Why do some people say *aks* and not *ask*?

How many different ways can you use the word *like*?

Do you feel *good* or *well*?

Who said *ain't* isn't a word?

Do you write with a "pen" or a "pin"?

Who wrote "the dictionary"?

When does "I'm busy" mean "No"?

Are some words too powerful to say?

Is hip-hop poetry?

How do children learn to speak?

How is a word like *blog* created?

Who speaks a dialect?

Why is *colonel* spelled the way it is?

Do men and women speak differently?

Will txtng make us talk in abbrevs?

HOW ENGLISH WORKS

A Linguistic Introduction
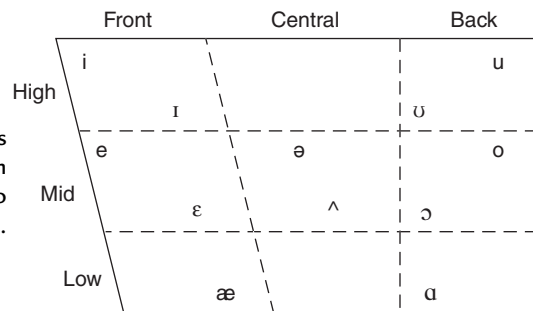
THIRD EDITION

ANNE CURZAN
MICHAEL ADAMS

The major dialect areas of American English (*The Atlas of North American English,* 2005).

Manner of Articulation	Bilabial	Labio-dental	Inter-dental	Alveolar	(Alveo-)Palatal	Velar	Glottal
Stops	p			t		k	
	b			d		g	
Fricatives		f	θ	s	ʃ (š)		h
		v	ð	z	ʒ (ž)		
Affricates					tʃ (č)		
					dʒ (ǰ)		
Nasals	m			n		ŋ	
Liquids				l (lateral)			
				r (bunched)			
Glides	w (ʍ)				j		

The consonant phonemes of standard American English categorized by distinctive features.

The vowel phonemes of standard American English drawn according to their distinctive features.

	Front	Central	Back
High	i		u
	ɪ		ʊ
Mid	e	ə	o
	ɛ	ʌ	ɔ
Low	æ		ɑ

Diphthongs: aɪ, aʊ, ɔɪ

This page intentionally left blank

How English Works

A LINGUISTIC INTRODUCTION

Third Edition

Anne Curzan

University of Michigan

Michael Adams

Indiana University

Chapter **13**

History of English:
Old to Early Modern English

Lovers can cleave to one another in the sense of 'cling', or an unfaithful lover can cleave ('split') a loved one's heart—breaking the heart with a metaphorical cleaver.

In Modern English, you can cleave to someone or something (i.e., 'be joined to another') and also can cleave something in two (i.e., 'break or sunder something into parts'). The Web site of the Cleave Counter Agency (http://www.cleave.com) states playfully: "We put things together. We take things apart." How is it that Modern English uses the same verb to mean contradictory things: to bring things together and to separate things permanently?

In fact, *cleave* is two different verbs, and they were not always identical. They derive from two distinct Old English verbs, one "strong" and one "weak." These two verbs were significantly different in Old English, but over time, the pronunciations and inflections of the two forms converged. The Old English verb from which *cleave* 'break into parts' developed was *clēofan,* a "strong" verb

417

that marked tense by changes in the internal vowel, rather than by adding an inflectional suffix. The past tense of this *cleave* was *clove*. The past participle was *cloven,* from which the adjective *cloven* (as in the *cloven hooves* of ungulates and the Devil) derives. The adjective *cleft* (as in *a cleft chin*) also can be traced back to the Old English "strong" verb paradigm.

If you *cleave* to someone or something, you do so with the descendent of the Old English "weak" verb *clīfan.* As a "weak" verb, *clīfan* formed the past tense by adding an inflectional suffix, which is where we get *cleave, cleaved,* and *had cleaved* (rather than *cleave, clove,* and *had cloven*). These two contradictory meanings can lead to potentially confusing sentences: for example, an unfaithful lover takes a metaphorical *cleaver* (imagine a butcher's knife) to the heart of the one to whom he or she should *cleave* in the sense of clinging, not butchering.

Many of the regularities and idiosyncrasies of Modern English can be traced back through the centuries, sometimes as far back as Old English—one reason the history of English is essential to the study of English linguistics. Sometimes history is framed primarily as knowledge of the past. The story of English, however, is living history. Current English is only one stage in an ongoing process of language change.

This chapter and the next one summarize the story of English—both of the language and of its speakers—relating historical facts to current features and then looking forward to the future.

A note before we begin: Historians typically divide the history of a language into periods, such as Old, Middle, Early Modern, and Modern. The lines between these periods are somewhat artificial, no more accurate than an isogloss (see Chapters 11 and 12). As with regional variation, chronological development is continuous. So a history of English can say that Middle English, for instance, "begins" in 1066 after the Norman Conquest, but features of Middle English are already in play before that date, and features of Old English persist well into the Middle English period in different dialects. Some historians choose an important historical event as the dividing line between periods. Speakers, however, wake up the day after these events speaking the same version of the language that they spoke the day before.

Old English (449–1066): History of Its Speakers

Old English, which Modern English speakers barely recognize as related to their language, originally developed from a group of Germanic dialects. In spite of later influence, English is fundamentally a Germanic language, a member of the same language family as Dutch, Modern High German, Pennsylvania German, and Yiddish, among others.

When Did English Begin?

In his *Ecclesiastical History of the English People* (731), the medieval scholar known as the Venerable Bede reports that in 449 CE Britain was invaded and settled by representatives of three Germanic tribes: the Angles, the Saxons, and the Jutes. Historians are not
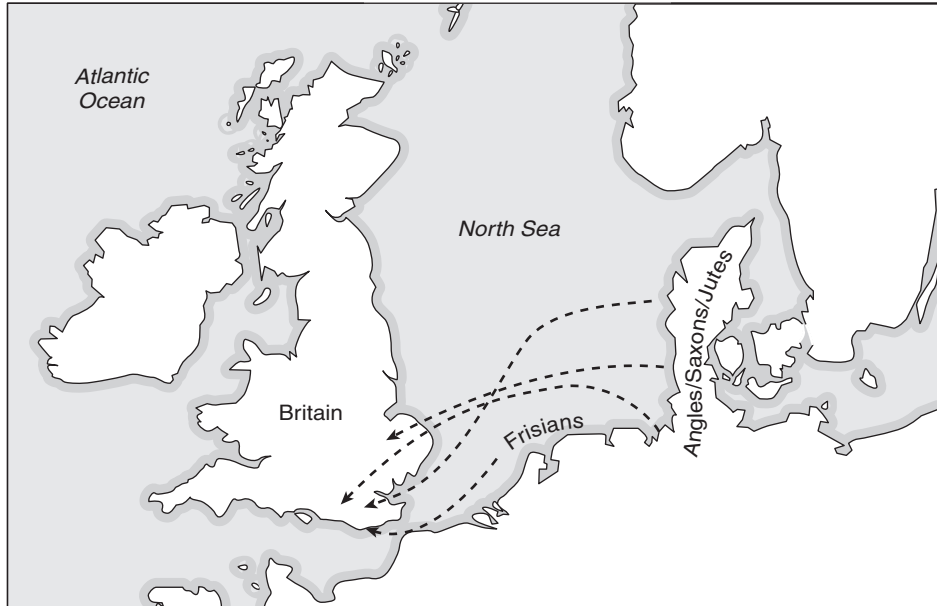
FIGURE 13.1 The Angles, Saxons, Jutes, and Frisians migrated from different parts of northern Europe to the southeastern part of Britain beginning in the middle of the fifth century.

entirely sure who the invaders were, but they believe that the Angles and Jutes hailed from what is now Denmark, and the Saxons from northwest Germany, between Denmark and the Netherlands (see Figure 13.1). Jutes settled in Kent, in the southeast corner of the island, during the fifth century. Later in the same century, Saxons established themselves in the south and west. Angles took control of the eastern coast by the middle of the sixth century. By the end of that century, many (though not all) of the Celts, who had lived in Britain for nearly a millennium, were driven into what became Wales, and the speakers of Germanic dialects occupied nearly all of what we now call England.

When the Germanic tribes arrived in Britain in 449, they spoke the same Germanic dialects that they spoke when they were on the European continent. Historians use 449 as the "beginning" of English because from that time onward, the Germanic dialect speakers in Britain were geographically isolated from the Germanic dialect speakers on the continent. The dialects spoken in Britain, through natural processes of language change and through language contact, began to drift away from their "sister" dialects on the continent to become a distinct language, which we call "English."

Which Germanic Dialect Is "Old English"?

"Old English" was actually a collection of several Germanic dialects that developed from the dialects that the waves of Germanic settlers spoke. By the seventh century, England was divided into seven kingdoms, known as the Heptarchy. Angles ruled in Northumbria, Mercia, and East Anglia; Saxons in Essex, Sussex, and Wessex (names meaning 'East Saxony', 'South Saxony', and 'West Saxony'); and the Jutes stayed in Kent. The fortunes of these kingdoms rose and fell. Initially, the Jutes were ascendant, but, in the seventh through the early ninth centuries, Northumbria and

Mercia (in that order) dominated the other kingdoms, until, finally, the Saxons became preeminent.

When a kingdom flourished, it usually produced more literature than its neighbors, so our knowledge of Old English depends somewhat on Anglo-Saxon political history. It also depends on which documents survived. Since very few people in the Old English period could read and write, the production of texts was confined almost entirely to monasteries, where monks or scribes composed or copied texts. It was an enormously time-consuming process, and written texts were relatively few and valuable. Texts were written on biodegradable material. And the monasteries in which most texts of the period were housed were vulnerable to the ravages of military attack.

Beginning around 787, Danes and Vikings, from Denmark and Norway, harried the eastern coast of England. They spoke Old Norse, a North Germanic language and distant cousin of Old English, a West Germanic language. They launched a serious attack against the English late in the ninth century, when Alfred was king of Wessex, the then ascendant Old English kingdom. Aware that he could not win a protracted conflict, Alfred allowed the Danes to settle the area north of London and east of the Watling Road—the Roman road between London and Chester (see the map). This area was designated the Danelaw (see Figure 13.2) in the Treaty of Wedmore (878). The Danelaw isolated Northumbria from the other kingdoms and broke the Heptarchy. It ensured a strong Old Norse influence on Old English, as Old Norse speakers settled throughout the Danelaw, living side by side (and intermarrying) with Old English speakers, in what may have been bilingual communities. The Viking raids and the battles
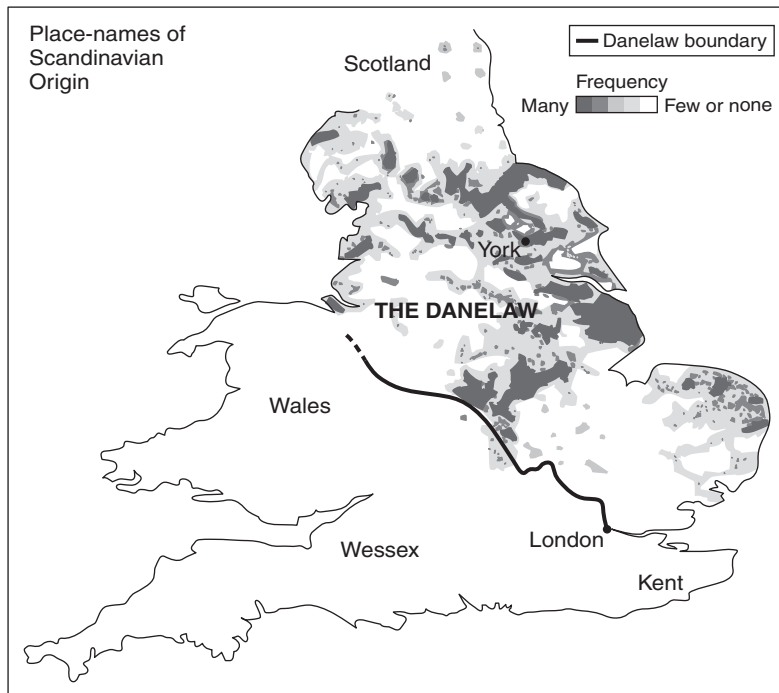

FIGURE 13.2 The Danelaw refers to the area north of the Thames River ceded to the Danes after the Treaty of Wedmore in 878 CE.

with Alfred also resulted in the burning of many monasteries, which dramatically affected the existing record of Old English texts. In 1016, the Danish king Cnut became king of England, and England became a province of Denmark. The Saxons regained control in 1042, with the accession of Edward the Confessor, only to lose it again in the Norman Conquest of 1066.

Before the Viking raids, Northumbria was a major European intellectual center, with important monasteries in Wearmouth, Jarrow, and Lindisfarne. Bede was resident at Jarrow, and, for a while, so was Alcuin, a formidable scholar who developed Europe's finest library, in York, before the emperor Charlemagne invited him to lead the school at his imperial court in France. When Mercia was in the fore, it produced the *Vespasian*

Language Change at Work

How English Was Written Down

From the seventh century on, the Latin-speaking Christian missionaries not only brought new words into English but also introduced the Latin alphabet, which was adopted for writing down English. Before the adoption of the Latin alphabet, English was written with the runic alphabet, which was used, in whole or in part, in Scandinavia, Iceland, and Britain from the third to the seventeenth centuries. The runic alphabet included twenty-four characters.

Even after the adoption of the Latin letters, English scribes kept a few runes in order to transcribe sounds unique to English. For example, Latin does not have the sounds /θ/ or /ð/, so scribes continued to use the symbols "thorn" (þ) and "eth" (ð)—often interchangeably—for what we now spell *th*. Scribes also maintained the symbol "ash" (æ) and "wynn" (which looks much like thorn, but without the rising staff at the top).

The evolution of thorn's written form is thought to explain the "ye" in store and brand names that aim to sound archaic, such as "Ye Olde Tea Shoppe" (the extra letters at the end of words seem to be inserted for a similar effect). Over time, the script form of thorn "opened up" on the top such that the curved line on the right did not

necessarily touch the vertical stroke—which allowed it to be reinterpreted as a "y." So the "ye" here originates as "the."

Carved on the Ruthwell Cross is one of the earliest surviving runic inscriptions of Old English.

Psalter, a Latin version of the Psalms with interlinear glosses in Mercian dialect. When the Saxons led the Heptarchy, from the reign of Alfred (871–899), West Saxon became the most influential literary dialect of Old English. Most of the Old English documents that survive are from the late ninth and tenth centuries and are written in the West Saxon dialect. Alfred, a scholar as well as a great warrior and diplomat, translated Boethius's *The Consolation of Philosophy* and Pope Gregory's *Pastoral Care* into English, and he also sponsored many other translations from Latin into English.

Alfred's reign, late in the ninth century, is the golden age of Old English prose, and the texts translated then are crucially important to our knowledge of Old English syntax, since we know the Latin texts from which the Old English ones were translated. That the "Old English" we know is mostly late West Saxon is partly a matter of accident: more texts from the period of West Saxon dominance have survived the ravages of time. *Beowulf*, at least as we have it today, is a product of the tenth century. So is the poetic account of the *Battle of Brunanburh*, which celebrated the English king Athelstan's victory over an army of Danes and Scots (937). In the poem *The Battle of Maldon*, Byrtnoth, earl of Essex, succumbs to Olag Tryggvason, a Viking invader. The actual battle occurred on August 11, 991, so the poem may date from the eleventh century. Remember, though, that almost all of these epic poems were probably sung for decades if not centuries before they were written down in the form we know today.

By the tenth century, something like a literary standard had emerged, best exemplified and possibly created by Ælfric (ca. 955–1010), abbot of the monastery at Eynsham. Ælfric was a prolific writer. He produced many theological works, including a collection of homilies, another of saints' lives, and Old English versions of several books of the Bible (though none of these survived). Most important, though, Ælfric's language was notably consistent, not only in syntax and morphology, but also in orthography, or the method of writing. By the eleventh century, Ælfric's language was the literary language of England.

Where Do the Names *English* and *England* Originate?

Until the Germanic tribes invaded the British Isles, what we now call England was known as "Britain," because it was a large area occupied by Brythonic Celts. The Celts spoke what we now call Welsh, Gaelic, and Cornish. After the Romans occupied Great Britain in 55 BCE, Latin was spoken in Britain as well. But in 449 CE, Brythonic languages dominated the island. When the Germanic tribes began to invade the island and drove the native inhabitants to the island's geographic peripheries, the balance shifted, and Germanic dialects dominated all other languages.

In 601, Pope Gregory named Æthelbert *rex Anglorum* 'king of the English', and Bede titled his work *Historia Ecclesiastica Gentis Anglorum* 'An Ecclesiastical History of the English People' a century or so later. Historians suspect, though they have no definitive evidence, that by the seventh century, *Englisc* had been derived from the name of the tribe predominant at that time, the *Engle*, or Angles. At some point, the Germanic settlers began to call themselves the *Angelcynn: Angel* 'Angle' + -*cynn* (= Modern English *kin* 'people'). By 1000, the island had taken the name *Englalond* ('land of the Angles'), replacing *Angelcynn*. Ironically, in more recent history, as people realized that the British Isles were composed of more than Angles, *Great Britain* once again became the name of the political entity once known as *England*.

Old English Lexicon

The Renaissance is well known as the period of massive borrowing of foreign words into the English vocabulary, but even in Old English, language contact resulted in extensive foreign borrowing. Although Celtic languages had little influence on Old English, two other languages, Latin and Old Norse, were significant influences.

Latin Borrowing

Approximately 25 percent of English vocabulary derives from Latin, and a significant proportion of that borrowing dates from the Old English period. That is, Latin influence significantly predates the Norman Conquest, let alone the Renaissance. Latin influenced Old English in four different stages.

The first is known as the "Zero period," because the Germanic tribes weren't in Britain when it occurred. The Germanic people alternately fought and traded with the Romans for centuries, and their conflict and commerce drew some Latin words into German. Here are some Old English words borrowed from Latin before the Germanic tribes invaded England, with their Modern English descendents:

Old English, from Latin		**Modern English**
camp	'battle'	*camp* 'place of temporary shelter'
cēap	'bargain'	*cheap*
cīese	'cheese'	*cheese*
cytel	'kettle'	*kettle*
flasce	'bottle'	*flask*
līne	'rope'	*line*
līnen	'flax'	*linen*
mangian	'trade' (verb)	*-monger* (as in *fishmonger*)
mīl	'mile'	*mile*
mynet	'coin'	*mint* (verb)
pīpe	'musical instrument'	*piper, bagpipes*
stræt	'road'	*street*
wīn	'wine'	*wine*

We know that these words were absorbed into Germanic dialects before Germanic speakers settled in England because other Germanic languages also contain cognates from very early dates. Since trading often involved basic necessities, some of these Latin words refer to mundane items at the core of the everyday English vocabulary.

The second stage of Latin influence on English is minimal. A very few Latin words came to English through Celtic languages, the most important of which survive in place-names. One is *ceaster*, a form of Latin *castra* 'camp' (not to be confused with English *camp* from Latin *campus* 'field, battle'), which survives in names of (originally) fortified towns in England, like *Lancaster*, *Worcester*, *Chester*, *Manchester*, *Gloucester*, as well as American towns of the same sort (*Lancaster*, Pennsylvania;

The Bayeux Tapestry, created shortly after the Norman Conquest, tells the story of the Battle of Hastings in great detail and informs modern understandings of the event. This is only a small part of the tapestry.

Worchester, Massachusetts; *Westchester*, New York; *Manchester*, New Hampshire). Similar place-name suffixes derive from *wīc* (Latin for *village*), as in *Greenwich* (in both England and Connecticut), and *port* (Latin for *harbor*), as in *Shreveport* (Louisiana) and *Westport* (Connecticut).

The third period of Latin borrowing occurred when the Roman Catholic Church exercised direct influence on English for (primarily) ecclesiastical purposes. The fifth-century Anglo-Saxon invaders were pagans when they landed on the shores of Britain. Subsequently, Saint Columba and others representing the Catholic Church attempted conversion of the English—via Ireland and Northumbria. But the decisive event in the eventual conversion of England to Christianity occurred in 597, when Saint Augustine, at the behest of Pope Gregory, arrived in Kent. Among the Latin words that entered English vocabulary in this period are *abbot*, *altar*, *angel*, *anthem*, *candle*, *deacon*, *disciple*, *epistle*, *hymn*, *martyr*, *mass*, *noon*, *nun*, *pope*, *priest*, *psalm*, *relic*, *rule*, and *shrine*. Religion depended on learning, so some educational terms also found their way from Latin into English, such as *gloss*, *master*, *notary*, *school*, and *scribe*. And some nonecclesiastical Latin words found their way in, such as *beet*, *cook* (noun), *fennel*, *lentil*, *pear*, *radish*, and *oyster*.

The fourth stage of Latin influence on Old English began in the tenth century, during the Benedictine Reform, a theological movement meant to restore monastic life in England. Monastic life had been disrupted by the Danes and Vikings, who had destroyed key centers of English intellectual life, like the monasteries at Jarrow and

Lindisfarne. Unsurprisingly, most of the Latin vocabulary adopted by Old English during the Reform was again ecclesiastical and intellectual, such as *alb* 'white robe', *apostle*, *brief* (verb) 'summarize, instruct', *cell* 'room occupied by a religious (monk, nun, anchorite)', *creed*, *decline* 'itemize forms of a noun or adjective according to grammatical case', *demon*, *history*, *paper*, and *title.* Other learned terms, like those of medicine (as monastic practitioners understood it), were too useful not to borrow: *cancer* and *paralysis*, for instance, entered English during the Reform. And many herbal terms— herbs were fundamental to medicine at the time—likewise found themselves "Englished" from their Latin originals: *cucumber*, *ginger*, and *verbena*, among many others.

Old Norse Borrowing

The other primary foreign influence on Old English was Old Norse, the language introduced by the Danes who settled, more and more permanently, in eastern and northern England. The modern Germanic language closest to Old Norse is Icelandic. If you shop for groceries in Iceland, you might be surprised to find that eggs are called *eggs* in Icelandic. Old English borrowed the Old Norse word *egg*, which gradually obliterated Old English *ay/ey* (which meant 'egg'). The relatively small difference between the forms— a palatal glide *y* in Old English and a velar stop *g* in Old Norse—reflects the close cognate relationship between Old English and Old Norse, both West Germanic languages.

Other differences between Old English and Old Norse exhibit similar phonological alteration. Old Norse *kirk* and Old English *cirice* lived side by side in the Danelaw, both meaning 'church' and closely related as cognates. They differed primarily in that one began and ended with /k/ and the other with /tʃ/. In this case, the Old Norse word did not survive in many varieties of Modern English (it is used in Scots). But most varieties of Modern English contain many other words that we can trace back to Old Norse, including *kid*, *get*, *give*, *skill*, *skin*, and *sky*, as well as the *th-* forms of the third-person pronouns (*they*, *them*, *their*). In cognate words, where Old Norse had /sk/, Old English had /ʃ/, and in Old English, the borrowed word *skirt* and the native Old English word *shirt* referred to the same item of apparel. In the long run, *skirt* specified to draped clothing from the waist down, and *shirt* to draped clothing from the waist up.

Old Norse also contributed new meanings to Old English words. For instance, Old English *gift* referred only to the 'price of a wife'; in the plural it referred to a marriage. In Old Norse, however, the word meant 'gift, present', as it does in Modern English. Old Norse influence generalized the word's meaning.

Native English Word Formation

A typically Germanic way to create new nouns is to take two familiar ones and form a compound. Compounding is still the most productive morphological process in both Modern English and Modern German. Some Old English compounds (like most Modern English ones) are self-explanatory, like *fiellesēocnes* (*fielle* 'falling' + *sēocnes* 'sickness'), which means 'epilepsy'. Old English also employed compounds metaphorically, however, as you can see in *Beowulf* or any other Anglo-Saxon poem. For instance, in *Beowulf*, we are told that Scyld Scēfing crossed the *hronrāde* 'whale-road', rather than merely the sea. The *scop* or singer of poems unlocks his *wordhord* 'word-hoard', rather than his memory of stories or his vocabulary, in order to recite the story of Scyld Scēfing. Such metaphorical compounds are called *kennings*, from Old Norse *kenna* 'know, name'.

The compound noun *fiellesēocnes* also features a familiar suffix: Modern English *-ness*. Several other Modern English affixes can be traced back to Old English. Among prefixes, Old English *wið-* has been least durable: only *withstand* among many Old English verbs formed with *wið-* survives, though the Middle English verbs *withdraw* and *withhold* are formed by analogy with Old English models. Old English derivational suffixes, on the other hand, have kept well: *-ful* combines with nouns to generate new nouns, as in *handful*; *-nes* shifts adjectives into nouns, as in *happiness* or *sickness*; *-dom* extends the agent to the area, as in *kingdom;* and *-lic* forms adjectives from nouns, as in Old English *frēondlic* 'friendly'—though the reflex of *-lic* (*-ly*) became a homophone with the adverb suffix *-ly* (from Old English *-lice*), and unlike the adverb suffix is no longer productive.

Old English Grammar

Old English grammar differs from Modern English grammar so extensively that speakers of either would find speakers of the other unintelligible.

The Origins of Modern English Noun Inflections

In Modern English, the personal pronouns typically change their form depending on their number (singular or plural) and on their grammatical function in the sentence—specifically, whether they are the subject, object, or possessor. For example:

> *He/They learned all about Old English grammar.* (subject: singular/plural)
>
> *The unfamiliarity of Old English grammar surprised him/them.* (object: singular/plural)
>
> *His/Their performance on the quiz was stellar.* (possessor: singular/plural)

Nouns in Modern English change form only to mark number and the possessive:

> *The quiz/quizzes seemed easy.* (subject: singular/plural)
>
> *But I bombed the quiz/quizzes.* (object: singular/plural)
>
> *The quiz's/quizzes' effect on my grade shocked me.* (possessor: singular/plural)

Why do Modern English personal pronouns mark the subject/object distinction but Modern English nouns do not? The beginning of an answer is that English nouns used to make this distinction.

Nouns in Old English marked number (singular or plural), **gender** (masculine, feminine, or neuter), and case, all by a system of inflectional endings attached to a noun stem. Number is straightforward enough, and Modern English maintains this distinction. We return to gender in the next section. Case refers to a system in which inflectional endings indicate the grammatical function of the noun. In Modern English, speakers determine a noun's grammatical function primarily by word order. For example, the noun before the verb is typically the subject, and the noun after the verb is typically the direct object. (As we mentioned in Chapter 4, the observation that "The dog bit the man" is not news, but "The man bit the dog" might make the front page.) If there are two nouns directly after the verb, the first noun is the indirect object and the second noun is the direct object: for example, *The instructor gave the class a quiz.*

In Old English, inflectional endings marked grammatical function. So if we take our example sentence, *The instructor gave the class a quiz*, in Old English, the equivalent of instructor, class, and quiz would all take different endings that reflect their role as the subject, indirect object, and direct object, respectively.

Old English had four major cases: nominative, genitive, dative, and accusative. For the most part, nouns in the nominative case are subjects and those in the accusative are direct objects or objects of prepositions. The genitive indicates possession; the dative indicates an indirect object or an object of a preposition. Old English had two major classes of nouns: "strong" nouns, such as *stān* 'stone', *bān* 'bone,' and *wer* 'man'; and "weak" nouns, such as *nama* 'name' and *sunne* 'sun'. One reason these two classes are of interest with respect to the structure of Modern English is that they explain the source of the regular plural ending *-s* and the irregular plural ending *-en*. Let's look at the declension (the list of different forms by case and number) of the masculine strong noun *stān:*

	Singular	Plural
Nominative	*stān*	*stānas*
Genitive	*stānes*	*stāna*
Dative	*stāne*	*stānum*
Accusative	*stān*	*stānas*

The final *-s* in the singular genitive and the final *-s* in the plural nominative and accusative are the ancestors of Modern English possessive *-s* and plural *-s*, respectively. All the other endings eventually dropped away. The Old English weak nouns took a final *-an* to form the plural, and Modern English still retains this feature in *oxen, children,* and *brethren.*

The Gender of Things

If English is a Germanic language, and most Germanic languages have grammatical gender, why doesn't English? Well, it used to.

Old English employed **grammatical gender**, much like modern German (and, indeed, Romance languages, like French and Spanish). All nouns carried gender, and the assignment of gender (masculine, feminine, neuter) was semantically arbitrary. By contrast, Modern English employs **natural gender**: inanimate things are typically neuter; animate things are feminine or masculine according to their sex or apparent gender. In Old English, *stān* was masculine and *spēd* 'fortune, luck' feminine, though there's nothing especially feminine about fortune, nothing especially masculine about stones. Old English *wīfmann*, the etymon of *woman*, was masculine: *wīf* 'female, woman' was neuter, and *mann* 'person' was masculine; as a compound, *wīfmann* took the second element's gender. You might think that Old English *scip* 'ship' was feminine, and that the tendency to refer to sailing vessels in Modern English as feminine is an anomalous reflex of the Old English gender. It isn't. *Scip* is neuter. In the seventeenth century, Ben Jonson, who wrote a grammar in addition to his plays, was the first English grammarian to assert that *she* could be used in reference to ships. The origins of this convention are unknown.

The Familiarity of Personal Pronouns

Old English personal pronouns often look familiar to Modern English speakers (despite their less familiar spellings) because Modern English pronouns still mark case to some

TABLE 13.1   **Personal Pronouns in Old English**

	Singular					Plural		
	First Person	Second Person	Third Person			First Person	Second Person	Third Person
			Masculine	Feminine	Neuter			
Nominative	*ic*	*þu*	*hē*	*hēo*	*hit*	*wē*	*gē*	*hīe*
Accusative	*mē*	*þē*	*hine*	*hie*	*hit*	*ūs*	*ēow*	*hīe*
Genitive	*mīn*	*þīn*	*his*	*hiere*	*his*	*ūser/ūre*	*ēower*	*hiera*
Dative	*mē*	*þē*	*him*	*hiere*	*him*	*ūs*	*ēow*	*him*

Note: There were multiple variants in different dialects for many of these pronouns. This chart describes primarily the West Saxon most common forms.

extent and because the pronouns, as is typical of closed-class items, have changed less over time than many other words in the lexicon. One big difference is the shift from four cases in Old English to three in Modern English. Historically, the accusative and dative cases, which distinguished between direct and indirect objects, collapsed into one "object" case. See Table 13.1 and Table 13.2.

Old English also used the dual number, a plural restricted to two things. Gradually the dual disappeared and the plural declensions applied to pairs as well as groups of things.

Some changes have occurred in these forms as Old English passed into Middle and Modern English. For example, the aspirated *h* of *hit* has eroded in modern *it*. In some instances, dialectal variants have replaced standard forms: *ūre* was a variant of *ūser* and gives us *our*. The origins of modern *she* remain somewhat mysterious and are a topic of scholarly discussion. The *th-* third-person plural forms are borrowed from Old Norse. The second-person plural form *you* generalized to become both the nominative and object form in the plural and in the singular, replacing *thou/thee*.

The Many Faces of Modifiers

In Modern English, the article *the* and the demonstrative pronoun *that* are invariant—they always and only appear in one form. In Old English, the equivalent of 'the, that' took a different form, depending on the noun's number, gender, and case. (See Table 13.3.) In Modern English, the definite article *the* no longer declines, even for number. The demonstrative pronoun *that* declines only for number, to become *those*.

TABLE 13.2   **Personal Pronouns in Modern English**

	Singular					Plural		
	First Person	Second Person	Third Person			First Person	Second Person	Third Person
			Masculine	Feminine	Neuter			
Nominative	*I*	*you*	*he*	*she*	*it*	*we*	*you*	*they*
Objective	*me*	*you*	*him*	*her*	*it*	*us*	*you*	*them*
Genitive	*mine*	*yours*	*his*	*hers*	*its*	*ours*	*yours*	*theirs*

TABLE 13.3 **Demonstrative Pronoun in Old English**

	Singular ('the, that')			Plural ('the, those')
	Masculine	Feminine	Neuter	
Nominative	*sē*	*sēo*	*ðæt*	*ðā*
Genitive	*ðæs*	*ðære*	*ðæs*	*ðāra*
Dative	*ðæm*	*ðære*	*ðæm*	*ðæm*
Accusative	*ðone*	*ðā*	*ðæt*	*ðā*

Adjectives don't decline in Modern English either (except as comparatives and superlatives), but they did in Old English, with a vengeance. Table 13.4 shows the Old English adjective paradigm, illustrated by forms for *gōd* 'good'. As a consequence of grammatical gender, in Old English adjectives had to agree in gender and case with the nouns they modified, much as adjectives in modern Romance languages (French, Italian, Spanish, Portuguese, Rumanian) and in most Germanic languages agree with their nouns: for example, *bon soir*, because 'evening' is masculine in French, but *bonne chance*, because 'luck' is feminine. Whether an adjective appears in "strong" or "weak" form in Old English is based on whether it is in predicative or attributive position, that is, after a linking verb or before a noun (see Chapter 5).

The Origins of Some Modern English Irregular Verbs

There were "strong" and "weak" verbs in Old English, just as there were "strong" and "weak" nouns and adjectives. Strong verbs conjugated for tense by a phonomorphological process called **ablaut**: rather than expressing tense by means of an inflectional suffix, the internal vowel changes to express tense. Modern English still has some strong verbs (e.g., *sing/sang/sung*), but not nearly as many as Old English, and speakers now

TABLE 13.4 **Adjective Declension in Old English**

	Strong Declension			Weak Declension		
	Masculine	Feminine	Neuter	Masculine	Feminine	Neuter
SINGULAR						
Nominative	*gōd*	*gōd*	*gōd*	*gōda*	*gōde*	*gōde*
Genitive	*gōdes*	*gōdre*	*gōdes*	*gōdan*	*gōdan*	*gōdan*
Dative	*gōdum*	*gōdre*	*gōdum*	*gōdan*	*gōdan*	*gōdan*
Accusative	*gōdna*	*gōde*	*gōde*	*gōdan*	*gōdan*	*gōde*
PLURAL						
Nominative	*gōde*	*gōda*	*gōd*		*gōdan*	
Genitive	*gōdra*	*gōdra*	*gōdra*		*gōdena/gōdra*	
Dative	*gōdum*	*gōdum*	*gōdum*		*gōdum*	
Accusative	*gōde*	*gōda*	*gōd*		*gōdan*	

view them as irregular verbs rather than as a separate class of regular verbs. In Old English, there were seven subcategories of strong verbs, all of which took different vowel changes. We can see the remnants of these different subcategories in different patterns of vowel changes in Modern English verbs: *swim/swam/swum* versus *drive/drove/driven* versus *run/ran/run* versus *bite/bit/bitten*.

	Ablaut	
Infinitive/Present Tense	*s<u>i</u>ng*	*dr<u>i</u>ve*
Past Tense	*s<u>a</u>ng*	*dr<u>o</u>ve*
Past Participle	*s<u>u</u>ng*	*dr<u>i</u>ven*

The "weak" verbs, which we now call "regular" verbs, conjugated by means of suffixes: the ancestor forms of Modern English final -*ed*, as in *walk*, *walked*, *had walked*. Most Modern English verbs now conjugate for tense on the pattern of weak verbs. In fact, many verbs that started out in Old English as strong verbs now conjugate as though they were weak (e.g., *climb*). A handful of verbs, however, have "swum upstream" and changed from historically weak verbs to verbs that undergo ablaut. For example, the past tense of *dig* used to be *digged*, and until quite recently, the only past tense of *dive* was *dived*.

Variation in Word Order

In Modern English, the typical sentence pattern is subject-verb-object (SVO). Old English admitted a broader variety of sentence patterns because the case system marked grammatical function. Old English often used subject-object-verb (SOV) sentence patterns, like other Germanic languages of the period, but it increasingly preferred SVO. In other words, we can already see movement toward Modern English word order during the Old English period.

Let's look at a passage from *Beowulf* to see how case and word order played out in actual texts. The syntax of alliterative poetry, like *Beowulf*, is sometimes more convoluted than prose texts, but it still provides a glimpse of Old English syntax at work. This passage describes the monster Grendel coming into the meadhall, where Beowulf's men are sleeping after the night's feasting. Grendel has just entered the hall, enraged and "intending evil." So *he* in the first line refers to Grendel:

ac hē gefēng hraðe forman sīðe	'and he seized quickly at the first opportunity
slǣpendne rinc, slāt unwearnum,	sleeping warrior, slit [him] eagerly,
bāt bānlocan, blod ēdrum dranc,	bit [the/his] bonelocks, blood from veins drank,
synsnǣdum swealh; sōna hæfde	in chunks swallowed; soon had
unlyfngedes eal gefeormod,	of the living one all consumed,
fēt ond folma. (ll. 740–745)	feet and hands.'

The first two lines demonstrate the SVO word order: *he* (subject) *gefēng* 'seized' (verb) *slǣpendne rinc* 'sleeping warrior' (object). In the third line, the object precedes the verb: *blod* 'blood' (object) *dranc* 'drank' (verb).

In this passage and its translation, you can also see the addition of prepositions in Modern English (*at*, *from*, *in*, *of*) where Old English used inflectional endings

(*-an*, *-e*, *-um*, *-es*) to indicate these grammatical relationships. The word *bānlocan* 'bone-locks' is also a good example of an Old English kenning or poetic compound, referring to human joints.

Old English was generally a **paratactic** language: sentences depend on coordination. Take, for example, this sentence from the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*:

> Hēr sæt hǣþen here on Tenet, and ġenāmon friþ wiþ Cantwarum, and Cantware him feoh ġehēton wiþ þǣm friþe; and under þǣm friþe and þǣm feoh-ġehāte se here hine on niht ūp bestæl, and oferhergode ealle Cent ēasterwearde.

> 'Here, in Tenet, the heathen army settled and made peace with the Kentish folk, and the Kentish folk promised them money for that peace; but, in spite of that peace and the price they paid for it, the army stole up on it and overran all of eastern Kent.'

Spoken Modern English is often paratactic—we often rely on coordination, sometimes in long "run-on" sentences. But written Modern English tends toward the **hypotactic**, readily employing subordination (as we just did in this sentence with the participial phrase *readily employing subordination*) in addition to the paratactic.

Middle English (1066–1476): History of Its Speakers

Middle English is a period of linguistic assimilation and development, during which the language underwent significant phonological, syntactic, and lexical change.

The Norman Conquest

The Norman Conquest of England in 1066 was a critical event for the future development of English. Normandy is the northernmost province of France, directly opposite England across the English Channel. Some 200 years before the Norman conquest of England, Vikings settled in Normandy and ruled it more or less independently of France. Ironically, the Normans were originally a Germanic people, closely related culturally and linguistically to the Angles, Saxons, and Jutes—*Norman* literally means 'person from the North'. After they settled in France, the Normans adopted French. Then they invaded England. With Normans living in and ruling England for over 200 years, the native Germanic language was infused with French vocabulary, though English morphology and syntax changed very little as a direct result of contact between the two languages. French, like Latin, contributes about 25 percent of Modern English words. During these centuries, English was relegated to the language "of the people," not of the court, government, law, or literature.

Language marked relative power. Normans spoke Norman French because they preferred to and could. Anglo-Saxons, now subjugated, weren't inclined to learn French beyond what was necessary to get along, nor were they expected to, unless they wanted to enter the professional class (as administrators, lawyers, diplomats, etc.). French persisted as the first language of the English nobility for centuries, and it was also the language of administration and government. But Norman French, different from Parisian French already, became different still: isolated from continental French, it developed into a dialect known as Anglo-French or Anglo-Norman. A form of French, in other words, was England's prestige language for

roughly half of the Middle English period. When written records of English reemerge in the thirteenth century, English looks dramatically different from its Old English form.

All that said, no matter how much foreign vocabulary English has absorbed (and continues to absorb), its syntax and much of its morphology are, and always have been, Germanic. The social boundaries between French and English speakers from 1066 through the thirteenth century kept the languages from influencing each other as much as they might have. And Normans probably never exceeded 2 percent of the population of England. It was not the kind of language contact situation likely to result in a creole. Linguists have found a few features of English syntax that might bear the mark of French influence, but these discoveries do not change the fundamental Germanicness of English.

A Scholar to Know

J. R. R. Tolkien the Philologist

J. R. R. Tolkien (1892–1973) is best known as the author of *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings,* but for most of his life, he was a professor at the University of Oxford, first the Rawlinson and Bosworth Professor of Anglo-Saxon (1925–1945) and then the Merton Professor of English Language and Literature (1945–1959). He was one of the most important scholars of Old and Middle English language and literature of the twentieth century.

Upon graduating from Oxford, Tolkien spent a year or so as an assistant to Henry Bradley, one of the *Oxford English Dictionary*'s chief editors. After compiling a glossary (1922) to accompany a standard textbook of the day, Kenneth Sisam's *Fourteenth-Century Verse and Prose*, he edited *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* (a very late fourteenth-century romance) with E. V. Gordon (1925). In 1962, the Early English Text Society published his edition of *Ancrene Wisse* (one of the earliest versions of *Ancrene Riwle*), an early thirteenth-century religious text. He was famous for lectures on *Beowulf* and on the Old English *Exodus,* of which he prepared an edition published after his death.

Tolkien also wrote several seminal articles in his fields of expertise. The most famous is "*Beowulf*: The Monsters and the Critics" (1937), which many scholars would agree is the most important essay ever written about the poem. In it, Tolkien argues that all previous scholars had misunderstood the poem, taking it for an epic when in fact it is a "heroic elegy." The article "Chaucer as Philologist: *The Reeve's Tale*" (1934) attempted to reconstruct the extent to which Chaucer, though an East Anglian, had understood and accurately represented Northern dialect in "The Reeve's Tale." Tolkien's lecture "English and Welsh" (1963) is also considered a philological classic.

Compared to other major scholars of his generation, Tolkien didn't publish much, but everything he did publish was significant. Many of his colleagues were appalled that he spent so much time writing fiction and so little fulfilling his scholarly agenda. But have you ever wondered how Tolkien managed to invent the languages of Middle Earth? No one knew language, or felt it, better than Tolkien.

The Renewal of English

The loss of Normandy to France in 1204 contributed to a consolidation of nationalism on the island of England. In 1258, Henry III promulgated what became known as the *Provisions of Oxford.* These were a response to a movement among English aristocrats to exclude foreigners (namely, French aristocrats) from political influence in England. The *Provisions* were published in both English and French, the first occasion since the Conquest in which English had been used as an official language. The movement was a nationalist one: ironically, most of those who objected to French influence in English affairs were Anglo-French speakers.

From 1258, Anglo-French gradually became less and English more prestigious. A Northern poem (dated ca. 1300) titled *Cursor Mundi* includes these lines, the first record we have of nationalist feeling about the English language during the Middle English period:

Efter haly kyrc[es] state	'After the holy church's state
Þis ilk bok it es translate	This same book is translated
In to Inglis tong to rede	Into the English tongue to read
For þe love of Inglis lede,	For the love of the English people,
Inglis lede of Ingland,	English people of England,
For þe commun at understand.	For the common people to understand.'

In 1362, English was unequivocally reestablished as the national language of England. In that year, Parliament enacted the Statute of Pleading. Before 1362, all arguments in criminal courts were made in Anglo-French, not in English. In the early Middle Ages, an English speaker needed a lawyer not only to argue according to the law, but also to argue in the language of the law: Anglo-French. The Statute of Pleading ensured that English-speaking defendants, if they so requested, could understand the arguments presented in their own cases. In the same year, Parliament heard its first speech in English. Suddenly, English was the language of most of the courts and of politics.

The Emergence of a Standard

There was no standard variety of English when the Statute of Pleading was enacted. By the middle of the fifteenth century, however, a standard had developed. In retrospect, historians can identify several forces pushing toward standardization.

- England was increasingly involved in international trade, which created demand for a standardized language.
- A protracted dynastic war with France, called the Hundred Years War (although it lasted from 1337 through 1453), promoted growing nationalist sentiments. As a result, English was ascending as the language of domestic politics and legal affairs.
- A circle of poets from London and East Anglia, including Chaucer, became preeminent among English writers—overshadowing a concurrent revival of Northern and Western literary traditions. When poets in the fifteenth century proclaimed Chaucer the prince of all English poets, the variety of English in which he had written gained a more widespread, elevated status. (This variety did not, however, become the standard in the end.)

■ The English used by clerks in the Courts of Chancery was regularized and became a sort of "official" English (see Fisher 1996).

Nationalism, commerce, literary culture, and bureaucratic language intersected to produce a late Middle English standard. Unfortunately, there is no chronologically continuous history of the dialect that contributed the most to the emergent standard variety: East Anglian. Of all Old English dialects, East Anglian is the least well attested.

By the end of the fifteenth century, the rising standard had established itself in competition with the enduring regional and local dialects. The standard, primarily a written dialect, did not replace spoken dialects of Middle English. Most of those dialects have survived, in at least a few features, into the twenty-first century, in regional dialects both in Great Britain and in America.

Middle English Dialects

Although the new Middle English standard emerged in the fifteenth century, Middle English was a collection of regional dialects, evolving from the Old English dialects from which they descended. They occupy essentially the same geographic areas.

- Kentish remained Kentish.
- West Saxon became the Southern dialect.
- Northumbrian became the Northern dialect.
- Mercian became the Midlands dialect, with distinctive varieties in the West and East.
- Recently, some scholars have granted East Anglian its own space on the map—a fact that becomes especially important in the next section.

As with all geographic variation in all languages, dialect is as local as it is regional, varying from town to town, just as it does in Pennsylvania (see Chapter 12) or anywhere else. Language historians can draw approximate dialect boundaries for Middle English, but they reflect only the broadest generalizations.

Each dialect exhibits features that distinguish it from the others. Many of these are phonological. For instance, the Northern dialect retained the Old English long *ā* (pronounced "ah"), while the other dialects gradually pronounced the same vowel as "oh." So in most dialects, one threw a *stone* and buried a *bone*, while in the North one continued to throw a *stāne* and bury a *bāne*. In the North, what others hooked or netted as *fish* (Old English *fisc*) were *fis*. Across the South (including Kent), and nowhere else, the labiodental fricatives *f* and *v* alternated with respect to other dialects and Modern English, so that a chicken could weigh *vife* pounds, rather than *five*. Similarly, Kentish alternated *s* and *z.* One person's voicing is another's unvoicing. The same is true in the West Midlands, where as a rule voiced *d* in the inflection marking past tense was unvoiced: in the East Midlands, one *cured* an illness, but in the West it was *icuret*.

Middle English dialects varied morphophonologically, too. The present participle took the suffix *-inde* in the South (including Kent), *-ende* in the East and West Midlands, and *-and* in the North. Thus from the Old English verb *wunian* 'dwell, live', the

dialects developed in various phonological directions: *wuninde* 'living' in the South, *wuniende* in the Midlands, and *wuniand* in the North. In Southern and East Midlands dialects, weary winter *wolcumeð* the spring, though it *wolcumes* spring in the North, and *wolcumet* spring in the West Midlands. In this case, the Northern form became the standard, and standard Modern English retains *-s* in the third-person singular present tense to this day (e.g., *welcomes*).

Of course, for all sorts of reasons (different foreign influences, different phenomena to name), each dialect also owned peculiar lexical items. For example, the Northern dialect follows Old Norse, with *kirk* and *skirt*, as opposed to the rest of England. Those living along the Welsh border might learn a word or two from the Celtic word-hoard.

Each dialect region produced noteworthy literature that reflects the special features of its variety of Middle English. *Gawain and the Green Knight* belongs to the West Midlands but was written so near the North that it includes a large number of words derived from Old Norse that would have been unusual in the South and Southeast. The mystical religious works of Richard Rolle typify Northern dialect as surely as Michael of Northgate's *Ayenbite of Inwit* ('The Prick of Conscience') is unmistakably Kentish. Many fourteenth-century romances, such as *King Horn*, *Havelok the Dane*, and *Sir Eglamour*, were written in the East Midlands. *The Owl and the Nightingale* hails from the Southwest, in language not too far from that of the West Saxons (see Exercise 13.2). Here are samples of some of these texts, to give you the flavor of the Middle English dialects.

> The bee has thre kyndis. Ane es þat scho es neuer ydill, and scho es noghte with thaym þat will noghte wyrke, bot castys thaym owte, and puttes thaym awaye. Anothire es þat when scho flyes scho takes erthe in hyr fette, þat scho be noghte lightly ouerheghede in the ayere of wynde. The thyrde es þat scho kepes clene and bryghte hire wyngeʒ. Thus ryghtwyse men þat lufes God are neuer in ydellnes. For owthyre þay ere in trauayle, prayand, or thynkande, or redande, or other good doande; or withtakand ydill mene, and shewand thaym worthy to be put fra þe ryste of heuene, for þay will noghte trauayle here.
>
> —Richard Rolle, *Tretis of the Bee*, Northern, ca. 1440

> And huanne he acsede ate guode wyfman, þo he hedde hise ycleped, hou moche hi hedde him ylete, hi andzuerede þet uerst hi hedde ywrite ine hare testament þet hi him let a þousend abd vyf hondred pond. Ac hi lokede efterward ine hare testament, and hi yzeʒ þe þousend pond defaced of hire write, and zuo ylefde þe guode wyfman þet God wolde þet hi ne zente bote vif hondred.
>
> —Michael of Northgate, *Ayenbite of Inwit*, Kentish, 1340

> A wilde der is ðat is ful of fele wiles:
> Fox is hire to name for hire qweðsipe.
> Husebondes hire haten for hire harm-dedes:
> Ðe coc & te capun ʒe feccheð ofte in ðe tun,
> & te gander & te gos, bi ðe necke & bi ðe nos.
> Haleð is to hire hole: forði man hire hatieð,
> Hatien & hulen boðe men & fules.
>
> —*Physiologus (Bestiary)*, Northeast Midlands, ca. 1300

Þer he watz dispoyled, with spechez of myerþe,
Þe burn of his bruny and of his bryȝt wedez.
Ryche robes ful rad renkkez hym broȝten,
For to charge, and to chaunge, and chose of þe best.
Sone as he on hent, and happed þerinne,
Þat sete on hym semly with saylande skyrtez,
Þe ver by his uisage verayly hit semed
Welneȝ to vche haþel, alle on hews
Lowande and lufly alle his lymmez vnder,
Þat a comloker knyȝt neuer Kryst made
hem þoȝt.
                    —*Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, Northwest Midlands, ca. 1400

The Middle English Lexicon

Though it retained its fundamentally Germanic character throughout the Middle Ages, after the Norman Conquest, English vocabulary was profoundly and permanently influenced by French, the language of the conquerors.

French Borrowing

French, of course, contributed richly to Middle English vocabulary. Words of French origin entered every possible register in the lexicon. The Anglo-French aristocracy contributed their own words in government and law. To list only a few of the terms by which the Anglo-French defined the political, legal, social, and economic relations after the Conquest:

accuse	*estate*	*noble*	*servant*
acquit	*evidence*	*oppress*	*sir* (both title and
administer	*felony*	*parliament*	term of respect)
advocate	*fine*	*peasant*	*slave*
attorney	*govern*	*plea*	*squire*
bail	*government*	*pledge*	*subject*
baron	*governor*	*prerogative*	*suit*
constable	*heir*	*prison*	*summons*
convict	*indict*	*property*	*tax*
council	*jury*	*realm*	*tenant*
count (the title)	*liberty*	*rebel*	*traitor*
court (both royal	*madam*	*reign*	*treason*
and legal)	*manor*	*royal*	*verdict*
crown	*mayor*	*sentence*	*warrant*
duke			

A few Old English words survived in this register: *king* and *queen*, *lady* and *lord*, *earl*. The word *law* also continued; it had been borrowed from Old Norse before the Angles, Saxons, and Jutes arrived in England.

The church was a center of power and authority, and after the Conquest, important ecclesiastical positions were generally held by Normans. The terms *religion*, *theology*, *abbess*, *baptism*, *cardinal*, *chaplain*, *clergy*, *confession*, *convent*, *crosier*, *crucifix*, *dean*, *devout*, *faith*, *friar*, *miracle*, *miter*, *parson*, *penance*, *piety*, *prayer*, *preach*, *repent*, *saint*, and *salvation* are only a small subset of the words relevant to religion that English adopted under French influence. Once again, however, Middle English retained some Old English terms of fundamental significance, most notably *church*, not only to designate an official place of *worship* (a native English word), but also to represent both the national and universal organization of Christian *belief* (a native English word).

French words dominated government, law, and religion. But French words also appeared in almost every sphere in English domestic life:

bacon	*cinnamon*	*music*	*sausage*
beef	*cream*	*mustard*	*spaniel*
biscuit	*cushion*	*oyster*	*squirrel*
blanket	*dance*	*paper*	*story*
blue	*dinner*	*pearl*	*sugar*
brown	*herb*	*pork*	*supper*
button	*lamp*	*salad*	*toast*
chair	*mitten*	*salmon*	*vinegar*

French gave us the *air* we breathe, the *debt* we owe, the *marriage* of true minds, the *grief* we suffer, the *pleasure* we feel when studying the *grammar* of a *language*—in other words, the *sum* and *substance* of our everyday lives. Something like 10,000 French words entered English between 1100 and 1500, most of them after 1250. Of these Middle English borrowings, approximately 7,500 survive in Modern English.

Latin Borrowing

Latin contributed words to Middle English, too, but the borrowings were increasingly learned and technical. By the fourteenth century, English scholars were industriously translating important Latin texts. In 1398, John Trevisa completed his translation of the thirteenth-century encyclopedia *De Proprietatibus Rerum*, originally written in Latin by Bartholomæus Anglicus (Bartholomew the Englishman). Trevisa named it *On the Properties of Things.* (Selections from Trevisa's work were reprinted by Stephen Batman in 1582, with the now humorous title, *Batman vppon Bartholomew.* Thus, both Chaucer and Shakespeare may have consulted the same encyclopedia, though in different languages.) The encyclopedia explained planets and stars, animals both real and mythical, the magical properties of gemstones, the operations of the human body, and pretty much everything else, according to the learning of the time. Somewhat later, in the early fifteenth century, someone translated Guy de Chauliac's *Chirurgia magna*, the great medieval medical textbook, from Latin into Middle English. Latin words adapted (sometimes minimally) into Middle English words from translations like these include *allegory*, *index*, *infinite*, *solar*, *ulcer*, and *zenith*.

Sometimes it is difficult to determine whether a word was borrowed into English from Latin or from French. French borrowed many Latin words in the same period as

Middle English, and because French is so closely related to Latin, a French form often so closely approximates its Latin etymon that we can't tell which is responsible for the Middle English result.

Other Borrowing

By the fourteenth century, England engaged extensively in trade with the Low Countries, what is now called the Netherlands, especially Flanders (whose citizens spoke Flemish) and Holland (where people spoke Dutch). England's major export during this period was wool, and the Flemish and Dutch bought the wool and wove it into cloth. Weavers, merchants, and sailors from the Low Countries were constantly in England, sometimes in large numbers, especially in London and other coastal towns. Naturally, many of the words borrowed into English from Flemish and Dutch had to do with the cloth trade in one aspect or another. So we speak of the *nap* 'soft, fuzzy surface' of cloth, unload *freight* from a ship onto a *dock*, and take products to *mart* (in current American English, *-mart* is a very productive combining form). Later on, the Dutch taught the English to drink *gin*, munch on *gherkins*, worship the almighty *dollar*, lower the *boom*, and admire the *landscape* (from which we abstract *-scape*, another familiar combining form in Modern English).

Word Formation Processes

Morphologically, Middle English still tended to form new words by compounding and affixing, but many Old English affixes became much less productive. Among the less productive prefixes, the chief is Old English *for-*, which intensified whatever followed it: *forcleave* means 'cut to pieces', not merely 'break in two'; we all bear sorrow, but when the sorrow is greatest, we must *forbear*. Besides *forbear*, less than a dozen *for-* words survive in Modern English. Either Middle English speakers *forswore* them or decided to *forsake* them, and now they are *forbidden*—but don't be *forlorn*: change is inevitable, not least in language, and it's best to *forgive* and *forget*. Anyway, during Middle English, Latin prefixes grew more and more productive. Try to imagine, for example, how many words we have formed with *dis-* or *re-* since the fourteenth century.

   Old English suffixes have fared better. For instance, *-ness* is often cited by language purists as overly productive, since many words formed with it aren't strictly necessary. Old English *-dom* gave us many still useful words, such as *kingdom*, *wisdom*, and *freedom*. In Middle English *-dom* was still productive, as it is in a more limited way today (*fandom*), but few items formed with *-dom* in Middle English have survived. Two that may come to mind—*dukedom* and *thralldom*—certainly aren't everyday words. The suffix *-ship*, used to form abstract nouns, is nearly extinct. A few Old English words formed with it persist and are important elements of our lexicon (*friendship*, *hardship*, *worship*), but none of the words formed with *-ship* in Middle English caught on. Instead, *-ness* usurped its function. You can gauge the extent of their relative productivity (and durability) by taking basic words formed with *-ness* and then consulting the *Middle English Dictionary* to discover whether Middle English formed a *-ship* synonym doomed to failure. Also, in Middle English, Old English suffixes had to contend with interlopers from Latin and French, like *-able/-ible*, *-al*, *-ive*, and *-ous*, all of which are perfect examples of forms so nearly indistinguishable in the two languages that we aren't sure in most cases which exercised its influence.

Middle English Grammar

Given what you have read about the grammar of Old English and what you know about the grammar of Modern English, you know the general direction of many of the phonological, morphological, and syntactic changes during the Middle English period.

The Loss of Inflections and Its Effects

Middle English is characterized by two major trends:

1. English gradually lost inflectional endings representing gender, case, and number. This pattern of morphological change was due partly to phonological change in unstressed syllables of words. First, unstressed syllables lost their terminal consonants; later, they lost the preceding vowels.

2. English gradually developed from synthetic to analytic syntax (i.e., from a case system to grammar that relied on word order), partly as a result of erosion among Old English inflections.

These two grammatical developments fed each other in a circular way. With a heavier reliance on word order, inflectional endings were not needed as much to indicate a word's grammatical function. And as inflectional endings became indistinct or lost, word order became more critical as the way to determine a word's grammatical function.

With the loss of inflectional endings (on both nouns and adjectives) and the rise of invariant *the*, *that*, and *this*, grammatical gender was no longer marked within the noun phrase. Only the personal pronouns (*he*, *she*, *it*) marked gender, and they came to follow natural gender during the Middle English period. Gender in the language came to depend on semantic distinctions about the type of things represented by the noun. There were already seeds of this natural gender agreement system in Old English: for example, the masculine noun *wīfmann* 'woman' was often referred back to with the pronoun *hēo* 'she', not *hē*.

The Inflections That Survive

Most Old English inflectional endings have been lost over the centuries, but a few remain in Modern English. The Middle English period witnesses the generalization of plural *-s*, which originally marked only strong masculine nouns but slowly came to mark the plural for all nouns, including those that had historically been weak and taken plural *-an.* Only three weak plurals survive in Modern English: *children*, *oxen*, and *brethren.* The possessive *-s* also generalized from the strong masculine and neuter nouns to be used for all nouns. Why *-s* for both? We cannot know for certain, but the final *-s* was probably less likely to be phonologically lost in final unstressed syllables than the nasals (/m, n/) and the many inflectional endings that were only vowels with no consonants. Adjectives in Modern English continue to take *-er* and *-est*, historically Old English forms, to mark the comparative and superlative. And the personal pronouns retain case, collapsing the dative and accusative into one "object" case but maintaining distinct forms for subject, object, and possessive (e.g., *I/me/mine*, *she/her/hers*).

The few remaining verb inflections (*-s*, *-ing*, *-ed*, *-en*) can all be traced back to Old English forms. And during the Middle English period, many historically strong verbs began to form the past tense with *-ed* rather than through an internal vowel change. Old English had just over 300 strong verbs, nearly half of which disappeared as strong verbs

before the sixteenth century. For example, Old English *helpan* 'help' conjugated *healp/hulpon/holpen*, but today we *help* someone, *helped* someone, and had *helped* someone. By the time Middle English began to absorb French and Latin verbs, the weak pattern was so ascendant that borrowings conformed to it, almost without exception. (Romance languages do not possess, even historically, the strong versus weak distinction.)

Analogy, the process by which the less usual is drawn to resemble the usual, is a powerful linguistic process, of which later sections of this chapter provide further examples. Analogy is potent, both in the historical development of a language and in language acquisition-related processes. You have very likely heard a child insist that he **swimmed* across the pool, or that daddy **singed* her to sleep with a lullaby. Given the preponderance of weak verbs in English, why would a child ever assume the ablaut (the internal vowel change that expresses tense)? Irregularities must be learned by rote, against the prevailing pattern.

Early Modern English (1476–1776): History of Its Speakers

Although Early Modern English syntax and morphology merely consolidated changes accomplished by the end of the Middle English period, the lexicon expanded and developed dramatically during the Early Modern period. In addition, many social factors of the period contributed to the rise of modern attitudes toward English.

The Printing Press

The printing press forever changed written texts by making them quickly, easily, and cheaply replicable and much more standardized.

In 1476, William Caxton established his printing house in Westminster. The date is often used by historians of English to mark the emergence of Early Modern English from Middle English. Printing contributed to standardization. On a practical level, printers had to invest large sums in the type from which they printed. Each letter printed on a page was the inked impression of a piece of leaden type. Each piece of type was cast in a mold that left the letter raised on one end of a stem. A page-worth of type was placed in a frame on the printing press, the letter ends were inked, and the frame was pressed against the paper that would then become the printed page. Over time, the letter ends broke and otherwise wore away and thus needed to be replaced on a regular basis. How many leaden *e*'s did they need? How many commas and how many apostrophes? Phonology and grammar were suddenly defined in terms of investment, of pounds spent (in type) for pounds earned (in books purchased). That doesn't mean punctuation and spelling were regularized fully in this period. On some pages of Shakespeare's text as printed in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, we

can find *its*, *it's*, and *its'* used interchangeably. It does mean that printed books began to define "correct" English.

The book market played a significant role in the dissemination of the developing standard. When the English Church separated from Rome in 1536, the English people wanted the Bible and other religious works available in print. The Roman Catholic Church still insisted that the only legitimate Bible was the Latin Bible, but English Protestantism required that everyone have access to the Biblical text in English. For religious reasons, people needed to read, so more and more English children, girls and boys, learned to read in school or at home as a matter of religious practice.

In the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, a merchant class (Chaucer belonged to it) learned to read for commercial purposes. If they could afford manuscripts, they also read literary, historical, and religious texts. By the sixteenth century, England began to develop a bona fide middle class. Its members needed to read for professional purposes, and they also read for pleasure and edification. To meet this demand, Caxton published a version of Aesop's *Fables*, a version of the beast-epic *Reynard the Fox*, and an account of the Trojan Wars, among numerous other books, including the *Promptorium Parvularum*, one of the Latin-English glossaries mentioned in Chapter 2. By the early sixteenth century, the variety of texts available to the reader with some disposable income included poetry, biography, reports of court proceedings, history, prayer books, the lives of saints (Catholic or Protestant), the Bible, political theory, scientific texts, courtesy books (books about how gentlemen or gentlewomen should behave)—nearly every type of text one could imagine reading. By the end of the same century, the numbers and types of texts already exceeded what even the most industrious reader could manage to read in a lifetime.

The mass production of texts went hand in hand with the dramatic expansion of literacy during the period. More texts were available. It became more imperative, regardless of social class, to teach and learn to read. But people cannot easily learn to read if every book is written in a slightly different language. It's easier to teach and (at least in theory) easier to learn how to read if texts conform to certain linguistic standards.

Standardization of English led to regulation. The more that people read, the more they wanted dictionaries to help them read. The more that they wrote, the more they wanted guides to write well, and "well" soon progressed to "correctly." As England became a land of opportunity and aspiration in the sixteenth century, access to the standard dialect meant access to particular professional and social benefits. Readers and writers began to demand "rules" by which they could hoist themselves from one rung of the social ladder to the one above. The details of regulation are summarized in Chapter 2, in the sections about dictionaries and usage books.

Attitudes about English

From the fourteenth century on, English gained social prestige. French had once been the prestige language, but its influence within national affairs passed into history. By the sixteenth century, when English people spoke French, they did so for commercial or diplomatic purposes, as an emblem of class, or as an affectation. Chaucer pokes fun at his Prioress, who spoke only finishing-school Anglo-Norman French, by then regarded as a corrupt dialect compared to the prestigious Parisian French.

Most folk seemed relatively satisfied with the standard dialect that they strove to master—it met their linguistic needs. But learned Englishmen were divided about the

status of English among other languages. Some thought that English was crude compared to Latin and the romance languages, especially French and Italian. Even Caxton had questioned the sufficiency of English, and he often apologized for diminishing foreign works by translating them into English for English readers.

For various reasons, England entered the Renaissance later than other European countries. As a result, it found itself short on terminology, compared to other languages. During the Renaissance, every scholarly discipline reorganized and flourished, and knowledge increased exponentially across Europe. The list of figures who transformed the arts and sciences only begins with Leonardo da Vinci, Michelangelo, Copernicus, and the seminal Italian architects, like Brunelleschi, who were also pioneering engineers. Each subject, from architecture to medicine, grammar to mathematics, grew increasingly sophisticated and developed terminology useful in its discourse. Many educated English people, both scholars and amateurs, were interested to learn all there was to know, but strangely found themselves unable to talk about it effectively in English—they lacked the specific vocabulary.

The obvious solution was to borrow foreign words to fill the lexical gaps. English has long borrowed words easily—it is an "opportunistic language" and takes what it needs. But, suddenly, borrowing was seen by some English speakers as problematic. Many public language commentators thought that English was, or ought to be, sufficient unto itself, that it had its own sound and style into which Latin terminology didn't fit comfortably. Others argued that Latin and other foreign words were essential to eloquence, working from the assumption that other languages were naturally more eloquent than English. From these positions, several competing attitudes about the English language developed: (1) there were linguistic nationalists who wanted to keep the English language pure, free from the taint of foreign influence to whatever extent possible; (2) there were rhetoricians who believed a plain, native style was more eloquent than an artificial or excessively Latinate one; (3) there were those who thought borrowing should be restrained, a matter of lexical necessity, not of style; and (4) there were rhetorical sophisticates who welcomed every Latinism, even the most obscure, into English and tried to promote their use. Suddenly, English was a hot topic.

Some English writers in the Early Modern period attempted to use words so obscure as never to be adopted by other writers, let alone everyday speakers of everyday English. If you don't recognize words like *allotheta*, *collachrymation*, *equithorizontal*, or *synnemenon*, don't feel bad—the authors of this book don't recognize them either. They are all terms used once or twice in the sixteenth or early seventeenth century by authors who thought that, when they used them, they captured some meaning precisely, in a way that English words could not. Contemporary detractors called such words "inkhorn terms." Words like these could be written, but they couldn't be used—use implies that someone besides the writers who used them could understand them.

Use of inkhorn terms by some English writers fueled the "Inkhorn Controversy," an argument among English writers about whether English was good enough as a common, native language or whether it could be improved by the introduction of fancy, Latinate words. Thomas Wilson, in the *Arte of Rhetoricke* (1553), advised that "among all other lessons this should first be learned, that wee neuer affect any straunge ynkehorne termes, but speake as is commonly receiued." Wilson sounds like a schoolmaster, but George Gascoigne sounds like a patriot, or English nationalist: "I have rather regarde to make our native language commendable in it selfe, than gay with the feathers of straunge birds."

Gascoigne's nationalism makes sense in historical context. Latin was the language of Renaissance learning, but it was also the language of the Roman church, and Early Modern England was (after 1536) a Protestant state. By the late sixteenth century, many English people were suspicious of Latin and all that it represented, and they weren't merely paranoid—the Spanish Armada of 1588 was an attempt by those who spoke a Romance language (i.e., one derived from Latin) to conquer England and return it to Roman Catholicism. Literary style and politics often mingle: they both construct power, freedom, community, and identity, sometimes separately, sometimes cooperatively.

By the end of the Early Modern period, the dispute had calmed. John Dryden, in the preface to his translation of Virgil's *Aeneid* (1697), sounded the voice of reason: "I trade both with the living and the dead, for the enrichment of our native tongue. We have enough in England to supply our necessity, but if we will have things of magnificence and splendour, we must get them by commerce."

The arguments about borrowing and inkhorn terms weren't the only language controversies in this period. Some observers had noticed that English spelling had little to do with English phonology. How can *breathe*, *green*, and *receive* all sound as though they contain the same vowel yet be spelled in such an apparently arbitrary way? Shouldn't spelling conform to the way that people speak? Early Modern English witnessed the first known attempts to reform English **orthography**, a Latinate term used to refer to spelling.

The earliest spelling reformers were schoolmasters—they tried to help students learn to read, but spelling was always in the way, so they hoped to change spelling to serve education. Among the most prominent were John Hart, whose *The Opening of the Unreasonable writing of our Inglish Toung* (1551) initiated the argument, despite the fact that Hart's own spelling often didn't represent any advance over spelling as historically received. His *Orthographie* (1569) is a classic of the movement and influenced any number of others, including Richard Mulcaster, head of the Merchant Taylor School, who taught the poet Edmund Spenser, among other celebrities of the period. Mulcaster's *First Part of the Elementarie* (1582) extended the tradition, and soon the impetus to "fix" the language manifested itself, not only in tracts on spelling reform, but in dictionaries and usage manuals (see Chapter 2).

The road from Middle to Modern English was paved with change and, importantly, argument about the very nature of a vernacular language. By the end of the period, with the proliferation of rhetorical guides, dictionaries, and grammar books, Early Modern English speakers could praise their tongue as both eloquent and, at least to some extent, regulated.

The Study of English

The Early Modern English period saw the rise of historical interest in the ways in which English had come to be what it was. The sixteenth century gave birth to antiquarianism in England: the collection, preservation, and investigation of Early English documents and literary manuscripts—those few that had survived the dissolution of monasteries when England left the Church of Rome. When the monasteries were abandoned, their libraries were dispersed if they weren't destroyed. Antiquarianism can be described as a movement, since all of the antiquarians knew one another, borrowed one another's manuscripts, and consulted one another about the manuscripts in their own collections. They even formed an Antiquarian Society so they could share materials and argue about their historical, legal, and linguistic values. They sought out facts from the past rather

A Question to Discuss

How Do We Preserve the Evidence of a Language?

After the antiquarian Robert Cotton died, his library was kept intact and, by the eighteenth century, was housed along with the King's Library in Ashburnham House in Westminster, close to the abbey. On October 23, 1731, a fire broke out at Ashburnham House and threatened the library. Most of it was saved, some of it by the librarian, Richard Bentley, who is reported to have run from the house in a nightgown and wig, with books under his arms. For a long time, it was assumed that over 200 of the manuscripts had been lost, though half of those were later restored.

Cotton's prized copy of the Magna Carta was damaged but saved. Two Old English texts were reduced to ash—Asser's *Life of Alfred* and *The Battle of Maldon*, the only surviving example of Anglo-Saxon epic besides *Beowulf.* Luckily, someone had copied *Maldon* only a year or so before the manuscript burned, so we still know the poem, even if certain linguistic details were lost or misrepresented in transcription. An eighth-century book of the gospels from Northumbria, written at the height of Northumbria's linguistic, literary, and political influence, was partially destroyed.

The only manuscript of *Beowulf*, though singed, survived. So did the manuscript that contains *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* and other examples of Middle English from the Northwest Midlands. It's fair to say that our picture of English literary history, not to mention the history of English language, would look entirely different had these texts
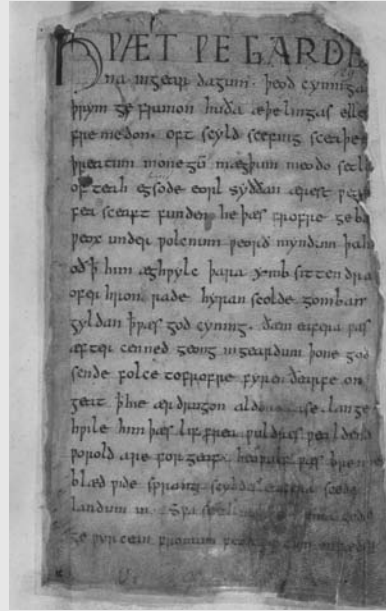
The *Beowulf* manuscript was burned around the edges during the fire at Ashburnham House

not been rescued from the Ashburnham House fire on that October night in 1731.

In the twenty-first century, we worry less than our forbears about unique manuscripts burning in a fire, but that doesn't mean evidence for the history of English in our time is invulnerable. What types of texts are central to the study of current English? Which are vulnerable to loss, and how might we ensure that when you want to write a book about English, all of the relevant materials will be preserved?

than merely retelling the old stories. But in order to use Old and Middle English texts in their research, they needed first to unravel the language.

One of the first antiquarians was William Camden (1551–1623), who wrote a multivolume history of England, drawing upon texts no one before him had ever consulted

for historical purposes. Camden was very aware that Elizabethan England was extraordinary, poised to become a great international power. He praised Elizabeth I for leading her nation toward glory in politics, religion, government, law, exploration, and commerce. Sometimes, his work verges on propaganda for the Tudor and Stuart dynasties. But he also recognized that it wasn't all Elizabeth's doing. Who the English were in 1600 somehow depended on who they were in ancient times. It was important to delineate English history from the very beginning, according to Camden, not as myth and story, but as a matter of fact.

Camden had an ally in Sir Robert Cotton (1571–1631), a collector of old books and documents, and the possessor of the greatest library of early English texts in his day. Cotton shared books with Camden while the latter wrote his history and appears to have been a sort of coauthor, though the lines between research associate and collaborator are blurry. Cotton joined the Antiquarian Society in 1590. Other members besides Camden consulted Cotton's collection, including Francis Bacon and Ben Jonson. Cotton's library included 958 manuscript volumes, many of which contained multiple literary works. Cotton owned two of four extant original copies of the Magna Carta, one of them with King John's seal intact. His prize possession was a fifth-century Greek manuscript of Genesis, notable not only for its text, but for its illuminations—it was one of the earliest illustrated manuscripts in existence. The story of Cotton's library is part of the story of many of the medieval manuscripts that we know today, including the *Beowulf* manuscript.

The interest in older English texts led to new publications. William Somner (1598–1669) published an edition of Ælfric's *Dictionarium Saxonicum-Latino-Anglicum* (originally of the eleventh century) in 1659. George Hickes published a grammar of Anglo-Saxon, Gothic, and Icelandic in 1689. Hickes's *Grammar* proved that the older Germanic tongues were just as systematically organized as Latin and Greek, though, at the time, they were held up as superior to English and its cognates. A millennium into the history of English, Early Modern scholars recovered the Old and Middle English origins of English language and literature, the root and branch from which Modern English and its literature blossom to this day.

Early Modern English Lexicon

During the Early Modern period, the English word-hoard increased by some 10,000 words. Many of them were adopted from other languages, including reliable contributors like Latin and French as well as new donors like Spanish and Italian. Although followers of the "native tradition" resisted exotic borrowings, plenty of foreign words found their way into the English lexicon. Indeed, Early Modern English was the first period in which the English could use the word *dictionary* as an English word, though English writers, like Ælfric, had used its Latin etymon centuries before. The alternative *lexicon*, borrowed from Greek, entered a century later, yielding *lexicography* and *lexicographer* alongside *dictionary-maker*, a combination of a Latin borrowing and a native English word.

Greek and Latin Borrowing

The road into English from Greek and Latin took many unexpected turns. Sometimes a word followed the shortest line of entry, as when *emphasis* was adopted directly from

Latin. But *adapt* entered English from Latin through French. The word *parenthesis* (what's included between the marks, not the marks themselves) was borrowed from Greek via Latin, as were *alphabet*, *euphemism*, *hyperbole*, *hypothesis*, and *phrase*, just to name a few. Though *ephemeral* derives from Greek, it made its way into English from French; nonetheless, those who used it recognized it as Greek, so they formed the plural, *ephemera*, according to the Greek pattern.

Many words borrowed during the Early Modern period were terms of art: the specialized terminology of the various academic disciplines and the arts. The words in the previous paragraph were borrowed to serve grammar and rhetoric, disciplines that branched into philology (the study of the development and structure of language), the precursor to linguistics. Other Early Modern borrowings are keywords of modern culture. Perhaps most important is *democracy*, a Greek word borrowed through Latin (though present in Old French). Early Modern Europe didn't include any democracies, but once the word was in the lexicon, people could talk about it, which may be one precondition of achieving it.

Romance Borrowing

Spanish had not significantly influenced English before the sixteenth century, but several indispensable words entered English from Spanish during the Early Modern period. Imagine doing without *banana* or *potato*, and life is certainly more pleasant because of *avocado*, *barbecue*, and *guitar*. Some speakers would add *tobacco* to the list of pleasures; others may regret the introduction of the plant and the word for it. The word *Negro* (Spanish in origin but probably borrowed into English via Portuguese) has caused more controversy than anyone could have imagined when it entered English in the late sixteenth century. *Creole*, on the other hand, shed most of the vestiges of dysphemism by the twentieth century and serves as an important cultural and linguistic term.

Italian also profoundly affected Early Modern English (and English thenceforth). Consider the following items, all adopted in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries and all still current in Modern American English:

antic	*broccoli*	*incognito*	*pasta*
artichoke	*carnival*	*lingua franca*	*pistachio*
balcony	*discount* (n)	*lottery*	*tarantula*
ballot	*ghetto*	*macaroni*	*volcano*
bankrupt (n)	*granite*	*motto*	

Italian provided an astonishing number of terms of art: *fresco*, *gesso*, *intaglio*, *miniature*, *profile* (noun), and *relief* in the visual arts; *cornice*, *cupola*, *rotunda*, and *stucco* in architecture; *madrigal*, *oratorio*, and *trill* in music; and *sonnet* and *stanza* in poetry.

Semantic Change in the Native Lexicon

Borrowing sometimes affected older English words, which specialized, generalized, extended metaphorically, or otherwise underwent semantic change to accommodate new words in the lexicon. A word like *intelligence*, which entered into late Middle English, did not become prominent until the sixteenth century, when it began to compete for semantic space with *wit* (as discussed in Chapter 7). As a result of synonymic pressure, mostly from borrowed terms, *wit* lost all but a few of its original meanings by the end of the seventeenth century. Other words of broad significance in Middle English similarly

specialized. *Humour* had originally referred to the fluids supposedly circulating in the human body (*bile*, *blood*, *choler*, and *phlegm*), but that medical sense generalized in Middle English to mean the disposition or character of a person, depending on which fluid was predominant in his or her system (*bilious*, *sanguine*, *choleric*, and *phlegmatic*). By the end of the Early Modern period, after William Harvey had correctly described the human circulatory system, the medical sense of *humour* disappeared; the "psychological" sense was on the wane, and *humour* 'disposition to amuse or be amused' became the dominant, specialized sense.

Some older English words were also revived in the period, and their chic new status could create new words. For example, *hap* 'fortune, chance, luck' had been borrowed into Middle English from Old Norse by the thirteenth century. *Mishap* and *happen* were later Middle English derivations from that word. In the sixteenth century, *hap* received a boost from poetic language. In the 1530s, Thomas Wyatt could write lines like "To mine unhap / For hap away hath rent of all my joy / The very bark and rind." Resurgence of the older term engendered a shift, and Modern English *happy* was born. Poetic usage recuperated many other Middle English words for Early Modern English readers, for instance, *askew*, *astound*, *birthright*, *dit* 'song' (as in *dittie*), *don* 'put on, wear' (as in "Don we now our gay apparel"), *forthright*, *mickle* 'great, much' (now obsolete), and *witless* (derived from the old senses of *wit* and still alive in Modern English).

Affixation

Despite the immense amount of borrowing during Early Modern English, affixation remained the most potent influence in expanding the lexicon of English. Affixation drew on a gamut of prefixes and suffixes. Some were retained from Old English, including:

be-	*-hood*	*mid-*	*-ways*
-dom	*-ing*	*-ness*	*-wise*
-er	*-less*	*-ship*	*-worthy*
for-	*-like*	*-ster*	*-y*
fore-	*-ling*	*un-*	
-ful	*-ly*	*-wards*	

Others were borrowed from Latin and French, among them:

-able	*-cy*	*hyper-*	*non-*
-acy	*de-*	*in-*	*pre-*
-age	*dis-*	*-ity*	*pro-*
-ance/ence	*en-*	*-ive*	*proto-*
-ancy/ence	*-ery*	*mal-*	*re-*
anti-	*-ess*	*-ment*	*semi-*
-ate	*-et*	*mis-*	*sub-*
-ation	*-ette*	*mono-*	*super-*
bi-	*extra-*	*multi-*	*uni-*

The prefixes and suffixes that are most productive today became productive in the Early Modern English period. They may not have originated then, but very active use solidified their role in English morphology.

Early Modern English Grammar

In Early Modern English, the ongoing progression of many grammatical changes under way in Middle English (some even in Old English) proceeded to the point that the language seems more familiar to speakers of Modern English. Such changes include the virtual disappearance of inflectional endings, increasingly analytic sentence structure, the introduction of *do* for questions and negation, the weakening of strong verbs, and the Great Vowel Shift.

Older Grammatical Retentions

Some of what occasionally makes Early Modern English strange to the modern ear is what was retained from Middle English. For instance, Early Modern English could mark the interrogative by placing the verb in the initial position, rather than with an auxiliary verb: the equivalent of "Go you to the movies this afternoon?" as opposed to "Will you go to the movies this afternoon?" The imperative could be expressed with the pronoun, rather than elliptically: the equivalent of "Go you to the movies!" rather than "Go to the movies!" And verbs were used in impersonal sentences more frequently than today. We say, "It bothers me when you make so much noise" and "It pleases me when you are quiet," but not "It likes me not ('I don't like it') when you listen to the television at that volume" or "It considers me ('I consider it') time to shut the door."

Early Modern English still had both the *thou* and *you* second-person pronouns, which had moved from primarily a singular-plural distinction to an informal-formal distinction (as between French *tu* and *vous*, and Spanish *tu* and *usted*). Shakespeare exploits this distinction for subtle insults and endearments in his plays. The forms are not an innovation of the Early Modern period, however, but relics of Middle English.

Developments in Morphosyntax

There are at least five important morphosyntactic developments in Early Modern English. First, the period is associated with "the rise of periphrastic *do*." Periphrastic *do* is the auxiliary *do* used to form questions and negation (see Chapter 5). Periphrastic *do* first took hold in questions and then in negative declaratives, but in the transitional period there was considerable variation. So Shakespeare could write in his plays "I doubt it not" and "I do not doubt you," as well as "Came he not home tonight" and "Do you not love me?"

Second, the *-s* plural overwhelmed other plural inflections. Although English still retains a few exceptions, like plurals in which the singular form's vowel mutates, such as *mouse/mice* and *foot/feet*, most such nouns were reanalyzed to take the *-s*. Early Modern English reanalyzed plurals such as *shoe/shoon* to *shoe/shoes* and *knee/kneen* to *knee/knees*, until plurals were almost perfectly uniform.

A third important Early Modern morphosyntactic development occurred in verbs, with the replacement of third-person indicative neuter *-eth* with *-s*: *he comes and goes* rather than *cometh and goeth.* By the end of the sixteenth century, the upstart *-s* outnumbered *-eth* approximately two to one, until the latter withered away entirely in fully Modern English.

Language Change at Work

The Invention of *pea*

The singular form *pea* is a sixteenth-century invention. In Middle English, *peasen* was the plural of *peas*, following the *-n* plural paradigm. As unstressed final syllables (especially those with final nasals) gradually eroded, *pease* became the plural form of *peas*, retained today only in the nursery rhyme:

> Pease porridge hot,
> Pease porridge cold,

> Pease porridge in the pot,
> Nine days old.

As final *-e* was lost, *peas* became both the singular and plural form. Because final *-s* typically marks the plural, *peas* was reanalyzed as a root plus a plural inflectional ending. Thus, by analogy, *pea* was invented as the singular of (once singular, now plural) *peas*.

A fourth innovation of fundamental significance was the invention of *its* as the third-person genitive neuter personal pronoun. If you return to the pronoun declension in the section on Old English, you'll see that the historical possessive pronoun was *his*, identical to the third-person masculine genitive. By the sixteenth century, nominative/accusative *hit* had lost its initial aspiration and become Modern English *it*. In order to distinguish among the parallel pronouns, sixteenth-century speakers gradually adopted *its* as possessive *it*.

Finally, written English witnessed the rise of hypotactic structures (sentences with subordinated clauses) instead of paratactic ones (sentences with coordinated clauses). This syntactic development was undoubtedly influenced by Latin grammatical models and notions of eloquence.

The Fate of Final *-e*

Early Modern English phonology is best known for the Great Vowel Shift, but a phonological question of interest to literary scholars is the status of final *-e*. By Early Modern English, the Middle English terminal *-e* was no longer pronounced. "Whan that Aprill with his shoores soote / The droghte of Merche had perced to the roote" ('When April, with its sweet showers, pierces the drought of March to its root'), the opening lines to Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*, suggest that the final *-e* was mainly poetic even in the late fourteenth century. The *-e* in *droghte* and *Merche* is unambiguously not pronounced. That in *shoores* and *perced* is unambiguously pronounced, but in these cases with the terminal consonant *-s*. The *-e* on *soote* and *roote* is ambiguous. It's likely that Chaucer pronounced them, since he learned English at the end of the period in which they still would have been pronounced, but it's hard to know. Are the decisions to voice or not to voice a matter of poetics, of line length and meter? By the sixteenth century all doubts evaporate: a fully pronounced terminal *-e* was merely a poetic device, not a feature of natural language.

Language Change at Work

The Great Vowel Shift

Sometime beginning in the fourteenth or fifteenth century, a set of English vowels—the historically long vowels which are now mostly described as tense vowels—began to shift toward new pronunciations. Low vowels moved to mid position, mid vowels to high position, and high vowels underwent diphthongization (see the discussion in Chater 3). The vowels with which Chaucer grew up were not the vowels with which folks read his poetry only a couple of centuries later, as illustrated in the diagram below.

Some scholars question whether the Great Vowel Shift was ever a comprehensive phenomenon, and they have a point: *root* to rhyme with *foot*, still a feature of both British and American English (described in Chapter 12), illustrates vowel pronunciations retained from before the supposed shift. Such pronunciations represent Middle English survivals into the Modern English period.
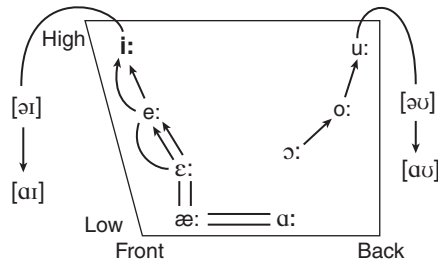
FIGURE 13.3 During the Great Vowel Shift, historically long vowels were raised and the high vowels became diphthongs. Long /æ/ eventually was raised all the way to /e/ and long /ɛ/ to /i/ (except for a few words like *great*, *break*, and *steak*).

Looking Ahead

An unexpected change in the Early Modern English period was the emergence of English as a world language. With the accession in 1603 of James I (James VI of Scotland), English exerted influence on the Scots in the Lowlands, the area closest to England and most interactive with government, law, commerce, and education. In 1707, Scotland and England were united. The English attempted to subjugate Ireland beginning in the sixteenth century. They began to settle North America in the early seventeenth century and islands in the Caribbean soon thereafter. India and other points in the east were introduced to the English people and their language in the eighteenth century. As England became an imperial power, the status of the English language also rose. The standard variety of English became an export of great value. And as the reach of English extended, it confirmed the value

of certain varieties of English at home. We see the effects of this global reach in the next chapter.

Suggested Reading

There are several good general histories of English, including A. C. Baugh and Thomas Cable's *A History of the English Language* (5th ed., 2002), N. F. Blake, *A History of the English Language* (1996), and C. M. Millward, *A Biography of the English Language* (2d ed., 1996). The preeminent history is the six-volume *Cambridge History of the English Language*, edited by Richard Hogg, with various volumes appearing at various dates under various editors. The *Oxford English Dictionary*, currently in its second edition (1989), is an indispensable guide to the histories of English words. The best etymological dictionary of English is still W. W. Skeat's *An Etymological Dictionary of the English Language* (4th ed., 1910).

Old English is thoroughly described in A. Campbell's *Old English Grammar* (1959) and conveniently described in *Sweet's Anglo-Saxon Primer*, revised by Norman Davis (9th ed., 1953). Bruce Mitchell and Fred C. Robinson provided the authoritative *Guide to Old English* (1982), though it's not a work for the faint of heart. Most Old English poetic texts are available in G. P. Krapp and E. V. K. Dobbie's six-volume *Anglo-Saxon Poetic Records* (1931–1953). The *Dictionary of Old English* is an ongoing project of the University of Toronto, currently edited by Antonette diPaolo Healey and others. J. R. Clark Hall's *A Concise Anglo-Saxon Dictionary*, revised by H. D. Meritt (4th ed., 1984), is a very useful dictionary in the interim. The best account of Old Norse is still E. V. Gordon's *An Introduction to Old Norse*, as revised by A. R. Taylor (1957).

The *Middle English Dictionary* edited by Hans Kurath, Sherman M. Kuhn, Robert E. Lewis, and others (1952–2001) accounts, exhaustively, for the Middle English lexicon. *An Elementary Middle English Grammar*, by Joseph Wright and Elizabeth Mary Wright, is still an excellent introduction (2d ed., 1928); the material is well expanded and supplemented by J. A. Burrow and Thorlac Turville-Petre in *A Book of Middle English* (1996). Tauno Mustanoja's *A Middle English Syntax*, vol. 1 (1960), is challenging, even for the advanced student. *The Emergence of Standard English* (1996) collects John H. Fisher's important articles on the subject. The Early English Text Society has published a remarkable number of Middle English texts from 1864 to the present. An increasing number are available online through the *Middle English Compendium* (http://ets.umdl.umich.edu/m/mec).

Early Modern English is capably described in Charles Barber's *Early Modern English* (1976). R. F. Jones's *The Triumph of the English Language* (1953) surveys attitudes toward English during the period. E. J. Dobson's two-volume *English Pronunciation 1500–1700* (1957) will daunt even the most professional reader but is nonetheless the authoritative account. Helge Kökeritz's *Shakespeare's Pronunciation* (1953) isn't much more accessible to the lay reader but is a very useful guide to those teaching Shakespeare, if they have the patience to deal with Early Modern English phonology. The most useful and successful recent treatment of this historical period is Terttu Nevalainen's *Introduction to Early Modern English* (2006).

Exercises

Exercise 13.1 Analyzing Early Texts

1. Below you will find versions of the Lord's Prayer from Old English, Middle English, Early Modern English, and Modern English (texts taken from Horobin and Smith 2002, 7). After each passage, we have included questions about what seems familiar and unfamiliar, and what language changes the later passages demonstrate. First, here is the Lord's Prayer in Modern English, as a reference for the other versions.

> **Modern English (Alternative Service Book)**
>
> Our Father in heaven, your name be hallowed; your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. Forgive us our sins, as we have forgiven those who have sinned against us. And do not bring us to the time of trial, but save us from evil.

Try to read the following passages aloud. The "yogh" (ȝ) sounds sometimes like /j/ and sometimes like /g/. As you read, write down the English words that you recognize.

> **Old English (West Saxon dialect, late ninth century)**
>
> Þū ūre fæder, þe eart on heofonum, sīe þīn nama ȝehālgod. Cume þīn rīce. Sīe þīn willa on eorþan swā swā on heofonum. Syle ūs tōdæȝ ūrne dæȝhwāmlican hlāf. And forȝief ūs ūre ȝyltas swā swā þē forȝiefaþ þǣm þe wið us aȝyltaþ. And ne lǣd þu nū ūs on costnunge, ac ālīes ūs fram yfele.

Questions

a. Given what you have read about case, why do you think the *-um* inflectional ending is required on *heofon*?

b. What grammatical role is *þu* 'thou' playing in the clause *And ne lǣd þu nū ūs on costnunge* (*costnunge* 'temptation')?

c. What phrases surprised you by their word order? Try to find at least two.

> **Middle English (Central Midlands, c. 1380)**
>
> Oure fadir, þat art in heuenys, halewid be þi name. Þi kingdom come to. Be þi wile don ase in heuene and in erþe. ȝiue to us þis day oure breed ouer oþer sub-staunse. And forȝiue to us oure dettes, as and we forȝiuen to oure dettouris. And leede us not into temptaciouns, but delyuere us from yuel.

Questions

a. In which words do you find remnants of the Old English case system? Try to list at least eight.

b. Comparing this text to the Old English version, which of the words new to the Middle English version would you guess are French? Verify your guesses.

Early Modern English (Book of Common Prayer, 1549)

Our Father, which are in heaven, Hallowed be thy Name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done, in earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our trespasses. As we forgive them that trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation; But deliver us from evil.

Questions

a. In the first line, what is surprising about the use of *which*? How does it compare to the Middle English version?

b. What about Old English elements? Can you figure out how *þe* is used?

2. Here are the first few sentences of Alfred's translation of Pope Gregory's *Pastoral Care.*

Ælfrēd cyning hāteþ grētan Wǣrferhþ biscop his wordum luflīce and frēondlīce. And ič þē cyðan hāte þæt mē cōm swiðe of on ȝe-mynd hwelče witan ȝēo wǣron ȝeond Angel-cynn, ǣȝðer ȝe god-cundra hāda ȝe weorold-cundra, and hū ȝe-sǣliȝlīča tīda þā wǣron ȝeond Angel-cynn, and hū þā cyningas þe þone anweald hæfdon þæs folces on þǣm dagum Gode and his ǣreandracum hīer-sumodon, and hū hīe ǣȝðer ȝe hira sibbe ȝe hira sidu ȝe hira an-weald innan-bordes ȝe-hēoldon, and ēac ūt hira eðel ȝe-rǣmdon.

Questions

a. What words do you recognize as Old English forms of Modern English words?

b. Which are the prepositions, and how do they measure up to modern ones?

c. Have Old English prepositional forms changed meaning in the last millennium or so? Explain.

d. Can you identify compounds? List them here.

e. Which nouns seem meaningful to you, and which verbs?

f. To what extent have these terms changed over time, either in meaning or in form?

g. Can you tell what some of the inflections indicate regarding number, gender, and case? Explain.

h. Though it isn't easy, try translating some parts of this passage into Modern English.

3. Here are two passages of early Middle English, one in prose (from the *Ancrene Riwle*) and the other in verse (from *The Owl and the Nightingale*). In what features do they resemble Old English texts? Can you read these more easily than Alfred's translation of Pope Gregory's *Pastoral Care*? If you can, then what has changed?

On oðer half understondeð. ȝe beoð i ierusalem. ȝe beoð iflohe to chirche grið. For nes ower nan þat nere sum chearre godes þeof. Me weiteð ow þat wite ȝe ful ȝeorne wið uten as me deð þeoues þe beoð ibroke to chirche. Haldeð ow feaste inne. nawt te bodi ane. for þat is þe unwurðest. ah ower fif wittes. & te heorte ouer al & al þer sawle lif is.

> Ich was in one sumere dale,
> in one suþe diȝele hale,
> iherde ich holde grete tale
> an hule ans one niȝtingale.
> Þat plait was stif & starc & strong,
> sum wile softe & lud among;
> an aiþer aȝ oþer sval,
> & let þat vuele mod ut al.
> & eiþer seide of oþeres custe
> þat alre-worste þat hi wuste:
> & hure & hure of oþeres songe
> hi holde plaiding suþe stronge.

4. Consider the following passage of Early Modern English. How does it differ from Old English? Middle English? Modern American English? You might list the differences in columns or synthesize your observations into a brief essay.

> there do some faultes remayne therin both because the barbarous and arabicke termes which the author dothe chiefly vse, and of the dyuerse and syndry opynyons of moyst notable and well lerned Phisicions alswell in the names as in the natures of herbes and symples, and especially that we be eyther ignorant or destitute of Englyshe names for a great sorte of them, yet I dyd as nigh as I could follow Dioscorides and in such thynges as I could not fynd in hym, I dyd confer Fuchsius, Ruellius, and Dorstenius together, and folowed the judgement wherein they dyd al or the most part of them agre, and in the Englyshing therof I & al other which intend any such worke are muche beholden to Mayster Wyllyam Turner, who wyth no small dylygence hath in both hys herballes most truly and syncerly set furth the names and natures of dyuerse herbes, vnto whose iudgement and a correccion and all other lerned in the most necessary science of Physycke, do I submit thys lytle worke.
>
> —Humfrey Llwyd, *The treasuri of helth*, ca. 1550

Exercise 13.2   Borrowing and Native Word Formation

1. Choose one of the listed words adopted into Middle English from French and take it to the dictionaries, especially the *OED*, the *Middle English Dictionary*, and any of a number of good etymological dictionaries. Then write a brief history of the word. When did it enter English? Has its meaning generalized or specialized over time (see Chapter 7)? Has it shifted semantically? If it has, provide informed speculation about why the semantic shifts might have moved in that direction. Has the word shifted into other lexical categories, and when?

2. Choose three affixes listed in the chapter and investigate their historical development. In each case, how does the affix shift the derived word from its stem's lexical category (that is, into what new category is the word derived)? Does the affix have multiple semantic functions? Does its function or meaning change over time? Feel free to consult any and all of the relevant dictionaries.

3. For the following Old English kennings, we have provided the literal meaning of the compound. Take an educated guess at what the word referred to metaphorically.

hwælweg	'whale way'
beadoleoma	'battle light'
bāncofa	'bone house'
sǣhengest	'sea steed'
hēofodgim	'head gem'
vindauga	'wind eye' (from Old Norse)

Exercise 13.3   Nouns and Verbs

1. A few verbs in the history of English have shifted from weak verbs, adding a suffix to form past tense, to strong verbs, forming past tense with an internal vowel change (e.g., *dived/dove*). The past tense of *sneak* has historically been *sneaked*. Why might this verb be shifting to become irregular? (One question to consider: What is the source of the analogy?)

2. Let's imagine that English speakers created a new verb to refer to swimming to stay trim: *twim*. How do you think English speakers would create the past tense and past participle of this verb? Justify your answer.

3. Only three words in English retain the Old English weak noun plural suffix *-en*: *children*, *oxen*, *brethren*. Make an argument in each case about whether you think this irregular form will survive for the next 200 years.

Exercise 13.4   Old English in Modern English

Select a passage of about 100 words from a text of your choice (fiction, poetry, periodicals, general nonfiction prose, academic prose, Web text). In order to do this exercise, you will need a good dictionary, like a Merriam-Webster dictionary, an American Heritage dictionary, the *New Oxford American Dictionary*, or the *Oxford English Dictionary*. Any of these will provide sound etymologies for the words in your passage, and etymologies are the focus of this exercise. Now, follow these steps.

Step 1: Determine which words are reflexes of Old English words. List these and determine the proportion of total words that derive from Old English.

Step 2: From what other languages do words in the passage come? Which of these languages are most significant to the history of English?

Step 3: Besides words, which parts of words (inflectional suffixes, derivational prefixes and suffixes) are also Old English in origin. How are they applied? Do Old English affixes cleave only to Old English stems? If so, why do you think that's the case? If not, why, do you suspect, is it not the case?

Step 4: In a summary paragraph or two, describe what types of words in your passage come from Old English. How do you explain the patterns you uncover?

Step 5: In a summary paragraph or two, describe what types of words in your passage come from other languages. How do you explain the patterns you uncover?

Step 6: In a paragraph, speculate about how the *type* of text you've worked on may affect the proportion of native English versus borrowed terms.