

FLAGS OUT FOR MULTILINGUALISM: MANAGING THE 'OTHER' LANGUAGE IN MANUSCRIPTS

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Abstract

Multilingualism in written texts takes many forms: for example, some texts present the same information in two or more languages, while in others we find individual words, phrases or longer units of the 'other' language embedded here and there. Especially for the latter, it is convenient to use the term *codeswitching*. The use of two or more languages or language varieties in the same conversation has been studied for decades, but more recently, research on this multilingual practice has been extended to written materials as well, including older texts (e.g. Schendl & Wright 2011; Pahta et al. 2018). While the syntax of bilingual sentences has been examined in both spoken and written materials, and more sociolinguistic research questions have also been prominent, there is now increasing interest in the visual aspect of non-monolingual written communication (e.g. Kopaczyk 2023). This covers, for example, the use of different colours or scripts for different languages in manuscripts and the use of italics in print; there are different means for flagging the presence of another language in a text.

My presentation at SPREMI will focus on codeswitching and flagging in medieval English manuscripts. My material consists mostly of texts with English as the main or matrix language and Latin as the embedded language, but also of Latin texts which contain some English – and it is not merely a matter of scraps of English scribbled in the margins, but also material carefully placed within the Latin prose. Not infrequently, the presence of the other language is marked with a visual flag, such as underlining, but in addition, there are also verbal or metalinguistic flags, such as language labels (“which is in English”) and, more importantly, intratextual translations, which give the potentially monolingual reader access to the content of the codeswitch. My objective is to expand the approach introduced in an earlier case study (Skaffari 2016) on the basis of a large number of manuscripts produced in England in and around the twelfth century. Most of these I have viewed in situ at various libraries in the United Kingdom, which makes it possible to account for visual features which are not consistently included in editions of medieval texts. Verbal flagging with intratextual translations is also an important part of the study (cf. Nurmi & Skaffari 2021). As the approach takes into account a range of forms used for flagging multilingual content and, in addition, the functions of the codeswitches and the flags, it can be applied to researching other language pairs and periods as well.

At the start of the presentation, I will also introduce my other current research topics briefly.

References

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