separatism in Saxony, Aquitaine, and the south-east, especially as regards liturgy and doctrine
- (ii) the characteristic Carolingian predilection for *spolia* with imperial shades – in this instance, the commitment to Latin learning in classicising forms.

So, from the times of Charlemagne onwards, a certain Carolingian mode of rule was linked, among other things, to the exclusive use of

²⁵ Martel 1993, p. 28.

Latin for literate purposes.²⁶ It came to mark the Post-Carolingian lands right up to the 13th century. It came to be emulated by neighbouring parts of the continent, along with other traits of Carolingianism: in the re-formation of the Asturias; in Poland, Bohemia, and Hungary; in Denmark, and later, Sweden; in post-conquest England – actually, a little earlier than that, with Edward the Confessor. Conversely, anxiousness about Carolingianism may have resulted, among other things, in a certain effort in vernacular literacy in regions just outside the sway of Carolingianism. I am leaving that question aside here, so as not to lose track.

Eleventh-century dealings

Back to the second main question, more narrow, about vernacular *political* literacy. Not all vernacular literacy is political, of course. On the other hand, vernacular political language – as used by kings, countesses and sword-bearers in halls and courtyards and orchards – need never pass into writing in its vernacular form. I have touched upon the conditions of this passage. Let us now get down to practicalities. Say, two mighties make what written sources term *pactum*, *pax*, *concordia*, *conventum*, *conventientia* – a deal. In all probability, words will be used in the process, alongside other forms of expression, mimics, gestures, dress and the like. All of these are semantic, they carry meaning and obey certain systems of encoding and decoding. Most of those are lost for us, so we must be clear about the fact that we are simply unable to approach Political Language in the Middle Ages semantically except for fairly narrow sections of it. All we can do is to look at the words, and be thankful for any supplementary information about non-verbal communication.²⁷

²⁶ Failure to comply with the requirements of Latin learning could entail loss of power and prestige, as intimated by the anecdote, recounted by Notker Balbulus (*Gesta Caroli Magni*, ch. 3), about Charlemagne deploring that the sons of noblemen were slothful and did worse in class than the children of mediocres and infimi, who then were rewarded with monasteries and bishoprics; cf. McKitterick 1989, p. 222.

²⁷ Cf. Schmitt 1990; Althoff 1997; Stollberg-Rilinger 2001. I may add that iconography is, along with written texts, another topic studied by the 'Political Language' project at Frankfurt.

The words may be recorded in writing in several ways, as outlined above. Accordingly, there are several ways for us of dealing with them. For instance, it might be possible to check whether word use in a given elaborate Latin *historia* or *chronica* varies significantly depending on whether we are in an oral situation (harangue, dialogue, report, conversation). Maybe the authors of those histories, advertently or not, let the actors 'speak their minds' in direct or indirect discourse.²⁸

At the other end of the range, there are texts written in the vernacular throughout. That leaves one with a quite varied choice, at any rate for the 12th century and later. Obviously, what we want to do is to look either at texts that mirror in some way their Latin functional counterparts²⁹ or at literary forms that are characteristic of the vernacular and which pointedly have *no* Latin counterpart, such as troubadour songs. They are, of course, quite unfit for any quantifying approach, and their status as oral discourse is highly difficult. The other main type of lay elite literacy, namely chivalric romances such as the Arthurian cycle, riddled as they are with direct speech, are easier to accommodate to sources of my intermediate type – 'bad' Latin, or rather what might be termed 'pragmatic Latinity', for instance, the rich documentary sources of Southern Gaul or narrative texts such as the *Conventum* between Count William V of Poitou-Aquitaine and Hugh of Lusignan (c. 1030), to which we shall return shortly.

These constitute so to speak the 'interface' between Latin writing and vernacular discourse.³⁰ They merit attention because they give us some idea of how lay elite usage differed from Learned Latin.

For one thing, on a linguistic level, the distribution of word categories varies considerably. Roughly speaking, it seems that such texts, es-

²⁸ Anastasia Brakhman, a Moscow scholar now at Bochum who joined the Frankfurt project team for a period in 2008/9, is pursuing research into this question on Liutprand of Cremona.

²⁹ For instance, at Frankfurt, Meike Pfefferkorn is studying the *Saxon World Chronicle*, steeped as it is in the tradition of Latin universal histories and yet distinctively vernacular.

³⁰ I borrow the expression from the research group 'Interfaces: Vernacular Voices and Latin Narratives, 900–1200' within the World Universities Network 'Multilingualism in the Middle Ages', which addresses questions of this type.

pecially when containing a lot of dialogue, have a slightly lower proportion of nouns compared to Learned Latin, a higher proportion of verbs, and a very low proportion of adjectives and adverbs.³¹ This of course affects co-occurrences and collocations, the main tools for quantifying semantical analysis.

Secondly, it is a fair hypothesis that variety in co-occurrences will be much lower – obviously so, because one of the characteristics of oral language is its being formulaic³², and it is the very essence of formulaic language that words tend to come in pairs or groups, such as ‘to have and to hold’ or *preux chevalier*. Scholars have in vain tried to establish neat lexicographical definitions of the core vocabulary of courtly literature, for instance – to take an example from a particularly developed political idiom, twelfth-century Occitan – the differentiation between the two elements of the word pair *pretz e valor* (‘price and value’), so common in troubadour poetry.³³ While there certainly are nuances – in this case, *pretz* would seem to refer to common consent of a peer group, while *valor* has more to do with innate qualities (much like modern economic ideas about ‘price’ as opposed to ‘value’ in fact) –, splitting formulas up into single lexemes means missing much of the point. As a pair, each word reinforces the semantical impact of the other; it is their coming in pairs that turns them into a meaningful element of courtly oratory. Indeed, it is probable that in these semantic systems, the basic elements (sememes) do not really operate at a lexematic level. In the grammar of troubadour diction, formulas – noun clauses or even full predicated sentences – are a lot more powerful than single lexemes as the minimum units of which a consistent discourse (a chanted speech of some 8–10 minutes’ duration) is constructed.³⁴

Thirdly, this means that any semantic approach on a lexematic level (as done by a manual or computerised word search) is of uncertain

³¹ Cf. Beech 1995, p. 98 ff.

³² Cf. Ong 1982, p. 33 ff.

³³ Cf. Rohr 1962; Cropp 1975.

³⁴ I have developed these themes more fully in Rüdiger 2000b and Rüdiger 2001, chs. 14–17 (p. 223–282).

value. For one, specialised semantic systems, such as the ‘fourfold sense’ of biblical (and other) exegesis, create semantic fields at several levels – this applies to the Latin material too, even more so probably –, making them difficult to grasp unless the methodology as used on modern material is qualified for the purpose. Moreover, formulaic language being one of the outstanding features of orality, medieval written sources use it widely and to calculated effects. Set expressions, seeming tautologies, lexeme clusters should therefore not be regarded as simply an obstacle to be circumvented, but ought to be taken as one of the characteristic features of the linguistic culture under observation. While this does apply to certain kinds of Latin texts, I believe it is significantly more relevant for the vernaculars. An entire Latin lexicographical tradition, including the categorical mode that runs from 4th-century BC Athens over Cicero to Isidore of Seville (and further on into medieval scholasticism), cannot have left untouched even the most provincial 11th-century cleric attempting to write a kind of ‘simple Latin’ that was easy to render in Romance. The point about Latin was that it could be split into words. On the other hand, intellectuals were self-conscious about the differences between Latin and the vernacular(s) – the former being termed, purely and simply, *grammatica*³⁵ – and probably well aware that it was often impossible to find full vernacular equivalents especially to highly developed Latin terminology. Vernacular writers – as well as speakers, of course – could feel more free in making use of the properties of their basically oral-aural language, and honing them to a fine point.

Fourthly, even on the lexematic level the type of ‘pragmatic latinity’ formed to fit vernacular language use among the lay élites differs considerably from the learned/clerical material. Let us take a look, for instance, at the use of words in the early 11th-century Western French *Conventum* mentioned above. It is a rather short narration of the prolonged quarrels one Poitevin magnate, Hugh of Lusignan, was having

³⁵ Such is the systematic use (as opposed to *romans*, the vernacular, which can again be differentiated regionally) in the early Occitan poetology by Raimon Vidal de Besalú, *Razós de trobar*.

with his overlord, Count William III (V as Duke of Aquitaine). Eminent medievalists such as Jane Martindale and Stephen D White have studied the text extensively³⁶ and highlighted its value as a source for the lay aristocratic vision of day-to-day political culture. At the same time, the status of the text remains unclear if measured by the established genres of medieval history. It is situated somewhere between a *cahier de doléances*, a quasi-judicial defence, a commentary on the nature of 'feudal' obligations comparable to Bishop Fulbert's famed letter to the same Duke William³⁷ or even (as its latest editor George Beech argues) a precursor of the *chansons de geste*. On reading it, the impression is that it is all of these things at once. Its longish depiction of the faithful Hugh, suffering from a series of hard deals at the hand of his lord the Count and stubbornly clinging to righteous behaviour, therefore constitutes a privileged access to the core concepts governing the 'politics of fidelity' (White), expressed in a kind of oral/vocal lay Latin.³⁸ There are no explicit theoretical considerations. « Les imaginations peu sensibles à l'abstrait » (Marc Bloch) were not interested in lexematic clarity. Instead, the text is 'episodical' throughout, which does not preclude – indeed it is conducive to – an inherent narrative logic, a point to which we shall return.

To give an idea of the kind of language used, I quote a short passage from one such episode, selected more or less at random :

*Veniens Ugo ad comitem, dixit ei :
 "Senior meus, valde est mi male quia senior quem feci per tuum
 consilium modo mi tollit meum fiscum.
 Precor te et ammonéo per fidem quam senior adiuvari debet
 homini suo :*

³⁶ The text was edited by Martindale 1969 (cf. Martindale 1997) and again, together with a full study, by Beech 1995. There are numerous studies and references by Stephen D White, available in his collected papers White 2005a and b. The 3,020 words of the *Conventum* run to some eight printed pages in Martindale's edition.

³⁷ Fulbert of Chartres, n° 51, p. 90–93.

³⁸ In her original 1969 edition, Martindale argued that the language of the *Conventum* was in fact eleventh-century Poitevin only lightly Latinised as regards morphology. That view has been contested and is not now held.

*aut placitum bonum, aut fiscum meum fac mihi habere sicut mi
 plevisti ;
 aut ostaticos meos quos ego tibi commendavi, redde mihi ;
 et insuper adiuva me sicut mihi plevisti.”
 Comes autem nihil adiuuavit
 nec finem non fecit ei,
 nec ostaticos suos non reddidit,
 sed absolutos illos reddidit Bernardo.
 Et post hoc crevit contentio inter Bernardum et Aimericum et
 Ugonem.*

Hugo came to the count and told him: “My lord, a lot of bad it is to me that the lord whom I made by your counsel has just taken away my income/possession. I beseech you and I admonish you by the faith that a lord shall help his man: do me either a good *placitum* [can be anything between ‘arbitration’, ‘deal’, and ‘judgement’ – meaning here: giving Hugh what he wants returned to him without recourse to arms] or let me have my income/possession like you pledged to me; or give me back the hostages which I commended to you; and on top of that help me like you pledged to me.” The count, however, did not help him nor made him a *finis* [‘judgement’, ‘arbitration’], nor gave him back his back his hostages, but gave them freely [meaning: without anything in return] to Bernard [Hugh's adversary]. And after that the quarrel grew between Bernard and Aimery and Hugh.³⁹

Even this short piece of Hugh's troubled dealings with his peers gives us a feel for the kind of arguments used, and the kind of vocabulary employed to that effect. Lexicometry can to some extent substantiate that feel. I should like to draw attention to some observations :

(1) It is, at first glance, a 'feudal' vocabulary. Words like *senior*, *fides*, *homo suus*, *adiuvare*, *plevire* flavour a narrative which has, of course, won its renown among medievalists interested in legal anthropology

³⁹ *Conventum*, ed. Martindale 1969, p. 544. The translation is mine. Beech 1995 has fluent English and French translations. I am trying a word-by-word one, meant to help grasp the original, not render it legible to a modern reader.

precisely for that quality: the insight it offers into a conceptual world obviously close to the lay élite's. That first impression holds true when quantified: *fides* and its derivations (*fidelis*, *fidelitas*, *fiducia*, *fidencia* and the verbs *me fideo* and *defido*, denoting the initiation and termination of a relation of fidelity respectively) is the most frequently used 'political' term (32 instances⁴⁰), followed by the words for 'agreement' or 'making a deal' (*conventum* 22 times, plus one instance of *convenientia*, the term most current on the Mediterranean fringe⁴¹) and 'lord' (*senior/dominus*, 21 times⁴²). High on the list comes *honor* (22 instances), which would be a nice case for an abstract term ('honour') structuring the discourses of legitimisation if it were not for the well-known fact that it commonly denotes a piece of land or other possession of value in securing a man's upkeep (a 'fief').⁴³ It would be tempting simply to try to discount the instances where *honor* 'means' a possession, leaving those where it 'means' honour. But of course the point about the semantical approach is to divest oneself of lexicographical preconceptions, so *honor* must be taken 'as is' and analysed from its – seemingly – double character as a moral quality and a material asset. It is easier then to argue why it can be perfectly obvious for a given society to fuse these ideas into a single concept, or rather, that they are not 'fused' but simply one and the same thing, and the problem of translation is ours, not theirs.

Some other terms are about half as frequent: *adiutor* and its related verbs *adiuvo* and *auxilio* [sic] (13 instances), and the technical term *finis* 'conflict resolution by arbitrage' (13 instances⁴⁴). Of course the translations given for terms like *finis* falsely suggest terminological precision. An in-depth study of the use of terms like *finis* in documen-

⁴⁰ This corresponds to 1.06%, which at first sight does not seem much. But lexicometry deals with small relative numbers. To give an idea, *virtus*, doubtless a central term in John of Salisbury's *Policraticus*, runs to only 0.24% (cf. Schwandt 2010).

⁴¹ Cf. Ourliac 1959; Kosto 2001. I am not counting the *explicit* where the entire text is referred to as 'Conventum'.

⁴² *Senior* (14) + *dominus* (5, of which three in the vocative) + *dominicum/-atum* adj. (2).

⁴³ Cf. Teunis 2000.

⁴⁴ This is including the verb *finire* ('make a *finis*') but excluding the final line *Finiunt...* From this total, two instances must be deducted where the term simply means 'death/to die'.

tary and historiographical sources would be necessary to reveal the range of situations West Frankish scribes felt merited the designation. And that examination would be the kind of close reading Paul Veyne was referring to when he described the process of historical interpretation as the composition of a 'bilingual dictionary' where lexicographical precision must give way to situational exegesis.⁴⁵

To sum up, the text stands up to expectations about the language of a 'feudal society' – in the sense of a society using the terms and probably embracing the concepts of face-to-face obligations with a double-faced moral and material side to them.⁴⁶

(2) Absence of 'learned' Latin vocabulary, and indeed the core 'political' as well as the ecclesiastical vocabulary prominent in most studies about political language and thought in the Middle Ages: *rex/regnum*, *imperator*, *ecclesia*, *virtus*, *coelum*, *pietas*, *peccatum* are completely absent. *Iustitia* and the adverb *iniuste* appear once each. God is invoked twice; the one occurrence of *Christus* and *sanctus* respectively describe a crucifix used in an oath-taking ceremony; the same goes for the two occurrences of *sacramentum*. The divine is, of course, an integral part of the political culture – entering into *conventa* and *fines* as one of the contractants as it were –, but it is not felt that there is any need to elaborate. As for the fundamental moral dichotomy, *bonus* is rare; in four of the five occurrences it qualifies nouns like *placitum* or *finis*, meaning 'a good peace' or 'a judgement that is observed'. Only one use has a moral quality to it: *Comes autem rememoravit Ugoni omnia bona que fecerat ei* 'Then the count reminded Hugh of all the *bona* he had done him'. But Count William, attempting to dissuade Hugh from breaking up with him, was clearly referring to 'goods' of a tangible kind along with 'good treatment'. Similarly, *beneficium* and *benefacere* unequivocally mean possessions and their transfer.

⁴⁵ Cf. Veyne 1986.

⁴⁶ Which is not the same thing as a society actually organising itself along these lines. The ubiquity of certain words is not a safe indicator of actual practice; a document telling us that a nobleman used 'feudal' formulas, even granting that it records the words actually spoken faithfully, does not necessarily assure us that the people concerned had the same idea about what was meant as modern handbooks (or even as their contemporaries elsewhere). Cf. Rüdiger 2000a.

The opposite, *malum*, however, reveals itself to be a central concept. Not only is it frequent (25 instances of adjective and adverb, plus five instances of its derivatives *malevolentia* and *maleficere/-ium*); it also has a 'non-technical' use which goes beyond the use in such a frequent fixed set as *per malum ingenium* 'with the intent of doing wrong, deceitfully'. If something *malum* is happening to an actor, he feels he has the right to do something about it: for instance, brood, complain or go plundering. To treat someone *male* is to affect relations in a way that must somehow be redressed. This usage marks the text throughout. Far from denoting any abstract kind of evil, *malum/male* is the one central term for legitimising counter-acts and stances.

If not *bonum*, the notional opposite of *malum* ought to be something like *iustum*, since the idea behind *malum* is clearly one of concrete wrongs being committed and needing redress. Interestingly, the classical Latin *iust*, as mentioned above, is extremely rare. There are, however, quasi-synonymous terms betraying vernacular usage: One is *rectum/-itudo*, certainly classical in itself but reinforced by its vernacular forms *droit/dreit* < **directum* and the derived noun *droiture/dreitura*, corresponding to *iustitia*. Another is *dexteras*, clearly a latinisation of *droits*, conflagrating two Latin equivalents for the same vernacular word. Here again, as with *honor*, we observe the tendency of this type of political language to extend the semantic field of central words from quite practical 'technical terms' to include the moral and indeed the transcendental. 'Right' can be a levy or a charge or the usufruct of a property: *homines sui tollebant mihi rectum meum* 'his men took my right away from me'. It can refer to accepted standards of political practice: *tu dicas quod non est rectum ut tibi vetem castrum que* [sic] *de te habeo* 'you may say that it is not right for me to hinder you [in taking possession of] the castle that I have from you'. But 'right' goes far beyond that. Indeed it would appear that justice is the one most important attribute of God; at any rate, the word pair 'God and Right' (alliterating in Romance: *Dieu e Dreit*) is remarkably prominent in a range of central vernacular texts, from courtly chants to Arthurian novel to rhymed chronicle: 'God and Right have turned the tables on our enemies! God and Right, our count and all saints will

defend us! God and Right are as one!⁴⁷ The quasi-divine quality of *dreit* would make it almost an abstract term, if the quite concrete and individual sense did not linger. Maybe we should conceive of *dreit* as a kind of collective good, composed of the sum of individual rights and enhanced by an intangible but quite real transcendental side to it. It is the nearest that we can come to the lay élite equivalent of what we would call an abstract concept. The fact that it is a rare word in our text is misleading, since it is of course the positive standard to which the very frequent qualification of aberrant acts as *mala* refers.

(3) The scarcity of other terms is at first surprising but may prove to be quite significant. For example, I may not have been alone in assuming, as a starting hypothesis, that *amor* (*amicus*, *amicitia*) would be about as prominent as *honor* or *fides*, 'love' being well-established as a core concept for describing man-to-man relations in high medieval society (not to mention the concomitant man-to-woman relations in the discourses of courtly love). Five instances of *amor*⁴⁸ plus one each of *amicus* and *amicitia* make a poor harvest, at least to a scholar looking for semantically heavy terms on the level of lexemes. But the fairly low frequency of *amor* words in the *Conventum* (0.23% or each 430th word) is, in fact, only marginally lower than the frequency of the *amour*

⁴⁷ Guilhem Rainol d'At: *A tornar m'er* (PC 231,1a), v. 31, ed. Frank (1957), p. 70: *mas Dieus e Dreitz lor a camiat lor sort* 'but God and Right have turned the tables on them' (on the French invaders suffering a defeat during the Albigensian War in 1216); *Cançon de la Crosada* (1989; an epic chronicle of the same war, its latter part composed by an anonymous Tolosan), laisse 188, v. 100–102, p. 384: *Li Francés se'n repairan, trist e fel e irat, e'lh baron de la vila son remazut ondrat que Dieus et dreitz governa* 'The French withdraw beaten, sad and angry, and the lords of the town come out of it honoured, for God and Right rule'; *ibid.*, laisse 214, v. 135 f., p. 550 (the last lines of the epic): *que Dieus e dreitz e forsa e'l coms joves e sens lor defendrà Tholozà!* 'for God and Right and Might and the young and wise count [Raymond VII] will defend the town for them!'; Chrétien de Troyes, *Le chevalier au lion* (1994, c. 1175), v. 4439, p. 404: *que Dix e drois a un s'an tienent* (var. *amis se tienent*) 'for God and Right hold together as one/as friends' (Yvain speaking before entering into single combat). The formula was going to have a rich posterity – as the English royal device *Dieu et mon Droit* and in many other modern guises.

⁴⁸ Of which three in the fixed expression *pro amore ... i* 'for the love [i e benefit] of...'. Once it refers to a failed project of marriage; once it is the love of Hugh for his count.

words (*amor* n., *amer* v., *ami(e)* n., rarely *amitié* n.) in the Arthurian romances of Chrétien de Troyes: they make 0.35% of the overall words in both *Érec* (c. 1150) and *Yvain* (c. 1170). Yet it would be quite nonsensical to argue that these verse romances are not about love just because the word is used so little. Obviously, talking about love in the Middle Ages does not necessarily mean using the word a lot. There are other ways of constructing discourse. Circumlocution is one of them. Another – I think the most interesting one – is story-telling.

(4) The most frequent word⁴⁹ in the *Conventum* is a verb: *facere*. That ‘to do’ should be a much-used verb in any text seems hardly surprising, but in fact *facere* is a rather remarkable one, because of the quality of the predicates built around it. We have met a typical case: *omnia bona que fecerat ei* ‘all the good he had done him’. Another would be the Count’s promise: *Noli hoc timere quamdiu tecum eris ut tibi faciant quicquam* ‘Don’t be afraid, as long as you are mine, that they should do you anything’. Good and bad lordship, peace and enmity are expressed as events which occur or fail to occur. Of course, social interaction and political practice are, beginning with the Latin and Greek roots of the words *actio/praxis*, about doing things, and it is with good reason that legal anthropologists (and others) talk about ‘actors’ in history. But in a discourse that so consistently avoids any explicit considerations about issues of right or wrong, good or bad, success or failure, the focus on action – on *facta*, things done – remains unrivalled in its narrative and explanatory power. The account of events is never, as in many other medieval ‘narrative’ genres, interrupted by reflections of an abstract kind. In an intellectual culture like that of the modern era, which sets high store by explicit reflection, this has earned texts of that type epithets like ‘episodical’ or ‘anectotic’. *Höhenkamm* authors like St Augustine and William of Ockham, or even Bishop Adalbero of Laon and Fulbert of Chartres (to name two frequently quoted ‘theoreticians’ of the feudal age) are on the whole more highly cherished. But as Gerd Althoff has pointed out, it is necessary to be aware of ‘the argument in the episode’, the impli-

⁴⁹ Disregarding, as is usual in quantitative corpus semantics, ‘small words’ like prepositions, conjunctions, exclamations.

cit but nonetheless audible praise or criticism that can be conveyed by sheer story-telling.⁵⁰ Much modern debate about the ‘viewpoint’ of, say, Snorri Sturluson (d. 1241), author of *Heimskringla*, the vastest of the Norwegian kings’ sagas, has to do with this apparent lack of taking a stance.⁵¹ But if we accept the ‘episodical’ style as a feature of lay elite political narration, we both remove a number of obstacles to our understanding of individual texts and sharpen our awareness of the differences between coeval modes of discourse: John of Salisbury and Walter Map both wrote *de nugis curialium* (‘on Courtiers’ Trifles’⁵²) but did so in rather different ways.

The Poitevin magnates whose discourse colours the account of the *Conventum* may have lacked a way of expressing themselves on the topic of bad lordship in any abstract terms. But to have the Count use a situation of relative powerfulness to tell his man Hugh: *Noli attendere quia tibi nihil faciam* ‘Do not expect anything since I am not going to do you anything [in your favour]’, amounts to pretty much the same thing.

To sum up this fourth and final observation: Perhaps the main characteristic of (near-) vernacular political language is its being bound up with action. As I have pointed out, lay political language (that is, the use of words) is only one part of political semantics, one not readily detached from its mimic and gestic context. Even in its written form it is kept within this context, in that *doing* things remains central. Hence the hypothesis that verbs are much more prominent in the key vocabulary than they are in Learned Latin – maybe they are more central in ‘structuring the discourse’ than nouns. If pressed to name one central term of Old Norse political language, I believe it is not *konungr*, or *riki*, or *höfðingi*, or *kirkja* or any equivalent to our Latin core vocabulary – but a verb: *ráða*.⁵³

⁵⁰ Althoff 2001, 151–170.

⁵¹ Cf. the different views of Bagge 1991 and von See 1999. There has been a lively debate around both which I am not going into here (but see Rüdiger 2007).

⁵² ‘Courtiers’ Trifles’ is the English title of the Oxford Medieval Texts edition of Walter Map, *De nugis curialium* (1914).

⁵³ Daniel Föller, a Frankfurt scholar, is finishing a doctoral dissertation on cognitive strategies in the Viking Age in which the mastery of runic inscriptions and skaldic verse, an intellectual skill sometimes referred to as *ráða* in Rune Swedish, is dis-

Political diglossia

By way of conclusion, I should like to turn these observations on one text, itself selected for the purpose rather at random, into some more general remarks about my third and final question: What does *diglossia* mean if applied to the question of medieval political language?

As indicated above, the term is commonly used to denote a specific kind of bilingualism, namely one in which the two languages (or varieties of the same language) are used in different social situations, each having its areas of appropriate use.⁵⁴ A typical instance of diglossia is dialect vs *rikssvenska* or *Hochdeutsch*. A specifically medieval instance of diglossia would be, of course, Latin vs. any vernacular. So far, the application of the term to historical sociolinguistics is, I think, uncontroversial. But we seldom stop to consider the specific properties that create situations of diglossia – which essentially means situations when users were not free to use either one or the other in a given context. It also means that context was created to a large extent by choice of language.

As for political language, the choice of Latin or the respective vernacular was, of course, mainly prompted by communicative convenience: it all depended on who was listening. But as the few examples given in the introductory passage of this book show, the choice was not always a simple one. Nor was it without possibly serious consequences. Moreover, the situation became complicated by the development of specialised political vernacular sociolects. Courtly Occitan, *parlar cortés*, must have been almost as far removed from everyday spoken Occitan (though in a different way) as simple clerical Latin. The same goes for the standards of courtly dialogue so painstakingly rehearsed by didactic *enseignements* and their lightly fictionalised romance counterparts, as well as the high art of Skaldic verse (about as rigidly developed a code of meritocratic intellectuality as has ever existed in Western Europe), and indeed a number of cases of *vulgaris*

cussed in depth. The saga prose meaning of *ráða (fyrir)* is 'rule' (a kingdom or a farmstead) but also, without a complement, 'have one's way', 'have the final say in a matter'.

⁵⁴ Cf. the influential definition by Ferguson 1959.

eloquentia, to quote Dante, its first fully Latinate theoretician. With the development of those sociolects, the situation became one of triglossia rather than Latin/vernacular diglossia. This meant that linguistic choices could be made on a much less predetermined basis. King Sverrir of Norway (d. 1202) and the abbot who was in charge of putting the narrative of his ascent known as *Sverris saga* down on parchment were still pioneers in the fields of royal self-invention by way of the vernacular written word. But at least they had that linguistic option, writing in Norse, more or less ready at hand when they set out on their endeavour in the 1180s. It was an option that their contemporaries, Duke Henry the Lion of Saxony or Emperor Frederick I, never had.

At the same time, options shape their own constraints. Talking about politics in the vernacular was in the high Middle Ages quite different from talking about politics in Latin. This was to change considerably in the course of the 13th and 14th centuries, when mode-changing became code-switching and the intricate relationship Latin-vernacular(s) was reduced to questions of translation (but this is another story). Up until 1250 at least, lay élite political language, as far as we can glimpse it, had its specific properties. To use it was to choose them.

So what are those distinctive features that shaped the communicative context, and ultimately, political culture? To condense them, by way of a working hypothesis, into headwords: Vernacular political language is

1. *vocal* – and not simply oral/aural: it depends on words spoken out aloud, chanted, sung, carefully pronounced with an intent of driving home a point. Even in its written forms, vernacular political language not only retains its basic indebtedness to oral discourse but tends to highlight it.⁵⁵

2. *episodic* – and therefore implicit, non-abstract, and bound up with describing action, thereby focusing attention and intellectual alacrity

⁵⁵ On the passage of the written text from being a help for reading out aloud to being an optical artefact cf. Illich 1991.

on the 'deciphering' on complex chains of events rather than chains of lexematic argument. As Walter Ong has reminded us, in an oral culture, a word cannot be 'looked up' in a dictionary, that is, any attempt at conceptual clarity transcending each particular situation of word use is simply impossible even to conceive of. 'Without a writing system, breaking up thought – that is, analysis – is a high-risk procedure.'⁵⁶

3. *material* – and therefore even further removed from the possibility of entering into a lexematic repository. This is a difficult topic to approach, but it must not be disregarded. Words that are not normally stored on a parchment leaf until needed are (unless carved into stone on burial slabs, church porches or rune stones) essentially physical, kinetic events. They are modulated air. It is no wonder, then, that a number of forms of word magic must have appeared infinitely more plausible to such (semi-) oral cultures as medieval Europe than we can imagine. Spells bound, maledictions killed, simple greetings cured. The 'speech act', a common practice even today ('I declare this bridge open')⁵⁷, must have been both more diversified and more portentous. Even the fact that someone was speaking at all (instead of staying silent) was, in the Middle Ages and a lot of more recent European societies until the advent and the generalisation of continuous talk as an everyday mode of interaction, often fraught with consequence. I am not making the claim that the idea of the magic quality of uttering certain words in certain ways was always a decisive feature of medieval vernacular political language. But it may be just as well to remember that a society that hardly uses the written (and preserved) word, knows and uses fewer words overall, and puts more store by each utterance, will tend to develop ideas rather different from ours about the qualities and properties of words well spoken.

4. *performative* – and therefore entirely contextual. Words cannot be used outside a specific situation; by taking away the situation, the words become literally meaningless. Of course it is a basic rule of

⁵⁶ Ong 1982, p. 39.

⁵⁷ A classic example of a performative speech act drawn from Austen 1962.

modern semantics that « les mots n'ont pas de sens, ils n'ont que des emplois ».⁵⁸ But a culture that has no techniques to recreate context medially, usage is irredeemably situational. A modern reader can find perfectly legitimate enjoyment by reading a pocket edition of the *Chanson de Roland*; a putative medieval reader would have felt silly (as did Sancho Pansa). Conversely, words always carry a situational surplus: they are always made to mean more than they do. In extreme cases, they can cease to 'mean' anything at all on a lexematic level, their meaning being reduced to the fact of their being spoken. A lot of futile controversy about time and extent of 'feudalisation' has at least partly resulted from a lack of receptiveness to the fact that magnates and scribes could be pretty indifferent to what actual words they said (and not 'terminology employed') in high-stake situations where quite other considerations mattered. Two armed chieftains surrounded by their retinues in a public spot, exchanging or brandishing words, do so in a manner markedly different from both modern political communication and the way their own contemporaries, Abelard and Bernard of Clairvaux, used verbal dispute in a power struggle.

* * *

All in all, medieval political language is quite possibly closer to the agonistic give-and-take used by present-day juvenile street gangs, including the highly-strung attention to inflections and changes of tone, than to the measured hypotaxes of the era of Bismarck or the calculated anaemia of today's politicians' middlebrow phraseology. It is no less worthy of our attention for that. Charlemagne may, for all we know, have lived up to the image Eginhard wished to paint of him, and grasped much of the kingship theory his Latinists were devising in his favour. But to survive until the next winter, other linguistic skills were required of him, and they were perhaps more immediately essential. The intellectual demands these skills made on their users were of a different kind, but perhaps no less heavy than those imposed by classicising Latin literacy. For talking (and carrying out) politics, people

⁵⁸ That adage of structural linguistics is attributed variously to Ludwig Wittgenstein and Ferdinand de Saussure.

were able to choose either, and select from both. Whatever cognitive inadequacies we sometimes are tempted to attribute to our vernacular or near-vernacular samples (the *Conventum*, the sagas, the chivalric novels, the surprisingly anodine troubadour 'love' songs) are, in fact, quite often the result of an incomplete approach to the social semantics of medieval political language.

There is a lot of enquiry into its properties ahead. I hope to have laid out some possible lines of research.

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