Preliminary Bibliography

There is an extensive literature on the study and usage of non-vernacular foreign languages, particularly Latin, from antiquity on. However, much less has been written on the medieval study of vernacular foreign languages, particularly in time periods and places which cannot be understood as leading up to Renaissance linguistics. I plan to write a literature review of the study and use of vernacular foreign languages in medieval Europe, roughly 500-1100, although the scope will decrease if there turns out to be enough material. I am particularly interested in all aspects of foreign language use not traditionally studied by philologers – to what extent did clergy and laity need to know foreign languages, to what extent was learning them possible, and how were they learned? Some understanding the place of classical languages in medieval societies will also be necessary to this end, since much thought about language was filtered through classical ideals.

Secondary Sources


Brunot, Ferdinand. Histoire de la Langue Française des Origines à Nos Jours. Tome I: De l’époque latine à la Renaissance. Paris: A. Colin, 1905-1938. Brunot’s still definitive history covers both internal (linguistic) and external (historical) development. The external history in volume I provides some information on who in Europe spoke French, loosely defined as the language of the court. Brunot’s History is authoritative but teleological, and must be read critically.


Penzl, Herbert. “‘Gimer mein Ros’: How German was Taught in the Ninth and Eleventh Centuries.” *The German Quarterly*, 57.3 (1984): 392-401. Basic information on this period, includes the discouraging statement that besides Bischoff’s article, “the whole question of the learning of foreign languages in the Middle Ages has not attracted the attention of many scholars.”


Richter, Michael. “Die Sprachenpolitik Karls des Grossen.” *Sprachwissenschaft*, 7 (1982): 412-437. We have an unusual amount of information on how Charlemagne dealt with his plurilingual realm and thought about language, this article should give basic information.

Zapp, Franz Josef et. al., eds. *Komunikation in Europa: Probleme der fremdsprachendidaktik in Geschichte und Gegenwart*. Frankfurt am Main: M. Diesterweg, 1981. Haven’t looked at it yet, but the historical essays might be useful.

**Primary Sources**

*Guide du Pélérin de Saint Jacques de Compostelle*, translation of the 12th century Latin guide to pilgrims to Santiago de Compostela. Includes advice and opinions on the foreign languages pilgrims will encounter en route. For example, Basque is a “barbaric tongue,” but the Latin-Basque glossary provides our earliest information on the language.

Bede, *Ecclesiastical History of the English People*. Includes some information on what languages different monks and bishops know, how that’s important in conversion missions and administration.

Einhard’s *Life of Charlemagne*, includes references to Charlemagne’s interest in ancient and vernacular languages.

Felix’ *Life of Saint Guthlac*, according to Bischoff says the Anglo-Saxons thought the devil spoke Briton. Might contain other opinions on language.

Konrad von Megenberg, *Ökonomik*, contains various opinions language and how peasants must learn new ones when they are uprooted in war.

I have not yet explored much of the Medieval Sourcebook (http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/index.html), but there seem to be anecdotes about language:

“But he [Julian] does not know the roads nor which route to take, nor does he know how he can learn them for he did not know the language.” (*The Life of Saint Julian*)

“Ethelwerd the youngest, by the divine counsels and the admirable prudence of the king, was consigned to the schools of learning, where, with the children of almost all the nobility of the country, and many also who were not noble, he prospered under the diligent care of his teachers. Books in both languages, namely, Latin and Saxon, were both read in the school.” (*The Life of King Alfred*)

There are a respectable number of reprinted medieval phrasebooks for travellers which I haven’t yet looked into. Their introductions could be especially helpful.