

## Multilingualism in Medieval Romance: A French Case Study

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**Abstract :** Inscribing itself in the field of the history of multilingual communities with a focus on the evolution of language didactics, our paper aims at providing a pragmatic-interactional approach on a corpus proposing to scholars of the international scientific community a relevant text of early modern European literature: the first romance in French, *The Conte of Flore and Blanchefleur* by Robert d'Orbigny (1150). The multicultural context described by the romance is one in which an Arab-speaking prince, Floire, and his Francophone protégée, Blanchefleur, learn Latin together at the court of Spain and become fluent enough to turn it into the language of their love. This learning process is made up of interactional patterns of affective relevance, in which the proficiency of the protagonists in the domain of emotive acts becomes a matter of linguistic and pragmatic emulation. From five to ten years old, the pupils are efficiently stimulated by their teacher of Latin, Gaidon – a Moorish scholar of the royal entourage – to cultivate their competencies of oral expression and reading comprehension (of Antiquity classics), while enjoying an ever greater freedom of written expression, including the composition of love poems in this second language of culture and emotional education. Another relevant parameter of the educational process at court is that Latin shares its prominent role as a language of culture with French, whose exemplary learner is the (Moorish) queen herself. Indeed, the adult 'First lady' strives to become a pupil benefitting from lifelong learning provided by a fortuitous slave-teacher with little training, her anonymous chambermaid and Blanchefleur's mother, who, despite her status of a war trophy, enjoys her Majesty's confidence as a cultural agent of change in linguistic and theological fields. Thus, the two foreign languages taught at Spain's court, Latin and French – as opposed to Arabic –, suggest a spiritual authority allowing the mutual enrichment of intercultural pioneers of cross-linguistic communication, in the aftermath of religious wars. Durably, and significantly – if not everlastingly – the language of physical violence rooted in intra-cultural solipsism is replaced by two Romance languages which seem to embody, together and yet distinctly, the parlance of peace-making.

**Keywords :** multilingualism, history of European language learning, French and Latin learners, multicultural context of medieval romance

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