

THE *MANIÈRES DE LANGAGE* AS EVIDENCE FOR THE USE OF SPOKEN FRENCH WITHIN FIFTEENTH-CENTURY ENGLAND

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ABSTRACT

This article examines what a group of medieval conversation manuals designed to teach spoken French to the English – the *manières de langage* – can tell us about the use of spoken French within late medieval England. Beginning with the observation that several of the *manières* dialogues are set in England, it argues that the *manières* model the French required to interact with three groups of in-coming French-speakers on English soil: travellers, merchants and artisans, and agricultural labourers. The approach pursued complements previous studies of the *manières*, including my own, which have established their fitness for preparing English learners of French to use French on the Continent. At the same time as the argument addresses the topics of French pedagogy and French acquisition in late medieval England, it thus also contributes to developing understandings of late medieval English multilingualism and of intercultural contact within late medieval England.

Keywords: *manières de langage*; medieval multilingualism; French in England; French conversation; French immigrants

IN AN ARTICLE published in the *Modern Language Review* in 2015, I presented the first results of my work on the *manières de langage*.¹ The early scholarship of H. G. Richardson and M. Dominica Legge had identified these fifteenth-century French conversation manuals as belonging to the curricula of the Oxford *dictatores*, a group of teachers existing on the fringes of the late medieval university who taught *dictamen*, or letter-writing, alongside the skills required to conduct basic business and legal transactions, including functional French and Latin.² The prevailing opinion seemed to be that the French component of these teachers' curricula was included to improve learners' mastery of specialized forms of the written language with a view to securing their subsequent employment within England.³ This thesis fits well with what has for some time been known about the continued use of written French in legal, mercantile, monastic and governmental contexts in fourteenth- and fifteenth-century England.⁴ It accords less well with the content and the stated aims of some of the French teaching materials that the *dictatores* produced or compiled.

While formularies of model documents are common among the surviving materials associated with these late medieval teachers, other resources deployed in their instruction seem designed to teach spoken as well as written French; in the case of the *manières*, the focus on improving oral communication skills is clear. Bearing in mind that the production of the extant *manières* manuscripts in the first half of the fifteenth century overlapped with the English assault on and subsequent occupation of Normandy, I suggested that, as well as preparing their clients for work at home, the *dictatores* served learners desirous to profit from the opportunities available to those who were willing to relocate to the new English-occupied territory. Since the English authorities were actively engaged in attempts to entice English merchants and artisans to Normandy, and since so many of the *manières* feature young men exercising these professions, it is likely that one of the aims of the teachers and learners who used these manuals was to ease the process of emigration.

In the present paper, I want to take a new approach to the *manières*. I want to think about the evidence that the *manières de langage* provide for the use of spoken French within fifteenth-century England. The traditional histories of Insular French emphasize the continued use of written forms of the language throughout the Middle Ages while setting quite an early date on the extinction of spoken French within England.⁵ What the *manières* allow us to glimpse against the background of these accounts is a vision of late medieval England that is awash with Francophones.

I begin with the simple observation that not all of the *manières* dialogues are set on the Continent. For instance, the version of the 1415 *Manière* that Andres Kristol edits from Cambridge, Trinity College MS 14. 40 imagines two travellers engaged in conversation on the road to Oxford (dialogue 3):

- Syre, ou pensez vous chivacher anoet?
- Sire, a la prochene ville, si Dieu plest.
- Sire, que l'apellez la prochyin ville?
- Sire, l'apellent Oxone, verement. (p. 71, ll. 1–4)⁶

- Sire, where are you planning on riding to this evening?
- Sire, to the nearest town, please God.
- Sire, what do you call the nearest town?
- Sire, they call it Oxford, truly.⁷

The first speaker suggests that they should ride together and, when he asks about lodging in Oxford, his interlocutor tells him where he might stay on the Northgate Road (now Cornmarket Street):

- Syre, a le Molyn sur le hope en la rewe de Northyate est le meillour hostelle d'icelle ville come je suppose, qar nous y averoumes bone chier et vitaille assez pur hommez et chivachx et boun merché. (p. 71, ll. 22–24).

- Sire, the best hostel in the town, as I suppose, is at the sign of the mill in Northgate road, for we'll get a good meal there and enough to eat for man and horse, and it won't cost too much.

The Oxonian colouring added here is enhanced at two further moments in this version of the 1415 *Manière*. When the travellers arrive at their destination, they complain to the innkeeper that they have ridden into town in great haste from Tetsworth because they were pursued by robbers at Shotover (dialogue 4.1): both Tetsworth and Shotover lie within a few miles of Oxford. Then, in a subsequent conversation, upon asking the whereabouts of the innkeeper, the travellers are given a description of a market at the nearby town of Woodstock: this is where the innkeeper is said to have gone (dialogue 4.5).

The references to Oxford are preserved in one further version of the 1415 *Manière* that survives in London, British Library MS Additional 17716.⁸ By contrast, in the other two extant versions of the dialogue preserved in Cambridge, University Library MS Dd. 12. 23 and Oxford, Bodleian Library MS Lat. misc. e. 93, a London location is specified:

- Sir, ou pensez vous chivachere a nut?
- Sir, a la procheyne ville, se Dieu plest.
- Sir, qu'est appellé la procheyne ville?
- Sir, ele est appellé Loundrez. (p. 20, ll. 56–59).⁹
- Sire, where are you planning on riding to this evening?
- Sire, to the nearest town, please God.
- Sire, what is the nearest town called?
- Sire, it is called London.

In these manuscripts, the reference to Northgate is absent; in place of Tetsworth and Shotover, their texts give Rochester and Blackheath; and for Woodstock, we find Winchester.¹⁰ This last divergence results in a geographical error:

- Dame, ou est vostre marit?
- Par Dieu, sir, il est alé a la feire d'un ville qu'est .x. leucez de cy appellé Wynchestre. (p. 23, ll. 220–22)
- Madam, where is your husband?
- By God, sire, he has gone to the fair at a town that is ten miles from here called Winchester.

While Woodstock is roughly ten miles from Oxford, Winchester is considerably farther removed from London. In view of this discrepancy, it seems likely that the texts setting their action in Oxford preserve an earlier version of the 1415 *Manière* and that the London setting is the result of a conscious reworking of the dialogue, if not a particularly careful one. At some point, a copyist of the 1415 *Manière* apparently determined to diversify its Insular scope.¹¹

Consultation of the textual variants recorded in Kristol's edition of the *manières* reveals that the copyists of the model conversations frequently differed in their geographical orientation of the texts, setting the same dialogues on either side of the Channel, or in an unspecified location that could stand either for England or France. For example, in the version of the 1396 *Manière* preserved in Cambridge,

University Library MS Dd. 12. 23, which Kristol takes as his base text, the terminus of the extended journey whose narration occupies the text's long fourth dialogue is repeatedly identified as Paris. The lord determines to set out 'devers Parys' (p. 7, l. 4: 'towards Paris'); he asks after the 'droit chymyn vers Parys' and the distance 'deci a Parys' (p. 8, l. 11 and l. 29: 'the right way to Paris' and 'from here to Paris'); and when he sends his servant ahead to organize his accommodation, the servant is pictured 'si fort galopant que c'est mervaille, tanque il serra a Parys' (p. 9, l. 27: 'galloping so fast that it's a marvel, until he is at Paris'). But in other versions of the 1396 text, the Continental focus of the fourth dialogue is more diffuse, or replaced with an Insular one. In the version of the 1396 *Manière* preserved in London, British Library MS Additional 17716, the lord sets out for and asks directions to London; in the versions of the text preserved in Oxford, All Souls College MS 182 and London, British Library MS Harley 3988, the terminus of the journey is not specified, although in the All Souls text it turns out that the lord is destined for Wales; and in the text of the 1396 *Manière* preserved in Paris, Bibliothèque nationale MS Nouv. acq. lat. 699, the lord sets out for Montpellier. In this last text, and in the All Souls and Harley texts, the lord goes on to ask directions for Orleans.¹² Similar patterns of divergence are in evidence at other moments across the extant manuscripts transmitting the 1396 *Manière*.¹³ The manuscript versions of the 1399 *Manière* likewise demonstrate a range of Continental and Insular settings.¹⁴

The English setting of several of the *manières* dialogues has given rise to speculation. Does the avoidance of Continental contexts by some writers reflect their lack of familiarity with the realities of life beyond the Channel? This is the view advanced by Kristol, who also points out that, even in the period directly following the Norman Conquest, the chances of hearing a casual exchange of spoken French among Englishmen on the topics covered in the 1415 *Manière* would have been slim.¹⁵ Perhaps England was simply meant to stand for France in this manual. But it also seems possible that the *manières* set in England reflected the kinds of conversations that English speakers expected to have with French-speaking visitors to their country. As Ardis Butterfield has shown with special clarity, the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries saw a great deal of trans-Channel traffic into as well as out of England.¹⁶ In what follows, I consider the *manières* in the light of what is increasingly known about this traffic. In particular, I will highlight the aptness of the *manières de langage* to prepare English learners for conversations with three different groups of incoming French speakers: travellers, merchants and artisans, and immigrant agricultural labourers.

The dialogue most clearly asking to be viewed in the perspective of trans-Continental travel is that in the 1396 *Manière* which stages an exchange between an Englishman and a Parisian who has just arrived in England via Venice (dialogue 21). The Englishman is extremely obsequious. 'Vous parlez bien et gracieusement doulx franceys, et pur ce il me fait grant bien et esbatement au coer de parler ovesque vous de vostre beal langage,' he simpers (p. 32, ll. 26–28: 'you speak sweet French, well and graciously, and so it does me great good and it warms my heart to speak with you in your beautiful language'). Some lines later, he continues, wishing 'plust a Dieu et a la virgyne Marie, mon tresdoux amy, que je sceusse si bien et

gracousement parler franceys com vous savez' (p. 33, ll. 2–3: 'that it might please God and the Virgin Mary, my dear friend, that I might be able to speak French as graciously as you can'). But the eagerness with which this English speaker engages the Parisian traveller seems to be of a piece with a broader pedagogic aim of the dialogue, which demonstrates the correct approach to a fortuitous opportunity to practise one's French in the comfort of one's own homeland.

This point is driven home when the visiting Parisian praises the French of his English interlocutor. The Frenchman says that the Englishman speaks French, 'bien et gentilment come se vous eussiez demurré a Parys ces .xx. ans' (p. 33, ll. 16–17: 'well and nobly, as if you had lived in Paris these past twenty years'). The Englishman's facility in the language is found to be all the more surprising because, the Englishman claims, he learned his French uniquely through conversation with 'lez gentz de ce pays icy' (p. 33, ll. 11–12: 'the people of this country'). In my first article on the *manières*, I pointed out that this dialogue effectively functions as an advertisement for the teachers who used the *manières*: learn French with us and you'll sound like you've been in Paris for the last twenty years!¹⁷ Now I would like to add that, when the Englishman claims to have perfected his French through conversation with the people of 'ce pays icy', he might be understood to refer not only to native English speakers and fellow learners of French but also to those French speakers who, like the Parisian traveller, came to England over the course of the fifteenth century.

The *manières* exemplify the trans-Continental currency of French as a language of travel. French is the language that one uses to ask the way, to organize lodgings, to see that one's horses are cared for, to entertain oneself and one's fellow travellers, and to exchange news on the road.¹⁸ For the English traveller to the Continent, such functional language must have been indispensable; in all probability, the *manières* were used to teach it. But as all teachers know, the best classroom materials can be used to teach more than one thing, and the same dialogues that modelled the language that English travellers needed on the Continent could also be used to model the language that an English host needed in order to make his foreign guests feel comfortable. There may sometimes have been an element of ostentatious display among the French-language performances of England's hosts, as there clearly is in the florid French that the Englishman rolls out for the visiting Parisian in the dialogue just discussed. But more pragmatic concerns were at play too. If English hosts could speak French with their guests, they stood a better chance of improving both their profit margins and those of their neighbours.

This argument achieves explicit expression in a dialogue in the 1399 *Manière* that features an anxious traveller who asks the way to Canterbury (dialogue 2.3). 'Que est la droite voie vers Canterbers?' asks the traveller, 'Ditez, a il point du peril des larrons? Et par ou purrey je passer sauvement?' (p. 54, ll. 11–12: 'Which is the right route to Canterbury? Say, is there any danger of thieves? And by what route will I be able to pass safely?'). The second speaker in the dialogue replies that the route is safe by day and for this reason the traveller should wait until tomorrow before riding out; in the meantime, the traveller should eat with him. When the first speaker

expresses his gratitude for this information, he identifies what might be at stake for his interlocutor: ‘Dieu vous doint bonne chevauché *et vous encroisse en voz marchandisez*’ (p. 54, ll. 17–18, my emphasis: ‘God give you good riding and enrich you in your trading’). At the same time as it models the language of asking for and giving the way that would have been of use for an Englishman abroad, this dialogue also models the kinds of interactions with foreign visitors that English learners of French might imagine having at home. Viewed from this perspective, the example conversation can be seen both to demonstrate how hospitality might be enacted through French and to highlight the financial profit that might accrue to an Englishman capable of mastering such situations linguistically and socially. The fictional traveller to Canterbury is shown apparently agreeing to lengthen his stay on the road by a day. If the second speaker in the dialogue was not imagined to benefit from these arrangements himself – might we perhaps envision him as an innkeeper? – he might have been perceived as an active promoter of his countrymen’s interests.

In this connection, it is worth recalling the description of the Northgate inn at Oxford in the 1415 *Manière*, which reads as if it were an advertisement. This inn, we are told, is the best inn in all the town; the food there is good, plentiful and not too expensive (p. 71, ll. 22–24, cited above). The description of the market at Woodstock in the same manual also reads like publicity material. The travellers in this dialogue are told that, besides the usual foodstuffs, English wool and cloths are on sale there:

Il a auxi la pur vendre .xx. sakes, .iiii. toddes, .iiii. peres et .v. clowes de layne, deux centz peaux lanuz, .xiiii. draps longez et dys doszeyns de mellez d’Oxenforde, .xx. kerseys d’Abyndoun, .x. blanketz de Wytteney, .vi. rougez de Castelcombe, .iiii. russet de Colchestere scarletz, bloyes ou pers selestiens, plunketz sanguyns et violetz en greyn rayés, motlez de Sarisbury et autrez divers colours de plusours sortz pur fayre lyverees si bien as seignours, abbees et priours come as autrez gentils du pays. (p. 76, ll. 5–11)

There is also there for sale twenty sacks, three *toddes*, four stones, and five cloves of wool, two hundred fleeces, fourteen (lots of?) woollen cloth and ten dozen of Oxford mix, twenty (lots of?) coarse Abingdon woollen cloth, ten (lots of?) Witney white cloth, six (lots of?) Castle Combe red cloth, four (lots of?) fine russet Colchester cloth, blue or sky blue (cloth?), blood-red plunket, fast-dyed and striped violet-coloured cloth, variegated Salisbury cloth and other diverse colours of different kinds fit to make liveries as well as for lords, abbots, and priors as for other nobles of the country.

The passage rehearses the vocabulary of the trans-Continental wool trade, which spans both Anglo-Norman and Middle English lexes.¹⁹ Crucially, several of the items mentioned in this spiel are locally made. Oxford itself is touted as the producer of a special mixed cloth; Abington and Witney, also mentioned as cloth-producing locations, are within a ten-mile radius of the city. Apparently, the ability to speak French in Oxford is being presented not only as a means of furthering one’s own business interests but also of supporting the local economy.

When the action of the 1415 *Manière* is transferred from Oxford to London, its dialogues lose some of their topicality, but the usefulness of French for engaging with foreign travellers can only have been greater there. Late medieval London’s status

as an international, polyglot city of trade has been stressed by historians such as Caroline M. Barron and David Nicholas.²⁰ Its merchants cultivated links with the Low Countries, France and Italy, and, further afield, with Bavaria, the Baltic ports and Constantinople. As a result, the city was constantly inundated with foreign visitors who came to England to buy and sell. Many of these will have spoken French as a first language; for others, such as the Genovese, the Milanese, the Florentines, the Germans, the Flemish, the Czechs and the Greeks, French will have been found useful for its broad currency as a language that facilitated trade.²¹ The status of French as a mercantile *lingua franca* in fifteenth-century London explains the rather clumsy re-situation of the 1415 *Manière* in that location: spoken French was surely a desired skill there. The financial benefits associated with knowing French in London are evident, and the French of the marketplace is a staple theme across the extant manuals, which quite extensively model the language required to haggle (cf. dialogues 4.6, 7 and 14 in the 1396 *Manière*, and dialogues 8.1 and 8.2 in the 1399 *Manière*). Apparently in order further to facilitate cross-Channel trade, the 1399 *Manière* also includes a useful comparative list of currencies:

Et sçachez que deux poetevines font un maille, et deux mailles font un denier, et quatre deniers font un gros blanc, et trois blans font un soude, et trois soulde englois font un franc, et un franc et un gros blanc font un escu, et deux escus font un noble, et deux nobles font une marc, et une marc et demy font un livre d'Anglitterre, et ainsy serront rebatuz. (p. 50, ll. 26–30).

And know that two *peitevins* make a *maille*, and two *mailles* make a *denier*, and four *deniers* make a *gros blanc*, et three *blans* make a *soude*, three English *soude*s make a *franc*, and a *franc* and *gros blanc* make an *escu*, and two *escus* make a *noble*, and two *nobles* make a *marc*, and one and a half *marcs* make an English *livre*, and that's how they will be valued comparatively.²²

The particular status of French as a *lingua franca* in London helps to clarify the rationale behind the final dialogue in the 1415 *Manière*, which in all its extant versions stages a conversation between a knight and a boy who has been destined to take up an apprenticeship in London by his mother. The mother has asked the knight to take her son to the big city, and the knight interrogates the boy before he agrees to her request:

- Moun fiz, avez vous esté a l'escole?
- Oy, syre, par vostre congé.
- A quel lieu?
- Syr, a l'ostelle de Will. Kyngesmylle Escriven.
- Beau fyz, comben de temps avez vous demurrez ovesque luy?
- Sire, forsque un quart de l'an.
- Cella n'est que un poi temps, mes qu'avez vous apriz la en ycel terme?
- Syr, moun maystre m'ad enseigné pur escrire, enditer, acompter et fraunceys parler.
- Et que savez vous en fraunceys dire?
- Sir, je say moun noun et moun corps bien descriere. (p. 76, ll. 24–34 – p. 77, l. 1)

- My son, have you been to school?
- Yes, sir, by your leave.

- In what place?
- Sire, at the hostel of the scrivener, Will. Kingsmill.
- Good son, how long have you stayed with him?
- Sire, only a quarter of a year.
- That's only a little while, but what have you learned there in that time?
- Sire, my master has taught me to write, compose, cast accounts, and speak French.
- And what can you say in French?
- Sire, I can say my name and describe my body well.

The French that the boy goes on to demonstrate is rudimentary. Once he has dutifully rattled off the nouns used to describe the body, he embarks on further word lists giving the lexes of clothing, ecclesiastical and secular rank, and household furniture. Perhaps the anticipation was that he would build on these foundations once he had arrived in London. Or perhaps what we should deduce from these lists is that a little French could go a long way in artisanal and mercantile contexts in the late medieval city. French might serve to set the tone of an exchange that could be continued in a mixture of vernaculars and Latin. This eventuality could explain the prolific listing of forms of greeting in all three of the extant *manières* (cf. dialogues 10 and 19 in the 1396 *Manière*; dialogues 2.1, 7.1, 7.3, 10.1 and 11.1 in the 1399 *Manière*; and dialogue 1 in the 1415 *Manière*). Literary portrayals of improvised communication between medieval European speakers having no shared language show a gravitation towards a simplified, romance-derived speech.²³ In such communicative contexts, the use that Kingsmill's boy might get out of his French noun lists was potentially quite great.

It is significant that Kingsmill makes his self-identification at this juncture in this manual and not in one of the conversations modelling more complex French (the second dialogue in the 1415 *Manière* includes a narrative account of the French defeat at the Battle of Agincourt, for example).²⁴ Kingsmill's biographical connections with London might have given him a keener sense of what skills would be required to succeed in the city as well as a cachet on which he could capitalize with potential customers at Oxford. Before setting up his school in Catte Street, the *dictator* is known to have worked as a scrivener in London and to have been under-marshal of the King's Bench.²⁵ At any rate, Kingsmill's decision to attach his name to the final dialogue in his collection indicates both his conviction that he would be able to attract clients by offering instruction in the basics of French and his determination to be identified as a man capable of imparting such knowledge.

One final dialogue whose application might be clarified by consideration of the presence of French-speakers in England is that transmitted in three versions of the 1396 *Manière* in which a garden-keeper and a ditch-digger discuss their work (dialogue 5). The two men compare the tasks that they have accomplished in the past week and the meagre wages that they have received as recompense. Whereas the ditch-digger has earned twelve deniers and his expenses, the gardener is worse off, despite the fact that he has been very busy:

– J'ay enté toutz les arbres de mon gardeyn des les plus beals entes que j'ay vieu pieça et ore ils comencent a reverdir, et auxi j'ay foué un autre gardein et je l'ay tresbien a point planté des cheux, porré, perselé et sauge et dez autres vertouse herbes. Et plus unquore je l'ay essraché et essarté toutz lez ortites putes et les mavaisses herbes, et tresbien semé de beaucope des bons semailles ou grains. Et j'en ay la auxi beaucope dez beals arbres portauns des diverse fruis come des pomes, poirs, prunes et cherises et noes, et je les ay tresbien appareillés et unquore j'en ay gaigné ceste sepmaine que troys deniers et mes despenses. Mais ne gaignay le darrayne sepmaine que fuit derechief atant, et j'en estoy adonques bien héties. (p. 17, ll. 11–21)

– I've grafted all the trees in my garden with the most beautiful grafts that I've seen in ages and now they are starting to sprout, and also I've dug another garden and I've planted it all out neatly with cabbages, leeks, parsley, and sage, and other virtuous herbs. And what's more I've pulled up and cleared the ground of all the bloody nettles and weeds, and sowed it very well with good seeds or grains. And I also have many beautiful trees carrying different fruits such as apples, pears, plums, and cherries and nuts, and I've sorted them out neatly, and still I've only earned three deniers and my expenses this week. But I didn't earn as much last week, so I was quite happy about it.

As Kristol intimates, the prospect of two fifteenth-century Englishmen of this status talking to each other in French is unlikely.²⁶ But the dialogue is less difficult to comprehend if viewed in the context of what is increasingly known about the immigration to England of French speakers in the fifteenth century. While many French-speaking travellers and merchants came to England and went again as a matter of course throughout the medieval period, some French-speakers settled in England and made their livelihoods there.

As Bart Lambert and W. Mark Ormrod have shown, there is a history of French speakers emigrating to England that runs throughout the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries despite the hostilities that accompanied the development of the Hundred Years War.²⁷ In the first half of the fifteenth century, the English occupation of northern France offered further opportunities for cross-Channel travel to the Normans, the Bretons and other French-speaking groups. Some time ago now, working with data compiled from the returns of the so-called Alien Subsidy of 1440, a tax levied on first-generation immigrants, Sylvia Thrupp demonstrated the broad geographical distribution of the French-speaking immigrants living in England in the mid fifteenth century as well as their professional versatility. Thrupp showed that French-speakers were scattered across Devon, Kent, Lincolnshire, Staffordshire, Wiltshire and Yorkshire, and that they worked in trades such as construction, iron-smithing, milling, weaving and brewing.²⁸ These returns provide an engaging context in which the more complex conversations between masters and apprentices in the 1396 *Manière* might be re-read. Those dialogues feature apprentices whose French is much farther advanced than that of Kingsmill's boy; their protagonists organize replacements when they need to take time off because they have injured themselves in a brawl (dialogue 6), or they use French in an attempt to excuse their late arrival at work after a night out carousing with prostitutes (dialogue 7). With

reference to the dialogue between the two labourers in the 1396 *Manière*, Thrupp's parallel observation that many French-speaking immigrants were also engaged in agricultural work is of potentially crucial importance. As well as herding livestock, Thrupp notes, a significant proportion of England's French-speaking immigrants worked the land as general labourers.²⁹ More recent research has confirmed the picture painted by Thrupp according to which many French-speaking immigrants lived rurally and engaged in field work. In a case study based on the Alien Subsidy returns for Devon, a county that attracted a large number of French-speaking migrants, Maryanne Kowaleski has stressed the lower status of the majority of these incomers as well as their tendency to cluster in coastal and farming communities, away from the bigger towns. Immigrants in these locations will almost as a matter of course have been involved in working the land, as are the two *vilains* (p. 18, l. 3) described in the 1396 *Manière*.³⁰

One way of looking at the dialogue between the two labourers in the 1396 *Manière* in the light of Thrupp's and Kowaleski's research is as a rehearsal of the vocabulary that an Englishman would have needed in order to discuss the conduct of agriculture with French-speaking labourers who were engaged to work the land that he owned or for which he was responsible. Another conversation in the same manual collects a series of greetings that are said specifically to be appropriate for addresses 'as overers et labourers' (p. 23, l. 11; dialogue 10: 'to workmen and peasants'), so conversations of some kind were clearly envisaged taking place between agricultural workers and the learners of French implicated in the 1396 *Manière*. This is not the first time that a teacher of French attempted to teach the French of the fields to the English; indeed, this brief text might be accounted a late contribution to an important tradition of Anglo-Norman writing on estates management.³¹ Dated to the second half of the thirteenth century, Walter de Bibbesworth's *Tretiz* is one of the earliest extant works of French-language instruction; its focus falls on the vocabulary of the countryside.³² The text remained popular well into the fifteenth century and looks to have provided some of the vocabulary lists learned by Kingsmill's boy in the dialogue that closes the 1415 *Manière*.³³

As well as facilitating communication between the English and incoming French-speakers, the dialogue between the two labourers in the 1396 *Manière* might also be seen to participate in the processes of cultural assimilation that cannot always have worked in favour of French-speaking immigrants. In this conversation, the peasants are shown to be resigned to their lot. The garden-keeper states that, although he didn't get much, he earned even less last week, and he is happy with what he has. The ditch-digger agrees that their wages are better than nothing 'quar il faut gaïner ce que n'en poet avoir a jour de huy' (p. 17, l. 23: 'because you have to get what you can these days'). They then go off to enjoy the simple pleasures of a slap-up meal and a dog fight. The model dialogue thus provides a potential estates manager with an idealized representation of his workforce as hard-working, grateful, reasonably comfortable and unambitious. It is not difficult to imagine the words of these imaginary peasants being turned against their real counterparts:

work hard and be grateful for what little you receive, because you have to get what you can nowadays! Certainly, other medieval English texts suggest that French-speaking labourers were not always viewed in the rosy light of the 1396 *Manière*. Among the fair field full of folk described in the opening vision of *Piers Plowman*, the dreamer includes a satirical portrait of a group of Francophone ditch diggers who would rather sing than work:

Of alle lybbynge laborers lopen forth somme –
As dykeres and delveres that doon hire dedes ille
And dryveth forth the longe day with ‘*Dieu vous save Dame Emmel*’ (Prologue, ll. 223–25)³⁴

Of all living labourers there leapt forth some
Such as dyke diggers and ditch delvers that do their jobs badly
And spend the long day singing *Dieu vous save Dame Emmel*

Whether they portray the low-status, French-speaking agricultural labourer or the wealthy, French-speaking traveller, the *manières* participate in a broader, on-going project of imagining non-English identities at a time when nationality was a flexible and porous category. The *manières* may have more to contribute to considerations of this topic than has hitherto been recognized.³⁵

Of course, no textbook can ever give an exact picture of an individual learner’s learning: who is to say whether the users of the *manières* perfected their lessons? Nevertheless, these conversation manuals give us a clear impression of the situations in which late medieval English learners of French might envisage using the language abroad and, if I am right, at home too. The evidence that they provide in this regard can be taken quite seriously. The *dictatores* were private teachers; they needed to attract clients in order to stay in business and, as such, their success depended on their ability to identify genuine requirements among potential customers and to service those requirements effectively in their teaching. As the final conversation in the 1415 *Manière* indicates, even a little French might have had quite extensive applications in late medieval England. Turning to other conversations contained in the *manières*, it is the sheer fluency of the spoken French modelled that is most striking, especially in light of the commercial pressures just adduced. The complexity and subtlety of many of the French conversations recorded in the *manières* puts paid to the old notion according to which French – and, in particular, spoken French – was in terminal decline in fifteenth-century England. For what would be the pedagogic point of presenting learners with materials that were too difficult for them to use?³⁶

The *manières* indicate that the English could use spoken French in a variety of situations and registers at home. French could be used to perform positions of subservience, as in the dialogues between the hosts and the travellers, or between apprentices and their masters or customers. At the same time, the conversation in the 1396 *Manière* between the two labourers adumbrates the use of French by English speakers to address an immigrant workforce engaged in agricultural labour.³⁷ Richard Ingham’s research into the longevity of Insular French has already yielded valuable results; the corpora that he analyses allow him to demonstrate the

concurrent use of both written and spoken French in manorial and legal milieux well into the fourteenth century.³⁸ The *manières* suggest that considerable spoken facility in French persisted later still among the English across an even broader spectrum of situations. Since the *manières* are not graded in the sense that they start out with easy conversations that gradually become more complex, the question is raised of how the English maintained an expert facility in spoken French so late into the Middle Ages, long after the passing of native proficiency. Ingham proposes that French was maintained among the English into the fourteenth century thanks to the practice pursued in English grammar schools of teaching Latin via the medium of French.³⁹ But this situation pertained only until the era of the Black Death, and it is unclear by what institutional means, if any, spoken French might have been maintained into the later period.⁴⁰ If the *manières* themselves contain any hint of a resolution to this quandary, it lies in their extensive modelling of language contact between English and Continental speakers of French.

In an early appeal in favour of the interest of the French-language teaching materials surviving from late fourteenth- and fifteenth-century England, Serge Lusignan stressed the respect for and academic interest in the workings of French among the English at this time; in France, by contrast, the first attempts to treat French scientifically date to the sixteenth century.⁴¹ Clearly, these teaching materials speak to the high regard enjoyed by French in late medieval England. Nevertheless, in closing I would like to stress the fundamental pragmatism that underpins these materials and that shapes the *manières de langage* in particular. Notwithstanding the florid utterances of the Englishman who engages the Parisian traveller arrived from Venice, the *manières* consistently set out a series of real-world situations, at home and abroad, in which their users might have expected to deploy French as a means to an end. The combined scope of the themes treated in these manuals demonstrates that, in the later Middle Ages, the English could conceive of French not simply as a language of prestige. The pragmatic attitude towards language acquisition and use that the *manières* encourage us to see among the late medieval English has clear implications for Insular multilingualism more broadly conceived. It is most likely that the goal-oriented approach to language acquisition that is manifested in the *manières* also motivated some French-speaking incomers to learn English, for instance – although, as Ormrod points out, their efforts have left few written records.⁴² The possibility that communication between English and Dutch speakers might not always have required the intermediary of French also deserves consideration, particularly given patterns in multilingual text recording that suggest mutual English–Dutch comprehension.⁴³ But again, it is to be imagined that the kind of fleeting, making-do conversation that analogies between English and Dutch might have made possible will have left few written records.⁴⁴ In a situation in which other forms of documentary evidence are lacking, the *manières de langage* represent an invaluable source of information regarding the spoken languages of late medieval England and the attitudes to foreign

language acquisition and use that prevailed there. Their usefulness for scholars interested in medieval Insular multilingualism remains fully to be exploited.

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NOTES

¹ Rory G. Critten, 'Practising French Conversation in Fifteenth-Century England', *Modern Language Review*, 110 (2015), 927–45.

² See H. G. Richardson, 'An Oxford Teacher of the Fifteenth Century', *Bulletin of the John Rylands Library*, 23 (1939), 436–57; 'Business Training in Medieval Oxford', *American Historical Review*, 46 (1941), 259–80, and 'Letters of the Oxford Dictatores', in *Formularies which Bear on the History of Oxford c. 1204–1420*, ed. by H. E. Salter, W. A. Pantin and H. G. Richardson, Oxford Historical Society, New Series, vol. 5 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1942), pp. 329–450; and M. Dominica Legge, 'William of Kingsmill: A Fifteenth-Century Teacher of French in Oxford', in *Studies in French Language and Medieval Literature Presented to Professor Mildred K. Pope* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1939), pp. 241–46. On the relationship between the *dictatores* and the university, see also Martin Camargo, 'If You Can't Join Them, Beat Them; or, When Grammar Met Business Writing (in Fifteenth-Century Oxford)', in *Letter-Writing Manuals and Instruction from Antiquity to the Present: Historical and Bibliographic Studies*, ed. by Carol Poster and Linda C. Mitchell (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2007), pp. 67–87.

³ See, for example, T. A. R. Evans, 'The Number, Origins and Careers of Scholars', in *The History of the University of Oxford*, ed. by Trevor H. Aston, 8 vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1984–2000), II: *Late Medieval Oxford*, ed. by J. I. Catto and Ralph Evans (1992), pp. 485–538 (p. 526).

⁴ See the seminal article by Helen Suggett, 'The Use of French in England in the Later Middle Ages', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 28 (1946), 61–83. More recently, see also William Rothwell, 'English and French in England after 1362', *English Studies*, 82 (2001), 539–59.

⁵ See, for example, William Rothwell, 'The Role of French in Thirteenth-Century England', *Bulletin of the John Rylands University Library*, 58 (1975–76), 445–66; and Ian Short, 'On Bilingualism in Anglo-Norman England', *Romance Philology*, 33 (1980), 467–79. More recent research offering alternative accounts of the longevity of spoken French is discussed below.

⁶ Citations from the *Manières* are by page and line number from *Manières de langage (1396, 1399, 1415)*, ed. by Andres M. Kristol, Anglo-Norman Texts 53 (London: Anglo-Norman Text Society, 1995). Where reference is made to the numbering of the dialogues within the individual *manières*, these numbers are also taken from Kristol's edition. As in my previous article ('Practising French

Conversation'), I take over Kristol's practice of referring to three distinct *manières* texts by the probable dates of their composition in 1396, 1399 and 1415.

⁷ All translations in this essay are my own.

⁸ See the variant readings recorded in *Manières*, ed. by Kristol, p. 93 (n71.4).

⁹ Cited by page and line number here and in the following quotation from the edition of Cambridge, University Library MS Dd. 12. 23 in *Liber Donati: A Fifteenth-Century Manual of French*, ed. by Brian Merrilees and Beata Sitarz-Fitzpatrick, Plain Texts Series 9 (London: Anglo-Norman Text Society, 1993).

¹⁰ See *Manières*, ed. by Kristol, pp. 93–95 (n71.22; n72.8; n72.9; and n75.30).

¹¹ On the manuscript versions of the 1415 *Manière*, see further *Manières*, ed. by Kristol, pp. xl–xlv.

¹² See *Manières*, ed. by Kristol, pp. 82–83 (n7.4; n7.5; and n8.11).

¹³ Where in Kristol's base text an apprentice is shown going to sell his master's wares 'a Parys' (p. 19, l. 28), for example, in the Harley and All Souls texts, the apprentice is simply shown going 'a l'overdure', which seems to mean something like 'to the shop' (dialogue 7). Then, where in Kristol's base text a sick man is invited on a pilgrimage to seek 'seint Denyse de Parys', in the Harley, All Souls and Paris texts, the same man is invited to visit Thomas of Canterbury (p. 30, l. 16; dialogue 20). See *Manières*, ed. by Kristol, p. 84 (n19.28) and p. 86 (n30.16). For the translation of 'a l'overdure' as 'to the shop', see the *Anglo-Norman Dictionary* s.v. *overdure*, citing only this occurrence of the word. The *Anglo-Norman Dictionary* can be consulted online at <<http://www.anglo-norman.net>>.

¹⁴ The text of this manual preserved in All Souls 182 has dialogues in which French is spoken on the way to both Paris and Canterbury (dialogues 2.1 and 2.3). In unique variant readings of the 1399 *Manière*, this Insular colouring is enhanced. In Cambridge, University Library MS Ii. 6. 17, a destination unnamed in the All Souls text is identified as Windsor (dialogue 2.2), and in Cambridge, University Library MS Additional 8870, a Francophone woman whose origins are not mentioned in the All Souls text is identified as coming from the Scottish town of Dunbar (dialogue 4.1). See *Manières*, ed. by Kristol, p. 90 (n53.26; n56.6).

¹⁵ See *Manières*, ed. by Kristol, p. xliv.

¹⁶ See Ardis Butterfield, *The Familiar Enemy: Chaucer, Language, and Nation in the Hundred Years War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009). For a brief but informative discussion of French pedagogy in late medieval England, including mention of the *manières*, see pp. 328–34. More recent work on the in-flow of French-speaking immigrants to England is discussed below.

¹⁷ See Critten, 'Practising French Conversation', p. 932.

¹⁸ On the pan-European use of French among travellers and on the diffusion across northwest Europe of pedagogic tools cataloguing traveller's French, see the summary account by Douglas A. Kibbee, 'Language Instruction for Western European Travellers', in *Trade, Travel, and Exploration in the Middle Ages: An Encyclopedia*, ed. by John Block Friedman and Kristin Mosser Figg (New York: Garland, 2000), pp. 330–31. Kibbee also discusses the use of the *manières* to prepare English travellers in his monograph, *For to Speke Frenche Trevely: The French Language in England, 1000–1600* (Amsterdam: J. Benjamins, 1991), pp. 78–83.

¹⁹ The noun phrases in the French often seem to be missing a quantifier; I have sometimes supplied one in parentheses in my translation. The first sentence contains weight measures: a *sacke* usually weighed 364lbs; a *todde*, 28lbs; a *pere*, 12lbs; and a *clowe*, 7–8lbs (see *Anglo-Norman Dictionary* s.vv. *perē*, *clou*; and the *Middle English Dictionary*, s.vv. *sak*, *todde*; the *Middle English Dictionary* can be consulted online at <<https://quod.lib.umich.edu/m/med/>>). The remainder of the English translation relies on the definitions in the *Anglo-Norman Dictionary* s.vv. *drap lange*, *drap medlé*, *blanchet*, *rusaz*, *escarlet*, *bleu*, *pers celetien*, *plunket* and *motlé*, and in the *Middle English Dictionary* s.vv. *kersei* and *violet engreined*. The appearance of these terms in a pedagogic treatise designed to aid English learners of French to communicate with travelling Continental Francophones suggests the potential currency of all of these terms, Anglo-Norman and Middle English, in Continental French. On the fluidity of the boundaries between English, French and Anglo-Norman, see further David Trotter, "'Deinz certains boundes": Where Does Anglo-Norman Begin and End?', *Romance Philology*, 67 (2013), 139–77.

²⁰ See, for example, Caroline M. Barron, *London in the Later Middle Ages: Government and People, 1200–1500* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), esp. pp. 84–117; and David Nicholas, *The Later Medieval City, 1300–1500* (London: Longman, 1997), esp. pp. 92–101.

²¹ On the use of French for the purposes of trade throughout England, see William Rothwell, ‘Sugar and Spice and All Things Nice: From Oriental Bazaar to English Cloister in Anglo-French’, *Modern Language Review*, 94 (1999), 647–59. For the suggestion that the *manières* model the kind of French that merchant-sailors would have needed to master, see Maryanne Kowaleski, ‘The French of England: A Maritime *lingua franca*?’, in *Language and Culture in Medieval Britain: The French of England, c. 1100–c. 1500*, ed. by Jocelyn Wogan-Browne et al. (York: York Medieval Press, 2009), pp. 103–17 (p. 107). On the parallel use of Dutch and English in these contexts, see my concluding comments.

²² The worth of the coins is given in ascending order. In my translation, I give the French terms in the forms listed in the *Anglo-Norman Dictionary*; for *soulde*, see the *Middle English Dictionary* s.v. *soude*. The list pays special attention to the equivalence of French and English monies: a *franc* was a French gold coin, whereas a *noble* was an English gold coin. My translation of ‘rebatuz’ extrapolates upon the definition given in the *Anglo-Norman Dictionary* s.v. *rebatre*⁶.

²³ For examples and further discussion, see Jonathan Hsy, ‘Lingua Franca: Overseas Travel and Language Contact in *The Book of Margery Kempe*’, in *The Sea and Englishness in the Middle Ages: Maritime Narratives, Identity and Culture*, ed. by Sebastian I. Sobecki (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2011), pp. 159–78.

²⁴ The identification is transmitted with varying degrees of clarity across the extant manuscripts. See further *Manières*, ed. by Kristol, p. xl.

²⁵ On Kingsmill’s London career, see Nigel Ramsey, ‘Scriveners and Notaries as Legal Intermediaries in Later Medieval England’, in *Enterprise and Individuals in Fifteenth-Century England*, ed. by Jennifer Kermod (Stroud: Sutton, 1991), pp. 118–31 (p. 124).

²⁶ See *Manières*, ed. by Kristol, p. xix.

²⁷ Bart Lambert and W. Mark Ormrod, ‘Friendly Foreigners: International Warfare, Resident Aliens and the Early History of Denization in England, c. 1250–c. 1400’, *English Historical Review*, 130 (2015), 1–24; and Bart Lambert and W. Mark Ormrod, ‘A Matter of Trust: The Royal Regulation of England’s French Residents During Wartime, 1294–1377’, *Historical Research*, 89 (2016), 208–26.

²⁸ Sylvia L. Thrupp, ‘A Survey of the Alien Population of England in 1440’, *Speculum*, 32 (1957), 262–73.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 267.

³⁰ See Maryanne Kowaleski, ‘French Immigrants and the French Language in Late-Medieval England’, in *The French of Medieval England: Essays in Honour of Jocelyn Wogan-Browne*, ed. by Thelma Fenster and Carolyn P. Collette (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2017), pp. 206–24 (p. 214–15). Kowaleski’s study makes use of the new online database of aliens resident in medieval England developed by researchers at the universities of York and Sheffield and at the National Archives. See <<https://www.englishimmigrants.com/>>. This database will facilitate a comprehensive review and extension of Thrupp’s early work. For a description of its parameters and of the research project of which it is one outcome, see Jessica Lutkin, ‘England’s Immigrants 1330–1550: A Study of National Identity, Culture, and Integration’, *Journal for Early Modern Cultural Studies*, 13 (2013), 144–47. See also *Resident Aliens in Later Medieval England*, ed. by Nicola McDonald, W. Mark Ormrod and Craig Taylor (Turnhout: Brepols, forthcoming).

³¹ On this tradition, see further William Rothwell, ‘*Husbanderie* and *Manauagerie* in Later Medieval England: A Tale of Two Walters’, in *The Anglo-Norman Language and its Contexts*, ed. by Richard Ingham (York: York Medieval Press, 2010), pp. 44–51.

³² An edition of the *Tretiz* by William Rothwell is hosted by the Anglo-Norman On-Line Hub at <<http://www.anglo-norman.net>>. For a recent reassessment of the *Tretiz* that considers its aesthetic as well as its functional investments, see Thomas Hinton, ‘Anglo-French in the Thirteenth-Century: A Reappraisal of Walter de Bibbesworth’s *Tretiz*’, *Modern Language Review*, 112 (2017), 855–81. It is noteworthy that both Bibbesworth’s *Tretiz* and the closing dialogue of the 1415 *Manière* show mothers playing a vital role in the transmission of French. On this point, see further

Jocelyn-Wogan Browne, ‘“Invisible Archives?” Later Medieval French in England’, *Speculum*, 90 (2015), 653–73.

³³ As noted in *Manières*, ed. by Kristol, pp. xliv–xlv.

³⁴ Cited from *William Langland: The Vision of Piers Plowman*, ed. by A. V. C. Schmidt, 2nd ed. (London: Everyman, 1995). Schmidt dates the B-Text of the poem, which he edits, to ‘c. 1379’ (p. xiv). For an engaging reading of these lines, which includes extensive discussion of their variance across the extant manuscripts of *Piers Plowman*, see R. D. Perry, ‘Langland’s French Song’, *Yearbook of Langland Studies*, 30 (2016), 277–96. Perry posits that the French tag-line invokes not a particular song but a ‘synthetic every-song’ (p. 278) in an argument that has wide-ranging consequences for the currency of French lyric in late medieval England. On the role played by song in the teaching of French in medieval England, see further Elizabeth Eva Leach, ‘Learning French by Singing in 14th-Century England’, *Early Music*, 33 (2005), 253–70.

³⁵ On medieval notions of nation, see further Ardis Butterfield, ‘National Histories’, in *Cultural Reformations: Medieval and Renaissance in Literary History*, ed. by Brian Cummings and James Simpson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), pp. 33–55. Lambert and Ormrod (‘Friendly Foreigners’, ‘A Matter of Trust’) argue that it is through their prolonged interaction with French-speaking immigrants that medieval English authorities come gradually to develop a notion of English identity attaching particular importance to the subject’s loyalty to the sovereign.

³⁶ The idea that French was in terminal decline in England in the fifteenth century can be traced back to Mildred K. Pope, *From Latin to Modern French* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1934). More recently, see Rolf Berndt, ‘The Period of the Final Decline of French in Medieval England (14th and early 15th Centuries)’, *Zeitschrift für Anglistik und Amerikanistik*, 20 (1972), 341–69.

³⁷ An anonymous reader of this article for the journal makes the useful suggestion that intermediaries might have been involved in these acts of communication. Members of the clergy could have been employed to negotiate between landowners and immigrant workers regarding delicate employment matters, for example. This situation is plausible given the currency of French among the late medieval clergy and what is known about the circulation of the manuscripts containing medieval French teaching materials, some of which were housed in religious institutions. For instance, Wiltshire, Longleat House MS 37 contains a range of French teaching materials and opens with a dedication to John of Bredon, monk of the Abbey of Combe, in Warwickshire. On this manuscript, see H. R. Richardson, ‘Cistercian Formularies’, in *Formularies Which Bear on the History of Oxford*, ed. by Salter, Pantin and Richardson, pp. 279–327.

³⁸ See Richard Ingham, ‘Investigating Language Change Using Anglo-Norman Spoken and Written Register Data’, *Linguistics*, 54 (2016), 381–410, and ‘Mixing Languages on the Manor’, *Medium Evum*, 78 (2009), 80–97.

³⁹ See Richard Ingham, ‘The Maintenance of French in Later Medieval England’, *Neuphilologische Mitteilungen*, 115 (2015), 623–45.

⁴⁰ On the instruction and acquisition of French in later medieval and early modern England, see Rory G. Critten, ‘French Didactics in Late Medieval and Early Modern England: Thinking Historically About Method’, in *The History of Language Learning and Teaching*, ed. by Nicola McLelland and Richard Smith, 3 vols (Oxford: Legenda, 2018), pp. 33–51.

⁴¹ See Serge Lusignan, *Parler vulgairement: les intellectuels et la langue française aux XIII^e et XIV^e siècles* (Paris: Vrin, 1986), pp. 91–127.

⁴² See W. Mark Ormrod, ‘French Residents in England at the Start of the Hundred Years War: Learning English, Speaking English and Becoming English in 1346’, in *The French of Medieval England*, ed. by Fenster and Collette, pp. 190–205.

⁴³ Regarding the uses of written English and Flemish, Kowaleski reports Lambert’s observation that ‘the fifteenth-century registers of the aldermen of Bruges usually translated verdicts involving merchants from France or southern Europe into French or Latin, but left verdicts involving English, Scottish or German merchants in Middle Dutch, implying that the English may have understood enough Flemish to avoid using French’ (‘French Immigrants and the French Language’, p. 208, n8).

⁴⁴ Literary sources can offer rare glimpses of the presence of spoken Dutch in medieval English contexts. In the *London Lickpenny*, a poem belonging to the *Piers Plowman* tradition, the speaker reports being accosted outside Westminster Hall by Flemish merchants, who cry out to him: 'Master, what will ye copen [cf. Dutch *kopen*, buy] or by | – Fine felt hatts, spectacles for to rede?' (ll. 53–54). For further discussion of the use of French, Dutch and Latin alongside English in this poem, see Jonathan Hsy, *Trading Tongues: Merchants, Multilingualism, and Medieval Literature* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2013), pp. 14–22. For the text, see *Medieval English Political Writings*, ed. by James M. Dean (Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, 1996), pp. 222–25.