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Language choices as ideological statements in medieval and Early Modern Britain

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Written records of medieval Britain show a form of “textual trilingualism” that can be investigated from a socio-historical linguistic point of view to establish what determined language choices in different text-types. This analysis has much to say about the ways in which Latin, French and Middle English were used responding to ideological and political strategies from different groups of text-producers within society. This sociolinguistic profile changed significantly in the Early Modern period, when the conception of the English “nation” came to a different level of maturation, leading to the abandonment of French, and to the adoption of English as national language with subsequent standardization; in this latter phase, the use of Latin in written texts is not discarded, but its symbolic and ideological value also changes. The talk will trace some of the crucial phases in the development of an ideology of national identity as expressed by language choices.

