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In search of a systematic approach to multilingualism on the manuscript page

It is trivial to say that communicative practices of the past have come down to us practically exclusively through the medium of writing. The writing of the past is hardly ever monolingual, nonetheless the study of historical texts has largely been biased towards monolingual narratives geared towards establishing individual language histories.

Multilingualism has been the focus of modern linguistics for much longer, but researchers have typically focussed on spontaneous speech (e.g. Myers-Scotton 1993). Multilingual writing is therefore a relatively new area of research and as such, it is still developing its methodological tools (Sebba et al. (eds.) 2012, Kopaczyk 2013). This presentation builds on two current approaches to historical texts: the recognition of historical multilingual practices (broadly defined in Pahta *et al*. (eds.) 2018; see also McLelland 2004, Schendl and Wright (eds.) 2011, Keller 2020) and the realisation that meaning on the written page is constructed from non-linguistic as well as linguistic elements (see, e.g. Jucker and Pahta (eds.) 2011, Carroll et al. 2013, Moore 2016). I have been working on constructing and applying a systematic descriptive model which could capture the ways in which changes in the linguistic mode are mediated (or not) by non-linguistic means, see Fig.1.)
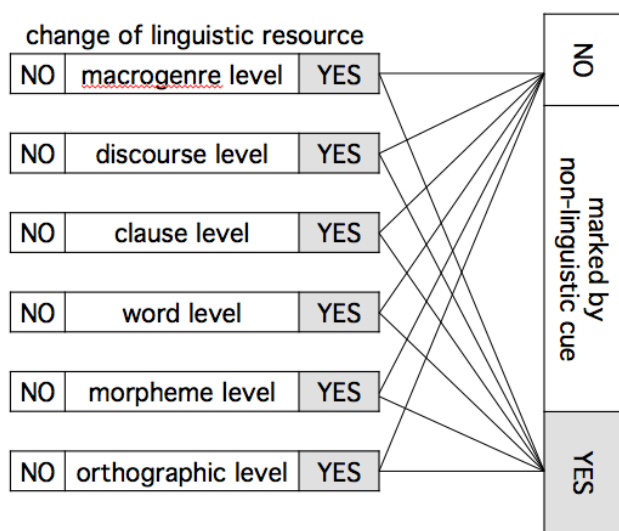

Fig. 1. The interaction between multilingual content and visual cues on different linguistic levels (adapted from Kopaczyk 2018: 292).

Changes of linguistic resource on any level of language complexity can be seen as types of code-switching or any other multilingual practice. I am interested in correlating these practices with their appearance - and their overall semiotic context - on the manuscript page. In their study of several manuscripts of the Middle English *Polychronicon*, Carroll et al. (2013) distinguished four main visual strategies of highlighting an element on the page: "changing its colour, increasing or reducing its size, using a different style than that of its immediate environment, and positioning it in a location where it stands out from the body text". I take up this basic taxonomy of visual cues on the page and relate them to structural levels of language in order to capture the multilingual experience in its full complexity. The benefits of

this approach are twofold: on the one hand the model allows for a more fine-grained qualitative engagement with the reasons behind particular linguistic and visual choices, and on the other, it can serve as a basis for a tagging system to implement in corpus construction and analysis (see e.g. Kopaczyk, Włodarczyk and Adamczyk 2016, Włodarczyk et al. 2020).

The ambition of the model is to cater for all kinds of communicative contexts where multilingualism is realised on a written page, regardless of language, genre or period. I will therefore illustrate the talk with several case studies: from Poland - medieval oaths (https://rotha.ehum.psnc.pl), from Scotland - legal and administrative manuscripts, and from England – a poetry collection (Harley MS 2253), to engage with shared multilingual past and suggest ways of analysing it in a comprehensive manner.

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