

*Language Connections with the Past:  
A History of the English Language*



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David Johnson, PhD



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# Introduction

This textbook is about two things: the English language and history. Specifically, it explains how languages work from a linguistic perspective. At the same time, this text will explore the history of English, again from a linguistic perspective. This text is not about how the English language *should* be used. Rather, it *describes* how English has changed from its earliest forms until the present day. In other words, it is not a traditional grammar book. Nor is it a traditional history textbook. Only events that are crucial to the history of English will be described and discussed. Therefore, this text is not a comprehensive history of England nor of any English-speaking country. I will be selective in the historical events I discuss. But this should not be surprising. Even traditional history books are selective. Historians must select the historical events they think are the most crucial.

A major theme of this textbook will be *language change*. Linguists know that all living languages change; this is a well-established linguistic fact. But linguists cannot always explain *why* languages change. Certainly, there are some general linguistic principles that drive language change. These will be explored in the pages that follow. However, there is also a bit of mystery when it comes to language change. Sometimes there is simply no apparent reason for certain kinds of language change, but speculation abounds regarding the motivations for certain language change. Therefore, this is not a traditional grammar book. Traditional grammar books often *prescribe* the grammar of a language, and some books go so far as to try to stop language change. Some language experts view language change as lamentable, and they think such change should be discouraged. This will not be the approach taken here. But neither will I pretend that standard English does not exist. It certainly does. We see it all the time in texts as well as

academic and professional settings. Yet, a cursory glance at the history of English will show that what is considered standard English has (and will) continue to change.

A second theme in this book will be connections. I will show linguistic connections between English's past and current linguistic phenomenon. For instance, I recently saw a commercial for the gas station and small market QuikTrip. The commercial was promoting the coffee and biscuits at QuikTrip. During the advertisement, the announcer used this word: *biscuitier*. It was the only word deemed apparently suitable to describe the flavor of the QT's flaky biscuits. During the entire history of English, words have been added using similar processes, not all pertaining to biscuits, of course. Nonetheless, in this case, the suffix *-ier* was added to a noun resulting in something resembling an adjective. This is one simple connection: using processes to add new words to Present-Day English.

This textbook, then, will describe the historical forces that shaped standard and non-standard English through 1,500 years. This is what will be termed the *external* history of English. The text will also describe the *internal* history of English, how the phonology, morphology, lexicon, and syntax of English have changed. Many times, these linguistic areas of English were impacted by historical events. Other times, these internal features of English simply changed for no apparent reason..

The book will begin with a general overview of linguistics. Next, I will describe the sound system in modern English. These two introductory linguistic chapters will add to our academic toolkit as we march through the history of English. Then I will describe the major events in the history of English and how these shaped the English language.

A word about the text: This text is an Open Educational Resource (OER). No one will make a profit off the text. It is intended primarily to accompany a course in the history of

English. However, it may be used for any non-profit purpose. I will also be using other OER materials throughout this textbook, many of which I modified and/or rewrote to give this textbook a similar format.

I welcome feedback and comments.

David Johnson, PhD (djohnson@kennesaw.edu)



# Chapter 1

## An Introduction to Language

### What is language?



Language is all around us, but difficult to define. Language allows us to share complicated thoughts, negotiate agreements, and make communal plans. Our learning, our courting, our fighting — all are mediated by language. The field of scholarship that tries to answer the question, “How does language work?” is called *linguistics*, and the scholars who study it are called *linguists*. Linguistics is a science. This means that linguists answer questions about language by observing the behavior of language users. Astronomy has its enormous telescopes, particle physics has its supercolliders, biology and chemistry have intricate and expensive apparatuses, all for learning about their particular facets of the world. Modern linguists go straight to the source by observing language users in action. One of the charms of linguistics is that the data is all around you; you need nothing more than a patient ear and an inquiring mind to do original linguistic research of your own. But you need not start from scratch — generations of linguists before you have laid a stable groundwork for you to build on. Throughout the history of linguistics, the primary source of data for linguists have been the speech, writing, and intuitions

of language users around them. And of course, in recent decades, technology has greatly aided in our ability to study language.

But let's come back to the issue of defining *language*. Millward and Hayes (2012) define language this way: “[Language is] a *systematic and conventional means of human communication* by way of *vocal sounds*; it may include *written symbols* corresponding in some way to these vocal sounds” (p. 1, emphasis added). We need to break this definition down some.

## Grammar

The *system* in language is its *grammar*. In this context, grammar refers to the hundreds and thousands of rules that native speakers have in their heads without even realizing it. These rules allow speakers to use and understand language; however, these rules are acquired and stored unconsciously. These internalized grammar rules are not obvious to native speakers of a language unless they are pointed out or disrupted in some way. For instance, parents do not teach their children how to make plurals in English. Children acquire this rule based on the input they hear as they mature. Over time (and given enough input), toddlers in an English-speaking environment learn to add the plural *-s* to make plurals: *books, phones, apples*. Naturally, toddlers overapply this internalized and unconscious rule, and they end up making “mistakes” and placing the *-s* on irregular plurals. Toddlers may say things like the following:

- *I put shoes on both my \*foots.*
- *The dentist looked at my \*tooths.*

By the way, anytime you see an asterisk in front of a word, phrase, or sentence in a linguistics text, this means something is wrong. A native speaker of that language would not make that kind of mistake, unless they were under four years old, tired, or drunk! The asterisk means the word, phrase, or sentence violates an internalized rule of grammar.

Here is another example. As toddlers listen to the Present-Day English (PDE) input around them, they learn to make a simple past tense by adding *-ed* at the end of a word: *biked*, *talked*, *learned*, *burned*. The actual sound that sometimes corresponds to the letters “ed” will differ depending on the environment. Sometimes it is a /t/ sound as in *biked* and *talked*. And in other environments, it is a /d/ sound, as in *learned* and *rubbed*. The toddlers learn the past tense formation, and they learn which sound goes with which environment. These different variations depending on the environment are known as *allomorphs*. Toddlers could not articulate these rules nor do they know the linguistic terminology, but they do acquire these rules. Again, toddlers may overapply rules because they have not learned all the exceptions yet, and they may utter sentences like the following:

- *I \*singed at preschool yesterday.*
- *My daddy \*tached me to play basketball.*

Sometimes the grammar mistakes are more subtle. Here is an actual sentence from a toddler.

- *We were playing with toys, but we had to leave. \*So, we picked up them.*

While the plural and past tense rule are relatively easy to acquire, the rules for pronouns are a bit more complicated. The sentence *\*We picked up them* violates a subtle rule for pronouns in PDE. Simply put, if phrasal verb (e.g. *pick up*, *look over*, *turn in*) occurs with a pronoun, then the pronoun has to go in the *middle* of the phrasal verb. The sentence *We picked them up* follows this rule and native speakers would not notice anything askew. However, *\*We picked up them* violates this rule by placing the pronoun *outside* of the phrasal verb. This placement of pronouns with phrase verbs is not a rule that is typically written down in grammar books for school.

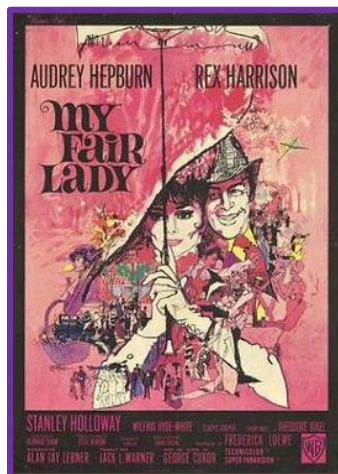
However, it most definitely is a rule that is acquired (not explicitly taught) as toddlers listen to and engage with native speakers of English such as parents and teachers.

Linguists classify grammar that is learned in two ways: *descriptive* and *prescriptive*. I just analyzed three descriptive rules of English grammar (plural formation, past tense formation, and phrasal verbs with pronouns). Descriptive grammar simply attempts to analyze the rules that native speakers have in their minds that allows them to generate and understand sentences. It does not indicate if something is “right or wrong” according to academic standards. Descriptive grammar only identifies how native speakers use a language. And yes, there is dialect variation among native speakers, and this will be examined more throughout this text. In fact, dialect variation is both a result of and a driving force in language change. But assuming the dialect difference is not too large, native speakers can easily detect a deviation from descriptive rules. If a native speaker hears the word *\*stooth* as an attempt at the plural of *tooth*, they would not understand because the rule breach of the communally agreed upon grammatical system is too severe. However, a toddler’s cute rendition of *\*tooths* (while descriptively erroneous) is not so serious of an infraction that an adult could not glean the meaning, particularly in a context-rich environment such a parent helping a toddler brush their teeth.

This text will primarily analyze the history of English from a *descriptive perspective*. That is to say, no attempt will be made to imply what changes in the grammar and lexicon of English are good or bad. However, the history of English has been influenced, particularly beginning in the 17<sup>th</sup> century A.D., by prescriptive tendencies among scholars. Prescriptive grammars try to establish and regulate “correct” language use. Prescriptivists through the centuries have exerted influence on English and have impacted English’s structure today. For instance, there was a strong proscription (i.e., a rule against) using the pronoun *me* in subject

position. For instance, the sentence *Anna and me read the book together* was deemed “incorrect” because *me* is appearing in subject position. Eventually this prescriptive rule was accepted in academic circles especially for writing, but *me* appears often in subject position in PDE, especially in spoken PDE. Because of the strong influence of this rule, it was overly applied to prepositional phrases so that the following sentence is regularly produced by speakers trying to follow the rule but overapplying it: *That is between you and I*. The pervasive use of *between you and I* demonstrates how prescriptive rules can influence English. While the influence of “strict” grammarians and prescriptivist tendencies undoubtedly has influenced the history of English, much of English’s structure has developed due to external historical events and organic linguistic processes.

Here is an additional explanation of descriptive vs. prescriptive approaches to grammar. Many people think of the movie *My Fair Lady* when they think of linguistics. Figure 1.1 shows the original movie poster.



*Figure 1.1: Poster of My Fair Lady*

Source: Wikipedia  
Attribution: Bill Gold  
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Link: [here](#)

The plot of this movie revolves around a professor trying to teach a British “commoner” how to use language “properly.” [Here is a clip from the movie that illustrates the professor’s](#)

[desire to correct “bad” grammar](#). Typically, when someone “corrects” someone else’s grammar, they do so from a prescriptive standpoint. In *My Fair Lady*, the professor and the commoner were able to communicate perfectly fine. This is because they shared most of the same descriptive rules of English. But the professor wanted to “cure” the commoner of her dialect features that were not aligned with the standards of the educated class in England. I believe that prescriptive rules do serve an important purpose for formal speech and writing in business and academic settings, but their draconian enforcement can be overstated. Despite the long-standing debate between the descriptivists and prescriptivists, it is important to remember that even people who never attended school have a perfectly developed grammatical system; it just happens to include deviations from the prescriptive standards set by teachers, scholars, and style guides such as Chicago and MLA.

## Conventional

The second part of our definition involves convention. All languages have a system of grammar that is *conventional*. Conventional indicates that these grammar rules are agreed upon. It is not as if all native speakers of a language had a meeting and decided on the rules of grammar. They develop (and change) organically (i.e., naturally) over time. If the rules were not conventional (agreed upon by most speakers), communication would be impossible.

We must follow agreed-upon rules to be able to communicate with other speakers. Let’s take a look at the example of the word *cat*. What would happen if there were no rules for using the sounds that make up this word? If placing these sounds in an agreed-upon order was not obligatory, then *\*cta*, *\*tac*, *\*tca*, *\*act*, or *\*atc* could all mean *cat*. And what would happen if there were not an agreed upon way to make *cat* plural? Speakers could add the /s/ sound at any place in the word: *\*csat*, *\*scat*, *\*cast*. Or a speaker could invent their own sound to denote

plurality in English. But this would not lead to effective communication or even communication at all. And these conventional rules apply to all levels of a language: *phonology* (sound system), *morphology* (word formation), and *syntax* (sentence creation). These linguistic areas of study will be discussed in the pages that follow.

For many languages in the world (including English), someone will codify these rules and write an academic grammar book. Most of the time, such grammar books are written from a prescriptive perspective. But as we know, few people speak following *all* the prescriptive rules in grammar books *all* the time. We all vary our speech some depending on the situation.

## Human Communication

The last part of our working definition of language includes *communication*. Obviously the most basic definition of language involves communication. We communicate our thoughts to others using language. Typically, this action is done verbally, but it can be done through written or visual means. Most linguists would argue that animals (i.e., non-humans) do not have language, even though animals may communicate at some level. The question about animal language is a long-standing debate, but to flesh out our definition of language, it is helpful to discuss why most linguists maintain that humans have language, but animals do not.

Linguists argue that animal communication lacks a key aspect of human language—the creation of new sign patterns under varied circumstances. For example, humans routinely produce entirely new combinations of words. Speakers create novel sentences all the time. Here are two sentences that no one has ever said before:

*Toss that thimble over here because I'm going to use it to play basketball!*

*The computer link with the ocean was severed due to the snowstorm on Mars.*

While these sentences most likely have never been uttered before, native speakers will recognize them as valid (albeit silly) sentences in PDE. The underlying grammatical system allows speakers to generate and understand an infinite number of sentences in their native language. In fact, Noam Chomsky, one of the founders of modern contemporary linguistics, came up with the following example: *Colorless green ideas sleep furiously*. He noted that this sentence follows the rules of English grammar, and all native English speakers can see that. However, it has no discernible meaning. Grammar rules are independent of meaning. Humans, as toddlers, learn the grammar rules and integrate words to form meaningful sentences.

Some researchers, including the linguist Charles Hockett, argue that human language and animal communication differ so much that the underlying principles are unrelated.

The following properties of human language have been argued to separate it from animal communication:

- **Arbitrariness:** There is usually no rational relationship between a sound or sign and its meaning. For example, there is nothing intrinsically house-like about the sounds in the word *house*.
- **Discreteness:** Language is composed of small and discrete (separate) units that are used in combination to create meaning.
- **Displacement:** Languages can be used to communicate ideas about things that are not in the immediate vicinity either spatially or temporally.
- **Duality of patterning:** The smallest meaningful units (words, morphemes) consist of sequences of units without meaning. This is also referred to as double articulation.
- **Productivity:** Users can understand and create an indefinitely large number of utterances.



- **Semanticity:** Specific signals have specific meanings.

You may or may not agree with this issue of animal language, but this debate does help shed light on key aspects of what constitutes language.

Now that we have a working definition of language and its general principles, let's focus on the different areas of a language. The areas I will discuss now are the areas that allow for change and variation in a language. These changes occur through time in all languages, including English.

## What is phonology?

**Phonology** is a branch of linguistics that studies how a language systematically organizes its sounds. The term also refers to the sound system of any particular language variety (dialect). In other words, phonology is the study of how sounds make up a meaningful word in a language. For instance, the sound /s/ does not appear to mean much in English. But as we've seen, it is meaningful. Adding this **phoneme** (i.e., a contrastive sound unit) changes a regular English noun into a plural. Linguists use slashes / / to indicate that what is being discussed is the *phoneme* (the meaningful and contrastive sound) and not the letter.

But a phoneme, however, does not have to mean something as overtly meaningful as plurality. The English phoneme /p/ does not mean anything, but it can form part of a meaningful word in English. For instance, the word *pot* is a cooking vessel. The sound /p/ does not mean anything, but its inclusion is essential for the word *pot* to have meaning for English speakers. Similarly, the vowel sound /a/ and the final consonants /t/ in *pot* do not have meaning here unless they are combined.

I will come back to phonology and its counterpart *phonetics* (the study of how humans produce and perceive sounds) in Chapter Two. For now, think of the difference this way. While phonetics concerns the physical production, acoustic transmission, and perception of the sounds or signs of language, phonology describes the way sounds function within a given language or dialect to encode and contrast meaning. A *pot* and *cot* are different words in PDE. And the difference is that the initial /p/ sound and the initial /k/ sound contrast meaning, even though the /p/ and the /k/ sound do not have a separate meaning by themselves.

## What is morphology?

*Morphology* is the study of words, not just their sounds. Morphology is the study of how words form units. Fromkin, Rodman, and Hyams (2017) define morphology this way: “The study of the internal structure of words; the component of grammar that includes the rules for word formation” (p. 494). Morphology analyzes language from the word perspective. It looks at *parts* of words. Words are typically composed of smaller units that have meaning and these components that have meaning are called *morphemes*. The traditional definition of morpheme is the small linguistic unit that has meaning.

If we examine the word *basketball*, it is apparent that there are two morphemes in that word: *basket* and *ball*. And they each have a meaning. When combined, they form a new but related meaning. We could also add an *-s*, and the word *basketballs* would have three morphemes. The *-s* has a meaning of plurality. Similarly, the word *kicked* had two morphemes: *kick* + *ed*. The morpheme *kick* is a morpheme and a word because it can “stand alone.” This kind of morpheme is known as a *free morpheme*. *Basket* and *ball* are also free morphemes. The *-ed* in the word *kicked* has a meaning, namely past tense. It is a morpheme, but it is a *bound morpheme* because it cannot stand alone; it is always used as part of another word. *Affixes* such as *prefixes*

and **suffixes** are bound morphemes. Just to be clear, a morpheme is the smallest unit in a language that has meaning, even if that meaning is plurality, a tense marker, or even a grammatical marker like /s/, as in the third-person form of the verb *wants*. In *wants*, the **-s** indicates third-person singular. In the sentence *He wants to be a famous artist*, the *-s* of *wants* is a morpheme and its “meaning” is third-person singular verb form.

The following are some examples of morphemes in common English words:

**one morpheme:** *boy, desire, meditate*

Note that *desire* and *meditate* are multisyllabic words, but they are still one morpheme.

**two morphemes:** *holi + day, camp + ing, boy + ish*

Note that *holiday* has two morphemes *holy + day*, and there was a slight spelling change when this became one word in English. In *camping*, the *-ing* can either be a progressive marker as in *Mary and her friends are camping in the woods*. It can also transform the verb *to camp* into a noun as in *Camping is a great pastime*. Like *-ing*, *-ish* is a bound morpheme. It transforms a noun into an adjective and means to have a quality of that noun. Here are some other examples of the *-ish* morpheme: *fortyish, bookish, squeamish*.

**three morphemes:** *un + break + able, un + desire + able, art + ist + ic*

In the word *unbreakable*, there are three morphemes with *un-* and *-able* both being bound affixes. *Artistic* has three morphemes as well. The bound morpheme *-ic* is often used to change a noun into an adjective. Other examples include *historic, athletic, and energetic*.

There is one more set of terms that is important when we discuss morphology. The term **inflectional morpheme** refers to a bound morpheme that is added to a base word but only has a

grammatical function such as number or tense. It does not change meaning nor transform the word into a new grammatical class (i.e., part of speech). For instance, the *-s* in English can be a plural marker or third-person singular marker for verbs. The *-ed* morpheme signifies past tense. The *'s* indicates possession. As we will see, Old English (OE) had many more inflection morphemes than PDE.



*Figure 1.2: Happy Birthday Balloons*  
Source: Wikimedia  
Link: [here](#)

Let me give another example of how toddlers begin to apply rules based on the input they hear. This example also demonstrates the concept of an inflection morpheme and that even toddlers understand inflectional morphemes even though they do not know that term. When my daughter was under three years old, she would often say *buyed*. (*We \*buyed a birthday present for my friend.*) She clearly had adopted the morphological rule in English of adding *-ed* to form past tense. She was never “taught” this; she acquired it from the input around her. But she overapplied it to form the word *buyed*. She had heard the standard (and irregular) form *bought* many more times than she had heard *buyed*. In fact, it is possible she had never heard *buyed*. But she ignored the irregular form and tried to *regularize* the verb by adding the inflectional morpheme. In her emerging system of grammar, the inflectional morpheme *-ed* ending should be applied to *all* verbs. In time, she would come to learn irregular forms: *bought, sung, threw, ate*. These irregular forms have their origin in the history of English.

In contrast to inflectional morphemes, *derivational morphemes* change the meaning of the word, and/or they change the grammatical category. For example, in *unbreakable*, the *un-* changes the word to the opposite meaning. And *-able* changes the word to an adjective. In the word *artistic*, the *-ist* morpheme means “one who practices some activity” (e.g., *economist*, *chemist*, *botanist*). The *-ic* transforms a noun (*artist*) into an adjective (*artistic*), which means having the character of that word (*artistic*, *sarcastic*, *bombastic*).

If you will bear with me, here is one more toddler example. My daughter would often say (before she turned three) *Daddy is razing his whiskers*. Something quite profound is happening here regarding morphology, and it reveals the remarkable grammatical system that all toddlers have. In English, the *-er* is a *derivational suffix*. Similar to *-ist*, the *-er* suffix indicates agency. It means one who does that action. Examples include *player*, *driver*, *reader*. Now, my daughter mis-analyzed the word *razor*. *Razor* is actually monomorphemic, that is, one morpheme. However, she mistakenly heard the /ər/ sound ending (more on these symbols in a bit) and she assumed it was the agent form: *razor* is one who *\*razes*. If that is the case, then she assumed that (like *player*), it is permissible to replace the derivational /ər/ and replace it with an inflection suffix: *-ing*. Hence, *\*Daddy is razing his whiskers*. This is quite logical. English speakers know that *player* has a root word *play*, to which either *-er* or *-ing* could be added. The issue is, however, is the sound /ər/ in *razor* is not a morpheme. It is simply part of the word and only coincidentally is similar to the *-er* suffix.

## What is syntax?

Rules of *syntax* tell the speaker how to put words together grammatically and meaningfully. There are two main types of syntactic rules: rules that govern word order, and rules that direct the use of certain morphemes that perform a grammatical function. For example, the order

of words in the English sentence *The cat chased the dog* cannot be changed around or its meaning would change: *The dog chased the cat* (something entirely different) or *Dog cat the chased the* (something meaningless). PDE relies on word order much more than many other languages do because English has so few morphemes that indicate the grammatical function of each word. Old English (OE), by contrast, had many more inflectional morphemes and this indicated which word was the subject, direct object, or indirect object. One of the great changes from OE to PDE was the loss of most inflectional morphemes. This has happened naturally over the last 1500 years. As a result, word order in PDE must be followed more strictly than in OE or highly inflected languages like Latin or German.

For example, in the sentence above, the phrase *the cat* must go first in the sentence, because that is how PDE indicates the subject of the sentence—the one that does the action of the verb. The phrase *the dog* must go after the verb, indicating that it is *the dog* that receives the action of the verb, or is its object. Other syntactic rules tell us that we must put *the* before its noun, and *-ed* at the end of the verb to indicate past tense. In Russian, the same sentence has fewer restrictions on word order because it has bound morphemes that are attached to the nouns and indicate which one is the subject and which is the object of the verb. So, the sentence *koshka 'chased' sobaku* ('The cat chased the dog') has the same meaning no matter how the words are ordered because the *-a* on the end of *koshka* means *the cat* is the subject, and the *-u* on the end of *sobaku* means *the dog* is the object. If we switched the endings and said *koshku 'chased' sobaka*, now it means *the dog* did the chasing, even though we haven't changed the order of the words. Notice, too, that Russian does not have a word for *the*.

In Spanish (which you may have studied), it is very common to drop the pronouns. The sentence *Yo compré un libro nuevo* ('I bought a new book') would most often be rendered as

*Compré un libro nuevo* thus eliminating the pronoun *yo* ('I'). The inflection ending *-é* on *comprar* ('to buy') indicates only first person singular, so the pronoun is redundant and often eliminated.

To repeat, in OE, inflectional morphemes were plentiful (as we will see), thus syntax rules were not as strict as they are in PDE.

## What is lexicon?

The **lexicon** of a language is the list of words (i.e., morphemes) in a language. Each speaker has a limited number of words in their personal lexicon. **And each language has a limited number of words in its total inventory.** But recall that with these finite numbers of words, speakers are able to create an infinite number of novel sentences due to the power of internalized grammar rules. Even dictionaries cannot contain all words in a language, in part because languages are constantly adding new words. For example, modern life has necessitated the need for new travel words: *cars, trucks, SUVs, trains, buses*, etc. We therefore have added thousands of words to talk about travel, including types of vehicles, models, brands, and parts. Technology is similar with how many new words have been added: *download, internet, browser*, etc.

A helpful distinction when discussing words is the notion of *lexical items* vs. *functional items*. When we think of adding new words, we typically think of **lexical items**. These are words that are more or less concrete. They have a specific meaning. Languages add new words to the group all the time based on the needs of users. I just mentioned several new technological words above. Since lexical items are continuously added, this group is often referred to as an open class. In contrast, languages have functional words such as prepositions, conjunctions, and pronouns. It is rare that languages add new words to the group, thus they are often referred to as a closed system.

But adding new words is not the only form of lexical change in language. Words can shift their meaning (*semantics*). For instance, *awful* originally meant “inspiring wonder or fear.” Over time, the meaning shifted to “very bad or unpleasant.” Another example of semantic change is the OE Word *sona* (PDE *soon*). In OE, this word meant “immediately,” but in PDE, it means “the near future.”

As we will see, semantic change is a very productive and robust area of language change. After a word enters a language, its meaning can change shift. Types of semantic shifts include the following:

- **Pejoration** indicates a word’s connotations have become more negative. For instance, *lust* used to mean “pleasure” with no negative connotations. *Villain* used to mean “serf,” but now means an “evil person.”
- **Amelioration** indicates a term’s connotations have become more positive. The word *knight* used to mean “youth.” But in PDE, the meaning is “hero,” usually on a horse. *Fond* used to mean “foolish,” but now means “affectionate.”
- **Generalization** indicates the word has broadened its meaning. The word *quarantine* used to refer to “a period of isolation for forty days.” Now the meaning has expanded to any period of isolation. The word *dog* itself has been broadened from its OE root *dogge*, the name of a particular breed, to become the general term for all domestic canines.
- **Narrowing** indicates a term’s potential uses are restricted. Old English *hund* once referred to any dog, whereas in PDE it denotes only a particular type of dog. The word *dog* itself has been broadened from its OE root *dogge*, the name of a particular breed, to become the general term for all domestic canines. In OE, the word *gyrele* refers to any child, regardless of gender. Over time, this word became *girl* in PDE.



Here are some examples of more modern examples of semantic shifting: *dope* (“good”), *wicked* (“brilliant”), and *tea* (“gossip”).

This brings us to a definition of *language change* and what motivates language change.

## What is language change and what causes it?

All living languages change. By language change, I do not mean a simple slip of the tongue or jumbled syntax due to the speaker being tired or nervous. Nor do I mean a new phrase that is here today but gone tomorrow. For example, in 2006 the American Dialect Society (ADS) chose *pluto* as its Word of the Year. The ADS is an academic organization that studies English in the Americas. Each year, members of the ADS select a word that is emerging as a new word or perhaps an established word that is undergoing a dramatic semantic shift as its Word of the Year. This is supposed to be a bit of fun (the meeting to vote on the new word occurs at the annual conference right before happy hour), but it also draws attention to language change. Note that the ADS is not *prescribing* the status and meaning of a word. Rather, the ADS *describes* (recall *descriptive* approaches to linguistics) changes in the English language, and part of this endeavor is to describe what members think is an emerging word or new meaning. It is the speakers of English that dictate the lexical change. The ADS simply tries to describe this socially-driven change. However, with *pluto*, the ADS members were a bit off. They predicted a new meaning of *pluto* would emerge and become part of the common lexicon in English due to astronomers’ decision to demote Pluto’s planetary status to something resembling an asteroid. The ADS members noticed English speakers began using the new verb form *to pluto* to mean “to kick out of an organization or to demote.” However, this usage was ephemeral (short-lived). This word did not take root in the speech community. Dictionaries such as the *Oxford English Dictionary*

have not included this new usage. New words or new meanings for established words must have some “staying power” before they are included in dictionaries.

So, what is language change if it is not a short-lived change or a slip of the tongue? It is a relatively permanent and wide-spread change to the language. It can be systematic or sporadic. But some sort of permanency and acceptance by most speakers is required for the change to become part of the language. Of course, even fairly systematic and wide-spread language changes can later be overturned by a new change in the future. Furthermore, changes can exist at all levels in a language. There are changes to the phonology, morphology, syntax, and lexicon in the history of any language. English has undergone changes in all these areas, and it is important to note that change in one area of language often results in changes in another area. There is a domino effect. Over centuries, OE lost many inflectional endings due to pronunciation shifts. The result was that word order became much more important in English as time progressed. This is just one example of how a change in OE pronunciation had a profound impact on syntax in the history of English.

Below are additional examples of changes in English. We will discuss more changes in detail later in the text.

- **Phonological change:** The pronunciations of the consonants /k/ and /g/ were lost before /n/ if they appeared in word-initial position. This is why we still write “knee” and “gnaw” even though the /k/ and /g/ are silent. The loss of these consonants occurred in the seventeenth century.
- **Morphological change:** At an early stage of English, certain words were marked plural with the inflectional morpheme *-n*. Examples include the Old English words *mōnan* (*moons*), *ēagan* (*eyes*), and *naman* (*names*). The plural marker *-s* also existed and it was

the dominant plural marker in Old English. Over time, the *-s* (precisely since it was the dominant form) took the place of *-n* in most words except for a few remnants such as *children, brethren, and oxen*.

- **Syntactic change:** In a later change of English's development, the auxiliary verb *do* became obligatory to form yes/no questions and negative statements. The *do* became obligatory soon after Shakespeare's time. Consider these statements from Shakespeare.
  - I doubt it not. (*Romeo and Juliet*, 3.5.52)
  - Why look you so upon me? (*As You Like It*, 3.5.69)

In PDE, these sentences require a *do*.

- I *do* not doubt it.
- Why *do* you look so upon me?

But the question remains, **why do languages change?** As the linguist Peter Trudgill noted, language change remains somewhat mysterious. He notes, "All languages change all the time. It is not very well understood why this is the case, but it is a universal characteristic of human languages" (1998, p.1). However, we can discuss some of the major motivating factors.

One reason for language change is **least effort**. As words are repeated, they tend to get "worn down" a bit. Some sounds are lost to allow for more rapid (i.e., "easier") speech. Sometimes it is as simple as certain phonemes might be more difficult to pronounce. Such sounds would be ripe candidates for slight modifications over the years. The next generation might hear the slightly altered version of a word, and they adopt this new pronunciation as the standard pronunciation.

Another reason is **analogy**. There is something in humans that likes to make things similar or regularized. Our use of language is no different. If there is an "oddity" in one aspect of

the language, there is a natural human tendency to regularize it. This may be exemplified in English by the plural of *octopus*. This is a borrowed word from Greek, and so should take a plural form *octopodes*. However, English has many nouns of Latin origin with singular forms ending with *-us* and plural forms ending with *-i*, such as *cactus/cacti*, *radius/radii*, etc. Thus, an analogy can be established. On the basis of this analogy, the plural *octopi* is established.

Or consider the word *livid*. Historically, *livid* meant “pale.” However, given the similarity to the word *vivid* (“bright”), *livid* changed its meaning to something similar to “bright with anger.” This is an example of *analogical semantic change*.

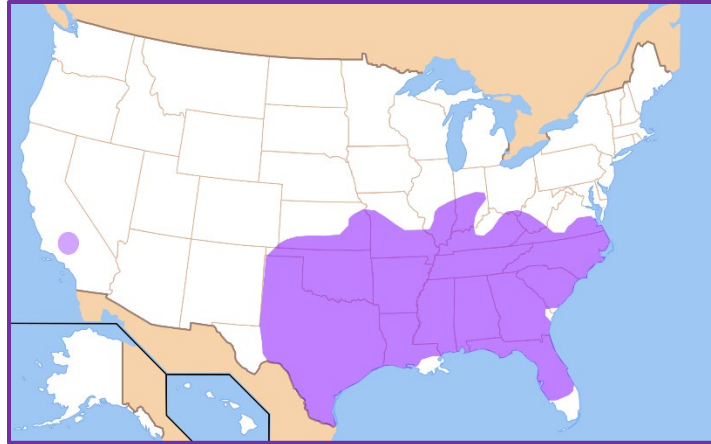
One more example. The word *delight* originally had no *-gh-* in its spelling but with words such as *light*, *fright*, *sight*, and *might*, there was an analogous spelling change.

Another reason for language change is *imperfect learning*. Toddlers may develop a grammatical system about the language they are learning that is slightly different from the grammatical system of their parents. It is important to be clear that toddlers acquire most of their grammatical system before they attend formal schooling. As they listen to adults and older children in their home, they form a grammar. It becomes a situation of a “copy of a copy,” and this may introduce innovations. As these toddlers become adults, these former innovations may become part of the standard system, but it is clear that imperfect learning cannot explain all language change. There are too many innovations that do not come from toddlers. Millward and Hayes (2012) point out that complicated embedding clauses and subordination did not exist in Old English and it is unlikely that children introduced these grammatical innovations. For instance, the following sentence use embedding and subordination: *Having left the game early, the star player, who would later regret her decision, appeared unremorseful as she left the playing field.*

Least effort, analogy, and imperfect learning are some general principles that drive language change. But there still remains a bit of mystery. Sometimes a language change will, ironically, make the use of the language a bit more complicated. For example, the OE verbs *dig*, *spit*, and *ring* were regular verbs in that the past tense: *digged*, *spitted*, and *ringed*. However, in the case of these verbs, the language system became more complicated because PDE uses irregular forms for what was once regularized verbs: *dug*, *spit*, and *rang*. It would be more intuitive to think that a language system would become less complicated, but this is not what happened here. And the reasons are not always clear.

These sorts of changes are what could be considered internal. That is to say, the changes occurred not because of any external influence. But there are external influences on the history of English. By external I refer to historical circumstances such as wars and migrations that have had a profound influence on English. In this text, we will examine both internal changes and external forces.

Changes can also be thought of as *conditioned* or *unconditioned*. When a change is caused by certain phonological environment, this could be considered conditioned. For example, for some speakers of present-day American English, the words *pen/pin*, *hem/him*, and *gym/gem* are pronounced with the same vowel. But the same speakers would not use the same vowels in words such as *bit/bet* and *sit/set*. This merger occurs only if an /n/ or /m/ follows the vowel. In other words, it is conditioned by the sounds that follow. This very famous dialect feature is known as the pen/pin merger and typically occurs in the southeastern part of the United States, as illustrated in Figure 1.2. The purple area shows where this feature is typically found among speakers.



*Figure 1.3: The Pen/Pin Merger in the United States*

Source: Wikipedia

Attribution: ANGR

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Link: [here](#)

It is important to understand that language change does not imply that the language is improving, nor is it deteriorating. Most linguists are of the opinion that language change is simply that—natural change. However, some people think language change implies language is getting worse and that given enough changes, the language will become beyond repair and ultimately hopeless. However, if the study of language (and the history of languages) has proven anything, it is that languages are self-regulating and self-healing systems. People want to be understood and communicate effectively and efficiently. Given this, languages will not devolve into something useless. If this were the case, English would have long ago become useless. Rather, languages will always maintain intelligibility. This is not to say that there are not difficulties with communication when a change is introduced. In fact, dialects will develop, and these can become unintelligible. And when this happens, the two dialects become two separate languages because there is no longer mutual intelligibility. This is often the case due to physical distance between the two emerging dialects.

While language change is constant, it is usually very slow. Think of language change as a slow-motion video rather than a sudden quick change. Most language change is in fact quite

slow. If a person were to live ninety years, they might not even perceive the language they use daily has changed during those ninety years, but it has changed.

Writing is typically slower to change than speech. While speech is more ephemeral, writing has a certain amount of permanency. We store written records permanently, and the printing press and computers have made storage even easier. Another reason for writing's resistance to language change is attitudinal. Since most of us are taught from our early school days to write carefully and "correctly," there is a certain sense that writing innovations should be avoided so as to preserve the "pure" form of a language. But eventually even writing systems succumb to pressures for change.

## What are the Major Periods of English?

Even though language change is slow moving, the history of English has often been presented a series of events that mark a "new period." Traditionally, the history of English is divided into four periods. And I will follow these traditional demarcations. But it is important to remember that these periods are somewhat artificial. People who lived in England during the Old English period did not think their language was "old." It was simply their language. Nonetheless, here are the four traditional periods.

**Old English 449 AD – 1066 AD**

**Middle English 1066 AD – 1500 AD**

**Early Modern English 1500 AD – 1800 AD**

**Modern English 1800 AD – present**

# Key Concepts from Chapter 1

- Language is defined as a rule-governed system for human communication.
- The traditional areas of linguistic inquiry are phonology (sound system), morphology (word formation), syntax (word order), semantics (meaning), and lexicon (vocabulary).
- Language change is a natural and organic process.
- The traditional periods for a study of the history of English are Old English, Middle English, Early Modern English, and Modern English.



# Key Terms from Chapter 1

- **amelioration**
- **allomorphs**
- **affixes**
- **communication**
- **conventional**
- **derivational morpheme**
- **descriptive grammar**
- **generalization**
- **grammar**
- **inflectional morpheme**
- **language**
- **lexicon**
- **linguistics**
- **morpheme**
- **morphology**
- **narrowing**
- **pejoration**
- **phoneme**
- **phonetics**
- **phonology**
- **prescriptive**
- **pejoration**
- **narrowing**
- **semantics**
- **systematic**
- **syntax**

## Materials for Chapter 1 adapted from the following:

Allard-Kropp, M. (2020). *Languages and worldview*. Open Educational Resources

Collection. Available at: <https://irl.umsl.edu/oer/17>

[Animal Language](#) (Wikipedia contributors, 2022)

[Linguistics/Introduction](#) (Wikibooks contributors, 2022)

[Phonology](#) (Wikipedia contributors, 2022)

## Works Cited for Chapter 1:

Bauer, L. and Trudgill, P. (Eds.) (1998). *Language myths*. London: Penguin Books.

Fromkin, V., Hymes, N., and Rodman, R. (2017). *An introduction to language*.

Boston: Wadsworth, Cengage Learning.

Millward, C. & Hayes, M. (2012). *A Biography of the English Language*. Wadsworth: Boston.

# Chapter 2

## An Introduction to English Phonology

### What is phonology?



A major area of language change is *sound* change. As noted in chapter one, all areas of language change, including the sound system (phonology). Some training in phonetics and phonology is essential for a study of the history of English. While this is not a text dedicated to phonetics and phonology, some basic understanding is needed, and this chapter will provide the necessary tools to understand discussions about sound changes in the history of English.

The best place to start is to recognize that spoken words have segments. When we listen to speech, we tend to think of words as whole units. This is natural because we are listening for word meanings. However, words have discrete (separate) units known as *phonemes*. And the study of *phonemes* and how these sounds form words is *phonology*.

The word *cat* registers the meaning of a furry four-legged animal in the English speaker's mind when they hear this word. However, it actually consists of three discrete sounds: /k/ /æ/ /t/. But these three sounds are “run” together and appear almost as one unit to the English speaker. Nonetheless, there are three separate sounds that the vocal apparatus produces. The mind

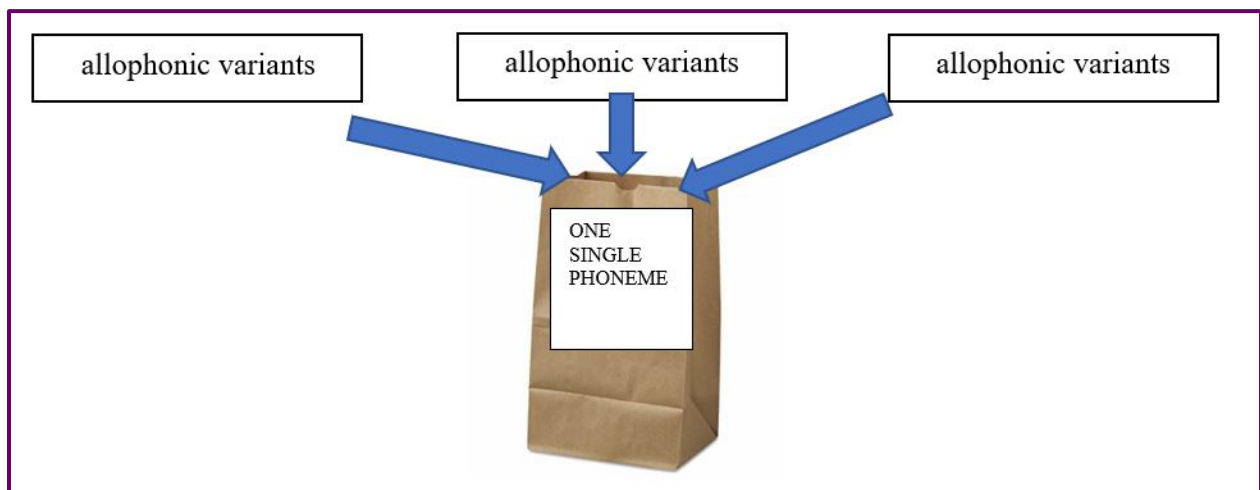
registers three sounds and can interpret this combination to mean that furry animal. This is evidenced by the fact that if someone were to say the word *mat*, then the listener registers a different meaning in their mind. One of the three sounds was changed, and our minds decode a completely different meaning. It is our phonological ability that allows us to decipher these different words based on changing this one phoneme.

The classic definition of a *phoneme* is a unit of sound that can distinguish one word from another in a particular language. The /k/ sound and the /m/ sound can contrast meaning in English as shown in the words *cat* and *mat*. Therefore, they are phonemes in English. However, if a speaker were to add a lot of aspiration on the /k/ sound (something like a breathy sound attached to the /k/ and symbolized with a raised <sup>h</sup> [k<sup>h</sup>]), this would not change the meaning of the word in English. [kæt] and [k<sup>h</sup>æt] are the same word in English. Just imagine someone adding a lot of air after the /k/ on the second pronunciation. Speakers would ignore this and only register the /k/ sound as part of the word *cat*.

Think of a phoneme in these terms—we all produce phonemes a little bit differently because we have different physical builds, mouth shapes, and dialectal backgrounds. However, a listener will decode the phoneme in their mind and essentially ignore small variations. In other words, a phoneme is a mental abstraction, almost an idealization of the contrastive sound. Put simply, our ears hear the true physical sound in the air. But our mind transforms that sound into an idealized phoneme, thus ignoring small differences and thereby increasing language efficiency and comprehensibility. If this were not the case, then we would have great difficulty in communicating with each other because everyone's /k/ (along with every other phoneme in a language) would be slightly different, thus inhibiting communication.

Here is another example of phonological processing. Many toddlers have trouble with the /r/ phoneme as they learn English. It often comes out like a /w/. So, a toddler may say something like this: *I love playing with my wobots*. By context (if the child is playing with robots in front of us), our minds are able to insert the true phoneme /r/ for the [w] sound that is actually produced by the toddler. The actual sound variation of a phoneme is called an *allophone*. An allophone (or slight variation of a phoneme) does not contrast meaning. In English, the [k<sup>h</sup>] sound and the [k] sound are allophones because they do not contrast meaning. However, in the Thai language, /k<sup>h</sup>/ and /k/ are phonemic because these two sounds contrast meaning. /kat/ means ‘to bite.’ And /k<sup>h</sup>at/ means ‘to interrupt.’ Note that phonemes are written in slashes / /. While allophones are written in brackets [ ].

Remember that a phoneme is something that exists in your mind: it’s like a shopping bag in which your mind stores phonetically similar sounds that are all members of one phoneme.



*Figure 2.1: Visual of several allophones of one phoneme*

Not all the sounds that you store in one phoneme category have to be identical; in fact, your mental category has room for a lot of variation. Any variants that are not contrastive, that don’t

lead to a meaning change, are members of that same phoneme category and are called allophones or allophonic variants.

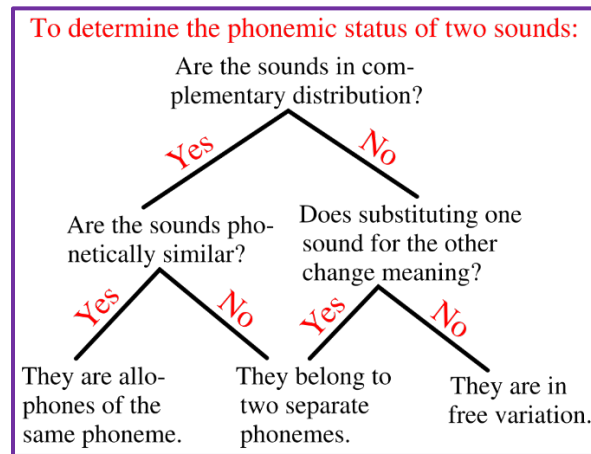
Some allophones appear in *free variation*, which means the variant that appears in any phonetic environment is random. For example, speakers of different dialects pronounce these words differently: *data* and *schedule*. Think of accents as perceptible phonological variants among dialects (Curzan and Adams, 2012, p. 64).

- *Data* is often pronounced as /dætə/. The initial vowel is like the vowel in the word *pat*. Some speakers pronounce this word as /deɪtə/. In this case, the initial vowel is the same as the vowel in the word *they*.
- In British English *schedule* is pronounced with the initial sound as /ʃ/ (like the “sh” sound). While in American English, the initial sound is /sk/.

Both these variations are “free” in the sense that there is nothing in the word itself that conditions which pronunciation is used. Speakers choose one based on their dialect or personal preference.

But most allophones are entirely predictable—linguists say that allophonic variation is phonetically conditioned because it depends on what other sounds are nearby within the word. Recall the *pen/pin* merger in chapter 1. This is predictable because what follows is an /m/ or an /n/. For many speakers of the Southern American dialect, this merger is predicted by the /m/ or the /n/ that follows. Another example would be the aspiration on the phoneme /p/. If the /p/ appears in an initial position and before a vowel, there is typically aspiration [p<sup>h</sup>]: *pit*, *pin*. But if the /p/ appears after a consonant, there is typically no aspiration [p]: *spit*, *spin*. The underlying phoneme is the same for the English /p/.

Linguists often call this *complementary distribution*. In other words, allophones usually appear in complementary distribution, that is, a given allophone of one phoneme appears in one predictable environment, but the other allophones of that phoneme never appear in that environment. *Figure 2.1* is a visual representation of this.



**Figure 2.2:** *How to Determine Complementary Distribution vs. Free Variation*  
 Source: Wikipedia  
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 Link: [here](#)

Phonology is concerned with the distribution of allophones—that is, what phonetic environments each allophone appears in. The distribution of allophones is a key part of the mental grammar of each language. It is something that all speakers know unconsciously.

So, let’s sum up. If we have two phonetic segments that are related but different from each other, and we find some *minimal pairs* (*cat/mat, sit/bit*) to show that this phonetic difference is contrastive, then we conclude that those two segments are two different phonemes. A *minimal pair* are two words that differ in only one sound in the same location and are different words. The following are minimal pairs: *kite/sight, bit/bite, kiss/kid*. Each of these pairs differ in only one sound. Thus /k/ /s/, /ɪ/ /aɪ/, and /s/ /d/ are phonemes because alternating them changes the word.

If we have two phonetic segments that are related but different and they're not contrastive (i.e., there are not minimal pairs), then we look to see what the distribution of these segments is, that is, what environments we see them in. If they're not contrastive and they're in complementary distribution, then we conclude that they're allophones of the same phoneme, and they don't change the meaning of the word. We've seen that *pin* with aspiration ([p<sup>h</sup>]) and *pin* without aspiration ([p]) are the same words in English. Thus, they are not minimal pairs. [p<sup>h</sup>] and [p] are allophones of one phoneme /p/ in English. I will continue to refer to the issue of phonemes and allophones throughout this text. Let's add a few final important points about phonemes to help clarify the concept.

- Phonemes are not letters. Letters are the basic elements of a writing system, which may or may not have been designed to represent the phonemes of a language. But the phonemes of a language such as English are represented very imperfectly by the English alphabet, as we will see, and other languages, such as Mandarin Chinese, have writing systems that do not even pretend to represent phonemes. Equally important is that many languages are not written at all.
- Each phoneme is a category—that is, it represents a cluster of possible consonant or vowel instances centered on a prototype.
- Speakers can produce differences that contrast, or represent, different phonemes and make a difference in meaning, and differences that do not contrast, or represent, different ways of producing the same phoneme and do not change the meaning.
- The way the space of possible sounds (consonants and vowels) is divided up into phonemes is to some extent arbitrary. That is, it can be expected to vary from language to language; the phonemes that a given language has are conventions. What is important is



that the phonemes are distinctive enough to be distinguished by hearers. Thus, one language might have five vowel phonemes, while another might have eight vowel phonemes.

## International Phonetic Alphabet

You might have already noticed that there's a challenge to talking about speech sounds (phonemes) in English because English spelling is notoriously messy. Take a look at these words: *say*, *weigh*, *they*, *rain*, *flame*, *lei*, *café*, *toupee*, and *ballet*. All of them contain the same vowel sound, /e/, but the sound is spelled with nine different combinations of letters. Some of them are more common spellings of the sound /e/, but even if we take away the ones that English borrowed from other languages, that still leaves five different ways of spelling one sound. One of the problems is that English has only five letter characters that represent vowels, but more than a dozen different vowel sounds that are phonemic.

English has the opposite problem as well. Take a look at these words: *bough*, *tough*, *cough*, *through*, and *though*. Here we've got a sequence of four letters that appear in the same order in the same position in each word, but that sequence of letters is pronounced in five different ways in English. Figure 2.2 shows the iconic *I Love Lucy* logo.



**Figure 2.3:** *I Love Lucy* Logo

Source: Wikipedia

Attribution: JBarta

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Link: [here](#)

[Here is a clip from the \*I Love Lucy\* show in which \*bough, tough, cough, and through\* are discussed.](#) It illustrates the problem that in English spelling, there is not always a one-letter-to-one sound correspondence.

Not only can a single sound be represented by many different spellings, but even a single spelling is not consistent with the sounds it represents. Even one letter can be pronounced in multiple ways. Look at these: *cake, century, ocean, and cello*.

The letter “c” represents four quite different sounds. Clearly, English spelling is a mess. There are a lot of reasons (mostly historical) for why that might be. The area where English first evolved was first inhabited by people who spoke early forms of Germanic and Celtic dialects, but then Normans invaded and brought all kinds of French and Latin words with their spellings. When the technology to print books was invented, there was influence from Dutch. So even the earliest form of English was influenced by many different languages. Modern English also borrows words from lots of languages. When we borrow words like *cappuccino* or *champagne*, we adapt the pronunciation to fit into English, but we often retain the spelling from the original language.

Another factor is that the English spelling system was standardized hundreds of years ago when it became possible to print books. A lot of our standard spellings became consistent when the Authorized Version of the Bible was published in the year 1611. Spelling hasn’t actually changed much since 1611, but English pronunciation has. So, the way we produce the sounds of English has diverged from how we write the language.

Furthermore, English is spoken all over the world, with many different regional varieties. British English sounds quite different from American English, which is different from Canadian English, which is different from Australian English, and Indian English is quite different again,

even though all of these varieties are spelled in nearly the same way. There's even variation with each speaker of English, depending on the context—the way you speak is going to be different depending on if you're hanging out with friends, interviewing for a job, or talking on the phone to your grandmother.

We need some way to be able to refer to particular speech sounds, not to English letters. Fortunately, linguists have developed a useful tool for doing exactly that. It's called the *International Phonetic Alphabet*, or *IPA*. The first version of the IPA was created over 100 years ago, in 1888, and it's been revised many times over the years. The last revision was fairly recent, in 2015. The most useful thing about the IPA is that, unlike English spelling, there's no ambiguity about which sound a given symbol refers to. Each symbol represents only one sound, and each sound maps onto only one symbol. Linguists use the IPA to transcribe speech sounds from all languages. When we use this phonetic alphabet, we're not writing in the normal sense. We're putting down a visual representation of sounds, so we call it *phonetic transcription*. That phonetic transcription gives us a written record of the sounds of spoken language. Here are just a few transcriptions of simple words so you can begin to see how the IPA works.

*snake* /sneɪk/

*sugar* /ʃʊɡəɹ/

*cake* /keɪk/

*cell* /sɛl/

*sell* /sɛl/

Notice that some of the IPA symbols look like English letters, and some of them are probably unfamiliar to you. Since some of the IPA symbols look a lot like letters, how can you know if you're looking at a spelled word or at a phonetic transcription? The notation gives us a clue—the

transcriptions all have slashes around them. Whenever we transcribe speech sounds, we use slashes to indicate that we're not using ordinary spelling. Recall that the slashes represent the phonemes and square brackets represent allophones (i.e., small variations). Another way to think about this is that the slashes are the general sound and the brackets are the very specific or much more narrow transcription. I want you to notice the one-to-one correspondence between sounds and symbols. Look at those first two words: *snake* and *sugar*. In English spelling, they both begin with the letter "s." But in speaking, they begin with two quite different sounds. This IPA symbol /s/ always represents the /s/ sound, never any other sound, even if those other sounds might be spelled with the letter "s." The word *sugar* is spelled with the letter "s" but doesn't begin with the /s/ sound, so we use a different symbol to transcribe it, /ʃ/, which is the "sh" sound. So, one IPA symbol always makes the same sound. Likewise, one sound is always represented by the same IPA symbol.

Look at the word *cake*. It's spelled with "c" at the beginning and "k-e" at the end, but both those spellings make the sound /k/, so in its transcription, it begins and ends with the symbol for the /k/ sound. Likewise, look at those two different words *cell* and *sell*. They're spelled differently, and we know that they have different meanings, but they're both pronounced the same way, so they're transcribed using the same IPA symbols. The reason the IPA is so useful is that it's unambiguous—each symbol always represents exactly one sound, and each sound is always represented by exactly one symbol. If you look at a dictionary, you will note that many dictionaries use the IPA while other dictionaries use some of the IPA but may also "invent" some of their own symbols which are considered "easier" for most readers. In this text, I will use the regular IPA symbols as we describe the sound changes in the history of English.

**Table 2.1** *Phonetic Alphabet for PDE Consonants*

IPA Symbol	Representative Word
/p/	<b>p</b> ill
/t/	<b>t</b> ill
/k/	<b>k</b> ill
/b/	<b>b</b> ill
/d/	<b>d</b> ill
/g/	<b>g</b> ill
/m/	mi <b>ll</b>
/n/	<b>n</b> ill
/ŋ /	<b>ri</b> ng
/f/	<b>f</b> eel
/s/	<b>s</b> eal
/h/	<b>h</b> eal
/v/	<b>v</b> eal
/z/	<b>z</b> eal
/l/	<b>l</b> eaf
/θ/	<b>th</b> igh
/tʃ /	<b>ch</b> ill
/r/	<b>r</b> eef
/ð/	<b>th</b> y
/dʒ/	<b>g</b> in

IPA Symbol	Representative Word
/j/	<b>y</b> ou
/ʃ/	<b>sh</b> ill
/w/	<b>w</b> hich
/w/	<b>w</b> itch
/z/ measure	<b>m</b> easure

*Table 2.2 Phonetic Alphabet for PDE Vowels*

IPA Symbol	Representative Word
/i/	beet
/ɪ/	bit
/e/	bait
/ɛ/	bet
/æ/	bat
/ə/	about
/ʌ/	butt
/ɑ/	balm
/u/	boot
/ʊ/	foot
/o/	boat
/ɔ/	pot
/aɪ/	bite
/ɔɪ/	boy
/aʊ/	bout

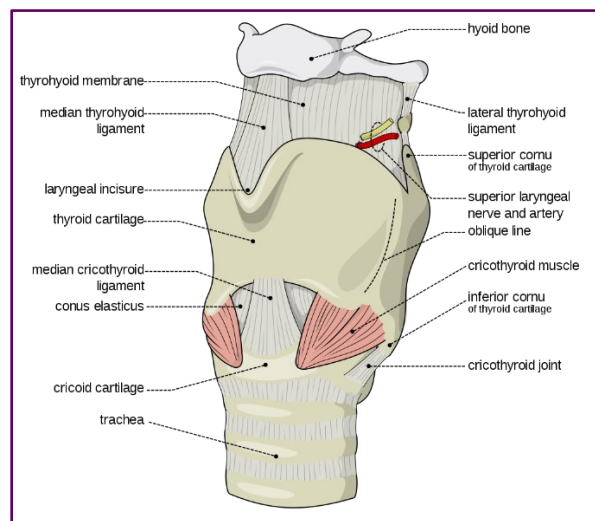
## Phonetic Descriptions

To study the actual, physical sound (*allophone*), we have another branch of linguistics. The field of *phonetics* studies the sounds of human speech. When we study speech sounds, we can consider them from two angles. *Acoustic phonetics*, in addition to being part of linguistics, is also

a branch of physics. It's concerned with the physical, acoustic properties of the sound waves we produce. We'll talk some about the acoustics of speech sounds, but we're primarily interested in *articulatory phonetics*, that is, how we humans use our bodies to produce speech sounds.

Producing speech needs three mechanisms. The first is a source of energy. Anything that makes a sound needs a source of energy. For human speech sounds, the air flowing from our lungs provides energy.

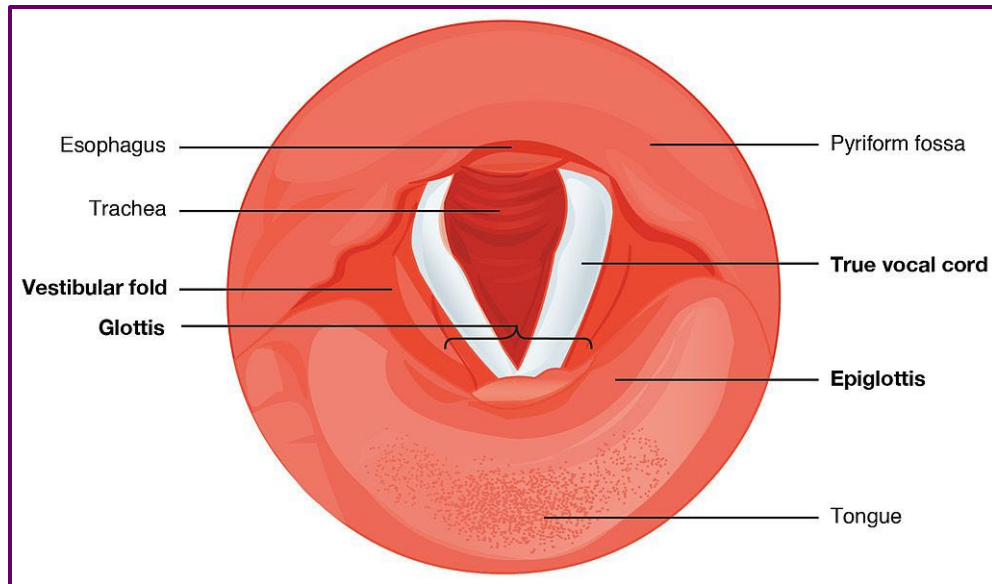
The second is a source of the sound—air flowing from the lungs arrives at the larynx. Put your hand on the front of your throat and gently feel the bony part under your skin. That's the front of your larynx. It's not actually made of bone; it's cartilage and muscle. *Figure 2.4* shows what the larynx looks like from the front.



**Figure 2.4: External View of Larynx**  
Source: Wikimedia Commons  
Attribution: Olek Remesz  
License: CC-BY-SA ver. 2.5, 2.0, 1.0  
Link: [here](#)

*Figure 2.5* is a view down a person's throat. This is important due to the vestibular fold. As we see, this allows for *voicing*. I will explain more in a minute, but for now voicing is the vibration in these folds. The “true” vocal folds (the white area) allows for certain vibrations.



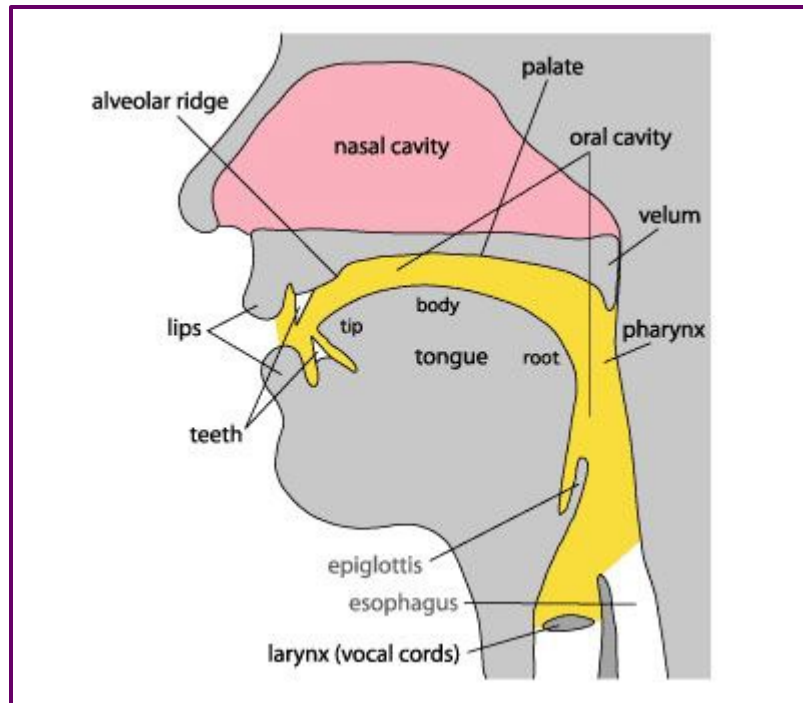


**Figure 2.5: View of Articulators**  
Source: *Essentials of Linguistics*  
Attribution: Catherine Anderson  
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What you see here is that the opening of the larynx can be covered by two triangle-shaped pieces of skin. These are often called “vocal cords” but they’re not really like cords or strings. A better name for them is vocal folds. The opening between the vocal folds is called the glottis. It might help to visualize how the air passes through the area between the vocal folds. Here are two videos.

- [Vocal folds video](#)
- [Vocal folds animation](#)
- [Here is a 3-D view](#)

Figure 2.6 shows the main articulators used when we produce speech. Linguists use these articulators to classify and describe sounds. This will be useful as we discuss the sound changes in the history of English.



*Figure 2.6: Articulators*

Source: Vowels

Attribution: Michael Gasser

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Link: [here](#)

## Consonants

Let's look more closely at the class of sounds we call consonants. Consonants have some constriction in the vocal tract that obstructs the airflow, either partially or completely. We can classify consonants according to three pieces of information.

The first piece of information we need to know about a consonant is its voicing—is it *voiced* or *voiceless*? Voiced consonants are produced by having the vocal folds vibrate.

Voiceless consonants are produced by having the vocal folds pulled about and, thus, they do not vibrate. If you place your hand over your throat and produce the sound /d/, you will feel a vibration. If you place your hand over your throat and produced the sound /t/, you will not feel a vibration. Be careful not to add a vowel after the /t/. All vowels are voiced, but for now we are

only interested in the /t/ sound. So, we can say that /d/ is voiced and /t/ is unvoiced. Here are the voiced and voiceless consonants in PDE:

- voiced consonants: /b d g m n ŋ v z l r ð dʒ j ʌ w ʒ/
- voiceless consonants: /p t k f s h θ tʃ ʃ ʌ/

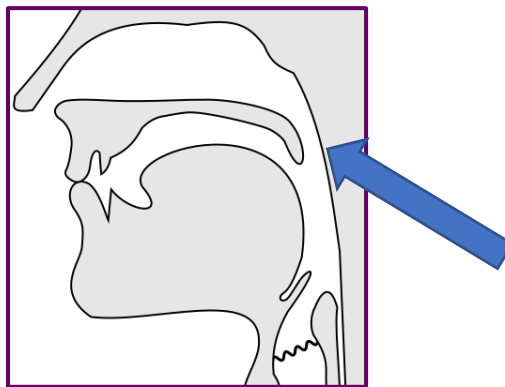
The second thing we need to know about consonants is where the obstruction in the vocal tract occurs—we call that the place of articulation. If we obstruct our vocal tract at the lips, like for the sounds /b/ and /p/, the place of articulation is bilabial. The consonants /f/ and /v/ are made with the top teeth on the bottom lip, so these are called labiodental sounds. Move your tongue to the ridge above and behind your top teeth and make a /t/ or /d/; these are alveolar sounds. Many people also make the sound /s/ with the tongue at the alveolar ridge. Even though there is quite a bit of variation in how people make the sound /s/, it still gets classified as an alveolar sound. If you're making an /s/ and move the tongue farther back, not quite to the soft palate, the sound turns into a /ʃ/, which is called postalveolar, meaning it's a little bit behind the alveolar ridge. You also sometimes see /tʃ/ and /dʒ/ called “alveo-palatal” or “palato-alveolar” sounds because the place of articulation is between the alveolar ridge and the palate. The only true palatal sound that English has is /j/. And if you bring the back of your tongue up against the back of the soft palate, the velum, you produce the velar sounds /k/ and /g/. Some languages also have uvular and pharyngeal sounds made even farther back in the throat, but English doesn't have sounds at those places of articulation. And, of course, English has a glottal fricative made right at the larynx, the sound /h/.

In addition to knowing where the vocal tract is obstructed, to classify consonants we also need to know how the vocal tract is obstructed. This is called the manner of articulation. If we obstruct the airflow completely, the sound is called a stop. When the airflow is stopped, pressure

builds up in the vocal tract and then is released in a burst of air when we release the obstruction. The other name for stops, therefore, is plosives. English has two bilabial stops, /p/ and /b/, two alveolar stops, /t/ and /d/, and two velar stops /k/ and /g/.

It's also possible to obstruct the airflow in the mouth but allow air to flow through the nasal cavity. English has three nasal sounds at those same three places of articulation: the bilabial nasal /m/, the alveolar nasal /n/, and the velar nasal /ŋ/. Because airflow is blocked in the mouth for these, they are sometimes called nasal stops, in contrast to the plosives which are oral stops. *Figure 2.7* shows the articulators forming the bilabial nasal /m/. Note that the velum lowers, which allows air to pass to the nasal cavity.

Velum (soft palate) is lowered allowing air to pass to the nasal cavity.



*Figure 2.7: The phoneme /m/*

Source: Wikimedia

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Link: [here](#)

Instead of blocking airflow completely, it's possible to hold the articulators close together and allow air to flow turbulently through the small space. Sounds with this kind of turbulence are called fricatives. English has labiodental fricatives /f/ and /v/, dental fricatives made with the

tongue between the teeth, /θ/ and /ð/, alveolar fricatives /s/ and /z/, post-alveolar fricatives /ʃ/ and /ʒ/, and the glottal fricative /h/. Other languages also have fricatives at other places of articulation.

If you bring your articulators close together but let the air flow smoothly, the resulting sound is called an approximant. The glides /j/ and /w/ are classified as approximants when they behave like consonants. The palatal approximant /j/ is made with the tongue towards the palate, and the /w/ sound has two places of articulation—the back of the tongue is raised towards the velum and the lips are rounded, so it is called a labial-velar approximant. The North American English /ɹ/ sound is an alveolar approximant with the tongue approaching the alveolar ridge. If we keep the tongue at the alveolar ridge but allow air to flow along the sides of the tongue, we get the alveolar lateral approximant [l], where the word lateral means “on the side.” The sounds /ɹ/ and /l/ are also sometimes called “liquids.” Look at (Figure 2.8) for IPA symbols for American English consonants. The places of articulation are listed along the top, and they start at the front of the mouth, at the lips, and move gradually backwards to the glottis. Down the chart’s left-hand side are listed the manners of articulation. The top of the chart has the manners with the greatest obstruction of the vocal tract, the stops or plosives, and moves gradually down to get to the approximants, which have the least obstruction and therefore greatest airflow. The shaded areas are voiced sounds.

### International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA) symbols for English consonants

	Bilabial		Labio-dental		(Inter-)dental		Alveolar		Palato-alveolar		Velar		Glottal	
Stop	p	b					t	d			k	g		
Fricative			f	v	θ	ð	s	z	ʃ	ʒ			h	
Affricate									tʃ	dʒ				
Nasal		m						n				ŋ		
Lateral								l						
Approximant		w						r		j				

Shaded = voiced

Unshaded = voiceless

### Example words

p	<u>p</u> at	[pæt]	θ	<u>th</u> ick	[θɪk]	dʒ	<u>j</u> udge	[dʒədʒ]
b	<u>b</u> at	[bæt]	ð	<u>th</u> e	[ðə]	m	<u>m</u> at	[mæt]
t	<u>p</u> at	[pæt]	s	<u>s</u> at	[sæt]	n	<u>g</u> nat	[næt]
d	<u>p</u> ad	[pæd]	z	<u>z</u> ip	[zɪp]	ŋ	<u>s</u> ing	[sɪŋ]
k	<u>c</u> at	[kæt]	ʃ	<u>w</u> ash	[wɑʃ]	l	<u>l</u> ast	[læst]
g	<u>g</u> et	[get]	ʒ	<u>g</u> arage	[gərəʒ]	r	<u>r</u> at	[ræt]
f	<u>f</u> at	[fæt]	h	<u>h</u> at	[hæt]	w	<u>w</u> hat	[wət]
v	<u>v</u> at	[væt]	tʃ	<u>m</u> atch	[mætʃ]	j	<u>y</u> et	[jæt]

(also ʔ, as in ‘uh-oh’ [ʔəʔo]; the symbol is called a ‘glottal stop’)

Figure 2.8 The IPA Symbols for American English Consonants

A flap (or tap) is a very short sound that is a bit like a stop because it has a complete obstruction of the vocal tract, but the obstruction is so short that air pressure doesn’t build up. Most people aren’t aware of this flap, but it’s actually quite common in American English. You can hear it in the middle of these words *metal* and *medal*. Notice that even though they’re spelled with “t” and “d,” they sound exactly the same when we pronounce them in ordinary speech. If

you're trying hard to be extra clear, you might say /mɛtəl/ or /mɛdəl/, but ordinarily, that “t” or “d” in the middle of the word just becomes an alveolar flap, where the tongue taps very briefly at the alveolar ridge but doesn't allow air pressure to build up. You can also hear a flap in the middle of words like *middle*, *water*, *bottle*, *kidding*, *needle*. The symbol for the alveolar flap /ɾ/ looks a bit like the letter “r” but represents that flap sound.

When we're talking about English sounds, we also need to mention affricates. If you start to say the word *cheese*, you'll notice that your tongue is in the position to make a /t/ sound. But instead of releasing that alveolar stop completely, like you would in the word *tease*, you release it only partially and turn it into a fricative, /tʃ/. Same thing for the word *jam*: you start off the sound with the stop /d/, and then release the stop but still keep the articulators close together to make a fricative /dʒ/.

To sum up, all consonants involve some obstruction in the vocal tract. We classify consonants according to three pieces of information:

- The voicing: Is it voiced or voiceless?
- The place of articulation: Where is the vocal tract obstructed?
- The manner of articulation: How is the vocal tract obstructed?

These three pieces of information make up the articulatory description for each speech sound, so we can talk about the voiceless labiodental fricative [f] or the voiced velar stop [g], and so on.

# Vowels

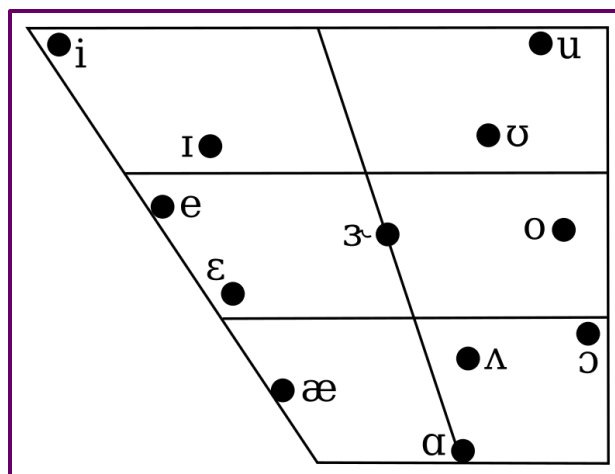
In the history of English, changes in vowels have caused considerable change in English. Even today, shifting vowels are responsible for dialect changes throughout the English-speaking world. Understanding vowels is essential to understanding sound changes in English. The best place to start is with three fundamental aspects of vowels:

1. First and most important, vowels are essential to syllables. All syllables have to have a vowel. Consonants are not essential to syllables. In other words, some syllables only have a vowel. But there are no syllables with only consonants.
2. All vowels are voiced. Thus, vowels can be shouted and sung.
3. Vowels do not have a clear place of articulation. That is to say, as air passes through the oral cavity, there is no place of contact with articulators.

With these three fundamental aspects in mind, let's discuss how linguists classify vowels. Vowels are made without an obstruction in the vocal tract, so they are quite sonorous. The body of the tongue moves in the mouth to shape each vowel, and for some vowels, the lips are rounded as well. Linguists classify vowels according to four pieces of information: tongue height, tongue backness, lip rounding, and tenseness. The difference between consonants and vowels is that consonants have some obstruction in the vocal tract, whereas, for vowels, the vocal tract is open and unobstructed, which makes vowel sounds quite sonorous.

Take a look at the IPA chart for American English vowels in *Figure 2.7*. Instead of a nice rectangle, it's shaped like a trapezoid.





*Figure 2.9: American Vowels*

Source: Wikipedia  
 Attribution: Moxfyre  
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 Link: [here](#)

We classify vowels according to four pieces of information—the high/mid/low distinction has to do with how high the tongue is in the mouth. Say this list of words: *beet, bit, bait, bet, bat*.

Now do the same thing but leave off the “b” and the “t” and just say the vowels. You can feel that your tongue is at the front of your mouth and is moving from high in the mouth for [i] to fairly low in the mouth for [æ]. We can do the same thing at the back of the mouth. Say the words *boot, boat*. Now do it again with just the vowels, [u], [o]. Your lips are rounded for both of them, but the tongue is higher for [u] than it is for [o]. The lowest vowel at the back of the mouth is [ɑ]. We don’t round our lips for [ɑ], and we often drop the jaw to move the tongue low and back. We also classify vowels according to whether the lips are rounded or unrounded. In American English, there are only four vowels that have lip rounding, and they’re all made with the tongue at the back of the mouth:

- [u] as in *boot*
- [ʊ] as in *book*

- [o] as in *boat*
- [ɔ] as in *bore*

The final piece of information that we use to classify vowels is a little trickier to explain. English makes a distinction between tense and lax vowels, which is a distinction that a lot of other languages don't have. Tense vowels are made with greater tension in the muscles of the vocal tract than lax vowels. To feel this difference, say the two words *sheep* and *ship*. And now make just the vowel sounds, [i], [ɪ]. The [i] sound in *sheep* and the [ɪ] sound in *ship* are both produced with the tongue high and front, and without lips rounded. But for [i], the muscles are more tense than for [ɪ]. The same is true for the vowels in *late* and *let*, [e] and [ɛ]. And also for the vowels in *food* and *foot*, [u] and [ʊ]. It can be hard to feel the physical difference between tense and lax vowels, but the distinction is actually an important one in the mental grammar of English. When we observe single-syllable words, we see a clear pattern in one-syllable words that don't end with a consonant. There are lots of monosyllabic words with tense vowels as their nucleus, like:

*day, they, weigh*

*free, brie, she, tea*

*do, blue, through, screw*

*no, toe, blow*

But there are no monosyllabic words without a final consonant that have a lax vowel as their nucleus. If we were to try to make up a new English word, we couldn't do so. We couldn't create a new invention and name it a [vɛ] or a [flɪ] or a [mʊ]. These words just can't exist in English. So, the tense/lax distinction is an example of one of those bits of unconscious knowledge we have about our language—even though we're not consciously aware of which vowels

are tense and which ones are lax, our mental grammar still includes this powerful principle that governs how we use our language.

## Key Concepts from Chapter 2

- Phonemes are the contrastive sound units in a language.
- The International Phonetic Alphabet was developed to have a one-sound to one-symbol correspondence for all the sounds in the world's languages.
- Phonetics descriptions allow linguist to classify and group phonemes by their articulatory features.
- Consonants have an obstruction to the air flow.
- Consonants are classified by voicing, place of articulation, and manner of articulation.
- Vowels do not have an obstruction of air flow.
- Vowels are necessary for syllable. Syllables have a sonority peak.
- Vowels are classified by height and position of the tongue.

## Key Terms from Chapter 2

- **allophone**
- **complementary distribution**
- **free variation**
- **International Phonetic Alphabet**
- **minimal pair**
- **phoneme**
- **phonology**
- **voicing**
- **consonant**
- **vowel**

## Materials for Chapter 2 adapted from the following:

Anderson, Catherine. (2022). *Essentials of linguistics*. Open Educational Resources Collection.

Available at <https://ecampusontario.pressbooks.pub/essentialsoflinguistics/>

[Phonology](#) (Wikipedia contributors, 2022).

## Works Cited for Chapter 2

Curzan, Anne and Adams, Michael. (2012). *How English works: A linguistic introduction*.

Boston: Longman.

# Chapter 3

## Indo-European Roots of English



*Figure 3.1: Image of Tower of Babel*

Source: Wikipedia

Attribution: Pieter Brueghel the Elder

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Link: [here](#)

### A First Language?

One of the most popular stories in the Old Testament is the Tower of Babel. In this story, “the whole earth had one language and the same words” (Genesis 11:1). However, the people in the story began to build a tower that would reach to the heavens, and this arrogance angered God. As punishment for their pride, God takes away their common language. The people of the earth are no longer able to communicate with one language.

This ancient story attempts to answer a very ancient question. Why are there so many languages in the world? Would it not be logical that as humanity interacted through the millennia that separate languages coalesced into one language? From an evolutionary standpoint, this would make sense. Or if there had only been one language to start with, is it not counterintuitive that this one language subsequently divided into mutually unintelligible languages? Recall from chapter one that linguists know that languages change for somewhat unknown reasons, but the

question remains: why would languages change so much that they become new and separate languages?

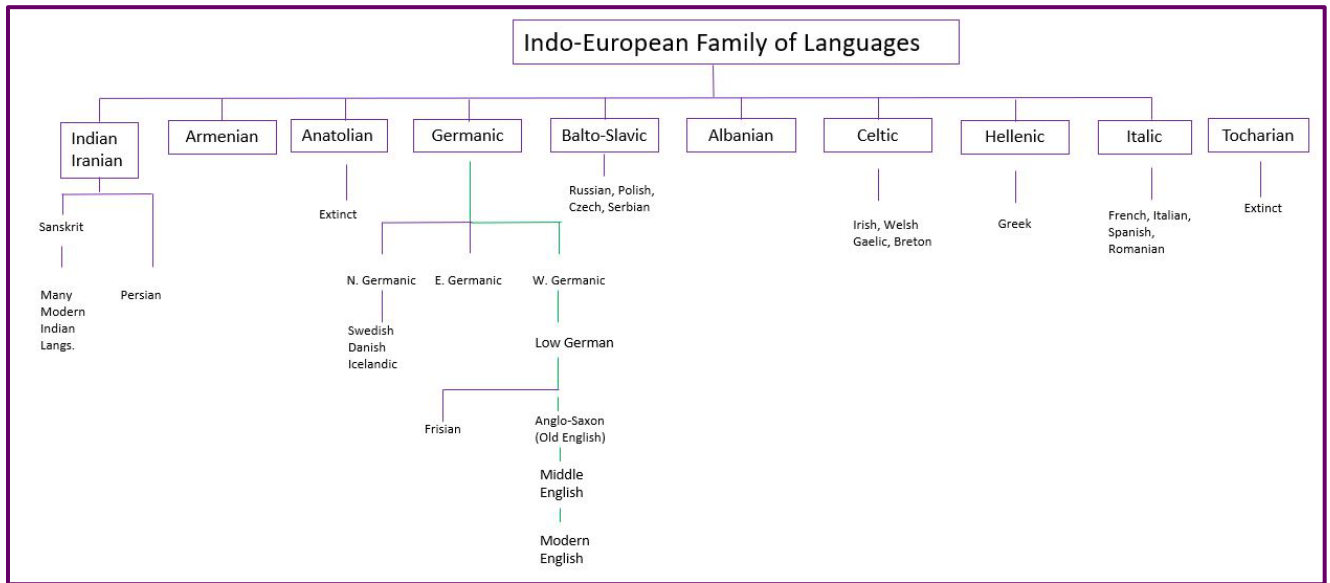
These are philosophical questions that are impossible to answer with certainty. But here are some facts. Currently there are between 5,000–7,000 languages in the world. No one knows if all languages sprang from one original language or if there were multiple languages on the earth in different locations that developed simultaneously. Despite these unknowns, linguists are able to trace the roots of many languages to a common language ancestor.

## The Indo-Europeans

Since we are concerned with the history of English, we will explore the language ancestor of English. This is known as *Indo-European*. Like the writers and audience of the “Tower of Babel” story in *Genesis*, linguists have been concerned with finding a common language or languages that were spoken by our ancestors. The truth of the matter is that without a time machine, it is impossible to determine which language (or languages) was (or were) the first language(s) spoken. However, due to some linguistic detective work, linguists have been able to determine that the language family known as Indo-European was the source of many languages in the world, including English.

Traditionally, linguists acknowledge that there are ten language families which have their origin in Indo-European. Figure 3.2 shows the ten language families of the Indo-European group. This figure does not show all the languages that are part of the Indo-European group of languages. There are roughly 440 surviving languages that descend from Indo-European. Most languages in Europe are Indo-European, but there are some exceptions: Basque, Hungarian, Finish, and Estonian. Also please note that Indo-European is not the source of **all** the world’s languages. Japanese, Navajo, and Quechua (among thousands of others) are not Indo-European

languages. However, English (and many European languages) are descended from this language family.



*Figure 3.2: Language Families from Indo-European.*

Let’s explore the Indo-European story a bit more because it is very important in the history of English. The Indo-Europeans were a nomadic group that inhabited the Eurasian Steppes about 5,000 years ago. *Figure 3.3* shows the original homeland of this group, although there has been debate as to the exact location.



*Figure 3.3: Indo-European Homeland*

Source: [The History of English Podcast](#)

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Figure 3.4 gives another perspective on the original homeland of the Indo-Europeans. It also shows the vast influence of this language as it spread throughout the world. The light green area shows the language influence, and if we were to include North America and South America (English and Spanish), we can see that the influence was very large.



*Figure 3.4: Influence of Indo-European Language*

Source: Wikipedia

Attribution: Joe Roe

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Link: [here](#)

The story of the Indo-European language often starts with the man who is credited for that discovery, Sir William Jones. In presenting a history of English, it's important to begin at this point. Many histories of English began with the arrival of the Anglo-Saxons in Britain in the 5<sup>th</sup> century AD. But modern English is a combination and blend of several languages: Anglo-Saxon, Norman French, Latin, Greek, Old Norse, languages of Scandinavia, and even some Celtic influences. But all of those languages have at least one thing in common. They all evolved from the same ancient source, the language of the so-called Indo-Europeans, which was spoken several thousand years ago. This is very significant in modern English. For example, English, unlike many other languages, has multiple words for almost everything. Take the word *father*. We can use the word *father* and we can make a lot of other words with it, like *fatherland*,

*father-in-law, stepfather, fatherhood, founding father*, and so on. We can even make it into a verb, as in *He fathered three children*. The word *father* is a Germanic Anglo-Saxon word which comes to us from the old English word *fæder*.

But we also have other words that mean *father*. For example, the words *paternal, paternity, paternalistic, and patriarch* also mean “father” or relate to some aspect of *fatherness*. Those words come to us via French from Latin. More specifically, these words come from the Latin word *pater*, which meant “father” in Latin. This is an example of why English has such a large vocabulary and how it pulls from multiple sources in creating words. For many basic words in English, we have a Germanic root word and an alternate Latin word. But here's the thing that may surprise you. The English word *father* from Old English and the Latin word *pater* are both derived from the same original word spoken by this tribe of nomads living on the Eurasian steppes about 5,000 years ago.

That original word was likely very close to the *pater* used by Latin. For reasons that will be explored later, the /p/ sound shifted to an /f/ sound in the Germanic languages and ultimately became *father* in modern English. So, all of the words—*father, fatherland, brotherhood, paternal, paternity, paternalistic, and patriarch*—are interconnected and come from the same single root word. Linguists say that all of these words are *cognates*.

For another example, consider the English word *foot*. This again is a Germanic word from Old English. From it we get lots of other words: *football, foothill, foothold, footing*. But we also have another group of words which relate to feet: *pedestrian, pedicure, pedal, pedometer*. Even the word *pedigree* which comes from the fact that a genealogical family tree resembles a crane's foot. Do you notice a common theme? All of these words begin with *ped*, which was the Latin word for *foot*. Again, the English word *foot* and the Latin word *ped* were once the same

word in this ancient common language. The same shift from the /p/ sound to the /f/ sound which distinguishes English *father* from Latin *pater* is also at work here. In Latin, the word retains its original /p/ sound and becomes *ped*, while in the Germanic languages, like English, it shifts to an /f/ sound and becomes *foot*.

The point here is that English did not just borrow words from Latin and other languages. It often borrowed words that were ultimately just another version of the words that English already had. So that's why it's important to begin the history of English at the point of this ancient common language known as Proto-Indo-European, rather than with the arrival of Anglo-Saxons in Britain, because it's important to understand that the history of English begins before the Anglo-Saxons, and before we have a language or dialect that we actually call English. It's also important to understand that all of the languages which have come together to create modern English are not completely separate languages, but are in fact part of a larger, interconnected language family. To put it another way, English, Latin, Greek, and the Celtic languages are ultimately all cousins within the same language family, and similarities between the languages can be found through all of them.

## Searching for the Origins of Indo-European?

But the idea that all of those languages evolved from a common ancestral language didn't really come into play until the late 1700s. When the discovery was made, however, it wasn't made in Europe. It was actually made in India, a continent away. The story of how this discovery was made involves European imperialism, private armies, and attacks on tea, which led to the loss of Britain colonies in America and the unintentional acquisition of a new colony in India. The story begins with the arrival of European traders in India in the 1600s.

Initially, the Europeans arrived in India not as colonizers but as traders. India's silks, spices, dyes and tea were irresistible to Europeans and all of the major powers of Europe established private trading companies to trade European money and goods for Indian products. The British East India Company was chartered in 1600 and it soon established trading ports with the Mughal Empire, which ruled India at the time.



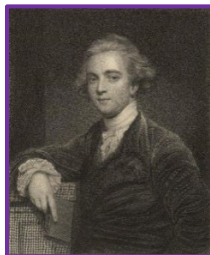
*Figure 3.4: Coat of Arms of British East India Company*

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One of those British trading ports was Calcutta, in the territory of Bengal in northeastern India. The British East India Company and its rival companies, established by other European powers, made vast amounts of money during this period. But the Mughal Empire began to fall apart in the 1700s and India fell into a state of unrest and civil conflict. Now this was not good for business. In fact, the unrest was enough to cause the Dutch and Portuguese to leave the country altogether. That left the French and British, and neither wanted to abandon India or leave the Indian market to their competitor. In order to stick it out in India, the British trading companies were going to have to find a way to survive the unrest and protect their own interests. The best way to do that is to have your own private army, and that's exactly what

happened. By the mid-1700s, the British East India Company was operating with a private army staffed largely with native Indians led by British officers.

However, there were legal and translation issues that needed to be resolved. Into this judicial dilemma arrived the key figure in Indo-European debate, William Jones.



*Figure 3.5: Portrait of Sir William Jones*

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Jones was not only a jurist and a scholar. He was also an expert in languages, including the Persian language, which was related to Sanskrit. Jones had been born in London in 1746 to a Welsh family. As a student at Oxford, he had studied a wide variety of languages, including Greek, Latin, Hebrew, Arabic, and many others. In fact, it's difficult to know how many languages Jones actually mastered. Some accounts suggest he knew as many as 28 languages. Regardless, he was very proficient in the study of languages. He also studied law and became a barrister, befriending other influential scholars and thinkers of the day, one of whom was Benjamin Franklin who resided in London for many years before the outbreak of the American Revolutionary War.

The Supreme Court in Calcutta had a vacancy and Jones was more than qualified, given his interest in Asia and his vast knowledge of languages, including Persian. Jones ultimately received the appointment to the court on March 4<sup>th</sup>, 1783. Now part of Jones's mission in India was to translate the ancient Hindu legal codes from Sanskrit to English. But Jones didn't actually

speak or know Sanskrit. So, soon after arriving in Bengal, he embarked on the study of the language so he could translate traditional Hindu laws and customs.

What he quickly discovered is that Sanskrit, this ancient Indian language, shared many similarities with Greek and Latin. These similarities were much the same as those found in other European languages, as well as Persian. But here is the key. Similarities among European languages could be explained as being the result of long-term borrowing between neighboring peoples. For example, the Latin speaking Romans interacted with the Germanic tribes east of the Rhine for centuries before the Roman Empire collapsed, and the Germanic tribes poured into Roman territory. So linguistic borrowing was an accepted fact within the various European languages. But that couldn't explain the similarities with Sanskrit. How could the Germanic speakers from the icy climes of Scandinavia borrow such a large number of words from the ancient residents of India? There had to be another explanation.

In 1786, Jones gave a lecture to the newly formed Asiatic Society, which he had helped to establish. In the lecture he highlighted the close similarities between three apparently dead languages: ancient Greek, Latin, and Sanskrit. He announced that Sanskrit derived from the same source as Greek and Latin. He also believed that the three were related to Gothic, a Germanic language spoken in Europe at a time before the Anglo Saxons had found their way to Britain. He also concluded that Sanskrit, Latin, and Greek were all related to Persian as well. The following quote from Jones's Lecture is often cited as the first formal statement that there was an ancient Indo-European language:

*The Sanskrit language, whatever be its antiquity, is of a wonderful structure. More perfect than the Greek. More copious than the Latin and more exquisitely refined than*

*either, yet bearing to both of them a stronger affinity, both in the roots of the verbs and in the forms of grammar than could possibly have been produced by accident. So strong, indeed, that no philology could examine them all three, without believing them to have sprung from some common source which perhaps no longer exists.*

Years of subsequent research has confirmed that Jones was correct in all of those assertions. Now, to be completely fair, I should note at this point that there were others who were reaching the same conclusions as William Jones around the same time. In fact, about 20 years earlier, a French Jesuit named Gaston-Laurent Coeurdoux had identified similarities between Sanskrit, Latin, Greek, German, and Russian. But it is Jones who is most often credited for this discovery.

This discovery sparked a dramatic increase in the study of ancient languages throughout Europe. Connections between ancient Sanskrit and European languages may have been noticed before Jones, but it was only after Jones that people began to take the connections seriously and began to study them in detail. In fact, the entire discipline of linguistics was developed in the 1800s, in large part to determine which languages belong to the Indo-European family and which do not.

So, in case you're curious, what type of similarities was Jones seeing as he compared these various languages? Let me give you an example. You will recall that earlier I mentioned that English has the word *father* and Latin has the word *pater*, and both words came from the same original source word. The Greek version of the word is very similar to Latin and is also pronounced *patera*. The Sanskrit version of the word is *pitar*. In Spanish, it is *padre*. You can

start to see how linguists realized that the /p/ sound shifted to an /f/ sound in the Germanic languages, but let's hold off on that for now.

In addition to having a very similar word for *father* in all of these languages, they also shared a common word for God. In Indo-European the word is *déiwo*. Sanskrit's word *devá* is derived from that Indo-European word. The Old Irish word is *día*. The Latin word is *deus*, from which English derives *divine* and *divinity*, and the Spanish word is *diós*.

The word form “mother” shares a similar pattern:

- Indo-European: *mātér*
- Sanskrit: *mātār*
- Latin: *mater*
- Old Irish: *māthair*
- Russian: *mati*
- German: *mutter*
- French: *mère*
- Spanish: *mader*

So let's go back to William Jones for a minute. He had announced an original source language, but pretty much left it at that. He identified the languages which he thought were part of this larger family of languages. It would be left to others to sort out how the languages fit together and which ones evolved from the others. In other words, further research would provide us with a family tree of languages which we still use today.

So far, I have referred to the language as the Indo-European language—technically, the Proto-Indo-European language. Just to be clear in that regard, Indo-European is sort of the family name or surname of the languages. Proto-Indo-European is the technical name for the original

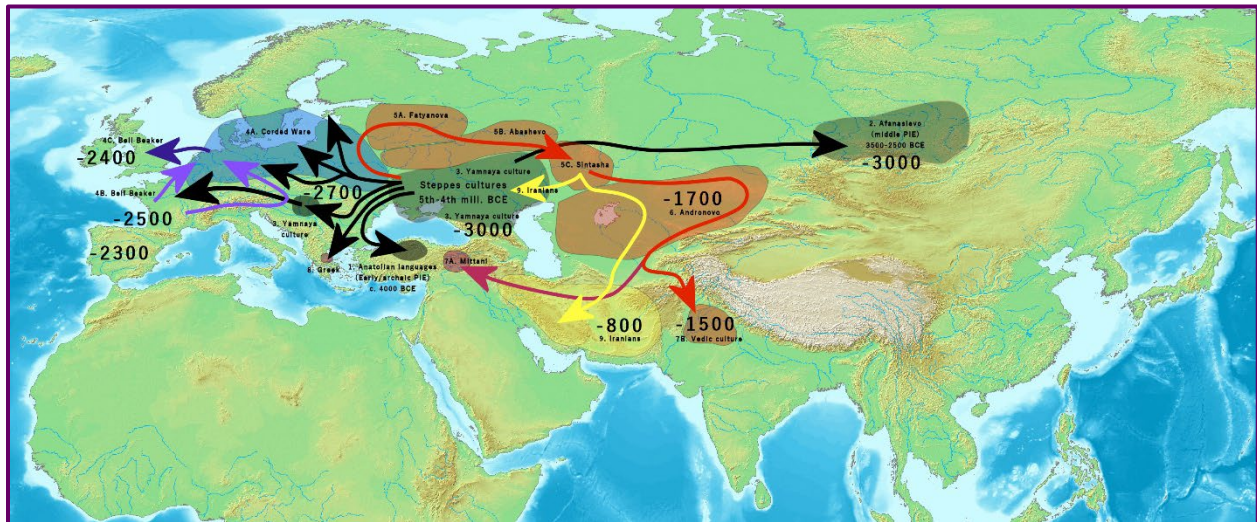


language. If you imagine a family tree which begins with an ancestor named John Smith, all of the members of the family might be called Smith. But the original ancestor was John Smith. The same thing applies for the Indo-European languages. All of the languages within the family are called Indo-European languages, but the full name, the original source language, is Proto-Indo-European, meaning the first Indo European language. The basis of the name Indo-European should be self-explanatory at this point. The language family is located throughout Europe and all the way into India. But the term Indo-European was introduced later. Jones developed his own term for the language. He noticed within Sanskrit and Persian literature that there were persons who spoke those languages and called themselves Aryans. The term Aryan meant noble in Sanskrit. So, since these were the earliest documented speakers of this family of languages, he called the original speakers the Aryans, and the language became known as the Aryan language. I bring this to your attention because the term is still used in some older literature. I think you can probably see why the term Indo-European is preferred today instead of Aryan. At the time Jones coined the term, it was not meant to refer to blonde haired, blue-eyed northern Europeans. In fact, it was presumed that these Aryans, whoever they were, lived in Asia in the vicinity of Ancient Persia, which is modern day Iran. In fact, the name Iran comes from the Persian word meaning “home of the Aryans.”

It was much later that this term came to be used by European Nazis and other racists to refer to a supposedly “ideal race” of Europeans. But until then, it was a more or less innocent term used to describe a specific ancient linguistic group of central Asia. During the 20<sup>th</sup> century, when the term came to be used as a racist term, it was largely discarded by linguists and Indo-European became the standard term which is still used today.

# The Migration of Indo-Europeans

There are many theories of how and where these people spread out from their original homeland. The most accepted theory is known as the Kurgan theory (or the Steppe theory). It postulates that the people of a Kurgan culture in the Pontic steppe north of the Black Sea were the most likely speakers of the Proto-Indo-European language (PIE). The term is derived from the Russian kurgan (кургán), meaning tumulus or burial mound. This Kurgan theory states that Indo-Europeans migrated out from their homeland and settled new territories including, as we've seen, Persia, northern India, and all of Europe. [Here is a video](#) that gives a good overview of how the Indo-Europeans spread and how their languages splintered into today's language families. Figure 3.6 shows dates and a possible migration pattern.



*Figure 3.6: Migration Patterns of Indo-Europeans*

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There are two factors that might have helped the Indo-Europeans as they spread through Europe (the focus of our study in the history of English). First, they seem to have established an early use of domesticated horses for travel and goods transport via wagon. This would have greatly aided in their expansion. In addition, there is speculation by Cochran and Harpending

(2009) that certain pre-historic groups developed the ability to digest milk past puberty. Most modern-day Europeans can digest milk, so there is speculation that the Indo-Europeans were one of these lactose tolerant groups. If so, they had nutritional advantage over the previous inhabitants of Europe. It allowed them to grow stronger, taller, and survive famine periods more easily. This may or may not have been the case; however, one thing remains clear. The Indo-Europeans were able to supplant other groups in Europe (be it by conquest, sheer numbers, domesticated horses, or nutritional advantages), and this forever changed the linguistic landscape of Europe and ultimately gave rise to English.

## Grimm's Law

I've mentioned several times that certain consonant shifts occurred in the Germanic family of languages. This began to distinguish the Germanic languages from other Indo-European languages. This is an important concept that should be covered in a text on the history of English language. This shifting of certain consonants in the Germanic languages became known as Grimm's law, named after the philologist and folklorist Jacob Grimm. He did not discover this shift, but he was the first to describe it in detail.



*Figure 3.7: Image of Jacob Grimm*

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What Grimm noticed is that there was a pattern of consistent change in consonants. It happened in three phases and over several centuries. These phases were as follows:

1. The voiceless stops in Indo-European changed to voiceless stops in Germanic languages.
2. The voiced stops in Indo-European changed to voiceless stops in Germanic languages.
3. The voiced aspirated stops change to voiced stops in Germanic languages.

Table 3.1 gives an overview of these changes and examples from Latin (a non-German language) and PDE (a Germanic language).

*Table 3.1 Sound Changes from Indo-European to Germanic Languages*

Sound Change	Latin Word	Germanic
/p/ > /f/	<i>p</i> edis, <i>p</i> ater	English <i>f</i> oot, <i>f</i> ather
/t/ > /θ/	<i>t</i> res, <i>t</i> onare	English <i>th</i> ree, <i>th</i> under
/k/ > /h/	<i>c</i> anis, <i>c</i> ornu	English <i>h</i> ound, <i>h</i> orn
/b/ > /p/	<i>turba</i> , “crowd”	Old English <i>thorp</i> , “village”
/d/ > /t/	<i>d</i> entis, <i>d</i> uo	English <i>t</i> ooth, <i>t</i> wo
/g/ > /k/	<i>g</i> ranum, <i>a</i> ger	English <i>c</i> orn, <i>a</i> cre
/b <sup>h</sup> / > /b/	<i>f</i> rater, <i>f</i> rango	English <i>b</i> rother, <i>b</i> reak
/d <sup>h</sup> / > /d/	<i>f</i> oris, <i>f</i> ingo	English <i>d</i> oor, <i>d</i> ough
/g <sup>h</sup> / > /h/	<i>h</i> ortus, <i>h</i> ostis	English <i>g</i> arden, <i>g</i> uest

It is important to understand these changes happened over centuries. Speakers of the early Germanic languages would most likely not have noticed. Also, this was a chain shift as linguists like to say. There was a sort of domino effect. In addition, you may notice that the /t/ became /θ/, but in time, the /t/ was re-introduced after coming from the /d/ sound.

There are two reasons to discuss Grimm's law. First, it is a well-known principle in the history of English. Second, it illustrates that language change happens in a principled manner. But the exact origins and reasons remain somewhat mysterious.

## Conclusion

The basic premise of this chapter is that English had its origin in Indo-European. Through a series of sound changes and grammatical changes, the Indo-European language splintered, first into dialects and then into languages. While William Jones did not "discover" this, he was the first to promulgate this far and wide.

## Key Concepts from Chapter 3:

- The Indo-Europeans originated from the Eurasian Steppes.
- Most European languages descended from the Indo-European languages.
- Sir William Jones “discovered” a common source of the Indo-European language families.
- The Germanic family of languages began to differentiate from other Indo-European languages. A Germanic language eventually supplanted other languages in England in the 5<sup>th</sup> century AD.

## Key Terms from Chapter 3:

- **Indo-Europeans**
- **Proto-Indo-European**
- **Eurasian Steppes**
- **Cognates**
- **Language Families**
- **Grimm's Law**

## Materials for Chapter 3 adapted from the following:

Stroud, Kevin. [\*The History of English Podcast\*](#). (Material was used and adapted with permission.)

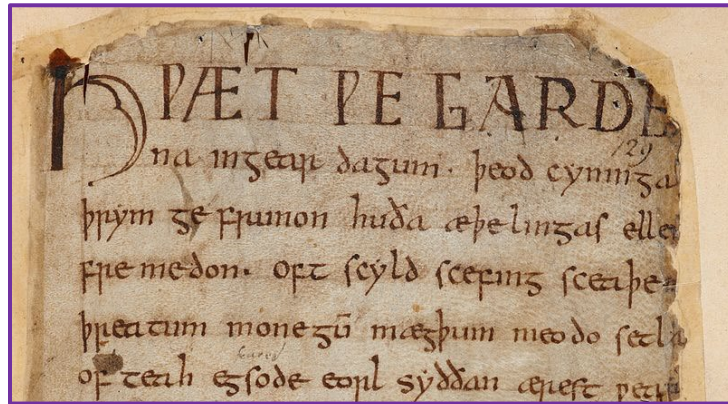
## Works Cited for Chapter 3:

Cochran, G. & Harending, H. (2009). *The 10,000 Year Explosion: How Civilization Accelerated Human Evolution*. New York: Basic Books.



# Chapter 4

## Old English – Outer History



*Figure 4.1: Opening Lines of Beowulf*

Source: British Library

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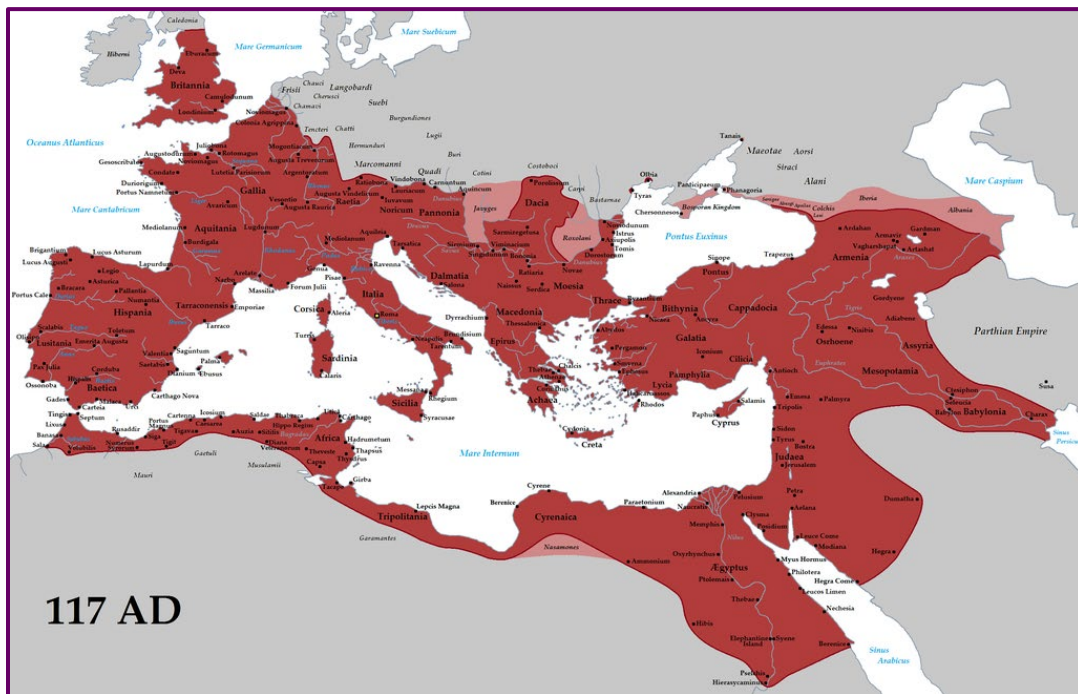
## The Early Inhabitants of Britain

Chapter three described in broad strokes the Indo-European language and its spread throughout Europe. We are jumping ahead from the early spread of this ancient language to a time when the linguistic descendants of the Indo-European language family had established themselves firmly around Europe. In the centuries before the traditional starting date of English (449 AD), there were established language families in Europe. Latin was the language of southern Europe, Germanic languages were dominant in northern Europe, Slavic languages were dominant in the eastern part of Europe, and Celtic languages were dominant in Gaul (modern-day France, Luxembourg, and Belgium). Eventually, the Celtic language spread to modern-day Britain. Remember that all these languages have their origins in Indo-European. Of course, by this time these language families were mutually unintelligible.

What is significant is that Celtic languages were the languages of what would become England. However, a very significant event led to the decline of Celtic languages—the Roman invasion of England.

The Romans first entered Britain in 55 BC under Julius Caesar, although they did not begin a permanent occupation until 43 AD, when Emperor Claudius sent a much better prepared force to subjugate the fierce British Celts. Despite a series of uprisings by the natives (including that of Queen Boudicca, or Boadicea in 61 AD), Britain remained part of the Roman Empire for almost 400 years, and there was a substantial amount of interbreeding between the two peoples, though the Romans never succeeded in penetrating the mountainous regions of Wales and Scotland.

Despite some limitations, the reach of the Roman Empire was vast. Figure 4.2 shows the region of the world that was under Roman rule around the year 100 AD.

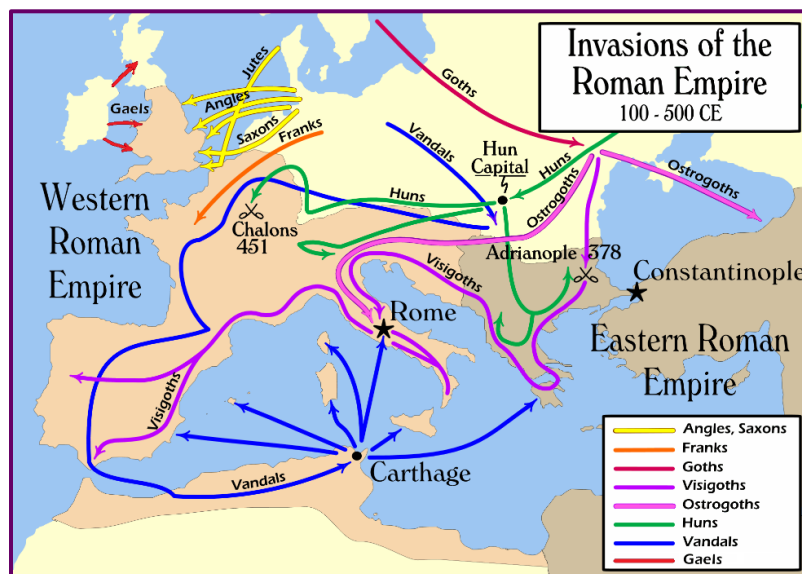


*Figure 4.2: The Roman Empire in 117 AD*

Source: Wikipedia  
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Although this first invasion had a profound effect on the culture, religion, geography, architecture and social behavior of Britain, the linguistic legacy of the Romans' time in Britain was, like that of the Celts, surprisingly limited. This legacy takes the form of less than 200 "loanwords" coined by Roman merchants and soldiers, such as *win* ("wine"), *butere* ("butter"), *caese* ("cheese"), *piper* ("pepper"), *candel* ("candle"), *cetel* ("kettle"), *disc* ("dish"), *cycene* ("kitchen"), *ancor* ("anchor"), *belt* ("belt"), *sacc* ("sack"), *catte* ("cat"), *plante* ("plant"), *rosa* ("rose"), *cest* ("chest"), *pund* ("pound"), *munt* ("mountain"), *straet* ("street"), *wic* ("village"), *mil* ("mile"), *port* ("harbour"), *weall* ("wall"), etc. However, Latin would, at a later time, with the coming of Christianity, the Norman invasion, literacy, and the English Renaissance come to have a substantial influence on the language.

Latin did not replace the Celtic language in Britain as it had done in Gaul. The use of Latin by native Britons during the period of Roman rule was probably confined to members of the upper classes and the inhabitants of the cities and towns. As the centuries progressed, Rome came under attack by various groups. See Figure 4.3.



**Figure 4.3: Invasion of the Roman Empire**

Source: Wikimedia Commons

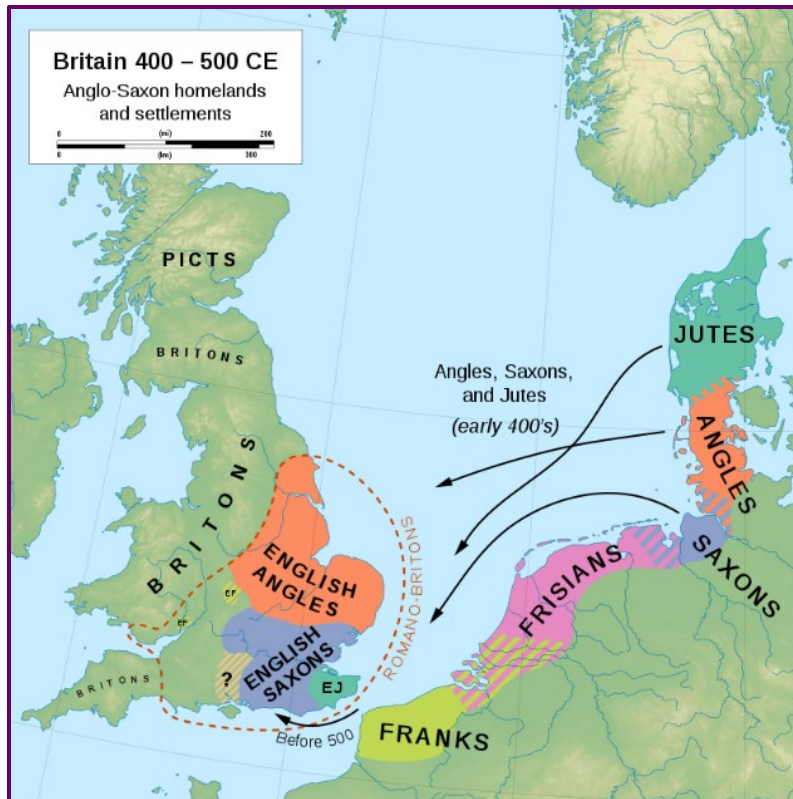
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The Romans, under attack at home from Visigoths, Ostrogoths, and Vandals, abandoned Britain to the Celts in 410 AD, completing their withdrawal by 436 AD. Within a remarkably short time after this withdrawal, the Roman influence on Britain, in language as in many other walks of life, was all but lost, as Britain settled into the so-called Dark Ages.

More important than the Celts and the Romans for the development of the English language, though, was the succession of invasions from continental Europe after the Roman withdrawal. No longer protected by the Roman military against the constant threat from the Picts and Scots of the North, the Celts felt themselves increasingly vulnerable to attack. Around 430 AD, the ambitious Celtic warlord Vortigern invited the Jutish brothers Hengest and Horsa (from Jutland in modern-day Denmark), to settle on the east coast of Britain to form a bulwark against sea raids by the Picts, in return for which they were “allowed” to settle in the southern areas of Kent, Hampshire, and the Isle of Wight.

But the Jutes were not the only newcomers to Britain during this period. Other Germanic tribes soon began to make the short journey across the North Sea. The Angles (from a region called Angeln, the spur of land which connects modern Denmark with Germany) gradually began to settle in increasing numbers on the east coast of Britain, particularly in the north and East Anglia. The Frisian people, from the marshes and islands of northern Holland and western Germany, also began to encroach on the British mainland from about 450 AD onwards. Still later, from the 470s, the war-like Saxons (from the Lower Saxony area of north-western Germany) made an increasing number of incursions into the southern part of the British mainland. Over time, these Germanic tribes began to establish permanent bases and to gradually displace the native Celts. See Figure 4.4 for a map of the areas of the Germanic invasion of Britain.



*Figure 4.4: Invasion of Britain by Germanic Groups*

Source: Wikipedia

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All these peoples spoke variations of a West Germanic tongue, similar to modern Frisian, variations that were different but probably close enough to be mutually intelligible. The local dialect in Angeln is, at times, even today recognizably similar to English, and it has even more in common with the English of 1,000 years ago. Modern Frisian, especially spoken, bears an eerie resemblance to English, as can be seen by some of the Frisian words which were incorporated into English, like *miel* (“meal”), *laam* (“lamb”), *goes* (“goose”), *bûter* (“butter”), *tsiis* (“cheese”), *see* (“sea”), *boat* (“boat”), *stoarm* (“storm”), *rein* (“rain”), *snie* (“snow”), *frieze* (“freeze”), *froast* (“frost”), *mist* (“mist”), *sliepe* (“sleep”), *blau* (“blue”), *trije* (“three”), *ffour* (“four”), etc.

The influx of Germanic people was more of a gradual encroachment over several generations than an invasion proper, but these tribes gradually colonized most of the island, with

the exception of the more remote areas, which remained strongholds of the original Celtic people of Britain. Originally sea-farers, they began to settle down as farmers, exploiting the rich English farmland. The rather primitive newcomers were, if anything, less cultured and civilized than the local Celts, who had held onto at least some parts of Roman culture. No love was lost between the two peoples, and there was little integration between them—the Celts referred to the European invaders as “barbarians” (as they had previously been labelled themselves)—the invaders referred to the Celts as *weales* (slaves or foreigners), the origin of the name Wales.

Despite continued resistance (the legends and folklore of King Arthur and the Knights of the Round Table date from this time), the Celts were pushed further and further back by the invaders into the wilds of Scotland, Wales, Cornwall and Ireland, although some chose to flee to the Brittany region of northern France (where they maintained a thriving culture for several centuries) and even further into mainland Europe. The Celtic language survives today only in the Gaelic languages of Scotland and Ireland, the Welsh of Wales, and the Breton language of Brittany (the last native speaker of the Cornish language died in 1777, and the last native speaker of Manx, a Celtic language spoken on the tiny Isle of Man, died as recently as the 1960s, and these are now dead languages).

The Germanic tribes settled in seven smaller kingdoms, known as the Heptarchy: the Saxons in Essex, Wessex and Sussex, the Angles in East Anglia, Mercia and Northumbria, and the Jutes in Kent. See *Figure 4.5*.





*Figure 4.5: Seven Kingdoms of Germanic Tribes in Britain*

Source: Wikipedia

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Evidence of the extent of their settlement can be found in the number of place names throughout England ending with the Anglo-Saxon *-ing*, meaning “people of” (e.g. Worthing, Reading, Hastings), *-ton*, meaning “enclosure” or “village” (e.g. Taunton, Burton, Luton), *-ford*, meaning a “river crossing” (e.g. Ashford, Bradford, Watford), *-ham*, meaning “farm” (e.g. Nottingham, Birmingham, Grantham), and *-stead*, meaning “a site” (e.g. Hampstead).

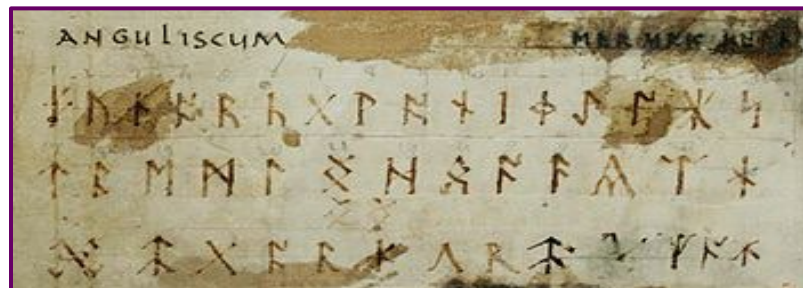
Although the different kingdoms waxed and waned in their power and influence over time, it was the war-like and pagan Saxons that gradually became the dominant group. The new Anglo-Saxon nation, once known in antiquity as Albion and then Britannia under the Romans, nevertheless became known as Anglaland or Englaland (the Land of the Angles), later shortened to England, and its emerging language as Englisc (now referred to as Old English or Anglo-

Saxon, or sometimes Anglo-Frisian). It is impossible to say just when English became a separate language rather than just a German dialect, although it seems that the language began to develop its own distinctive features in isolation from the continental Germanic languages by around 600 AD. Over time, four major dialects of Old English gradually emerged: Northumbrian in the north of England, Mercian in the midlands, West Saxon in the south and west, and Kentish in the southeast.

## The Coming of Christianity and Literacy

Although many of the Romano-Celts in the north of England had already been Christianized, St. Augustine and his 40 missionaries from Rome brought Christianity to the pagan Anglo-Saxons of the rest of England in 597 AD. After the conversion of the influential King Ethelbert of Kent, it spread rapidly through the land, carrying literacy and European culture in its wake. Augustine was made Archbishop of Canterbury in 601 AD and several great monasteries and centers of learning were established, particularly in Northumbria (e.g. Jarrow, Lindisfarne).

The Celts and the early Anglo-Saxons used an alphabet of runes, angular characters originally developed for scratching onto wood or stone. *Figure 4.6* shows examples of Anglo-Saxon runic writing.



*Figure 4.6: Example of Runic Symbols from 9<sup>th</sup> Century*

Source: Wikipedia  
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The first known written English sentence, which reads, “This she-wolf is a reward to my kinsman,” is an Anglo-Saxon runic inscription on a gold medallion found in Suffolk, and has been dated to about 450–480 AD. *Figure 4.7* shows an image of this sentence on the coin.



**Figure 4.7: Undley Bracteate**  
Source: British Museum  
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Link: [here](#)

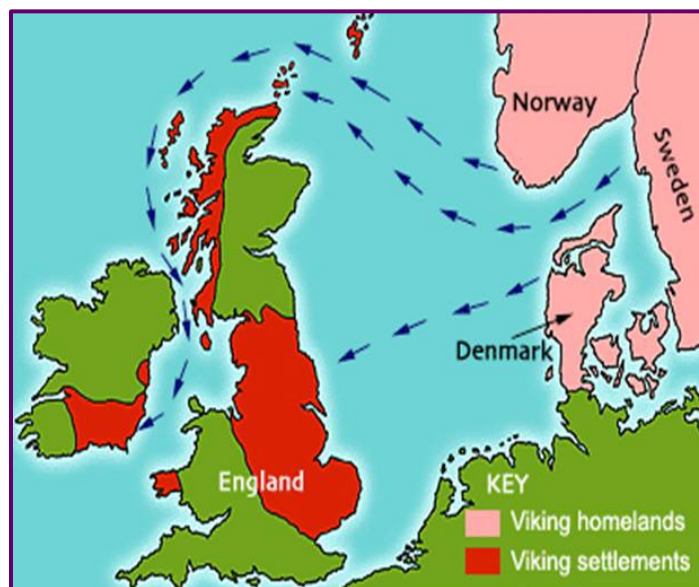
The early Christian missionaries introduced the more rounded Roman alphabet (much as we use today), which was easier to read and more suited for writing on vellum or parchment. The Anglo-Saxons quite rapidly adopted the new Roman alphabet, but with the addition of letters such as wynn (“wynn”), þ (“thorn”), ð (“edh” or “eth”) and ȝ (“yogh”) from the old runic alphabet for certain sounds not used in Latin. Wynn later became “uu” and, still later, “w;” þ and ð were used more or less interchangeably to represent the sounds now spelled with “th;” and ȝ was used for “y,” “j,” or “g” sounds. In addition, the diphthong æ (“ash”) was also used; “v” was usually written with an “f;” and the letters “q,” “x,” and “z” were rarely used at all.

The Latin language the missionaries brought was still only used by the educated ruling classes and Church functionaries, and Latin was only a minor influence on the English language at this time, being largely restricted to the naming of Church dignitaries and ceremonies (*priest, vicar, altar, mass, church, bishop, pope, nun, angel, verse, baptism, monk, eucharist, candle, temple* and *presbyter* came into the language this way). However, other more domestic words (such as *fork, spade, chest, spider, school, tower, plant, rose, lily, circle, paper, sock, mat, cook,* etc.) also came into English from Latin during this time, albeit substantially altered and adapted for the Anglo-Saxon ear and tongue. More ecclesiastical Latin loanwords continued to be introduced, even as late as the 11<sup>th</sup> century, including *chorus, cleric, creed, cross, demon, disciple, hymn, paradise, prior, sabbath,* etc.

Old English literature flowered remarkably quickly after Augustine's arrival. This was especially notable in the north-eastern kingdom of Northumbria, which provided England with its first great poet (Caedmon in the 7<sup>th</sup> century), its first great historian (the Venerable Bede in the 7<sup>th</sup>–8<sup>th</sup> century) and its first great scholar (Alcuin of York in the 8<sup>th</sup> century), although the latter two wrote mainly in Latin. The oldest surviving text of Old English literature is usually considered to be "Cædmon's Hymn," composed between 658 and 680. Northumbrian culture and language dominated England in the 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> centuries, until the coming of the Vikings, after which only Wessex, under Alfred the Great, remained as an independent kingdom. By the 10<sup>th</sup> century, the West Saxon dialect had become the dominant, and effectively the official, language of Britain (sometimes referred to as the koiné, or common dialect). The different dialects often had their own preferred spellings as well as distinctive vocabulary (e.g. the word *evil* was spelled *efel* in the south-east, and *yfel* elsewhere; *land* would be *land* in West Saxon and Kentish, but *lond* further north.)

# The Vikings

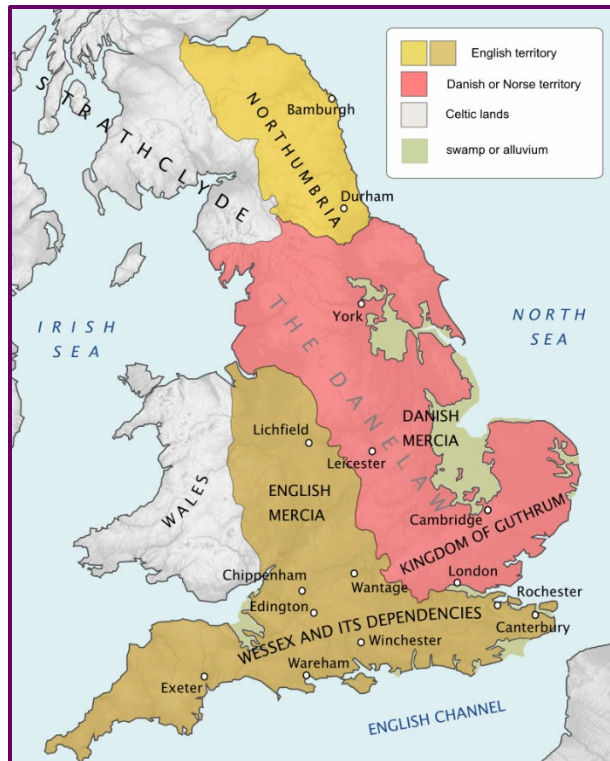
By the late 8<sup>th</sup> century, the Vikings (or Norsemen) began to make sporadic raids on the east coast of Britain. They came from Denmark, Norway, and Sweden, although it was the Danes who came with the greatest force. Notorious for their ferocity, ruthlessness, and callousness, the Vikings pillaged and plundered the towns and monasteries of northern England. In 793, they sacked and looted the wealthy monastery at Lindisfarne in Northumbria before turning their attentions further south. By about 850, the raiders had started to over-winter in southern England and, in 865, there followed a full-scale invasion and ongoing battles for the possession of the country.



*Figure 4.8: Map of Viking Invasion*

Source: John Mcklethwait

Viking expansion was finally checked by Alfred the Great and, in 878, a treaty between the Anglo-Saxons and the Vikings established the Danelaw, splitting the country along a line roughly from London to Chester, giving the Norsemen control over the north and east and the Anglo-Saxons the south and west.



**Figure 4.9: Danelaw**  
 Source: Wikipedia  
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 Link: [here](#)

Although the Danelaw lasted less than a century, its influence can be seen today in the number of Norse place names in northern England (over 1,500), including many place names ending in *-by*, *-gate*, *-stoke*, *-kirk*, *-thorpe*, *-thwaite*, *-toft* and other suffixes (e.g. Whitby, Grimsby, Ormskirk, Scunthorpe, Stoke Newington, Huthwaite, Lowestoft, etc.), as well as the *-son* ending on family names (e.g. Johnson, Harrison, Gibson, Stevenson, etc.) as opposed to the Anglo-Saxon equivalent *-ing* (e.g. Manning, Harding, etc).

The Vikings spoke Old Norse, an early North Germanic language not that dissimilar to Anglo-Saxon and roughly similar to modern Icelandic (the word viking actually means “a pirate raid” in Old Norse). Accents and pronunciations in northern England even today are heavily influenced by Old Norse, to the extent that they are largely intelligible in Iceland.

Over time, Old Norse was gradually merged into the English language, and many Scandinavian terms were introduced. In fact, only around 150 Norse words appear in Old English manuscripts of the period, but many more became assimilated into the language and gradually began to appear in texts over the next few centuries. In all, up to 1,000 Norse words were permanently added to the English lexicon, among them, some of the most common and fundamental in the language, including *skull, skin, leg, neck, freckle, sister, husband, fellow, wing, bull, score, seat, root, bloom, bag, gap, knife, dirt, kid, link, gate, sky, egg, cake, skirt, band, bank, birth, scrap, skill, thrift, window, gasp, gap, law, anger, trust, silver, clasp, call, crawl, dazzle, scream, screech, race, lift, get, give, are, take, mistake, rid, seem, want, thrust, hit, guess, kick, kill, rake, raise, smile, hug, call, cast, clip, die, flat, meek, rotten, tight, odd, rugged, ugly, ill, sly, wrong, loose, happy, awkward, weak, worse, low, both, same, together, again, until.*

Old Norse often provided direct alternatives or synonyms for Anglo-Saxon words, both of which have been carried on (e.g. Anglo-Saxon *craft* and Norse *skill, wish, and want, dike and ditch, sick, and ill, whole and hale, raise and rear, wrath and anger, hide and skin*). Unusually for language development, English also adopted some Norse grammatical forms, such as the pronouns *they, them, and their*, although these words did not enter the dialects of London and southern England until as late as the 15<sup>th</sup> century. Under the influence of the Danes, Anglo-Saxon word endings and inflections started to fall away during the time of the Danelaw, and prepositions like *to, with, and by* became more important to make meanings clear, although many inflections continued into Middle English, particularly in the south and west (the areas furthest from Viking influence).

By the time Alfred the Great came to the throne in 871, most of the great monasteries of Northumbria and Mercia lay in ruins and only Wessex remained as an independent kingdom. But Alfred, from his capital town of Winchester, set about rebuilding and fostering the revival of learning, law, and religion. Crucially, he believed in educating the people in the vernacular English language, not Latin, and he himself made several translations of important works into English, include Bede's *Ecclesiastical History of the English People*. He also began the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, which recounted the history of England from the time of Caesar's invasion, and continued until 1154.

He is revered by many as having single-handedly saved English from the destruction of the Vikings, and by the time of his death in 899, he had raised the prestige and scope of English to a level higher than that of any other vernacular language in Europe. The West Saxon dialect of Wessex became the standard English of the day (although the other dialects continued nonetheless), and for this reason the great bulk of the surviving documents from the Anglo-Saxon period are written in the Wessex dialect.

The following paragraph from Aelfrich's 10<sup>th</sup> century "Homily on St. Gregory the Great" gives an idea of what Old English looked like (if not how it sounded):

*Eft he axode, hu ðære ðeode nama wære þe hi of comon. Him wæs geandwyrd, þæt hi Angle genemnode wæron. þa cwæð he, "Rihtlice hi sind Angle gehatene, for ðan ðe hi engla wlite habbað, and swilcum gedafenað þæt hi on heofonum engla geferan beon."*

A few words stand out immediately as being identical to their modern equivalents (*he*, *of*, *him*, *for*, and, *on*) and a few more may be reasonably guessed (*nama* became the modern *name*, *comon* became *come*, *wære* became *were*, *wæs* became *was*). But several more have survived in altered form, including *axode* ("asked"), *hu* ("how"), *rihtlice* ("rightly"), *engla* ("angels"),

*habbað* (“have”), *swilcum* (“such”), *heofonum* (“heaven”), and *beon* (“be”), and many more have disappeared completely from the language, including *eft* (“again”), *ðeode* (“people, nation”), *cwæð* (“said, spoke”), *gehatene* (“called, named”), *wlite* (“appearance, beauty”), and *geferan* (“companions”), as have special characters like þ (“thorn”) and ð (“edh” or “eth”), which served in Old English to represent the sounds now spelled with “th.”

## Old English Texts

About 400 Anglo-Saxon texts survive from this era, including many beautiful poems, telling tales of wild battles and heroic journeys. The oldest surviving text of Old English literature is “Cædmon's Hymn,” which was composed between 658 and 680, and the longest was the ongoing “Anglo-Saxon Chronicle.” But by far the best known is the long epic poem *Beowulf*.

*Beowulf* may have been written any time between the 8<sup>th</sup> and the early 11<sup>th</sup> century by an unknown author or authors, or, most likely, it was written in the 8<sup>th</sup> century and then revised in the 10<sup>th</sup> or 11<sup>th</sup> century. It was probably originally written in Northumbria, although the single manuscript that has come down to us (which dates from around 1000) contains a bewildering mix of Northumbrian, West Saxon, and Anglian dialects. The 3,182 lines of the work show that Old English was already a fully developed poetic language by this time, with a particular emphasis on alliteration and percussive effects. Even at this early stage (before the subsequent waves of lexical enrichment), the variety and depth of English vocabulary, as well as its predilection for synonyms and subtleties of meanings, is evident. For example, the poem uses 36 different words for hero, 20 for man, 12 for battle, and 11 for ship. There are also many interesting “kennings,” or allusive compound words, such as *hronrad* (literally, “whale-road,” meaning the sea), *banhus* (“bone-house,” meaning “body”) and *beadoleoma* (“battle-light,”



meaning “sword”). Of the 903 compound nouns in *Beowulf*, 578 are used once only, and 518 of them are known only from this one poem.

The outer history of Old English is largely one of the impact of cultures and languages colliding. It is inevitable that groups of people will feel that something has been lost when the old traditions give way to a new reality. This was the case with the Germanic tribes in England. During the latter part of the OE stage, there was a longing for the heroic past that had become mythologized in the mindset of the OE speakers. Stories of heroic deeds on the continent were clung to as their society changed due to clashes, migrations, and the introduction of Christianity.

*Beowulf* is a heroic poem that speaks of monsters, demons, and the deeds of great men. The sole surviving copy can be dated to around 1000 AD. *Beowulf* survives in a single manuscript that was burned around the edges in a fire in 1741—without it, the story of the hero of the Geats would have been lost to history. It is impossible to know how long the oral story was in circulation before it was written down.

It was written in OE, although the main actions of the story take place in what would be modern-day Denmark and Sweden (see *Figure 4.10*), but the vocabulary would have seemed a bit dated even to its first audience. Nonetheless, *Beowulf* offers a glimpse into society toward the end of the OE period. There is a fascinating blend of paganism and Christianity in the narrative as audiences listen to the deeds of the hero, Beowulf.





Figure 4.10: Beowulf Geography Map

Source: Wikimedia Commons

Artist: Wiglaf

Link: [Here](#)

Texts on the history of English often include works of literature to illustrate the social and cultural elements of the time. The following excerpt in the next section will give readers a taste of this great work. The language has been modernized because the OE would be unintelligible to the modern PDE reader.

The story can be divided into three major sections: the conflict with Grendel (a monster), which draws Beowulf to Hrothgar's kingdom at the beginning of the story; the fight with Grendel's (unnamed) mother; and Beowulf's battle with the dragon years later. As these divisions suggest, heroic behavior drives the action, but the story also asks the audience to stop and consider what heroic behavior really is, sometimes by highlighting the opposite. When Hrothgar lectures Beowulf after Grendel dies (a passage referred to as Hrothgar's sermon), he warns about the dangers of pride and seeking after fame, foreshadowing Beowulf's death. This warning is appropriate for a warrior culture, but it also works as a reference to Christian values. The tensions in the story between the Germanic heroic code and Christian values are worth

noting, since the clearly pagan story was written down after the Saxons had begun to convert. The story records the past glories of warrior culture within a (barely) Christian framework to justify preserving the story.

The first section is included below.

## Excerpts from *Beowulf*

Heyla! We have a story about the Spear-Danes, from the old days when they were big and their kings showed their strength. There was one king, Shield Schefing, who stole many mead-benches from other tribes and terrified their leaders. At first, he was found weak and wandering, but was taken in and then grew under the comfort of the skies. He consumed honors until each of the other surrounding tribes over the whale's road were forced to obey him and pay tribute. They say, that was a good king.

After all this (when he was old), Shield had a son—a young one in the courtyard—who had been sent by God as a comfort to the people because He had seen how they were distressed, left without a strong leader for a long while.

The Lord of life,  
ruler of glory, gifted worldly honour:  
Beowulf was famed with widespread renown,  
son of Scyld, in the northern lands.  
So should a young man do good things  
with costly gifts in his father's care,  
so that in old age loyal companions  
remain with him afterwards; when war comes  
they will support their prince. Through glorious deeds  
a man shall prosper among peoples everywhere.  
Scyld then set off at his due time,  
the mighty lord went into the Lord's keeping.

16

His beloved companions carried him then to the  
water's edge, as he himself had instructed  
when he still governed, that much-loved Scylding friend,  
their<sup>3</sup> beloved land-prince held power a long time.  
There in the port a ring-prowed ship stood anchored,  
icy and eager, a nobleman's vessel.  
They laid down their dear king,  
giver of rings, in the bosom of the ship,  
mighty by the mainmast. There were many treasures  
from faraway lands, such precious things loaded there.  
I have never heard of a finer ship  
fitted with the weapons and armor of war,  
swords and harnesses. In its embrace lay

31

a multitude of treasures, which were to go with him  
far off, into the dominion of the sea.  
No fewer gifts were provided for him there,  
the very wealth of a nation, than what was once done by those who,  
at his birth, set him adrift,  
alone over the waves as a child.  
Then they set for him a golden banner  
high over his head, let the water carry him,  
gave him to the powers of the sea. In them there was a sad spirit,  
a mournful mind. Men did not know,  
to tell the truth, hall counselors,  
heroes under the heavens, who accepted that load.

46

I

Then was in the stronghold Beow of the Scyldings  
a beloved king of the people for a long time,  
famous among the folk. His father had gone elsewhere,  
that honored one had left the earth. Until to Beow once more was born  
high Healfdene, who held while he lived,  
old and battle-fierce, the glorious Scyldings.  
From him four children all told  
arose into the world, from the leader of the host,  
Heorogar,<sup>5</sup> and Hrothgar, and Halga the Good.  
That woman, I heard, was the noble one's queen,  
the beloved bedfellow of the Battle-Scylfing.  
Then Hrothgar was granted success in war,  
glory in battle, so that his dear kinsmen  
served him eagerly, until the young warriors  
grew to be a mighty troop. He had the idea  
that he should bid men to build  
a house, a great mead-hall, which  
the children of men would hear of forever.  
And there within he would share everything,  
with young and old, such as God gave him,  
except for the common land and lives of men.  
Far and wide then I heard the work was declared  
to many peoples throughout this middle earth,  
To<sup>6</sup> adorn the place of the nation. It happened to him in time,  
Quickly among men, that it was all ready,  
The largest of hall-buildings. He gave it the name "Heort,"  
He who had power of his word far and wide.  
He did not neglect his vow, distributed rings,  
Treasure at the feast. The hall towered,  
High and wide-gabled. It awaited the flames of battle,  
The hated fire. It was not to be much longer,  
Until the sword-hatred, swearing with oaths,  
After murderous malice, would awaken.  
Then the powerful spirit miserably  
Endured the time, he who lived in the shadows,

61

76

When he each day heard merriment  
Loud in the hall. There was the music of the harp,  
The clear song of the scop. He spoke, who knew how  
To narrate from afar the origin of men,  
Said that the Almighty created the earth,  
The bright beauteous land, as the water surrounds it,  
Established victorious the sun and moon,  
The luminaries as light for land-dwellers,  
And adorned the fields of the earth  
With branches and leaves, He also created life  
For each of the kindreds that move about alive.  
So those courtiers lived happily,  
Blessedly, until one began  
To carry out crimes, an enemy in hell.  
That grim spirit was called Grendel,  
The infamous border-walker, who ruled the moors,  
The fens and strongholds. The land of the race of monsters  
That miserable man lived in for a time,  
after<sup>7</sup> the Creator had condemned him  
with Cain's kin. That killing He punished,  
the everlasting Lord, the slaying of Abel.  
There was no relish in that feud, for He banished him far away,  
the Maker for that sin, away from mankind.  
From him awoke each kind of onerous offspring:  
enemies and elves and evil spirits  
and likewise giants, who wrestled with God  
time and time again; He repaid them a reward for that.

106

## II

He advanced then as soon as night came, sought the  
high house, and how the Ring Danes  
had occupied it after their beer-banquet.  
He found within there a band of princes  
sleeping after the feast. Sorrow they did not know—  
the misfortune of men. The wretched wight,  
grim and greedy, was ready at once,  
fierce and furious, and from their rest he seized  
thirty thegns. From there he left,  
boasting of booty, to return home,  
sated by slaughter, to find his abode.  
It was at dawn, with daybreak,  
that Grendel's war-cunning became known to men.  
Then after feasting woe arose,  
a great cry in the morning. The renowned leader,  
the good prince of old, sat mournfully;  
the mighty one suffered, bore sorrow for his thegns,  
once they witnessed the track of that loathed one,  
of that cursed spirit. That strife was too strong,  
loathed and lengthy. It was not much later,  
only after a night, he acted again,

121

perpetrated greater murder-slaughter, and mourned not for it, 136  
 acts of feuding and crime; he was too fixated on them.  
 Then the man was easy to find who would elsewhere,  
 further away, seek his resting place,  
 a bed among the outer buildings, when it was shown to him,  
 truly told with a clear sign:  
 the hatred of the hall-thane; he kept further away  
 and more securely afterwards, whoever had escaped the fiend.  
 So he ruled and strove against justice,  
 one against all, until it stood abandoned,  
 that best of halls. The time was long:  
 For the space of twelve winters he endured anguish,  
 the friend of the Scyldings, every kind of woe,  
 endless sorrows. Therefore, it became visible  
 to the children of mankind, known and revealed  
 sadly in stories, that Grendel struggled 151  
 for a long time with Hrothgar, and carried forth his hate-violence,  
 his sins, and his enmity, for many half-years,  
 a perpetual strife. He wanted no friendship  
 with any men of the Danish host,  
 and wished neither to cease his deadly evil, nor settle for a fee;  
 nor did the wise advisers there have reason to expect  
 brilliant compensation from the hands of the slayer.  
 The hideous opponent, the dark death-shadow,  
 pursued both the aged and the young;  
 he lay in wait and ambushed them, and in perpetual night held  
 the misty moors. Men do not know  
 which way hell-demons glide in their goings.  
 Thus, the enemy of mankind, hideous and solitary,  
 often carried out his many crimes, 166  
 harsh<sup>11</sup> injuries. He dwelled in Heorot,  
 the richly ornamented hall in dark nights.  
 Not at all could he touch the gift-seat,  
 the precious thing because of God, nor did he know his purpose.  
 That was great misery for the lord of the Scyldings,  
 the mind's griefs. Often many a mighty man  
 sat in consultation; they heeded the advice,  
 what for strong-minded ones would be best  
 to do against the perilous horror.  
 Sometimes they vowed at heathen temples  
 reverence to idols, urged with words  
 that the soul-killer would grant them aid  
 against the people's threat. Such was their custom,  
 hope of the heathens. They remembered hell  
 in their minds, they did not know the Creator  
 the<sup>12</sup> Judge of deeds, nor did they know the Lord God. 181  
 Nor indeed did they understand how to praise Heaven's Protector,  
 the Ruler of Glory. Woe shall befall the one who must,  
 because of evil affliction, thrust their soul  
 into the fire's embraces, unable to hope for comfort

or any change. Well shall it be for the one who is able,  
after their death-day, to go to the Lord  
and seek the protection of the Father's embraces.

### III

Thus, on the sorrow of the age, the son of Healfdene  
brooded ceaselessly. The wise warrior was unable  
to set misery aside. The oppression was too severe;  
grievous and relentless, it had befallen the people;  
cruel, violent torment, the greatest of night terrors.  
News was heard in the homeland of Hygelac's warrior,  
a man respected among the Geats, of Grendel's actions.

He was mankind's strongest of might  
in those days of this life,

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noble and great. He asked to equip  
a good ship. He said he would seek  
the war king over the swan road,  
famous king, since he was in need of men.

Not at all did the wise noblemen blame him  
for the adventure, though he was dear to them,  
they urged the valiant one. They studied omens.

The good man had from the Geats  
chosen warriors, those the bravest  
he might find. One of the fifteen  
went to the ship, the man led the way,  
the sea-skilled man, to the shore.

210

A span of time passed. The ship was on the waves,  
The boat beneath the bluff. Noble ones, equipped,  
ascended the ship. Currents whirled,  
water against the sand. Warriors carried  
into the ship's hold shimmering treasures,  
emblazoned battle-gear. The men shoved off,  
men on their willed-for journey, in a well-bound boat.  
Then they left, over the whale-home, propelled by the wind—  
the frothy-necked boat looked most like a bird—  
even after the expected time of the following day had elapsed,  
the stem-twisted ship had travelled,  
so that those sailors saw land:

the gleaming sea-cliff, high promontory,  
expansive sea-ness. Then the sea voyage was over,  
the ocean ended whence, quickly,  
the people of the Weder-Geats stepped onto the strand;  
the<sup>16</sup> sea-wood was moored, the mail-shirts resounding,  
the battle-garb. They gave thanks to God  
that the wave-ways were easy for them.

226

Then the ward of the Scyldings saw them from the wall,  
he who must keep the ocean-cliffs,  
must bear bright spears over the deck,  
ready in his war-gear. Curiosity plagued him  
in his mind-thoughts who these men were.

Then he departed riding his horse to the shore,  
the thane of Hrothgar, brandishing mightily  
the strong wood in his hands, asking in formal terms,  
“Who are you all, armor-having warriors  
guarded in your corslets, who have thus come  
leading your steep ship over the watery lanes,  
to here across the seas?” He amid his select troop was  
at<sup>17</sup> the farthest point, held watch by the sea, so that no enemy with  
a sea-invading army might do harm in the land of the Danes. “Shield-  
bearers have not more openly dared to come, nor did you know that  
leave would be readily granted from those accomplished in battle,  
permission from kinsmen. I never saw a greater man in the world  
than is one of you, a fighter in war-gear; he is not merely a hall-  
retainer decked out with weapons unless his looks betray him, his  
unique appearance. Now I shall know your lineage, rather than you  
go farther from here as spies into the land of the Danes. Now you  
travellers from afar, you sea-journeymen, hear  
this<sup>1</sup> simple thought: that it is advisable to say quickly from where  
you came.”

#### IV

That noblest of men, the leader of the company, answered him,  
unlocking his word-hoard: “We are from the nation of the Geatish  
people, and Hygelac’s hearth-companions. My father, a great war-  
rior, was well known among the people. He was called Ecgtheow. He  
saw many winters before he departed on his journey from this world.  
He was well-regarded by the wise throughout the whole wide world.  
We come in good faith to your lord, the son of Healfdene, the protector  
of your people. Let your counsel be true! We have a great message to  
declare to him,  
to the lord of the Danes. Nor shall there be  
anything secret, I expect: you know, if it is  
truly as we have heard tell,  
that an enemy of some sort among the Scyldings,  
a secret persecutor in the dark nights,  
manifests terror and awful affliction,  
humiliation and slaughter. I can give Hrothgar  
this counsel from my generous mind,  
how he, wise and good, may overcome the enemy—  
if a reversal of fortune should ever come to him,  
a remedy of these afflictions come again,  
and the seethings of his sorrow become cooler,  
or always afterward endure a time of tribulation,  
a great distress while the best of houses  
remains in its high place.”  
The guard spoke from where he sat on horseback,  
the fearless officer. “A keen shield-warrior,  
he who considers well, must know  
the distinction between both words and deeds.  
I hear that this host is friendly

to the king of the Scyldings. Go forth bearing  
your weapons and gear; I will guide you.  
Likewise I will command my young followers  
to guard your ship with honor against all enemies,  
this newly-tarred vessel on the sand,  
until the twist-prowed wood carries  
back over the ocean currents to the Weder borders  
every beloved man among these doing good,  
who is fated to survive the battle-rush whole.”  
They<sup>21</sup> went to leave then. The ship stayed in place, 301  
rested in the tideland, the wide-bosomed vessel  
secured at anchor. Boar effigies,  
gold-touched, gleamed above cheekguards—  
a decorated, fire-hard thing to keep watch over life.  
War-hearted ones clattered, fell in together,  
the men hurried on till they caught sight of it  
fully timbered, fitted out richly, trimmed with gold:  
that hall, the most famous to land-dwellers  
under the heavens, in which the mighty one abode.  
Its brightness shone on many lands.  
The fierce fighter pointed them to the splendid  
home of the proud so they could march  
right to it. One among warriors,  
he turned his horse, spoke a word behind him: 316  
“It is time for me to depart. May the all-ruling Father keep you safe  
on your journeys through his kindness. I will go to the sea to keep  
watch against a hostile troop.”

## V

The street was stone-paved; the path guided the warriors together.  
The hard, hand-linked battle-byrnie shone, the bright iron-ring of  
the armor resounded, when they first set out for the hall in their awe-  
inspiring armor. The sea-weary men set down their wide shields,  
those exceptionally hard rounds, against the wall of the building; they  
bent down onto the bench—the byrnies, the warriors’ war-gear, rang;  
the spears stood, the gear of the sea-men gathered together, an ash-  
grove topped with gray; the armed troop was 331  
honored<sup>23</sup> in its weapons. Then the bold warrior  
asked those combatants about their own warriors:  
“Where do you come from bearing gilt shields,  
grey hauberks, and grim helmets,  
that band of battle-shafts? I am Hrothgar’s  
herald and attendant. I have never seen a foreign host,  
so many men, looking more courageous.  
I expect that you, because of boldness, not banishment,  
and for strength of heart, sought Hrothgar.”  
To him then the valor-brave answered,  
proud prince of the Weders, pronounced these words,  
hardy under his helm: “We are Hygelac’s  
table-mates. Beowulf is my name.



I want to tell Halfdane's son,  
 that peerless prince, my errand,  
 to your prince, if he will allow us, 346  
 so that we may greet him, this good man."  
 Wulfgar spoke formally. He was the Wendels' prince,  
 his courage of spirit known to many,  
 at war and in wisdom: "I will ask  
 the Danes' friend, the Scyldings' ruler,  
 the giver of rings, as you have requested,  
 the celebrated prince, about your errand,  
 that you quickly know the answer  
 which that good man thinks to give me."  
 He turned quickly then to where Hrothgar sat,  
 old and very grey, with his troop of noblemen.  
 The braveheart went so that he stood by the shoulder  
 of the Danes' ruler. He knew the custom of warriors.  
 Wulfgar spoke properly to his good lord:  
 "The Geatish people are led here, 361  
 Come from afar over an expanse of sea.  
 Warriors call the chief one  
 Beowulf. They are requesting,  
 My king, that they might  
 Exchange words with you. Do not refuse them  
 Your answers, gracious Hrothgar.  
 In war-equipment, they appear worthy  
 Of praise from warriors; indeed, the chief  
 Who lead the warriors hither is powerful."

## VI

Hrothgar, protector of the Scyldings, spoke:  
 "I knew him as a boy;  
 His late father was called Ecgtheow;  
 Hrethel of the Geats gave him his only daughter  
 As a wife; now his son,  
 The<sup>26</sup> brave one, has come here to seek a loyal lord. 376  
 From Geatland far, whence seamen sailed  
 Bearing gifts of thanks come tales of one  
 Whose hand-grip rivals that of thirty men,  
 A hero of battle-fame.  
 Holy God 381  
 For our honor has sent him to us,  
 The West-Danes, as I would hope,  
 Against Grendel's terror. For the good man's might  
 And great daring I shall bestow gifts.  
 Now make haste, call them inside  
 To look upon my band of kinsmen gathered together.  
 Tell them in words that they are welcome 388  
 To the people of the Danes." Wulfgar relayed the word:  
 "My lord bids me to tell you, the victory-lord,  
 leader of the East-Danes, that he knows of your nobility

and that you have sailed across the sea-wellings.  
 We welcome you here, spirited ones.  
 “Now you may come forth in your armor, 394  
 Wearing your war-helms, to witness Hrothgar.  
 However, you must leave your battle-shields,  
 Your weapons of wood behind while we discuss the matter.”  
 Then the Geatish ruler rose, surrounded by his loyal retinue,  
 A splendid troop of thanes.  
 Some bided there 399  
 To keep the battle-gear guarded as the brave one ordered.  
 Guided by the warrior together they hastened  
 Under Heorot’s roof. [The warrior strode]  
 Hardy under helm, ‘til he stood in the hall.  
 Beowulf spoke, in his shining byrnie,  
 His battle-net skillfully smithed:  
 “Be thou, Hrothgar, well. I am Hygelac’s 406  
 kinsman and young retainer. In my youth I have  
 undertaken many glorious things. This thing  
 with Grendel became apparent to me on my native soil.  
 Seafarers say that this hall stands,  
 the best of halls to every man,  
 idle and useless, since evening’s light  
 became hidden under the brightness of heaven.  
 Then persuaded me, mine people,  
 the best men, the wisest men, lord Hrothgar, that I you seek  
 because they knew the strength of my skill;  
 they themselves had observed, when I came from battle,  
 bloodstained from the enemy, where I bound five together,  
 destroyed a family of giants, and in the waves slew  
 water-monsters by night, endured dire distress, 421  
 avenged assaults on the Weders. They asked for that woe,  
 I crushed the hostile ones. And now with Grendel,  
 with that miserable wretch, I will by myself hold  
 a meeting with the giant. Now I ask you,  
 lord of the Bright-Danes, I would ask you,  
 shelter of the Shieldings, a single favor,  
 that you not refuse me, refuge of fighting men,  
 noble friend of the folk, now I have come thus from afar:  
 that I myself might, with this troop of my earls  
 and this hard company, cleanse Heorot.  
 I have also found out that the foe  
 in his recklessness disregards weapons.  
 I will therefore forego them, so that Hygelac,  
 my liege-lord, may be glad of heart,  
 scorn that I should bear sword or broad shield, 436  
 yellow-board to battle, but with my grip  
 I shall grapple with the fiend and fight for life,  
 enemy against enemy. Let him trust  
 in the Lord’s judgement, he whom death takes!  
 I expect that he desires, if he is allowed to have mastery

in that war-hall, to feed fearlessly  
on the Geatish people just as he often has done,  
the strength of the Hrethmen. Nor will you need  
to cover my head, but he will have me,  
stained with blood, if death takes me.  
He will bear my bloody corpse, think to taste it,  
to ruthlessly eat the solitary one,  
mark his moor-retreat with blood. You need not for a moment  
worry about the disposal of my body.  
To Higelac send, if battle takes me,  
My splendid armor, best of battle-shirts,  
My breast's defender, Hreðel's gift to me,  
The work of Weland. Fate cannot be stopped."

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## VII

Thus Hroðgar, lord of Scyldings, gave reply:  
"For fights, dear Beowulf, you sought us out—  
For favors came to me. Your father killed  
A man; with sword in hand he caused a feud:  
With Wilfingas he murdered Heapolaf.  
He feared the Weders' vengeance, wrath of kin,  
And fled from home, afraid to stay with them.  
He, seeking refuge, sought the South-Dane folk,  
The honored Scyldings, over rolling waves,  
When first I ruled the Danish folk in youth—  
A king with power over men and wealth,  
a<sup>35</sup> rich fortress of warriors. At that time Heorogar was dead, my  
elder brother was no longer alive, Healfdene's son. He was better than  
I am. Afterwards, I settled the feud with money. I sent old treasures  
to the Wylfings over the water's crest. He swore oaths to me. It grieves  
me in my heart to tell any man what humiliations, what sudden  
afflictions Grendel has caused in Heorot because of his hateful  
thoughts. My hall-troop, my band of warriors is lessened. Fate has  
swept them off into Grendel's terrible power. God may easily hinder  
the deeds of the wild ravager. Very often warriors vowed over the ale-  
cup, having drunk beer,  
that they wished to await in the beer-hall  
Grendel's attack with the terror of swords.  
Then this mead-hall, in the early morning  
the princely hall was gore-stained; when daylight shined  
all the benches were damp with blood,  
a sword-bloody hall. I had fewer faithful ones,  
dear warriors, when death took them away.  
Sit now at the feast and loosen your thoughts,  
your glory gained by swords, as your mind incites you."  
Then for the Geat men all together  
a bench was cleared in the beer-hall. There the strong-minded went to sit,  
bold in their strength. A thane observed his duty,  
he who bore in his hands an ornamented ale-cup,  
gave out clear sweet drink. A scop sang at times

466

481

clear-voiced<sup>37</sup> in Heorot. There was joy of heroes,  
a host of Danes and Geats, not few in number.

496

### VIII - IX

*For brevity's sake, I have omitted part of the text here. In the missing parts, Unferth, a Dane, questions Beowulf's ability because he did not win a swimming race against a companion. Unferth was jealous of Beowulf. Beowulf replies that he did not win the race because he battled and killed a sea monster during the race. Beowulf then questions Unferth's bravery and skill in battle. The action resumes with Hrothgar's queen talking with Beowulf and his men.*

Hrothgar's queen mindful of custom,  
gold-adorned, greeting the men in the hall,  
and that noble wife gave a cup  
first<sup>45</sup> to the Lord of the East Danes,  
bade him bliss at the beer-drinking,  
beloved of the folk. He eagerly enjoyed  
feast and mead-cup, victorious lord.  
Then she walked around, the woman of the Helmings,  
to the old and the young warriors, each at his bench,  
holding the cup, the ring-adorned queen coming finally  
to Beowulf.

615

Worthy of mind the mead-bearer  
greeted the dear Geat, thanking God  
with wise words for the fact that she'd got her wish, that such an earl  
had emerged to offer relief from horrors.  
He took the full cup from Wealtheow  
and spoke then, battle-eager  
Beowulf, son of Ecgtheow, spoke:

"I had it in mind when I mounted the swell,  
sat in the sea-boat with soldiers in order, that—  
no matter what—the will I'd do  
of all you people, else perish in slaughter  
in the fiend's tight grasp. I'll follow through  
with a hero's valor, else here in the mead-hall  
the end of me I'll meet for sure."

631

These words the woman well did impress,  
this boast from the Geat. Gold-adorned she went,  
lady of the people, by her lord to sit.

Then again, as erstwhile, inside the hall  
noble speech reigned—the rabble lighthearted—  
the tumult of winners, until in the end  
the son of Healfdene sought to retire  
for night's repose. He knew that monster  
planned<sup>47</sup> an attack against that high hall.

646

After they could see the sun's light,  
until darkening night, shapes from the cover of shadow,  
came crawling over everything, dusky under the clouds.  
The troop all arose.

Then, one warrior greeted the other warrior, Hroðgar to Beowulf, hailed him with fortune,  
granted command of the wine-house and spoke these words: "Never, since I could raise  
hand and shield,  
have I before entrusted the glorious hall of the Danes, to any man except to you now.  
Keep now and protect the best of houses,  
remember fame, demonstrate mighty courage, watch against wrath.  
There will be no dearth of desire for you  
if you survive that courageous work... alive."

## X

Then Hrothgar departed with his troop of warriors, the protector 661  
of the Scyldings, out from the hall; the war-chief wished to seek  
Wealhtheow, the queen in bed. The King of Glory, so men learned, had  
appointed a hall-guard against Grendel; he held a special service to the  
lord of the Danes, kept watch against a giant. Indeed the man of the  
Geats firmly trusted his brave strength and the favor of the Lord. Then  
he removed his mail shirt and the helmet from his head, gave his  
decorated sword, the best of weapons, to an attendant and ordered  
him to guard his war-gear. Then the good man spoke a boast:  
"I do not claim for myself lesser war-skills, 676  
deeds of battle, than Grendel himself.  
Therefore I do not wish to kill him with a sword,  
to deprive him of life, though I am very well able to.  
He does not know finer skills, so as to be able to strike me,  
to cut my shield to pieces, though he be renowned  
for hostile deeds. But we two shall, in the night,  
refrain from swordplay, if he dares seek out  
battle without weapon. And thereafter, wise God,  
the holy Lord, shall grant glory  
to whoever's hand as seems proper to Him."  
He then bent down, the battle-brave one; the cushion met  
the warrior's face, and around him many  
brave sailors lay down on the hall-bed.  
Not one of them thought that he would ever return 690  
from there to his homeland, to the people or village  
where he was raised. But they had heard  
that far too many of the Danes in the wine hall  
had been seized before in death-slaughter.  
But the Lord granted to them a war-victory weaving,  
comfort and help to the Wederas men  
that they entirely overcome their enemy  
through the strength of one by his self-same might.  
Truly it is known that mighty God  
has forever ruled mankind. In blackest night he came,  
the shadow-walker moved. The archers slept—  
those that must hold the horned-house—  
all but one. That was known to men,  
that if God did not wish it, the battle-demon could not heave them 705  
down into the shadows, but the fierce, wakeful foe, his heart spurred,  
awaited the result of battle.

## XI

Then Grendel came, scrambling from the moors under misty cliffs:  
he bore God's fury. The evil killer meant to capture some human in  
the hall, the high one. He advanced under cloud-cover until he was  
sure he knew the gilded wine-hall, golden gathering-place of men. Not  
that it was the first time that he had sought out Hrothgar's home.  
Never in the days of his life, before or after, did he find a harder fate  
among heroes. Then the striding warrior came to the hall, despoiled  
of joys. The door sprang quickly open,  
made fast with fire-forged bands, as he touched it with his hands. 721  
Then with baleful intent, angered as he was, he ripped open  
the mouth of the hall. Immediately then  
the enemy trod forth on that patterned floor,  
angry of mood he advanced. From his eyes there shone  
a horrible light like that of fire.  
He beheld in the hall many a warrior  
sleeping there together, a band of kinsmen,  
a company of young warriors. In his heart he then laughed,  
evil monster, for he meant to separate body and soul  
of many a warrior present there  
before the day dawned. There welled up in him there  
the expectation of his fill in feasting. But it was not to be  
that he should feast anymore upon mankind  
after that night. The powerful one observed,  
Hygelac's brave kinsman, 736  
marked how the ravager  
would carry out his ambush.  
The powerful one didn't think to pause  
but at his first chance swiftly snatched up  
a sleeping man, greedily tore at him,  
crushed his bones, slurped blood from his veins,  
gulped down bite after bite. Soon he had  
devoured the dead man's feet, hands—  
everything. The fiend advanced,  
groped and grasped again  
for the bold-hearted warrior in the bed.  
Beowulf, grasping his hostile intent,  
braced himself with his own arm.  
Immediately the guardian of evil realized  
that he had never encountered  
in<sup>54</sup> the corners of the earth, in another man 751  
a greater hand-grip. He became in his mind  
afraid at heart. None the sooner was he able to get away.  
His mind was eager for him to depart, he wished to flee into a hiding place,  
to seek the company of devils. It was not his experience there  
such as he met before in his life-days.  
He remembered then, the good kinsman of Hygelac,  
the evening-speech. He stood up  
and seized him firmly. Fingers burst.

The giant was trying to escape; the warrior stepped further.  
The famous one intended, where he might do so,  
to go to a more remote place, and away from there  
to escape into the fen-retreats. He knew the control of his fingers  
was in the grips of the hostile one, that it was a sad journey  
that the harmful destroyer took to Heorot.

The<sup>55</sup> splendid hall rang. For all the Danes arose,  
for the fortress-dwellers, for each of the bold ones,  
for the warriors, great terror. Both were enraged,  
the fierce hall-guardians. The building resounded.  
It was a great wonder that the wine-hall  
withstood the battle-brave ones, that it did not fall to the ground,  
the beautiful building. But for this it was firm,  
inside and outside with iron bands,  
fastened with ingenuity. There from the floor  
many a mead-bench bent away, as I have heard tell,  
adorned with gold, where the hostile ones fought.  
They had not expected this before, the councillors of the Scyldings,  
that ever in any way any man

766

might break apart the excellent and bone-decorated hall,  
destroy it with cunning, unless the embrace of fire  
might<sup>56</sup> swallow it in flames. The sound rose up,  
new and strange: shock and awe  
arose in the North-Danes, in everyone  
who heard the wailing woe through the wall,  
God's enemy howling his agony,  
a song without triumph, Hell's captive  
wailing his pain. He held him fast,  
he who was the strongest man of might  
in that day of this life.

781

## XII

The protector of earls did not wish at all  
to let that deadly visitor leave alive,  
and did not consider his life-days useful  
to any people. Around him, many  
an earl of Beowulf drew his ancient heirloom,  
wished to protect the life  
of the great prince, as they were able to do so.  
They did not know it, when they endured battle,  
brave-minded warriors,  
and intended to strike on every side,  
to seek Grendel's soul: that no war-swords,  
best of swords, any over the earth,  
would touch the malefactor.  
But Grendel had cursed weapons of victory,  
every blade. His death,  
on that day of this life,  
had to be miserable, and the alien spirit  
had to travel far into the dominion of his enemies.

795

Then he who earlier carried out many  
afflictions of mind upon mankind,  
many crimes—he was guilty before God—then he found out  
that his body would not avail him; 811  
but that courageous kinsman of Hygelac  
had him by the hand. Each was to the other  
loathsome while living. The terrible adversary  
weathered a body-wound. On his shoulder showed  
a woeful wound plain to see, sinews sprang apart,  
bone-links burst. To Beowulf was  
granted battle-glory. Grendel had to  
flee thence, life-sick, under the fen-slopes  
to seek his doleful dwelling. He knew it more firmly  
that his life's end was come,  
the day-count of days. To all the Danes,  
after that bloody battle, blitheness had come about.  
He had then cleansed, he who before came from afar,  
wise and brave, the halls of Hrothgar,  
saved<sup>59</sup> them from strife. He rejoiced in his night-work, 826  
his feats of courage. The man of the Geats had  
fulfilled his boast to the East-Danes.  
Likewise, he remedied all distress,  
the sorrow that they had suffered before,  
and the misery they had been bound to endure  
no small grief. That was made evident  
when the battle-fierce man placed the hand,  
arm, and shoulder—all of Grendel's grip  
was there together—under the vaulted roof.

### XIII

Then, in the morning, as I have heard it said,  
there were many warriors around the gift-hall.  
Chieftains traveled from far and near,  
over the wide way, to behold the marvel,  
the tracks of the enemy.  
His death 840  
seemed no sad thing to any man  
of those who beheld the wretch's footsteps, how he, wearied and on his way,  
overcome with enmity, bore his mortal trudge  
into the mere of the monsters, doomed and shunned.

*At this point in the epic, a great feast is held. Heorot is restored to its original glory. As the saga continues, Beowulf has two more great battles and eventually becomes king of the Geats.*



## Key Concepts from Chapter 4:

- The Romans occupied England for over 400 years but eventually left due to invasions of Roman territory.
- The Romans never completely subjugated the Celtic inhabitants to the north and west of England.
- Latin had minimal influence on OE.
- OE eventually adopted the Roman alphabet.
- The “beginning” of English is the invasion of England by the Germanic Tribes in 449 AD.
- The Viking invasions of the 9<sup>th</sup> century AD led to the establishment of the Danelaw.

## Key Terms and People from Chapter 4:

- **Alfred the Great**
- **Angles**
- **Augustine**
- **Beowulf**
- **Cademon**
- **Danelaw**
- **Frisians**
- **Gaul**
- **Old Norse**
- **Roman alphabet**
- **runes**
- **Saxons**
- **Venerable Bede**
- **Vikings**

## Materials for Chapter 4 adapted from the following:

Mastin, Luke. [\*The History of English\*](#). (Material was used and adapted with permission.)

Abbott, J., Treharne, E., & Fafinski, M. *Beowulf for All*. ARC Humanities Press.

# Chapter 5

## Old English – Inner History

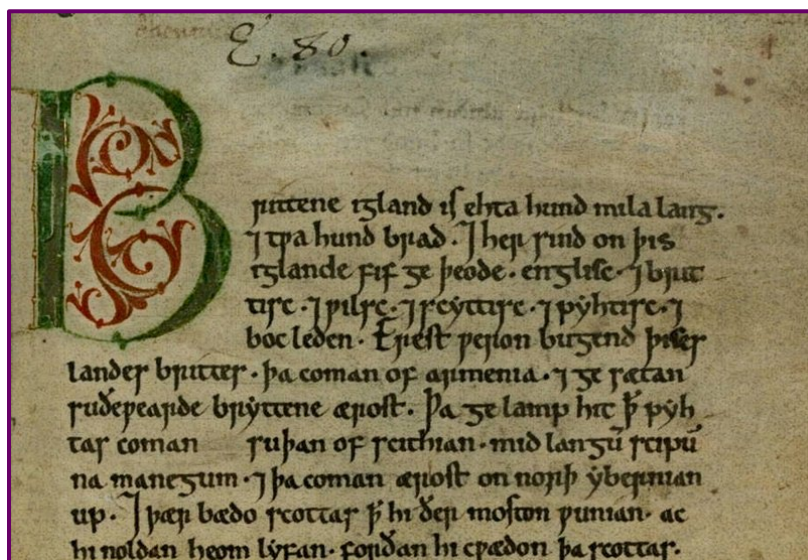


Figure 5.1: The Initial Page of the Peterborough Chronicle

Source: Wikipedia

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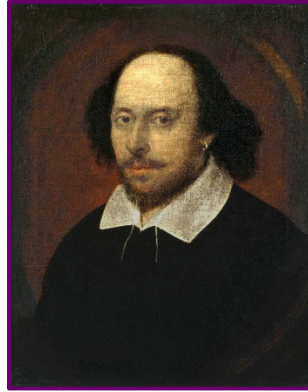
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## Understanding Internal Change

Chapter four examined some of the major external historical events that shaped OE: the Indo-European migrations, the Anglo-Saxon invasion, and the Viking incursions into Anglo-Saxon territory. In this chapter, I will discuss the internal structure of OE, that is to say, what OE was like in regard to its phonology, morphology, and syntax. The linguistic terms and concepts from chapter one will be valuable and necessary tools as we examine the structure of OE.

I need to clarify three issues at the outset. First, when we discuss the structure of OE, it is important to understand that the English spoken between 449 AD and 1066 AD was not one monolithic whole. There were regional dialects around Britain, and these dialects changed over these six hundred years that traditionally constitute the period of Old English. There is

a 500-year rule in dialects and languages. Once a language is 500 years older than a previous point in time, it has changed so much that it is typically considered a separate language. Consider Shakespeare.



*Figure 5.2: Portrait of William Shakespeare*

Source: Wikimedia

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Link: [here](#)

After 500 years, contemporary readers may understand a lot of Shakespeare today, but it is becoming increasingly more difficult as the decades go by. And this is reading Shakespeare. If we were to speak to someone from that time period, it would be even more difficult to understand. Similarly, what is current English today will be difficult for English speakers to understand in 500 years.

Nonetheless, it is customary to discuss the West Saxon dialect as the “model” for OE even though it is a snapshot of one dialect during *one time period*. Figure 5.3 shows the dialects of OE just prior to the Viking incursions, which altered the speech of the East and North Midlands. Most written works in OE are in the West Saxon dialect. However, modern standard English descends largely from the Mercian dialect.



*Figure 5.3: Dialects of Old English as they were just prior to the Viking incursions*

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Link: [here](#)

Second, as we discuss the phonology, we have to remember that there are no audio recordings of OE. It is guesswork on the part of historical linguists—however, linguists base their claims about the shape of OE on surviving manuscripts. One example is above in Figure 5.1. Using manuscripts from different regions and from different time periods gives some indication of what OE sounded like. Just to give an idea of how different OE sounded, [here is the “Our Father” prayer in OE.](#)

Third, I will not describe all aspects of what is, ostensibly, a foreign language to PDE speakers. There are entire books dedicated to OE. In fact, a lot of universities offer OE as a possible fulfillment of foreign language requirements. While not a comprehensive treatment of OE, I will give some of the major linguistic characteristics, particularly those that have a connection to PDE.

I start with a curious letter to the editor from the September 12<sup>th</sup>, 2019 issue of *The Marietta Daily Journal*:

*Swear Off the Curse Words:*

*Dear Editor:*

*Young women: some advice. Using the F-word does not make you cool or attractive.*

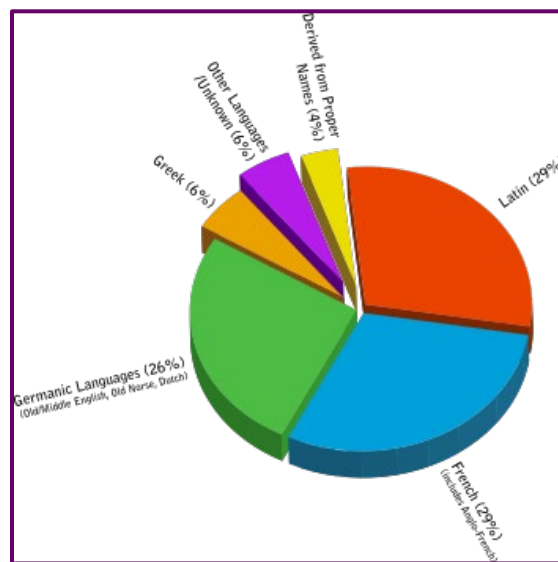
*Expand your vocabulary and learn how to cut people down using English not Anglo-*

*Saxon words. It's definitely cooler. Watch those Antifa morons on TV, where you can't*

*understand what they're saying, because of the bleeps. They (and you, if you curse) look*

*like uneducated morons.*

What caught my eye was this line in the letter: "Use English, not Anglo-Saxon words." But PDE is awash with words that are of Anglo-Saxon origin. A large percentage of the lexicon of PDE is composed of Anglo-Saxon words, about 25%. See Figure 5.4.



**Figure 5.4: Origin of PDE Words by Percentage**

Source: Wikipedia

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Link: [here](#)

In fact, in a typical written text, approximately 70% of the words on a page have Anglo-Saxon roots (Fennell, 1998) due to the most common words (prepositions, articles, pronouns, and common verbs) having Germanic origins. While it is true that English borrowed much of its lexicon from French and Latin during the Middle English period, the most common words are of Anglo-Saxon origin.

Yet the writer of the letter advised young speakers to use English and not Anglo-Saxon words. This reveals an interesting language attitude. In this case, that writer considers “English” words (perhaps words of French or Latin origin) as better than Anglo-Saxon. This attitude has more to do with perceptions of the “nobility” of the language than with linguistic reality.

## Features of Old English

I turn now to some selected aspects of the internal history of OE. The guiding questions will be these:

- What is the structure of OE?
- How did OE start changing internally through the centuries?

Taking the West Saxon dialect (see Figure 5.3) as our starting point, here are some of the features of OE.



## OE Consonants

Let's start with consonants. Figure 5.5 below shows the consonant inventory of Old English.

Consonants in Old English							
	Labial	Dental	Alveolar	Post-alveolar	Palatal	Velar	Glottal
Nasal	m		(ŋ) n			(ŋ)	
Stop	p b		t d			k (g)	
Affricate				tʃ (dʒ)			
Fricative	f (v)	θ (ð)	s (z)	ʃ	(ç)	x ɣ	(h)
Approximant			(l) l		j	(w) w	
Trill			(r) r				

Figure 5.5 Consonants of OE

The consonant inventory is very similar to the consonant inventory of PDE. There are a few differences, but for the most part they are the same. This is using our linguistic analysis of consonants with *place for articulation*, *manner of articulation*, and *voicing*. One thing to note is that during the history of OE, three constants were added, and they are highlighted above. The three palatal-alveolar sounds /ʃ tʃ dʒ/ were added, as in *she*, *chicken*, and *judge*. OE added these three sounds to the Germanic base of consonants. Remember, the slashes indicate the phoneme, not the letter.

Just a quick word about how this happened. This can get a little technical but by way of illustration, let me demonstrate how one of the sounds entered the language. The Germanic languages that reached Britain had the /k/ sound. It did not have the /tʃ/ sound as a separate phoneme, but here is how that came about.

If the phoneme /k/ occurred next to a front vowel (recall that front vowels are articulated by the tongue moving toward the front of the mouth; the vowels /i/ and /e/ are examples), then

the /k/ phoneme shifted to /tʃ/ in OE. For example, originally the letter “c” in the following words was pronounced as a /k/ in the Germanic roots of English: *cēap* (“cheap”), *dīc* (“ditch”), *cild* (“child”). But overtime as OE separated from its Germanic roots, the /k/ sound shifted to the /tʃ/ before front vowels.

Now this may sound a bit technical, but it really isn’t. It simply illustrates a basic point in sound change. And that point is that once a sound change starts, it spreads throughout the language, not just a few words. In other words, it is *systematic*. When you have enough of these sound changes, the two dialects (over time) slowly become two separate languages. The speakers of OE, however, were not conscious of this change. It just happened throughout the system—organically, naturally, and quite unconsciously.

Think about this. We have the word *kid* in *kindergarten*. That initial sound did not undergo this change because *kid* was a later addition into English from German, and it did not undergo this change.

Another example of an internal change in OE that is reflected in PDE is the /sk/ consonant cluster. All /sk/ clusters (spelled “sc” in OE) changed to /ʃ/. Examples include *fisc* (“fish”), *wascan* (“wash”), and *scearp* (“sharp”).

Again, this happened organically throughout the system. There was no decision. Most people were illiterate, so reading skills played no part in this. It just started shifting. As we've seen, languages will shift their sounds. Now, you may say, well, we have a lot of /sk/ words in PDE: *sky*, *skin*, *sketch*, *skit*, and the list could go on and on. However, all of these words came into English after this sound change, after the /sk/ sounds, and all the other words became /ʃ/. These words entered later.

## Vowels

Let's switch to vowels. To start, let's talk about vowels versus consonants. What is the difference between a vowel and a consonant? There are two parts to this answer. First, a consonant has a clear place of articulation. There's a clear obstruction of air flow. Vowels are wide open in the vocal tract. Second, vowels are required for every syllable. Every syllable has a nucleus and that is the vowel. Every syllable must have a vowel-like element (a sonority peak), but not every syllable has to have a consonant.

Figure 5.6 gives a rough approximation of the vowels in OE. These could be the nucleus of a syllable. The dots mean the vowel is long. PDE does not make use of long vowels in the same way OE did.

Front		Back	
unrounded	rounded	unrounded	rounded
i i:	y y:		u u:
e e:	ø ø:		o o:
æ æ:		ɑ ɑ:	

*Figure 5.6: Vowels in Old English*

Source: Wikipedia

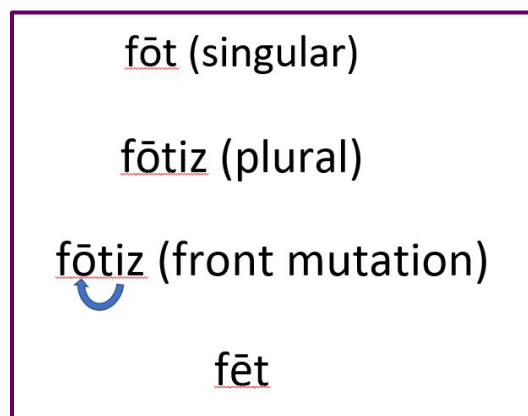
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Because the language has been dead for 900 years, we cannot be completely sure how Old English was pronounced. However, we can make good, educated guesses at how Old English was pronounced because the Anglo-Saxons almost certainly wrote phonetically (that is, they wrote words how they sounded)—we can compare it with Middle English, various Modern English dialects, and other closely related Germanic languages; we can look at phonetic poetic strategies used in Old English poems; and we can look at spelling variations and clues within Old English texts themselves.

Second, vowels are also very unstable. They often shift precisely because they don't have a clear place of articulation. So, there's a lot of shifting. During the OE period, there was a lot of vowel shifting. To illustrate a very famous example of vowel shifting, let's examine this issue of irregular plural nouns in PDE.

We all know that for most English words, you add an /s/ for plurality. In fact, when a new word is added into English, that's always the system—you add an /s/. However, we have certain holdovers from OE. We have irregular plurals such *feet*, *teeth*, *geese*, and *lice*. Where did these come from? Well, they came again from the history of English, specifically the **front mutation** of vowels (also known as **umlaut** or **i/j mutation**).

Simply put, this means that there used to be inflectional endings in the original Germanic words that meant plural. For example, before the mutation, the plural for *fōt* (“foot”) was *fōtiz* (“feet”). The *-iz* meant plural. Overtime, the ending *-iz* influenced the preceding (or front) vowel (*ō*), and it became *fētiz*. Eventually, the ending (*-iz*) disappeared, but the influence on the front vowel had already happened. Thus, *fēt* (“feet”) became the form for plural for *fōt* in OE. Figure 5.7 shows an illustration of the change. Note that over time, the *-iz* ending disappeared, but only after it caused the *ō* to shift higher in the mouth to match the /i/ in the second syllable.



*Figure 5.7 Consonants of OE*

Other words that underwent the same sort of vowel shifting (front shifting) are *teeth*, *geese*, *lice*, and *men*. Even the adjective form *elder* (as opposed to the competing form *older*) has its origin in this front mutation.

Most PDE words were regularized into taking the -s for plural. But for some reason, there were a few words that got stuck. They fossilized. PDE kept the original plural: *feet*, *teeth*, *geese*. The word *book* is an example of a word that was originally pluralized like *teeth*. The plural form was *bec*. But PDE regularized this to become *books* instead of *bec*. This was done by analogy. Remember analogy means to make it regularize and make it look like everything else. Along the history of this word, someone, probably toddlers, started saying *books* instead of *bec* for the plural. Through the years, the vowel shifted back to /u/ and an -s was added.

## Syntax

Syntax is word order. Old English had a more flexible word order because there were so many inflections that indicated what the role of the noun did. *Figure 5.8* shows the **declension** (the different endings for nouns) for the word *man* and *book* in *OE*.

Masculine		Feminine	
Sg.	Pl.	Sg.	Pl.
N.mann	m <u>e</u> nn	bōc	bēc
G.mannes	man <u>a</u>	bōc	bōca
D.m <u>e</u> nn	man <u>u</u> m	bēc	bōcum
A.mann	m <u>e</u> nn	bōc	bēc

*Figure 5.8 Declension of 'man' and 'book' in OE*

The N indicates nominative (subject), G indicates possessive, D indicates dative (indirect object), and A was used for accusative (direct object). Since PDE lost almost all of these endings on nouns, word order became much more important.

Double negatives were very common in OE. Look at this translation of a sentence from Old English:

- *thaet heo nanne aeftter hyre ne forlete* “that she should not leave none behind her.”

Today, to use a double negative is a big grammatical sin. But this did not happen until the 18<sup>th</sup> century. In the 18<sup>th</sup> century, there was a group of people who decided English should not use double negatives and that had a profound influence on the history of English.

Now, when we talk about language change, we often talk about language change *from below*—it just happens. But we can also talk about change *from above*. When there is a group, such as academics or grammarians, and they “impose” their ideas on what should be good or proper English, then this prescription (such as eliminating double negatives) can have an influence on English. So, this change from above, from grammarians, can affect how English works, but most of the language changes come from below. People change language naturally without even realizing change is happening.

One final note on syntax. Prepositions are words that talk about placement. They are used to indicate position: *on the table*, *under the chair*, *over the roof*. Two issues with Old English: OE used fewer prepositions since inflections indicated much of what prepositions do; and second, prepositions often came after their object in OE. Here we can see one bit of evidence on this—*I danced the night away*, instead of, *I danced away the night*. This is a holdover from Old English when prepositions could occur after the object. In that case, they were called postpositions and not prepositions.

## Lexicon

OE lexicon consisted of mostly Indo-European and Germanic words. Of course, the Germanic languages had their origins in Indo-European. Few Celtic words entered into Old English. There

was little prestige for the Celtic words, and therefore little prestige for the Celtic language. They were a conquered people, and shoved off to the western part of the island. Scandinavian influence did occur with Old English, but became more apparent in Middle English. The Scandinavian conquest and invasion started during the eighth or ninth century, so it had a much slower effect on OE. Eventually, OE did incorporate many words from the Scandinavian languages, such as Old Norse. Latin also had an influence on Old English. There was an intermingling of the Germanic and Latin languages on the continent before the Germanic tribes invaded England. After this period, the Germanic languages had incorporated words such as *belt*, *cheese*, *copper*, *butter*, *cheap*, *mile*, *stop*, and *wine*. So, before the Germanic languages ever came to England, there was a smattering of Latin-based words in the Germanic languages, but not too many. During Middle English, a substantial increase of Latin came into English due to the Norman invasion which will be discussed in the next chapter.

It is estimated that about 85% of the 30,000 or so Anglo-Saxon words gradually died out under the cultural onslaught of the Vikings and Normans who would come after the Vikings leaving a total of only around 4,500 Anglo-Saxon words in PDE. This represents less than 1% of the modern English vocabulary, but it includes some of the most fundamental and important words (e.g. *man*, *wife*, *child*, *son*, *daughter*, *brother*, *friend*, *live*, *fight*, *make*, *use*, *love*, *like*, *look*, *drink*, *food*, *eat*, *sleep*, *sing*, *sun*, *moon*, *earth*, *ground*, *wood*, *field*, *house*, *home*, *people*, *family*, *horse*, *fish*, *farm*, *water*, *time*, *eyes*, *ears*, *mouth*, *nose*, *strong*, *work*, *come*, *go*, *be*, *find*, *see*, *look*, *laughter*, *night*, *day*, *sun*, *first*, *many*, *one*, *two*, *other*, *some*, *what*, *when*, *which*, *where*, *word*, etc.), as well as the most important “function” words (e.g. *to*, *for*, *but*, *and*, *at*, *in*, *on*, *from*, etc.). Because of this, up to half of everyday modern English will typically be made up of OE words,

and, by some estimates, all of the one hundred most commonly-used words in PDE are of Anglo-Saxon origin (although pronunciations and spellings may have changed significantly over time).

## Strong vs. Weak Verbs

We will conclude our look at OE by examining the traditional distinction between so-called **strong verbs** and **weak verbs**. We will also examine why that distinction has become so muddled in modern English. This is a common question about English—why do some verbs add *-ed* to form a past tense, while many other change the vowel to indicate past tense: *ran* (not *\*runed*), *began* (*\*begined*), *sang* (not *\*singed*), *taught* (not *\*teached*)? Now, this may seem very technical, but it's really not. It's ultimately the reason why some English speakers say *dived* and others say *dove*, and why some people say *dreamed*, and other people say *dreamt*, and it's why we say *hanged* in certain situations but *hung* in other situations. So, we're going to try to figure out why those past tense forms are so variable in PDE. And as is often the case, the answer lies in the history of the language.

This section is about the history of the past tense forms of those verbs and why the past tense forms can vary so much within English. When it comes to verbs, there are many different ways to classify them depending on their function and how they work within sentences. But the most basic and fundamental way to distinguish verbs is to look at how they change from present tense to past tense. English doesn't have a specific future tense form. We actually use the present tense forms and add a word to it. So, *I jump* becomes, *I will jump* and *I am jumping* becomes *I will be jumping*.

But when it comes to past tense, we do have distinct verb forms. *I jump* becomes *I jumped*. *I sleep* becomes *I slept*. PDE indicates past tense by adding a /d/ sound or a /t/ sound to



the end of the verb. That's an inflection and it has survived over the centuries. Note, however, that some verbs don't follow that general rule.

- *Sing, sang, sung*
- *freeze, froze, frozen*
- *steal, stole, stolen*

In these cases, the verb changes are based upon a vowel change in the middle and sometimes an **-en** ending for the past participle. This is the basic distinction between so-called **strong verbs** and **weak verbs**. Those verbs like *sing, sang, sung*, which have their own internal structure for changing tense, are called strong verbs. They stand on their own and have their own inherent rules. They don't have to rely on that *-ed* ending. All of the other generic verbs which take a standard *-ed* or *-t* ending are called **weak verbs**.

Today, most of our verbs fall into that category (the weak verbs), and all new verbs come in as weak verbs with an *-ed* ending. So, the word *fax* came into English as a shortened version of the word facsimile, and that produced the verb *to fax*. When *fax* came into English as a verb, its past tense form was made with an *-ed* and became *faxed*. The same thing happened with a word like *Google*. It was originally a noun, a website, but it also became a verb over time. So, you might *google* something if you want to find out more about it. But if you did it yesterday, you *googled* it, with an *-ed* ending. So, when new verbs come in, we just stick an *-ed* on the end to make them past tense. In other words, when a new verb comes into the language, it's always regularized. You'll never find a new verb that has a strong form. It's always the weak form, the *-ed*, hence the example of *googled*.

If we were to go back in time to the original Indo-European period, we would find that things were completely different. At that point, all verbs were strong verbs. In other words, all

verbs had an internal vowel change to distinguish present and past tenses, like *sing, sang, sung* and *shake, shook, shaken*. As we know, the original Indo-European language spread throughout Europe with the migration of people who spoke that language. Northern Europe, the original proto-Germanic language emerged out of that original Indo-European language. Within the original Germanic language, the older traditional verb system began to break down, and linguists are not 100% sure why. For some reason, the Germanic speakers began to express past tense by sticking a /d/ or a /t/ sound on the end of verbs. This type of ending is called a dental suffix. As we've seen before, the /d/ sound and the /t/ sound are basically the same. The primary difference is that the /d/ sound is voiced with the vocal cords and the /t/ sound is voiceless. But other than that, the two sounds are produced the same way.

The Germanic speakers started to put those sounds on the end of verbs to indicate that something happened in the past. Of course, those sounds were the precursors to our modern *-ed* ending. In fact, the /t/ ending appears to be gradually disappearing. We still use it in a word like *slept*, but *burnt* is increasingly being rendered as *burned*. *Smelt* is increasingly *smelled*. *Learnt* is *learned*. *Dwelt* is *dwelled*, *spilt* is *spilled*, *spoilt* is *spoiled* and so on. So, those *-t* endings are gradually giving way to the more popular *-ed* ending.

However, those older *-t* endings are still prominently found as adjectives. We still refer to *spilt milk* or *burnt toast*. But even in some of those cases, there may be some erosion occurring. The original Germanic speakers developed this particular verb ending to indicate past tense, and it proved to be very popular. It was simpler than the old strong system. With the older Indo-European strong system, you had to keep track of all the internal vowel changes like we still do with *sing, sang, sung*. With the generic *-ed* ending, you could just stick it on the end of a verb and you are good to go. It also made it easier to incorporate new verbs into the language. You

can just add that generic ending to the new verb, like we do today. So that weak *-ed* ending became increasingly popular. And, over time, that *-ed* ending began to replace the older strong forms.

By the time of the OE period, English had a mix, both types of verbs, but there were more strong verbs that lingered back then. In fact, OE had about 300 strong verbs, which were mainly holdovers from the Indo-European language. In OE, there were seven classes or categories of strong verbs, and the verbs within those respective categories behaved in a very predictable manner. So, for example, one class of verbs included the early version of words like *sing*, *sting*, *spring*, and *swing*. All of those verbs behave the exact same way in OE, but notice what happens today. We have *sing* and *sang*, *spring* and *sprang*, but we have *sting* and *stung*, *swing* and *swung*, as well. So, what happened there? Well, the answer has to do with the fact that things were far more complicated in OE.

Today, we have a simple present tense form, *sing*, and a simple past tense form, *sang*. It's always *sang*, no matter what the subject is.

- I sang
- you sang
- she sang
- we sang
- they sang

It's always the same. But of course, in OE, there were different forms for each person. So, the past tense forms varied depending on whether they were being used in first person, second person, third person, and whether they were referring to the action of a single subject or plural subject. In first-person singular, the form was just like today. *I sang* was *Ic sang*, which later

became I *sang*. The same form was used for third person singular. So, *he sang* was *hē song*, which later became *he sang*. The form changed in second person singular. *You sang* was *þū sunga*, and the plural forms were *sungan*. So, *we sang* was *pē sungan*. As we go through these various forms of the verb *sing* in OE, we have the past tense form *sang* or *sang*, and we have the past tense form *sunga*. We also have the plural past tense form, *sungan*.

Within these various forms, we can find the original versions of our modern *sing*, *sang*, *sung*. After the Norman conquest, however, English began to lose all of those specific inflections, which were all reduced to just one past tense form. Every verb, therefore, needed a specific past tense form. So, English speakers had to choose between those various past tense forms and pick one, and this process wasn't completed by a committee. It just happened naturally over time as people tended to favor one particular verb form over the others. In the case of *sing*, they selected the first-person and third-person singular forms, *sang*. The same thing happened with *spring*, which acquired the past tense form *sprang*. In the case of *sting* and *swing*, however, the plural form was selected as the past tense form. So, the past tense of *sting* became *stung*, and the past tense of *swing* became *swung*. Now, all of this starts to get complicated, but that's the point. The old, somewhat orderly verb system of OE was breaking down in Middle English. The newer forms which emerged did so in a somewhat random manner. Strong verbs, which had once resembled each other in *Old English* were now starting to have completely different forms in Middle English. That change was partly because English was simplifying all of those endings during OE.

This process helps to explain why the strong verb forms sometimes seem illogical in PDE. Another verb in this same class of Old English strong verbs was the original version of *to shrink*. In Old English, it was conjugated and behaved exactly like those other verbs: *sing*,

*spring*, and *swing*. And just as *sing* became *sang* and *spring* became *sprang*, the simple past tense of *shrink* became *shrank*.

But tell that to Hollywood, which had a big hit with *Honey, I Shrunk the Kids*.



*Figure 5.9: Honey, I Shrunk the Kids*

Source: Wikipedia

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*Shrunk* is traditionally reserved for the past participle. As in, *Honey, I have shrunk the kids*. But today it can sometimes be found beside *shrank* as a simple past tense form. So, these past tense forms continued to evolve within modern English. The key, however, is that this evolution is not a new aspect of English. It's been going on for about 1,000 years.

So, forget trying to make any sense out of these various forms today. There really isn't much sense to be had. The forms evolved in a somewhat random manner over the centuries, and they continue to evolve, while dictionary makers and grammarians have decided what people are using (i.e., *shrunk* as past tense) is technically wrong. In spite of this process, people continue to use such forms today.

The fact is that history has not been kind to those 300 or so strong verbs from the OE period. As we know, a very large percentage of the words in OE have simply disappeared from the language. That high rate of attrition took care of a lot of old English strong verbs. Of the

roughly 300 strong verbs in Old English, about half of them completely disappeared from the language, gone forever. About 150 are left, which still survive in some form in PDE.

The popularity of that weak *-ed* verb form was so great that about half of those 150 strong verbs have been converted into weak *-ed* verbs over the centuries by analogy. In other words, they lost their older internal vowel changes. Today, they just use the standard *-ed* ending, indicating how they were broken down over the centuries. This process is consistent with the general desire of English speakers to use fixed word forms. We don't really like having to change the word form. Over the centuries, words like *climb*, *glide*, *shove*, *chew*, and *burn* all evolved from strong verbs into weak *-ed* verbs. At one time they had their own internal vowel changes to indicate past tense, but today we say *climbed*, *glided*, *shoved*, *chewed*, and *burned*. They've all become *weak* because they use the *-ed* ending today.

The verb *melt* also followed this path. It was once a strong verb, *melta*, *melt*, *molten*, but again, it lost those forms over time. Today, it takes the standard *-ed* ending and past tense, which makes the forms *melt* and *melted*. Notice, however, that its original past participle was *molten*, and that word still survives as an adjective, as in *molten* lava.



**Figure 5.10:** Molten lava

Source: Wikimedia

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Link: [here](#)

Another strong verb which became weak was *help*. It was another one of those strong verbs which gradually lost its internal vowel change. So, what was once *help* and *holp* became *help* and *helped*. *Holp* is still used in some dialects. But as this example shows, some of those older forms still linger in a few regional dialects.

Another strong verb which had a very similar history was the verb *to snow*. Believe it or not, at one time, the past tense of snow was *snew* in many parts of the British Isles. You might say it *snew* yesterday. Eventually, *snew* was replaced with *snowed*, but *snew* lingered on in some dialects of Northern England until the last few centuries.

So those OE strong verbs were having a hard time in Middle English and early modern English. The consistent, orderly past tense forms of Old English were breaking down and becoming more random. Many of those OE verbs were disappearing altogether, along with other OE words. Many of the words which survived lost their old strong forms and adopted a standard *-ed* ending. So, let's try to put some numbers on all of that. There were about 300 strong verbs in OE, and about half of them died out altogether, so that left about 150. Of those 150 or so strong verbs, about 80 evolved into weak verbs using the process I just described, that leaves about 70 strong verbs which have survived into modern English. They include a host of our modern strong verbs, *sing, sang, sung, spring, sprang, sprung freeze, froze, frozen*, and so on. They include verbs like *write, ride, bite, shine, drive, drink, fly, shoot, lose, shake, begin*, and a few dozen others.

If we were to leave the story there, PDE would actually make sense. Whenever we would come across a strong verb, like *sing, sang, sung*, we could just assume that it was one of those handful of verbs from OE, which has survived with its original strong form. But, alas, English is not so easy or simple.

The fact is that English speakers were not done working their magic on those old verbs. Over the centuries, those old weak and strong distinctions started to break down even further, and this process has created a lot of confusion in modern English. This is what gives us *dived* and *dove*, *strived* and *strove*, and *hanged* and *hung*. It also gives us the problems we have with *lie* and *lay* and *set* and *sit*.

So, let's examine what happened. As is so often the case, what happened was linguistic confusion. People didn't know the history of verbs. They didn't know if a verb was historically strong or weak, so sometimes speakers would mix up the various forms. This type of confusion has happened in several different ways over the centuries. So, let's try to break it down a little bit.

One thing that happened in the Middle English period is several weak *-ed* verbs actually became strong verbs. We wouldn't expect a perfectly normal verb with a simple *-ed* ending to suddenly start having complex vowel changes in the middle. We expect verbs to become simpler over time, not more complex. Yet in some cases, verbs did go from weak to strong. Take a word like *dig*, for example. At one time, the past tense was actually *digged*. We only acquired the word *dug* in the last 1,500 hundreds. Around the same time, words like *spit* and *stick* also acquired their modern past tense forms: *spat* and *stuck*. Prior to that point, the past tense of *spit* was *spited*, and the past tense of *stick* was *sticked*.

Another example of this change is the verb *to ring*. *Ring* was once a weak form with the past tense *ringed*. But today, it's *ring*, *rang*, *rung*. Notice that it takes the same form as *sing*, *sang*, *sung*, which is the important point here. Sometimes when words sound alike, we get confused as to the proper form. So once again, we're dealing with linguistic confusion. It appears that some of those weak *-ed* verbs resemble strong verbs, like *sing* and *ring*, and in the confusion

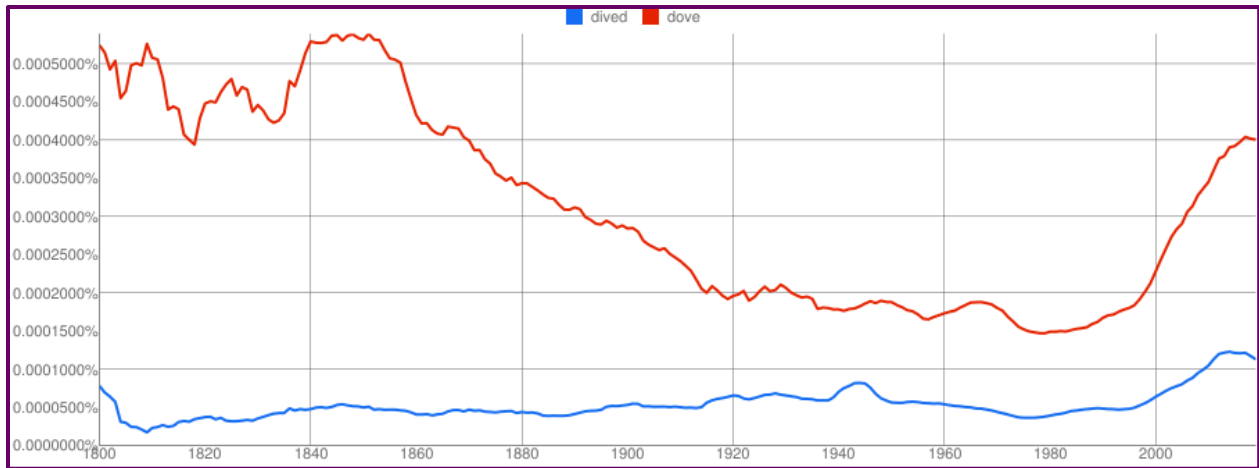


of the Middle English period, people started to mix up verbs which sounded alike.

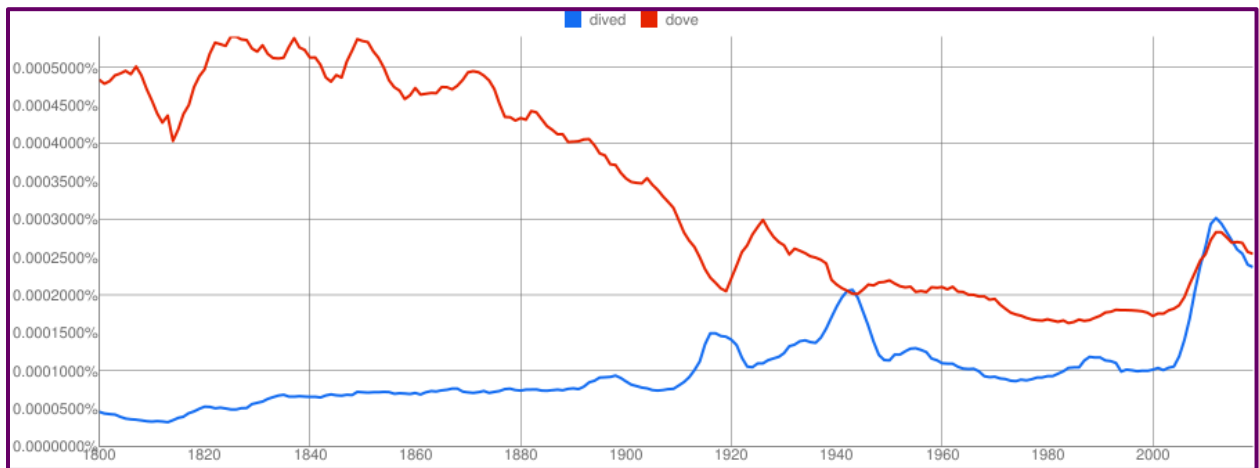
Remember, modern English grammar books didn't really exist yet, so sometimes it wasn't clear if a verb was a strong or weak verb. Therefore, these forms started to get mixed together. Let's consider verbs like *tear*, *swear*, and *bear*, as in bearing a child. All of these verbs are strong verbs, and they were strong verbs in Old English as well. We have *tear*, *tore*, *torn* and *swear*, *swore*, *sworn*, and *bear*, *bore*, *born*, but then we have a verb like *wear*. In Old English, it was a weak verb and took an *-ed* ending. The past tense was *weared*. But it appears that English speakers assumed that since the past tense of *tear* was *tore*, and *swear* was *swore* and *bear* was *bore*, then the past tense of *wear* must be *wore*. Again, this is done by analogy to regularize the system.

In the process, the past-tense *weared* became *wore*. As a result, the verb *wear* went from being a weak verb to a strong verb. Another example of this can be found in the word *dive*, which was once a weak verb. The past tense was *dived*. English dialects in the British Isles have generally retained the older form, *dived*. In the United States, however, early English speakers apparently thought that *dive* was analogous with words like *weave*. Therefore, the past tense of *dive* became *dove*, and that's still the primary past tense form in American English.

*Figure 5.11* and *Figure 5.12* use Google Ngrams to compare *dived* vs. *dove* in American and British English through the years in published books. Note that in American English, *dove* is more frequent.



*Figure 5.11: Dove vs. Dived in American English*  
 Source: Google Ngrams  
 Link: [here](#)



*Figure 5.12: Dove vs. Dived in British English*  
 Source: Wikimedia  
 Public Domain  
 Link: [here](#)

## The Wanderer - Background

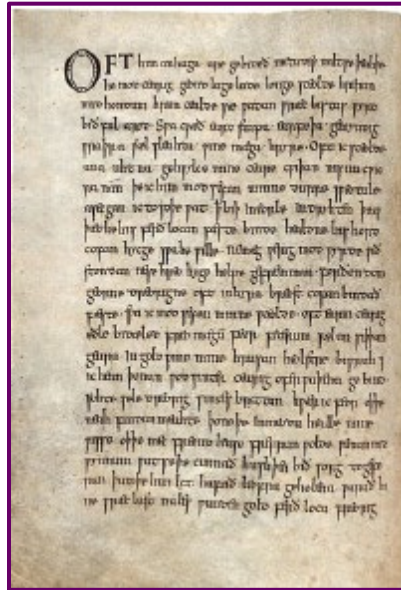


Figure 5.13: First Page of the Wanderer

Source: Wikimedia

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*The Wanderer* is found only in the manuscript known as the *Exeter Book*, which was copied in the late tenth century. The 115-line poem follows the usual Anglo-Saxon pattern of short alliterative half-lines separated by a caesura (pause). The wanderer (or “earthstepper”) has buried his lord (his “gold-friend”) and finds himself alone in the world. Members of a lord’s comitatus, or war band, were expected to die alongside their leader in battle; the wanderer is looking for a new lord as he suffers through the uncertainty, loneliness, and physical hardships of exile. The poem begins and ends with references to Christianity, with a kenning near the end of the poem with God as “Shaper of Men;” the only certainty that the speaker has is that there is a “safe home” waiting for him in heaven. The rest of the poem focuses on what he has lost. Like *The Ruin* and *The Seafarer*, also found in the *Exeter Book*, *The Wanderer* is what is known as an “ubi sunt” poem (Latin for “where has”). In J.R.R. Tolkien’s *The Two Towers*, Aragorn recites a poem about Eorl the Young that begins “Where now the horse and the rider? Where is the horn

that was blowing?” (142; the movie transfers the speech to King Theoden), which was drawn directly from *The Wanderer*’s “Where has the horse gone? Where is the man?” Because of its theme, *The Wanderer* is usually classified as a type of elegy, or lament for what has been lost.

## *The Wanderer*

Often the solitary man prays for favour, for the mercy of the Lord, though, sad at heart, he must needs stir with his bands for a weary while the icy sea across the watery ways, must journey the paths of exile; settled in truth is fate! So spoke the wanderer, mindful of hardships, of cruel slaughters, of the fall of kinsmen:

’Often I must bewail my sorrows in my loneliness at the dawn of each day; there is none of living men now to whom I dare speak my heart openly. I know for a truth that it is a noble custom for a man to bind fast the thoughts of his heart, to treasure his broodings, let him think as he will. Nor can the weary in mood resist fate, nor does the fierce thought avail anything. Wherefore those eager for glory often bind fast in their secret hearts a sad thought. So I, sundered from my native land, far from noble kinsmen, often sad at heart, had to fetter my mind, when in years gone by the darkness of the earth covered my gold-friend, and I went thence in wretchedness with wintry care upon me over the frozen waves, gloomily sought the hall of a treasure-giver wherever I could find him far or near, who might know me in the mead hall or comfort me, left without friends, treat me with kindness. He knows who puts it to the test how cruel a comrade is sorrow for him who has few dear protectors; his is the path of exile, in no wise the twisted gold; a chill body, in no wise the riches of the earth; he thinks of retainers in hall and the receiving of treasure, of how in his youth his gold-friend was kind to him at the feast. The joy has all perished. Wherefore he knows this who must long forgo the counsels of his dear

lord and friend, when sorrow and sleep together often bind the poor solitary man; it seems to him in his mind that he clasps and kisses his lord and lays hands and head on his knee, as when erstwhile in past days he was near the gift-throne; then the friendless man wakes again, sees before him the dark waves, the sea-birds bathing, spreading their feathers; frost and snow falling mingled with hail. Then heavier are the wounds in his heart, sore for his beloved; sorrow is renewed. Then the memory of kinsmen crosses his mind; he greets them with songs; he gazes on them eagerly. The companions of warriors swim away again; the souls of sailors bring there not many known songs. Care is renewed in him who must needs send very often his weary mind over the frozen waves. And thus I cannot think why in this world my mind becomes not overcast when I consider all the life of earls, how of a sudden they have given up hall, courageous retainers. So this world each day passes and falls; for a man cannot become wise till he has his share of years in the world. A wise man must be patient, not over-passionate, nor over-hasty of speech, nor over-weak or rash in war, nor over-fearful, nor over-glad, nor over-covetous, never over-eager to boast ere he has full knowledge.) A man must bide his time, when he boasts in his speech, until he knows well in his pride whither the thoughts of the mind will turn. A wise man must see how dreary it will be when all the riches of this world stand waste, as in different places throughout this world walls stand, blown upon by winds, hung with frost, the dwellings in ruins. The wine halls crumble; the rulers lie low, bereft of joy; the mighty warriors have all fallen in their pride by the wall; war carried off some, bore them on far paths; one the raven bore away over the high sea; one the grey wolf gave over to death; one an earl with sad face hid in the earth-cave. Thus did the Creator of men lay waste this earth till the old work of giants stood empty, free from the revel of castle-dwellers. Then he who has thought wisely of the foundation

of things and who deeply ponders this dark life, wise in his heart, often turns his thoughts to the many slaughters of the past, and speaks these words:

“Whither has gone the horse? Whither has gone the man? Whither has gone the giver of treasure? Whither has gone the place of feasting? Where are the joys of hall? Alas, the bright cup! Alas, the warrior in his corslet! Alas, the glory of the prince! How that time has passed away, has grown dark under the shadow of night, as if it had never been! Now in the place of the dear warriors stands a wall, wondrous high, covered with serpent shapes; the might of the ash-wood spears has carried off the earls, the weapon greedy for slaughter—a glorious fate; and storms beat upon these rocky slopes; the falling storm binds the earth, the terror of winter. Then comes darkness, the night shadow casts gloom, sends from the north fierce hailstorms to the terror of men. Everything is full of hardship in the kingdom of earth; the decree of fate changes the world under the heavens. Here possessions are transient, here friends are transient, here man is transient, here woman is transient; all this firm-set earth becomes empty.”

So spoke the wise man in his heart, and sat apart in thought. Good is he who holds his faith; nor shall a man ever show forth too quickly the sorrow of his breast, except he, the earl, first know how to work its cure bravely. Well is it for him who seeks mercy, comfort from the Father in heaven, where for us all security stands.

## *Durham Proverbs - Background*

The Durham Proverbs is a collection of 46 mediaeval proverbs from various sources. They were written down as a collection, in the eleventh century. The manuscript is currently in the collection of Durham Cathedral, to which it was donated in the eighteenth century. The Proverbs form the first part of the manuscript. Each proverb is written in both Latin and Old English, with the former preceding the latter

(1) Geþyld byþ middes eades.

Patience is half of happiness.

(2) Freond deah feor ge neah; byð near nyttra.

A friend is useful, far or near; the nearer the better.

(3) Æt þearfe mann sceal freonda to cunnian.

In time of need, a man finds out his friends.

(4) Nafað ænig mann freonda to fela.

No one can have too many friends.

(5) Beforan his freonde biddeþ, se þe his wædle mæneþ.

He who bemoans his poverty should seek help from his friends.

(6) God ger byþ þonne se hund þam hrefne gyfeð.

It's a good year when the dog gives to the raven.

(8) Hwilum æfter medo menn mæst geþyrsteð.

Sometimes men are thirstiest after drinking mead.

(9) Æfter leofan menn langað swiðost.

People long most for a loved one.

(10) Nu hit ys on swines dome, cwæð se ceorl sæt on eoferes hricge.

It's up to the pig now, said the man sat on the boar's back.

(12) Eall on muðe þæt on mode.

All in the mouth that's in the mind.

(13) Gemæne sceal maga feoh.

Wealth should be shared by kinsmen.

(14) Man deþ swa he byþ þonne he mot swa he wile.

A man acts what he is when he may do what he will.

(16) Eaðe wis man mæg witan spell and eac secgan.

Easily may a wise man understand a story, and tell it too.

(17) Blind byþ bam eagum se þe breostum ne starat.

He is blind in both eyes who does not look with the heart.

(18) Ða ne sacað þe ætsamne ne beoð.

They do not quarrel who are not together.

(19) Ne deah eall soþ asæd ne eall sar ætwiten.

It does no good to tell all truths or blame all wrongs.

(20) Gyf þu well sprece, wyrc æfter swa.

If you speak well, act accordingly.

(21) Soþ hit sylf acyþeð.

Truth will make itself known.

(22) Earh mæg þæt an þæt he him ondræde.

A coward can only do one thing: what he fears.

(23) Ne sceal man to ær forht ne to ær fægen.

One should not be too soon fearful nor too soon joyful.

(26) Ne byð þæt fele freond, se þe oþrum facn heleð.

He who harbours treachery against another is not a faithful friend.

(27) Swa cystigran hiwan, swa cynnigran gystas.

The more generous the household, the more noble the guests.



(28) Gyfena gehwilc underbæc besihþ.

Every gift looks backwards.

(29) Ne wat swetes ðanc, se þe biteres ne onbyrgeð.

He never knows the pleasure of sweetness, who never tastes bitterness.

(30) To nawihtc ne hopað, se to hame ne higeð.

He hopes for nothing, who does not think about home.

(31) Eall here byþ hwæt þonne se lateow byþ hwæt.

The whole army is brave when the general is brave.

(35) Leana forleosað, se þe hit lyþran deð.

He who gives to an unworthy person wastes his gifts.

(36) Seo nydþearf feala læreð.

Necessity teaches many things.

(37) Betere byþ oft feðre þonne oferfeðre.

Better to be often loaded than overloaded.

(38) Cræfta gehwilc byþ cealde forgolden.

Every deceit will be coldly repaid.

(39) Ciggendra gehwilc wile þæt hine man gehere.

Everyone who shouts out wants to be heard.

(40) Weard seteð, se þe wæccendum wereð.

He who guards against the watchmen sets a guard.

(41) Ne sceall se for horse murnan, se þe wile heort ofærnan.

He who wants to catch a hart must not worry about his horse.

(42) Swa fulre fæt, swa hit mann sceal fægror beran.

The fuller the cup, the more carefully it must be carried.

(43) Ne mæg man muþ fulne melewes habban and eac fyr blawan.

No one can have a mouth full of flour and also blow on a fire.

(44) Wide ne biþ wel, cwæþ se þe gehyrde on helle hriman.

Things are bad everywhere, said the man who heard wailing in hell.

(46) Hwon gelpeð, se þe wide sipað.

Little boasts the one who travels widely.

## Key Concepts from Chapter 5:

- OE was not a uniform dialect and varied by region and time.
- OE added / š č ĵ / to the Germanic consonant base.
- OE vowels were substantially different than those found in PDE, but no one is exactly sure what the previous vowels sounded like.
- Front mutation resulted in some irregular plural nouns in PDE.

## Key Terms from Chapter 5:

- **Change from above**
- **Change from below**
- **Declension**
- **Systematic sound change**
- **Front mutation (umlaut or i/j mutation)**
- **Strong vs. weak verbs**

## Materials for Chapter 5 adapted from the following:

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[Old English Phonology](#) (Wikipedia contributors, 2022)

Robinson, B.J., & Getty, L. (Eds.). [\*British Literature: Middle Ages to the Eighteenth Century and Neoclassicism\*](#). University of North Georgia Press.

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# Chapter 6

## Middle English – Outer History



*Figure 6.1: The Battle of Hastings from the Bayeux Tapestry*

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### 1066: A Critical Year in the History of English

One of the most important dates in English history and the history of the English language is 1066. Of course, this was the year of the Norman conquest, and the beginning of the end of Old English. It was an incredibly active year, so much happened, and if the events had not unfolded in just the way they did, English would be a completely different language today. It also shows how William the Bastard became known to history as William the Conqueror.

So, let's turn to the big event: the Norman Conquest. Many scholars consider the Norman Conquest to be the most important and significant event in the overall development of the English language. It may seem strange that a battle could so fundamentally change a language,

but it did, and if we want quick proof of that change, all we have to do is look at the words which we use for warfare. Since the Normans emerged victorious in battle, today, we tend to use their words when we're discussing the military. Almost all of the common English words for warfare, military personnel, strategy, and tactics come from French. That includes words like *war*, *warrior*, *battle*, *military*, *army*, *navy*, *soldier*, *troop*, *division*, *rank*, *private*, *captain*, *corporal*, *lieutenant or lieutenant*, *infantry*, *cavalry*, *comrade*, *ally*, *enemy*, *invade*, *assail*, *advance*, *attack*, *defend*, *retreat*, *defeat*, *surrender*, *strategy*, *campaign*, *victory*, and *champion*.

And there are many more, and they all came into English because William the Conqueror and his descendants gave us the language in which English warfare was conducted after 1066. In fact, you have to work to find military terms which survive from the defeated Anglo Saxons. Most of those words actually relate to the equipment they used, and they continue to exist in some form even to this day. The Anglo Saxons gave us words like *sword*, *shield*, *axe*, *spear*, *helmet*, *bow*, *arrow*, and *weapon*, but other than surviving tools and equipment names generally come from Norman French. And that's a good example of how the French conquerors changed the language of the Anglo-Saxons.

King Edward of England had become very sick late in the year 1065, and his condition got progressively worse. By late December, he was bedridden. As it turned out, his last illness coincided with the completion of his favorite project: the construction of Westminster Abbey, just upriver from London. Throughout his reign, Edward had supervised and overseen the construction of the church, and now, late in the year 1065, it was finally completed. The consecration and dedication of the church was set for December 28th. But despite the fact that it had been his lifelong passion, Edward the Confessor was too ill to attend the dedication

ceremony. Rumors of Edwards' illness were probably widespread by this point and his failure to attend the Westminster dedication confirmed to everyone that he was likely in his final days.



*Figure 6.2: King Edward the Confessor*

Source: Wikipedia

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Edward held on for another week, so as we enter the first week of January 1066, Edward was still the king of England, but that reign was coming to an end. In his final days, Edward was surrounded by a small handful of retainers and close associates. One of those associates was the man who had been the effective ruler of England over the prior decade: Harold Godwinson, the Earl of Wessex and the son of the late Earl Godwin. Godwin the father had been a rival of the king, but his son Harold generally ruled as an ally.

It appears that Edward came to trust Harold over time, and now as Edward lay dying, he designated Harold as his successor. On his deathbed, the king told Harold that he wanted to be buried at Westminster, and he committed the kingdom to Harold's protection. Early in the morning of January 5th, Edward finally passed away. With Edward's death, he had to be buried, and a new king had to be chosen. Now under normal circumstances, the selection of a new king might take a few days or a few weeks, but as it turned out, the Witan (literally 'wise men' who advised the king) had already been summoned at Christmas time, and given Edward's dire



condition, they were still in town waiting for the inevitable. As soon as Edward died, the Witan were gathered to select a new king, and they immediately selected Harold.

On the day after Edward died, two major events occurred. In the morning, *Edward was laid to rest at Westminster, and in the afternoon, Harold was crowned as the new king. The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* records the following:

King Edward died, or went forth, on Twelfth-mass eve,

*se cyng Eadward forðferde on Twelfts mæsse æfen*

And he was buried on Twelfth mass day

*hine mann bebyrgede on Twelftan mæssedæg*

In the newly hallowed, or consecrated church at Westminster

*innan þære niwa halgodre circean on Westmyntre*

And earl Harold succeeded to the Kingdom of England

*Harold eorl feng to Englalandes cynerice*

Thanks to these rapidly moving events, England now had a new king before most of the country even knew the old King was dead. However, William of Normandy felt that he had been promised the throne by Edward and that Harold Godwinson had confirmed that promise by taking an oath to William. So as word spread that Edward the Confessor was terminally ill in England, William was probably planning a trip across the Channel to receive his new title. But that's not what happened.

For years, William had let it be known around Normandy that he was Edward's heir, that he would one day be the king of England. Now he had been made a liar and made to look like a fool. Some historical sources say that William tied and untied his cloak because buttons were

not yet a fashion accessory, and I make this note because there's actually a linguistic connection between buttons and William's ultimate response to the news he received.



*Figure 6.3: Statue of William the Conqueror*

Source: Wikipedia

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The word *button* is, in fact, a French word, though it has Germanic and ultimately Indo-European roots. The Indo-European root word was *bhau-*, and it meant ‘to push or strike,’ and a button was a fastener which you had to push through a small opening, so that root word produced the word *button*. And that same sense of pushing or striking something also produced the Old English word *beat*, so *beat* and *button* are cognates. And you might beat something with a *bat*, from the same root, and if you have *beat* someone with a *bat*, you might get charged with *battery* from the same root via French. And if you have an argument with someone you might *butt heads*, again via French. If your argument leads to a physical confrontation then you might engage in *combat*, from the same root. And if you gather supporters and face off against your opponent, then you might have a *battle*, again from the same root via French.

So, all of that means that *beat*, *bat*, *butt*, *button*, and *battle* are cognates; they come from the same root. And even though William might not have known anything of buttons, he definitely knew about battles, and the ultimate kingship of England was going to be determined by a battle.

In February of 1066, about a month after Edward died, William arranged a meeting of his closest allies and vassals. He told them that he planned to gather an army and invade England in the summer. Now this announcement was probably expected, but it was still met with a lot of skepticism. Many of William's allies and supporters weren't sure that he could pull off a successful invasion by sea. Yes, the Vikings had invaded England by sea, but they were skilled at sailing and boat-building. The Normans, on the other hand, were a land power, not a sea power. They didn't have the ships or the maritime skill to launch an invasion of England.

Furthermore, when the Vikings invaded England, they fought on foot, just like the Anglo-Saxons did. But the Normans had a cavalry and they fought on horseback with chain mail and armor, so horses would also have to be transported across the channel, along with all of the knights' equipment. Beyond the logistics of building ships and gathering an army big enough to actually win, they would be completely dependent upon the wind to get there. Again, Viking ships could be rowed if the winds weren't favorable, but Norman ships relied solely upon the wind and sails. And the winds were unpredictable in the North Atlantic; no wind would leave them stranded, and too much wind in the wrong direction would send them off course, so the logistics were a nightmare, and assuming they actually made it across the Channel intact, the English army would certainly be waiting for them. It wasn't going to be a surprise attack like most of the Viking raids because everyone in England knew that William would be coming.

And England was larger and richer than Normandy, so England could muster large armies, while William could only fight with the number of troops he could actually bring across

the Channel on boats. In order for William to launch a successful invasion of England, he was going to have to be either a miracle worker or a magician, but if he was successful, he would be remembered for working wonders and doing what no other man could do.

But more important for the history of English, he did something that ultimately contributed to the decline of Old English as a written language. Realizing that he needed support throughout France for his planned invasion, William decided to seek the approval of the one person who would give his mission legitimacy: the Pope. The Crusades were still about 30 years away, but the idea of papal support for a military mission wasn't new. If the Pope gave his blessing, all who died in support of the mission were deemed martyrs, and they would be guaranteed eternal salvation. So, it was a great way to drum up support for the expedition.



*Figure 6.4: William the Conqueror with Papal Flag*

Source: Wikipedia  
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As it turned out, William had an inside connection to the Pope. The Pope was Alexander II. About 20 years earlier, as a young cleric, Alexander had studied at a monastery in Normandy.

And while there, one of his teachers was a monk named Lanfranc, and Lanfranc was now a bishop in Normandy. Lanfranc was not only a close ally of William, he was also a close friend of the Pope. So Lanfranc acted as a go-between. William was seen as a sympathetic figure in Rome; he'd been a strong patron of the church in Normandy, and Pope Alexander remembered his time in Normandy with great fondness. But more importantly, William argued that the English Church was out of line with Rome's teachings, and that only he could bring it back into compliance. Furthermore, the English Church was so far away that Rome didn't always have a good sense of what was going on in England. That made it easy to convince the pope that the English Church was out of control, but the biggest problem for the English Church may have been the fact that much of its literature and pastoral work was being composed in English rather than Latin. Since the time of Alfred the Great, the English church had been translating parts of the Bible and other religious texts into English. And that was unusual at the time; the original Latin texts were considered sacred, and any attempt to render them into a local vernacular was viewed with suspicion in Rome.

The Roman cardinals and church officials didn't speak English, so they weren't exactly sure what was being taught to the English congregations. They suspected that the true meaning of the original texts were being lost in those translations. So here, we may find part of the answer for why Old English writing disappeared so quickly in the wake of the Norman Conquest. Certainly, the church scribes in England didn't stop speaking English, so why did so many of them immediately stop writing in English after 1066? Well, it appears that it was all part of William's agenda. He promised to reform the English Church in order to get papal support for his invasion. And part of those reforms probably included a return to Latin and the relegation of the English language to a secondary role.

After the conquest, Latin once again became the primary language of the English Church and Old English writing began to disappear. Here we see some of the first linguistic consequences of the Norman Conquest; William's coronation ceremony was conducted in both Latin and English. And during the coronation a new element was introduced: a call for the people to consent to William's rule. The people assembled in the Abbey were questioned in both French and English as to whether they accepted William as their ruler. The congregation shouted, "Vivat Rex!" and then in English, "Long live the King!" but William's assembled knights outside of the Abbey misinterpreted the commotion inside. They heard the yelling and thought a revolt was under way, so they went on a rampage and set fire to the surrounding buildings and killed many of the Saxons who are assembled outside.

It was an ominous beginning to William's reign. The political and social changes were just beginning and so were the linguistic changes. Old English texts became much less common after Hastings. Latin and French would become the standard written languages going forward.

## Excerpt from Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*

Chaucer lived near the end of the ME period. But he wrote one of great works of this period, *The Canterbury Tales*. Chaucer (1343-1400) lived during the Middle English period (1066 - 1500). He was ten years old when the bubonic plague hit English (1348 - 1352).

This is a modern translation. Just so you are aware, *The Canterbury Tales* describes a group of twenty-nine travelers who are on religious pilgrimage to Canterbury. The travelers have a competition to see who can tell the most entertaining story. This is the prologue to one of the tales and the actual tale. Be aware the Chaucer used some very crude language and there are many allusions to sex and other bodily functions. But this is important to us because this shows

how English, after the bubonic plague, made a comeback from being pushed aside by Latin and Norman French.

## General Prologue

WHEN that Aprilis, with his showers swoot,  
The drought of March hath pierced to the root,  
And bathed every vein in such licour,  
Of which virtue engender'd is the flower;  
When Zephyrus eke with his swoote breath  
Inspired hath in every holt and heath  
The tender croppes and the younge sun  
Hath in the Ram his halfe course y-run,  
And smalle fowles make melody,  
That sleepen all the night with open eye,  
(So pricketh them nature in their corage);  
Then longe folk to go on pilgrimages,  
And palmers for to seeke strange strands,  
To ferne hallows couth in sundry lands;  
And specially, from every shire's end  
Of Engleland, to Canterbury they wend,  
The holy blissful Martyr for to seek,  
That them hath holpen, when that they were sick.  
Befell that, in that season on a day,  
In Southwark at the Tabard as I lay,  
Ready to wenden on my pilgrimage  
To Canterbury with devout corage,  
At night was come into that hostelry  
Well nine and twenty in a company  
Of sundry folk, by aventure y-fall  
In fellowship, and pilgrims were they all,  
That toward Canterbury woulde ride.  
The chamber, and the stables were wide,  
And well we weren eased at the best.  
And shortly, when the sunne was to rest,  
So had I spoken with them every one,  
That I was of their fellowship anon,  
And made forword early for to rise,  
To take our way there as I you devise.  
But natheless, while I have time and space,  
Ere that I farther in this tale pace,  
Me thinketh it accordant to reason,

To tell you alle the condition  
Of each of them, so as it seemed me,  
And which they weren, and of what degree;  
And eke in what array that they were in:  
And at a Knight then will I first begin.  
A KNIGHT there was, and that a worthy man,  
That from the time that he first began  
To riden out, he loved chivalry,  
Truth and honour, freedom and courtesy.  
Full worthy was he in his Lorde's war,  
And thereto had he ridden, no man farre,  
As well in Christendom as in Heatheness,  
And ever honour'd for his worthiness  
At Alisandre he was when it was won.  
Full often time he had the board begun  
Above alle nations in Prusse.  
In Lettowe had he reysed, and in Russe,  
No Christian man so oft of his degree.  
In Grenade at the siege eke had he be  
Of Algesir, and ridden in Belmarie.  
At Leyes was he, and at Satalie,  
When they were won; and in the Greate Sea  
At many a noble army had he be.  
At mortal battles had he been fifteen,  
And foughten for our faith at Tramissene.  
In listes thries, and aye slain his foe.  
This ilke worthy knight had been also  
Some time with the lord of Palatie,  
Against another heathen in Turkie:  
And evermore he had a sovereign price.  
And though that he was worthy he was wise,  
And of his port as meek as is a maid.  
He never yet no villainy ne said  
In all his life, unto no manner wight.  
He was a very perfect gentle knight.  
But for to telle you of his array,  
His horse was good, but yet he was not gay.  
Of fustian he weared a gipon,  
Alle besmotted with his habergeon,  
For he was late y-come from his voyage,  
And wente for to do his pilgrimage.  
With him there was his son, a younge SQUIRE,  
A lover, and a lusty bachelor,  
With lockes crulle as they were laid in press.  
Of twenty year of age he was I guess.  
Of his stature he was of even length,



And wonderly deliver, and great of strength.  
And he had been some time in chevachie,  
In Flanders, in Artois, and Picardie,  
And borne him well, as of so little space,  
In hope to standen in his lady's grace.  
Embroider'd was he, as it were a mead  
All full of freshe flowers, white and red.  
Singing he was, or fluting all the day;  
He was as fresh as is the month of May.  
Short was his gown, with sleeves long and wide.  
Well could he sit on horse, and faire ride.  
He coulde songes make, and well indite,  
Joust, and eke dance, and well pourtray and write.  
So hot he loved, that by nightertale  
He slept no more than doth the nightingale.  
Courteous he was, lowly, and serviceable,  
And carv'd before his father at the table.  
A YEOMAN had he, and servants no mo'  
At that time, for him list ride so  
And he was clad in coat and hood of green.  
A sheaf of peacock arrows bright and keen  
Under his belt he bare full thriftily.  
Well could he dress his tackle yeomanly:  
His arrows drooped not with feathers low;  
And in his hand he bare a mighty bow.  
A nut-head had he, with a brown visiage:  
Of wood-craft coud he well all the usage:  
Upon his arm he bare a gay bracer,  
And by his side a sword and a buckler,  
And on that other side a gay daggere,  
Harnessed well, and sharp as point of spear:  
A Christopher on his breast of silver sheen.  
An horn he bare, the baldric was of green:  
A forester was he soothly as I guess.  
There was also a Nun, a PRIORESS,  
That of her smiling was full simple and coy;  
Her greatest oathe was but by Saint Loy;  
And she was cleped Madame Eglentine.  
Full well she sang the service divine,  
Entuned in her nose full seemly;  
And French she spake full fair and fetisly  
After the school of Stratford atte Bow,  
For French of Paris was to her unknow.  
At meate was she well y-taught withal;  
She let no morsel from her lippes fall,  
Nor wet her fingers in her sauce deep.

Well could she carry a morsel, and well keep,  
That no droppe ne fell upon her breast.  
In courtesy was set full much her lest.  
Her over-lippe wiped she so clean,  
That in her cup there was no farthing seen  
Of grease, when she drunken had her draught;  
Full seemely after her meat she raught:  
And sickerly she was of great disport,  
And full pleasant, and amiable of port,  
And pained her to counterfeite cheer  
Of court, and be estatly of mannere,  
And to be holden digne of reverence.  
But for to speaken of her conscience,  
She was so charitable and so pitous,  
She woulde weep if that she saw a mouse  
Caught in a trap, if it were dead or bled.  
Of smalle houndes had she, that she fed  
With roasted flesh, and milk, and wastel bread.  
But sore she wept if one of them were dead,  
Or if men smote it with a yarde smart:  
And all was conscience and tender heart.  
Full seemly her wimple y-pinched was;  
Her nose tretis; her eyen gray as glass;  
Her mouth full small, and thereto soft and red;  
But sickerly she had a fair forehead.  
It was almost a spanne broad I trow;  
For hardily she was not undergrow.  
Full fetis was her cloak, as I was ware.  
Of small coral about her arm she bare  
A pair of beades, gauded all with green;  
And thereon hung a brooch of gold full sheen,  
On which was first y-written a crown'd A,  
And after, Amor vincit omnia.  
Another Nun also with her had she,  
That was her chapelleine, and PRIESTES three.  
A MONK there was, a fair for the mast'ry  
An out-rider, that loved venery;  
A manly man, to be an abbot able.  
Full many a dainty horse had he in stable:  
And when he rode, men might his bridle hear  
Jingeling in a whistling wind as clear,  
And eke as loud, as doth the chapel bell,  
There as this lord was keeper of the cell.  
The rule of Saint Maur and of Saint Benet,  
Because that it was old and somedeal strait  
This ilke monk let olde thinges pace,

And held after the newe world the trace.  
He gave not of the text a pulled hen,  
That saith, that hunters be not holy men:  
Ne that a monk, when he is cloisterless;  
Is like to a fish that is waterless;  
This is to say, a monk out of his cloister.  
This ilke text held he not worth an oyster;  
And I say his opinion was good.  
Why should he study, and make himselfe wood  
Upon a book in cloister always pore,  
Or swinken with his handes, and labour,  
As Austin bid? how shall the world be served?  
Let Austin have his swink to him reserved.  
Therefore he was a prickasour aright:  
Greyhounds he had as swift as fowl of flight;  
Of pricking and of hunting for the hare  
Was all his lust, for no cost would he spare.  
I saw his sleeves purfil'd at the hand  
With gris, and that the finest of the land.  
And for to fasten his hood under his chin,  
He had of gold y-wrought a curious pin;  
A love-knot in the greater end there was.  
His head was bald, and shone as any glass,  
And eke his face, as it had been anoint;  
He was a lord full fat and in good point;  
His eyeen steep, and rolling in his head,  
That steamed as a furnace of a lead.  
His bootes supple, his horse in great estate,  
Now certainly he was a fair prelate;  
He was not pale as a forpined gost:  
A fat swan lov'd he best of any roast.  
His palfrey was as brown as is a berry.  
A FRIAR there was, a wanton and a merry,  
A limitour a full solemne man.  
In all the orders four is none that can  
So much of dalliance and fair language.  
He had y-made full many a marriage  
Of younge women, at his owen cost.  
Unto his order he was a noble post;  
Full well belov'd, and familiar was he  
With franklins over all in his country,  
And eke with worthy women of the town:  
For he had power of confession,  
As said himselfe, more than a curate,  
For of his order he was licentiate.  
Full sweetely heard he confession,

And pleasant was his absolution.  
He was an easy man to give penance,  
There as he wist to have a good pittance:  
For unto a poor order for to give  
Is signe that a man is well y-shrive.  
For if he gave, he durste make avant,  
He wiste that the man was repentant.  
For many a man so hard is of his heart,  
He may not weep although him sore smart.  
Therefore instead of weeping and prayeres,  
Men must give silver to the poore freres.  
His tippet was aye farsed full of knives  
And pinnes, for to give to faire wives;  
And certainly he had a merry note:  
Well could he sing and playen on a rote;  
Of yeddings he bare utterly the prize.  
His neck was white as is the fleur-de-lis.  
Thereto he strong was as a champion,  
And knew well the taverns in every town.  
And every hosteler and gay tapstere,  
Better than a lazar or a beggere,  
For unto such a worthy man as he  
Accordeth not, as by his faculty,  
To have with such lazars acquaintance.  
It is not honest, it may not advance,  
As for to deale with no such pouraille  
But all with rich, and sellers of vitaille.  
And ov'r all there as profit should arise,  
Courteous he was, and lowly of service;  
There n'as no man nowhere so virtuous.  
He was the beste beggar in all his house:  
And gave a certain farme for the grant,  
None of his bretheren came in his haunt.  
For though a widow hadde but one shoe,  
So pleasant was his In Principio  
Yet would he have a farthing ere he went;  
His purchase was well better than his rent.  
And rage he could and play as any whelp,  
In lovedays there could he muchel help.  
For there was he not like a cloisterer,  
With threadbare cope as is a poor scholer;  
But he was like a master or a pope.  
Of double worsted was his semicope,  
That rounded was as a bell out of press.  
Somewhat he lisped for his wantonness,  
To make his English sweet upon his tongue;

And in his harping, when that he had sung,  
His eyen twinkled in his head aright,  
As do the starres in a frosty night.  
This worthy limitour was call'd Huberd.  
A MERCHANT was there with a forked beard,  
In motley, and high on his horse he sat,  
Upon his head a Flandrish beaver hat.  
His bootes clasped fair and fetisly.  
His reasons aye spake he full solemnly,  
Sounding alway th' increase of his winning.  
He would the sea were kept for any thing  
Betwixte Middleburg and Orewell  
Well could he in exchange shieldes sell  
This worthy man full well his wit beset;  
There wiste no wight that he was in debt,  
So estately was he of governance  
With his bargains, and with his chevisance.  
For sooth he was a worthy man withal,  
But sooth to say, I n'ot how men him call.  
A CLERK there was of Oxenford also,  
That unto logic hadde long y-go.  
As leane was his horse as is a rake,  
And he was not right fat, I undertake;  
But looked hollow, and thereto soberly.  
Full threadbare was his overest courtepy,  
For he had gotten him yet no benefice,  
Ne was not worldly, to have an office.  
For him was lever have at his bed's head  
Twenty bookes, clothed in black or red,  
Of Aristotle, and his philosophy,  
Than robes rich, or fiddle, or psalt'ry.  
But all be that he was a philosopher,  
Yet hadde he but little gold in coffer,  
But all that he might of his friendes hent,  
On bookes and on learning he it spent,  
And busily gan for the soules pray  
Of them that gave him wherewith to scholay  
Of study took he moste care and heed.  
Not one word spake he more than was need;  
And that was said in form and reverence,  
And short and quick, and full of high sentence.  
Sounding in moral virtue was his speech,  
And gladly would he learn, and gladly teach.  
A SERGEANT OF THE LAW, wary and wise,  
That often had y-been at the Parvis,  
There was also, full rich of excellence.

Discreet he was, and of great reverence:  
He seemed such, his wordes were so wise,  
Justice he was full often in assize,  
By patent, and by plein commission;  
For his science, and for his high renown,  
Of fees and robes had he many one.  
So great a purchaser was nowhere none.  
All was fee simple to him, in effect  
His purchasing might not be in suspect  
Nowhere so busy a man as he there was  
And yet he seemed busier than he was  
In termes had he case' and doomes all  
That from the time of King William were fall.  
Thereto he could indite, and make a thing  
There coulde no wight pinch at his writing.  
And every statute coud he plain by rote  
He rode but homely in a medley coat,  
Girt with a seint of silk, with barres small;  
Of his array tell I no longer tale.  
A FRANKELIN was in this company;  
White was his beard, as is the daisy.  
Of his complexion he was sanguine.  
Well lov'd he in the morn a sop in wine.  
To liven in delight was ever his won,  
For he was Epicurus' owen son,  
That held opinion, that plein delight  
Was verily felicity perfite.  
An householder, and that a great, was he;  
Saint Julian he was in his country.  
His bread, his ale, was alway after one;  
A better envined man was nowhere none;  
Withoute bake-meat never was his house,  
Of fish and flesh, and that so plenteous,  
It snowed in his house of meat and drink,  
Of alle dainties that men coulde think.  
After the sundry seasons of the year,  
So changed he his meat and his soupere.  
Full many a fat partridge had he in mew,  
And many a bream, and many a luce in stew  
Woe was his cook, but if his sauce were  
Poignant and sharp, and ready all his gear.  
His table dormant in his hall alway  
Stood ready cover'd all the longe day.  
At sessions there was he lord and sire.  
Full often time he was knight of the shire  
An anlace, and a gipciere all of silk,

Hung at his girdle, white as morning milk.  
A sheriff had he been, and a countour  
Was nowhere such a worthy vavasour  
An HABERDASHER, and a CARPENTER,  
A WEBBE, a DYER, and a TAPISER,  
Were with us eke, cloth'd in one livery,  
Of a solemn and great fraternity.  
Full fresh and new their gear y-picked was.  
Their knives were y-chaped not with brass,  
But all with silver wrought full clean and well,  
Their girdles and their pouches every deal.  
Well seemed each of them a fair burgess,  
To sitten in a guild-hall, on the dais.  
Evereach, for the wisdom that he can,  
Was shapely for to be an alderman.  
For chattels hadde they enough and rent,  
And eke their wives would it well assent:  
And elles certain they had been to blame.  
It is full fair to be y-clep'd madame,  
And for to go to vigils all before,  
And have a mantle royally y-bore.  
A COOK they hadde with them for the nones,  
To boil the chickens and the marrow bones,  
And powder merchant tart and galingale.  
Well could he know a draught of London ale.  
He could roast, and stew, and broil, and fry,  
Make mortrewes, and well bake a pie.  
But great harm was it, as it thoughte me,  
That, on his shin a mormal hadde he.  
For blanc manger, that made he with the best  
A SHIPMAN was there, wonned far by West:  
For ought I wot, be was of Dartemouth.  
He rode upon a rouncy, as he couth,  
All in a gown of falding to the knee.  
A dagger hanging by a lace had he  
About his neck under his arm adown;  
The hot summer had made his hue all brown;  
And certainly he was a good fellow.  
Full many a draught of wine he had y-draw  
From Bourdeaux-ward, while that the chapmen sleep;  
Of nice conscience took he no keep.  
If that he fought, and had the higher hand,  
By water he sent them home to every land.  
But of his craft to reckon well his tides,  
His streames and his strandes him besides,  
His herberow, his moon, and lodemanage,

There was none such, from Hull unto Carthage  
Hardy he was, and wise, I undertake:  
With many a tempest had his beard been shake.  
He knew well all the havens, as they were,  
From Scotland to the Cape of Finisterre,  
And every creek in Bretagne and in Spain:  
His barge y-cleped was the Magdelain.  
With us there was a DOCTOR OF PHYSIC;  
In all this worlde was there none him like  
To speak of physic, and of surgery:  
For he was grounded in astronomy.  
He kept his patient a full great deal  
In houres by his magic natural.  
Well could he fortune the ascendent  
Of his images for his patient.  
He knew the cause of every malady,  
Were it of cold, or hot, or moist, or dry,  
And where engender'd, and of what humour.  
He was a very perfect practisour  
The cause y-know, and of his harm the root,  
Anon he gave to the sick man his boot  
Full ready had he his apothecaries,  
To send his drugges and his lectuaries  
For each of them made other for to win  
Their friendship was not newe to begin  
Well knew he the old Esculapius,  
And Dioscorides, and eke Rufus;  
Old Hippocras, Hali, and Gallien;  
Serapion, Rasis, and Avicen;  
Averrois, Damascene, and Constantin;  
Bernard, and Gatisden, and Gilbertin.  
Of his diet measurable was he,  
For it was of no superfluity,  
But of great nourishing, and digestible.  
His study was but little on the Bible.  
In sanguine and in perse he clad was all  
Lined with taffeta, and with sendall.  
And yet he was but easy of dispense:  
He kept that he won in the pestilence.  
For gold in physic is a cordial;  
Therefore he loved gold in special.  
A good WIFE was there OF beside BATH,  
But she was somedeal deaf, and that was scath.  
Of cloth-making she hadde such an haunt,  
She passed them of Ypres, and of Gaunt.  
In all the parish wife was there none,



That to the off'ring before her should gon,  
And if there did, certain so wroth was she,  
That she was out of alle charity  
Her coverchiefs were full fine of ground  
I durste swear, they weighede ten pound  
That on the Sunday were upon her head.  
Her hosen weren of fine scarlet red,  
Full strait y-tied, and shoes full moist and new  
Bold was her face, and fair and red of hue.  
She was a worthy woman all her live,  
Husbands at the church door had she had five,  
Withouten other company in youth;  
But thereof needeth not to speak as nouth.  
And thrice had she been at Jerusalem;  
She hadde passed many a strange stream  
At Rome she had been, and at Bologne,  
In Galice at Saint James, and at Cologne;  
She coude much of wand'ring by the Way.  
Gat-toothed was she, soothly for to say.  
Upon an ambler easily she sat,  
Y-wimpled well, and on her head an hat  
As broad as is a buckler or a targe.  
A foot-mantle about her hippes large,  
And on her feet a pair of spurres sharp.  
In fellowship well could she laugh and carp  
Of remedies of love she knew perchance  
For of that art she coud the olde dance.  
A good man there was of religion,  
That was a poore PARSON of a town:  
But rich he was of holy thought and werk.  
He was also a learned man, a clerk,  
That Christe's gospel truly woulde preach.  
His parishens devoutly would he teach.  
Benign he was, and wonder diligent,  
And in adversity full patient:  
And such he was y-proved often sithes.  
Full loth were him to curse for his tithes,  
But rather would he given out of doubt,  
Unto his poore parishens about,  
Of his off'ring, and eke of his substance.  
He could in little thing have suffisance.  
Wide was his parish, and houses far asunder,  
But he ne left not, for no rain nor thunder,  
In sickness and in mischief to visit  
The farthest in his parish, much and lit,  
Upon his feet, and in his hand a staff.

This noble ensample to his sheep he gaf,  
That first he wrought, and afterward he taught.  
Out of the gospel he the wordes caught,  
And this figure he added yet thereto,  
That if gold ruste, what should iron do?  
For if a priest be foul, on whom we trust,  
No wonder is a lewed man to rust:  
And shame it is, if that a priest take keep,  
To see a shitten shepherd and clean sheep:  
Well ought a priest ensample for to give,  
By his own cleanness, how his sheep should live.  
He sette not his benefice to hire,  
And left his sheep eucumber'd in the mire,  
And ran unto London, unto Saint Paul's,  
To seeke him a chantery for souls,  
Or with a brotherhood to be withhold:  
But dwelt at home, and kepte well his fold,  
So that the wolf ne made it not miscarry.  
He was a shepherd, and no mercenary.  
And though he holy were, and virtuous,  
He was to sinful men not dispitous  
Nor of his speeche dangerous nor dign  
But in his teaching discreet and benign.  
To drawen folk to heaven, with fairness,  
By good ensample, was his business:  
But it were any person obstinate,  
What so he were of high or low estate,  
Him would he snibbe sharply for the nones.  
A better priest I trow that nowhere none is.  
He waited after no pomp nor reverence,  
Nor maked him a spiced conscience,  
But Christe's lore, and his apostles' twelve,  
He taught, and first he follow'd it himselve.  
With him there was a PLOUGHMAN, was his brother,  
That had y-laid of dung full many a fother.  
A true swinker and a good was he,  
Living in peace and perfect charity.  
God loved he beste with all his heart  
At alle times, were it gain or smart,  
And then his neighebour right as himselve.  
He woulde thresh, and thereto dike, and delve,  
For Christe's sake, for every poore wight,  
Withouten hire, if it lay in his might.  
His tithes payed he full fair and well,  
Both of his proper swink, and his chattel  
In a tabard he rode upon a mare.

There was also a Reeve, and a Millere,  
A Sompnour, and a Pardoner also,  
A Manciple, and myself, there were no mo'.  
The MILLER was a stout carle for the nones,  
Full big he was of brawn, and eke of bones;  
That proved well, for ov'r all where he came,  
At wrestling he would bear away the ram.  
He was short-shouldered, broad, a thicke gnarr,  
There was no door, that he n'old heave off bar,  
Or break it at a running with his head.  
His beard as any sow or fox was red,  
And thereto broad, as though it were a spade.  
Upon the cop right of his nose he had head  
A wart, and thereon stood a tuft of hairs  
Red as the bristles of a sowe's ears.  
His nose-thirles blacke were and wide.  
A sword and buckler bare he by his side.  
His mouth as wide was as a furnace.  
He was a jangler, and a goliardais,  
And that was most of sin and harlotries.  
Well could he steale corn, and tolle thrice  
And yet he had a thumb of gold, pardie.  
A white coat and a blue hood weared he  
A baggepipe well could he blow and soun',  
And therewithal he brought us out of town.  
A gentle MANCIPILE was there of a temple,  
Of which achatours mighte take ensample  
For to be wise in buying of vitaille.  
For whether that he paid, or took by taile,  
Algate he waited so in his achate,  
That he was aye before in good estate.  
Now is not that of God a full fair grace  
That such a lewed mannes wit shall pace  
The wisdom of an heap of learned men?  
Of masters had he more than thries ten,  
That were of law expert and curious:  
Of which there was a dozen in that house,  
Worthy to be stewards of rent and land  
Of any lord that is in Engleland,  
To make him live by his proper good,  
In honour debtless, but if he were wood,  
Or live as scarcely as him list desire;  
And able for to helpen all a shire  
In any case that mighte fall or hap;  
And yet this Manciple set their aller cap  
The REEVE was a slender choleric man

His beard was shav'd as nigh as ever he can.  
His hair was by his eares round y-shorn;  
His top was docked like a priest befor  
Full longe were his legges, and full lean  
Y-like a staff, there was no calf y-seen  
Well could he keep a garner and a bin  
There was no auditor could on him win  
Well wist he by the drought, and by the rain,  
The yielding of his seed and of his grain  
His lorde's sheep, his neat, and his dairy  
His swine, his horse, his store, and his poultry,  
Were wholly in this Reeve's governing,  
And by his cov'nant gave he reckoning,  
Since that his lord was twenty year of age;  
There could no man bring him in arrearage  
There was no bailiff, herd, nor other hine  
That he ne knew his sleight and his covine  
They were adrad of him, as of the death  
His wonnin was full fair upon an heath  
With greene trees y-shadow'd was his place.  
He coulde better than his lord purchase  
Full rich he was y-stored privily  
His lord well could he please subtilly,  
To give and lend him of his owen good,  
And have a thank, and yet a coat and hood.  
In youth he learned had a good mistere  
He was a well good wright, a carpentere  
This Reeve sate upon a right good stot,  
That was all pomel gray, and highte Scot.  
A long surcoat of perse upon he had,  
And by his side he bare a rusty blade.  
Of Norfolk was this Reeve, of which I tell,  
Beside a town men clepen Baldeswell,  
Tucked he was, as is a friar, about,  
And ever rode the hinderest of the rout.  
A SOMPNOUR was there with us in that place,  
That had a fire-red cherubinnes face,  
For sausefleme he was, with eyen narrow.  
As hot he was and lecherous as a sparrow,  
With scalled browes black, and pilled beard:  
Of his visage children were sore afeard.  
There n'as quicksilver, litharge, nor brimstone,  
Boras, ceruse, nor oil of tartar none,  
Nor ointement that woulde cleanse or bite,  
That him might helpen of his whelkes white,  
Nor of the knobbes sitting on his cheeks.

Well lov'd he garlic, onions, and leeks,  
And for to drink strong wine as red as blood.  
Then would he speak, and cry as he were wood;  
And when that he well drunken had the wine,  
Then would he speake no word but Latin.  
A few termes knew he, two or three,  
That he had learned out of some decree;  
No wonder is, he heard it all the day.  
And eke ye knowen well, how that a jay  
Can clepen "Wat," as well as can the Pope.  
But whoso would in other thing him grope  
Then had he spent all his philosophy,  
Aye, *Questio quid juris*, would he cry.  
He was a gentle harlot and a kind;  
A better fellow should a man not find.  
He woulde suffer, for a quart of wine,  
A good fellow to have his concubine  
A twelvemonth, and excuse him at the full.  
Full privily a finch eke could he pull.  
And if he found owhere a good fellow,  
He woulde teache him to have none awe  
In such a case of the archdeacon's curse;  
But if a manne's soul were in his purse;  
For in his purse he should y-punished be.  
"Purse is the archdeacon's hell," said he.  
But well I wot, he lied right indeed:  
Of cursing ought each guilty man to dread,  
For curse will slay right as assoiling saveth;  
And also 'ware him of a *significavit*.  
In danger had he at his owen guise  
The younge girles of the diocese,  
And knew their counsel, and was of their rede.  
A garland had he set upon his head,  
As great as it were for an alestake:  
A buckler had he made him of a cake.  
With him there rode a gentle *PARDONERE*  
Of *Ronceval*, his friend and his compere,  
That straight was comen from the court of Rome.  
Full loud he sang, "Come hither, love, to me"  
This *Sompnour* bare to him a stiff burdoun,  
Was never trump of half so great a soun.  
This *Pardoner* had hair as yellow as wax,  
But smooth it hung, as doth a strike of flax:  
By ounces hung his lockes that he had,  
And therewith he his shoulders oversprad.  
Full thin it lay, by culpons one and one,

But hood for jollity, he weared none,  
For it was trussed up in his wallet.  
Him thought he rode all of the newe get,  
Dishevel, save his cap, he rode all bare.  
Such glaring eyen had he, as an hare.  
A vernicle had he sew'd upon his cap.  
His wallet lay before him in his lap,  
Bretful of pardon come from Rome all hot.  
A voice he had as small as hath a goat.  
No beard had he, nor ever one should have.  
As smooth it was as it were new y-shave;  
I trow he were a gelding or a mare.  
But of his craft, from Berwick unto Ware,  
Ne was there such another pardonere.  
For in his mail he had a pillowbere,  
Which, as he saide, was our Lady's veil:  
He said, he had a gobbet of the sail  
That Sainte Peter had, when that he went  
Upon the sea, till Jesus Christ him hent.  
He had a cross of latoun full of stones,  
And in a glass he hadde pigge's bones.  
But with these relics, whenne that he fond  
A poore parson dwelling upon lond,  
Upon a day he got him more money  
Than that the parson got in moneths tway;  
And thus with feigned flattering and japes,  
He made the parson and the people his apes.  
But truely to tellen at the last,  
He was in church a noble ecclesiast.  
Well could he read a lesson or a story,  
But alderbest he sang an offertory:  
For well he wiste, when that song was sung,  
He muste preach, and well afile his tongue,  
To winne silver, as he right well could:  
Therefore he sang full merrily and loud.  
Now have I told you shortly in a clause  
Th' estate, th' array, the number, and eke the cause  
Why that assembled was this company  
In Southwark at this gentle hostelry,  
That highte the Tabard, fast by the Bell.  
But now is time to you for to tell  
How that we baren us that ilke night,  
When we were in that hostelry alight.  
And after will I tell of our voyage,  
And all the remnant of our pilgrimage.  
But first I pray you of your courtesy,

That ye arette it not my villainy,  
Though that I plainly speak in this matter.  
To tellen you their wordes and their cheer;  
Not though I speak their wordes properly.  
For this ye knowen all so well as I,  
Whoso shall tell a tale after a man,  
He must rehearse, as nigh as ever he can,  
Every word, if it be in his charge,  
All speak he ne'er so rudely and so large;  
Or elles he must tell his tale untrue,  
Or feigne things, or finde wordes new.  
He may not spare, although he were his brother;  
He must as well say one word as another.  
Christ spake Himself full broad in Holy Writ,  
And well ye wot no villainy is it.  
Eke Plato saith, whoso that can him read,  
The wordes must be cousin to the deed.  
Also I pray you to forgive it me,  
All have I not set folk in their degree,  
Here in this tale, as that they shoulde stand:  
My wit is short, ye may well understand.  
Great cheere made our Host us every one,  
And to the supper set he us anon:  
And served us with victual of the best.  
Strong was the wine, and well to drink us lest.  
A seemly man Our Hoste was withal  
For to have been a marshal in an hall.  
A large man he was with eyen steep,  
A fairer burgess is there none in Cheap:  
Bold of his speech, and wise and well y-taught,  
And of manhoode lacked him right naught.  
Eke thereto was he right a merry man,  
And after supper playen he began,  
And spake of mirth amonges other things,  
When that we hadde made our reckonings;  
And saide thus; "Now, lordinges, truly  
Ye be to me welcome right heartily:  
For by my troth, if that I shall not lie,  
I saw not this year such a company  
At once in this herberow, am is now.  
Fain would I do you mirth, an I wist how.  
And of a mirth I am right now bethought.  
To do you ease, and it shall coste nought.  
Ye go to Canterbury; God you speed,  
The blissful Martyr quite you your meed;  
And well I wot, as ye go by the way,

Ye shapen you to talken and to play:  
For truely comfort nor mirth is none  
To ride by the way as dumb as stone:  
And therefore would I make you disport,  
As I said erst, and do you some comfort.  
And if you liketh all by one assent  
Now for to standen at my judgement,  
And for to worken as I shall you say  
To-morrow, when ye riden on the way,  
Now by my father's soule that is dead,  
But ye be merry, smiteth off mine head.  
Hold up your hands withoute more speech.”  
Our counsel was not longe for to seech:  
Us thought it was not worth to make it wise,  
And granted him withoute more avise,  
And bade him say his verdict, as him lest.  
“Lordings (quoth he), now hearken for the best;  
But take it not, I pray you, in disdain;  
This is the point, to speak it plat and plain.  
That each of you, to shorten with your way  
In this voyage, shall tellen tales tway,  
To Canterbury-ward, I mean it so,  
And homeward he shall tellen other two,  
Of adventures that whilom have befall.  
And which of you that bear'th him best of all,  
That is to say, that telleth in this case  
Tales of best sentence and most solace,  
Shall have a supper at your aller cost  
Here in this place, sitting by this post,  
When that ye come again from Canterbury.  
And for to make you the more merry,  
I will myselve gladly with you ride,  
Right at mine owen cost, and be your guide.  
And whoso will my judgement withsay,  
Shall pay for all we spenden by the way.  
And if ye vouchesafe that it be so,  
Tell me anon withoute wordes mo',  
And I will early shape me therefore.”  
This thing was granted, and our oath we swore  
With full glad heart, and prayed him also,  
That he would vouchesafe for to do so,  
And that he woulde be our governour,  
And of our tales judge and reportour,  
And set a supper at a certain price;  
And we will ruled be at his device,  
In high and low: and thus by one assent,



We be accorded to his judgement.  
And thereupon the wine was fet anon.  
We drunken, and to reste went each one,  
Withouten any longer tarrying  
A-morrow, when the day began to spring,  
Up rose our host, and was our aller cock,  
And gather'd us together in a flock,  
And forth we ridden all a little space,  
Unto the watering of Saint Thomas:  
And there our host began his horse arrest,  
And saide; "Lordes, hearken if you lest.  
Ye weet your forword, and I it record.  
If even-song and morning-song accord,  
Let see now who shall telle the first tale.  
As ever may I drinke wine or ale,  
Whoso is rebel to my judgement,  
Shall pay for all that by the way is spent.  
Now draw ye cuts ere that ye farther twin.  
He which that hath the shortest shall begin."  
"Sir Knight (quoth he), my master and my lord,  
Now draw the cut, for that is mine accord.  
Come near (quoth he), my Lady Prioress,  
And ye, Sir Clerk, let be your shamefastness,  
Nor study not: lay hand to, every man."  
Anon to drawen every wight began,  
And shortly for to tellen as it was,  
Were it by a venture, or sort, or cas,  
The sooth is this, the cut fell to the Knight,  
Of which full blithe and glad was every wight;  
And tell he must his tale as was reason,  
By forword, and by composition,  
As ye have heard; what needeth wordes mo'?'  
And when this good man saw that it was so,  
As he that wise was and obedient  
To keep his forword by his free assent,  
He said; "Sithen I shall begin this game,  
Why, welcome be the cut in Godde's name.  
Now let us ride, and hearken what I say."  
And with that word we ridden forth our way;  
And he began with right a merry cheer  
His tale anon, and said as ye shall hear.

## The Wife of Bath's Tale

### THE PROLOGUE

Experience, though none authority  
Were in this world, is right enough for me  
To speak of woe that is in marriage:  
For, lordings, since I twelve year was of age,  
(Thanked be God that is etern on live),  
Husbands at the church door have I had five,  
For I so often have y-wedded be,  
And all were worthy men in their degree.  
But me was told, not longe time gone is  
That sithen Christe went never but ones since  
To wedding, in the Cane of Galilee,  
That by that ilk example taught he me,  
That I not wedded shoulde be but once.  
Lo, hearken eke a sharp word for the nonce,  
Beside a welle Jesus, God and man,  
Spake in reproof of the Samaritan:  
“Thou hast y-had five husbandes,” said he;  
“And thilke man, that now hath wedded thee,  
Is not thine husband:” thus said he certain;  
What that he meant thereby, I cannot sayn.  
But that I aske, why the fifthe man  
Was not husband to the Samaritan?  
How many might she have in marriage?  
Yet heard I never tellen in mine age in my life  
Upon this number definitioun.  
Men may divine, and glosen up and down;  
But well I wot, express without a lie,  
God bade us for to wax and multiply;  
That gentle text can I well understand.  
Eke well I wot, he said, that mine husband  
Should leave father and mother, and take to me;  
But of no number mention made he,  
Of bigamy or of octogamy;  
Why then should men speak of it villainy?  
Lo here, the wise king Dan Solomon,  
I trow that he had wives more than one;  
As would to God it lawful were to me  
To be refreshed half so oft as he!  
What gift of God had he for all his wives?  
No man hath such, that in this world alive is.  
God wot, this noble king, as to my wit,  
The first night had many a merry fit  
With each of them, so well was him on live.  
Blessed be God that I have wedded five!  
Welcome the sixth whenever that he shall.  
For since I will not keep me chaste in all,

When mine husband is from the world y-gone,  
Some Christian man shall wedde me anon.  
For then th' apostle saith that I am free  
To wed, a' God's half, where it liketh me.  
He saith, that to be wedded is no sin;  
Better is to be wedded than to brin. burn  
What recketh me though folk say villainy  
Of shrewed Lamech, and his bigamy?  
I wot well Abraham was a holy man,  
And Jacob eke, as far as ev'r I can.  
And each of them had wives more than two;  
And many another holy man also.  
Where can ye see, in any manner age,  
That highe God defended marriage  
By word express? I pray you tell it me;  
Or where commanded he virginity?  
I wot as well as you, it is no dread,  
Th' apostle, when he spake of maidenhead,  
He said, that precept thereof had he none:  
Men may counsel a woman to be one,  
But counseling is no commandement;  
He put it in our owen judgement.  
For, hadde God commanded maidenhead,  
Then had he damned wedding out of dread;  
And certes, if there were no seed y-sow,  
Virginity then whereof should it grow?  
Paul durste not commanden, at the least,  
A thing of which his Master gave no hest.  
The dart is set up for virginity;  
Catch whoso may, who runneth best let see.  
But this word is not ta'en of every wight,  
But there as God will give it of his might.  
I wot well that th' apostle was a maid,  
But natheless, although he wrote and said,  
He would that every wight were such as he,  
All is but counsel to virginity.  
And, since to be a wife he gave me leave  
Of indulgence, so is it no reprove  
To wedde me, if that my make should die,  
Without exception of bigamy;  
All were it good no woman for to touch  
(He meant as in his bed or in his couch),  
For peril is both fire and tow t'assemble  
Ye know what this example may resemble.  
This is all and some, he held virginity  
More profit than wedding in frailty:

(Frailty clepe I, but if that he and she frailty,  
Would lead their lives all in chastity),  
I grant it well, I have of none envy  
Who maidenhead prefer to bigamy;  
It liketh them t' be clean in body and ghost;  
Of mine estate I will not make a boast.  
For, well ye know, a lord in his household  
Hath not every vessel all of gold;  
Some are of tree, and do their lord service.  
God calleth folk to him in sundry wise,  
And each one hath of God a proper gift,  
Some this, some that, as liketh him to shift.  
Virginity is great perfection,  
And continence eke with devotion:  
But Christ, that of perfection is the well,  
Bade not every wight he should go sell  
All that he had, and give it to the poor,  
And in such wise follow him and his lore:  
He spake to them that would live perfectly, —  
And, lordings, by your leave, that am not I;  
I will bestow the flower of mine age  
In th' acts and in the fruits of marriage.  
Tell me also, to what conclusion  
Were members made of generation,  
And of so perfect wise a wight y-wrought?  
Trust me right well, they were not made for nought.  
Glose whoso will, and say both up and down,  
That they were made for the purgatioun  
Of urine, and of other thinges smale,  
And eke to know a female from a male:  
And for none other cause? say ye no?  
Experience wot well it is not so.  
So that the clerkes be not with me wroth,  
I say this, that they were made for both,  
That is to say, for office, and for ease  
Of engendrure, there we God not displease.  
Why should men elles in their bookes set,  
That man shall yield unto his wife her debt?  
Now wherewith should he make his payement,  
If he us'd not his silly instrument?  
Then were they made upon a creature  
To purge urine, and eke for engendrure.  
But I say not that every wight is hold,  
That hath such harness as I to you told,  
To go and use them in engendrure;  
Then should men take of chastity no cure.

Christ was a maid, and shapen as a man,  
 And many a saint, since that this world began,  
 Yet ever liv'd in perfect chastity.  
 I will not vie with no virginity.  
 Let them with bread of pured wheat be fed,  
 And let us wives eat our barley bread.  
 And yet with barley bread, Mark tell us can,  
 Our Lord Jesus refreshed many a man.  
 In such estate as God hath cleped us,  
 I'll persevere, I am not precious,  
 In wifhood I will use mine instrument  
 As freely as my Maker hath it sent.  
 If I be dangerous God give me sorrow;  
 Mine husband shall it have, both eve and morrow,  
 When that him list come forth and pay his debt.  
 A husband will I have, I will no let,  
 Which shall be both my debtor and my thrall,  
 And have his tribulation withal  
 Upon his flesh, while that I am his wife.  
 I have the power during all my life  
 Upon his proper body, and not he;  
 Right thus th' apostle told it unto me,  
 And bade our husbands for to love us well;  
 All this sentence me liketh every deal.  
 Up start the Pardoner, and that anon;  
 "Now, Dame," quoth he, "by God and by Saint John,  
 Ye are a noble preacher in this case.  
 I was about to wed a wife, alas!  
 What? should I bie it on my flesh so dear?  
 Yet had I lever wed no wife this year."  
 "Abide," quoth she; "my tale is not begun  
 Nay, thou shalt drinken of another tun  
 Ere that I go, shall savour worse than ale.  
 And when that I have told thee forth my tale  
 Of tribulation in marriage,  
 Of which I am expert in all mine age,  
 (This is to say, myself hath been the whip),  
 Then mayest thou choose whether thou wilt sip  
 Of thilke tunne, that I now shall broach.  
 Beware of it, ere thou too nigh approach,  
 For I shall tell examples more than ten:  
 Whoso will not beware by other men,  
 By him shall other men corrected be:  
 These same wordes writeth Ptolemy;  
 Read in his Almagest, and take it there."  
 "Dame, I would pray you, if your will it were,"

Saide this Pardonour, "as ye began,  
Tell forth your tale, and spare for no man,  
And teach us younge men of your practique."  
"Gladly," quoth she, "since that it may you like.  
But that I pray to all this company,  
If that I speak after my fantasy,  
To take nought agrief what I may say;  
For mine intent is only for to play.  
Now, Sirs, then will I tell you forth my tale.  
As ever may I drinke wine or ale  
I shall say sooth; the husbands that I had  
Three of them were good, and two were bad  
The three were goode men, and rich, and old  
Unnethes mighte they the statute hold  
In which that they were bounden unto me.  
Yet wot well what I mean of this, pardie.  
As God me help, I laugh when that I think  
How piteously at night I made them swink,  
But, by my fay, I told of it no store:  
They had me giv'n their land and their treasure,  
Me needed not do longer diligence  
To win their love, or do them reverence.  
They loved me so well, by God above,  
That I tolde no dainty of their love.  
A wise woman will busy her ever-in-one  
To get their love, where that she hath none.  
But, since I had them wholly in my hand,  
And that they had me given all their land,  
Why should I take keep them for to please,  
But it were for my profit, or mine ease?  
I set them so a-worke, by my fay,  
That many a night they sange, well-away!  
The bacon was not fetched for them, I trow,  
That some men have in Essex at Dunmow.  
I govern'd them so well after my law,  
That each of them full blissful was and fawe  
To bringe me gay thinges from the fair.  
They were full glad when that I spake them fair,  
For, God it wot, I chid them spiteously.  
Now hearken how I bare me properly.  
Ye wise wives, that can understand,  
Thus should ye speak, and bear them wrong on hand,  
For half so boldely can there no man  
Swearen and lien as a woman can.  
(I say not this by wives that be wise,  
But if it be when they them misadvise.)

A wise wife, if that she can her good,  
Shall beare them on hand the cow is wood,  
And take witness of her owen maid  
Of their assent: but hearken how I said.  
“Sir olde kaynard, is this thine array?  
Why is my neigheboure’s wife so gay?  
She is honour’d over all where she go’th,  
I sit at home, I have no thrifty cloth.  
What dost thou at my neigheboure’s house?  
Is she so fair? art thou so amorous?  
What rown’st thou with our maid? benedicite,  
Sir olde lechour, let thy japes be.  
And if I have a gossip, or a friend  
(Withoute guilt), thou chidest as a fiend,  
If that I walk or play unto his house.  
Thou comest home as drunken as a mouse,  
And preachest on thy bench, with evil prefe:  
Thou say’st to me, it is a great mischief  
To wed a poore woman, for costage:  
And if that she be rich, of high parage;  
Then say’st thou, that it is a tormentry  
To suffer her pride and melancholy.  
And if that she be fair, thou very knave,  
Thou say’st that every holour will her have;  
She may no while in chastity abide,  
That is assailed upon every side.  
Thou say’st some folk desire us for richness,  
Some for our shape, and some for our fairness,  
And some, for she can either sing or dance,  
And some for gentiless and dalliance,  
Some for her handes and her armes smale:  
Thus goes all to the devil, by thy tale;  
Thou say’st, men may not keep a castle wall  
That may be so assailed over all.  
And if that she be foul, thou say’st that she  
Coveteth every man that she may see;  
For as a spaniel she will on him leap,  
Till she may finde some man her to cheap;  
And none so grey goose goes there in the lake,  
(So say’st thou) that will be without a make.  
And say’st, it is a hard thing for to weld wield,  
A thing that no man will, his thanks, held.  
Thus say’st thou, lorel, when thou go’st to bed,  
And that no wise man needeth for to wed,  
Nor no man that intendeth unto heaven.  
With wilde thunder dint and fiery leven

Mote thy wicked necke be to-broke.  
Thou say'st, that dropping houses, and eke smoke,  
And chiding wives, make men to flee  
Out of their owne house; ah! ben'dicite,  
What aileth such an old man for to chide?  
Thou say'st, we wives will our vices hide,  
Till we be fast, and then we will them shew.  
Well may that be a proverb of a shrew.  
Thou say'st, that oxen, asses, horses, hounds,  
They be assayed at diverse stounds,  
Basons and lavers, ere that men them buy,  
Spoones, stooles, and all such husbandry,  
And so be pots, and clothes, and array,  
But folk of wives make none assay,  
Till they be wedded, — olde dotard shrew! —  
And then, say'st thou, we will our vices shew.  
Thou say'st also, that it displeaseth me,  
But if that thou wilt praise my beauty,  
And but thou pore alway upon my face,  
And call me faire dame in every place;  
And but thou make a feast on thilke day  
That I was born, and make me fresh and gay;  
And but thou do to my norice honour,  
And to my chamberere within my bow'r,  
And to my father's folk, and mine allies;  
Thus sayest thou, old barrel full of lies.  
And yet also of our prentice Jenkin,  
For his crisp hair, shining as gold so fine,  
And for he squireth me both up and down,  
Yet hast thou caught a false suspicioun:  
I will him not, though thou wert dead to-morrow.  
But tell me this, why hidest thou, with sorrow,  
The keyes of thy chest away from me?  
It is my good as well as thine, pardie.  
What, think'st to make an idiot of our dame?  
Now, by that lord that called is Saint Jame,  
Thou shalt not both, although that thou wert wood,  
Be master of my body, and my good,  
The one thou shalt forego, maugre thine eyen.  
What helpeth it of me t'inquire and spyen?  
I trow thou wouldest lock me in thy chest.  
Thou shouldest say, 'Fair wife, go where thee lest;  
Take your disport; I will believe no tales;  
I know you for a true wife, Dame Ales.' Alice  
We love no man, that taketh keep or charge care  
Where that we go; we will be at our large.



Of alle men most blessed may he be,  
 The wise astrologer Dan Ptolemy,  
 That saith this proverb in his Almagest:  
 ‘Of alle men his wisdom is highest,  
 That recketh not who hath the world in hand.  
 By this proverb thou shalt well understand,  
 Have thou enough, what thar thee reck or care  
 How merrily that other folkes fare?  
 For certes, olde dotard, by your leave,  
 Ye shall have [pleasure] right enough at eve.  
 He is too great a niggard that will werne  
 A man to light a candle at his lantern;  
 He shall have never the less light, pardie.  
 Have thou enough, thee thar not plaine thee  
 Thou say’st also, if that we make us gay  
 With clothing and with precious array,  
 That it is peril of our chastity.  
 And yet, — with sorrow! — thou enforcest thee,  
 And say’st these words in the apostle’s name:  
 ‘In habit made with chastity and shame  
 Ye women shall apparel you,’ quoth he  
 ‘And not in tressed hair and gay perrie,  
 As pearles, nor with gold, nor clothes rich.’  
 After thy text nor after thy rubrich  
 I will not work as muchel as a gnat.  
 Thou say’st also, I walk out like a cat;  
 For whoso woulde singe the catte’s skin  
 Then will the catte well dwell in her inn;  
 And if the catte’s skin be sleek and gay,  
 She will not dwell in house half a day,  
 But forth she will, ere any day be daw’d,  
 To shew her skin, and go a caterwaw’d.  
 This is to say, if I be gay, sir shrew,  
 I will run out, my borel for to shew.  
 Sir olde fool, what helpeth thee to spyen?  
 Though thou pray Argus with his hundred eyen  
 To be my wardecorps, as he can best  
 In faith he shall not keep me, but me lest:  
 Yet could I make his beard, so may I the.  
 “Thou sayest eke, that there be thinges three,  
 Which thinges greatly trouble all this earth,  
 And that no wighte may endure the ferth:  
 O lefe sir shrew, may Jesus short thy life.  
 Yet preacheest thou, and say’st, a hateful wife  
 Y-reckon’d is for one of these mischances.  
 Be there none other manner resemblances

That ye may liken your parables unto,  
But if a silly wife be one of tho?  
Thou likenest a woman's love to hell;  
To barren land where water may not dwell.  
Thou likenest it also to wild fire;  
The more it burns, the more it hath desire  
To consume every thing that burnt will be.  
Thou sayest, right as wormes shend a tree,  
Right so a wife destroyeth her husband;  
This know they well that be to wives bond.”  
Lordings, right thus, as ye have understand,  
Bare I stiffly mine old husbands on hand,  
That thus they saiden in their drunkenness;  
And all was false, but that I took witness  
On Jenkin, and upon my niece also.  
O Lord! the pain I did them, and the woe,  
‘Full guilteless, by Godde’s sweete pine;  
For as a horse I coulde bite and whine;  
I coulde plain, an’ I was in the guilt,  
Or elles oftentime I had been spilt  
Whoso first cometh to the nill, first grint;  
I plained first, so was our war y-stint.  
They were full glad to excuse them full blive  
Of things that they never aguilt their live.  
Of wenches would I beare them on hand,  
When that for sickness scarcely might they stand,  
Yet tickled I his hearte for that he  
Ween’d that I had of him so great cherte:  
I swore that all my walking out by night  
Was for to espy wenches that he dight:  
Under that colour had I many a mirth.  
For all such wit is given us at birth;  
Deceit, weeping, and spinning, God doth give  
To women kindly, while that they may live.  
And thus of one thing I may vaunte me,  
At th’ end I had the better in each degree,  
By sleight, or force, or by some manner thing,  
As by continual murmur or grudging, complaining  
Namely a-bed, there hadde they mischance,  
There would I chide, and do them no pleasance:  
I would no longer in the bed abide,  
If that I felt his arm over my side,  
Till he had made his ransom unto me,  
Then would I suffer him do his nicety.  
And therefore every man this tale I tell,  
Win whoso may, for all is for to sell;

With empty hand men may no hawkes lure;  
For winning would I all his will endure,  
And make me a feigned appetite,  
And yet in bacon had I never delight:  
That made me that I ever would them chide.  
For, though the Pope had sitten them beside,  
I would not spare them at their owen board,  
For, by my troth, I quit them word for word  
As help me very God omnipotent,  
Though I right now should make my testament  
I owe them not a word, that is not quit  
I brought it so aboute by my wit,  
That they must give it up, as for the best  
Or elles had we never been in rest.  
For, though he looked as a wood lion,  
Yet should he fail of his conclusion.  
Then would I say, "Now, goode lefe tak keep  
How meekly looketh Wilken oure sheep!  
Come near, my spouse, and let me ba thy cheek  
Ye shoulde be all patient and meek,  
And have a sweet y-spiced conscience,  
Since ye so preach of Jobe's patience.  
Suffer alway, since ye so well can preach,  
And but ye do, certain we shall you teach  
That it is fair to have a wife in peace.  
One of us two must bowe doubtless:  
And since a man is more reasonable  
Than woman is, ye must be suff'erable.  
What aileth you to grudge thus and groan?  
Is it for ye would have my [love] alone?  
Why, take it all: lo, have it every deal, whit  
Peter! shrew you but ye love it  
For if I woulde sell my belle chose,  
I coulde walk as fresh as is a rose,  
But I will keep it for your owen tooth.  
Ye be to blame, by God, I say you sooth."  
Such manner wordes hadde we on hand.  
Now will I speaken of my fourth husband.  
My fourthe husband was a revellour;  
This is to say, he had a paramour,  
And I was young and full of ragerie,  
Stubborn and strong, and jolly as a pie.  
Then could I dance to a harpe smale,  
And sing, y-wis, as any nightingale,  
When I had drunk a draught of sweete wine.  
Metellius, the foule churl, the swine,

That with a staff bereft his wife of life  
For she drank wine, though I had been his wife,  
Never should he have daunted me from drink:  
And, after wine, of Venus most I think.  
For all so sure as cold engenders hail,  
A liquorish mouth must have a liquorish tail.  
In woman vinolent is no defence,  
This knowe lechours by experience.  
But, lord Christ, when that it rememb'reth me  
Upon my youth, and on my jollity,  
It tickleth me about mine hearte-root;  
Unto this day it doth mine hearte boot,  
That I have had my world as in my time.  
But age, alas! that all will envenime,  
Hath me bereft my beauty and my pith:  
Let go; farewell; the devil go therewith.  
The flour is gon, there is no more to tell,  
The bran, as I best may, now must I sell.  
But yet to be right merry will I fand.  
Now forth to tell you of my fourth husband,  
I say, I in my heart had great despite,  
That he of any other had delight;  
But he was quit, by God and by Saint Joce:  
I made for him of the same wood a cross;  
Not of my body in no foul mannere,  
But certainly I made folk such cheer,  
That in his owen grease I made him fry  
For anger, and for very jealousy.  
By God, in earth I was his purgatory,  
For which I hope his soul may be in glory.  
For, God it wot, he sat full oft and sung,  
When that his shoe full bitterly him wrung.  
There was no wight, save God and he, that wist  
In many wise how sore I did him twist.  
He died when I came from Jerusalem,  
And lies in grave under the roode beam:  
Although his tomb is not so curious  
As was the sepulchre of Darius,  
Which that Apelles wrought so subtly.  
It is but waste to bury them preciously.  
Let him fare well, God give his soule rest,  
He is now in his grave and in his chest.  
Now of my fifthe husband will I tell:  
God let his soul never come into hell.  
And yet was he to me the moste shrew;  
That feel I on my ribbes all by rew,

And ever shall, until mine ending day.  
But in our bed he was so fresh and gay,  
And therewithal so well he could me glose,  
When that he woulde have my belle chose,  
Though he had beaten me on every bone,  
Yet could he win again my love anon.  
I trow, I lov'd him better, for that he  
Was of his love so dangerous to me.  
We women have, if that I shall not lie,  
In this matter a quaint fantasy.  
Whatever thing we may not lightly have,  
Thereafter will we cry all day and crave.  
Forbid us thing, and that desire we;  
Press on us fast, and thenne will we flee.  
With danger utter we all our chaffare;  
Great press at market maketh deare ware,  
And too great cheap is held at little price;  
This knoweth every woman that is wise.  
My fifthe husband, God his soule bless,  
Which that I took for love and no richness,  
He some time was a clerk of Oxenford,  
And had left school, and went at home to board  
With my gossip, dwelling in oure town:  
God have her soul, her name was Alisoun.  
She knew my heart, and all my privity,  
Bet than our parish priest, so may I the.  
To her betrayed I my counsel all;  
For had my husband pissed on a wall,  
Or done a thing that should have cost his life,  
To her, and to another worthy wife,  
And to my niece, which that I loved well,  
I would have told his counsel every deal.  
And so I did full often, God it wot,  
That made his face full often red and hot  
For very shame, and blam'd himself, for he  
Had told to me so great a privity.  
And so befell that ones in a Lent  
(So oftentimes I to my gossip went,  
For ever yet I loved to be gay,  
And for to walk in March, April, and May  
From house to house, to heare sundry tales),  
That Jenkin clerk, and my gossip, Dame Ales,  
And I myself, into the fieldes went.  
Mine husband was at London all that Lent;  
I had the better leisure for to play,  
And for to see, and eke for to be sey

Of lusty folk; what wist I where my grace  
Was shapen for to be, or in what place?  
Therefore made I my visitations  
To vigilies, and to processions,  
To preachings eke, and to these pilgrimages,  
To plays of miracles, and marriages,  
And weared upon me gay scarlet gites.  
These wormes, nor these mothes, nor these mites  
On my apparel frett them never a deal  
And know'st thou why? for they were used well.  
Now will I telle forth what happen'd me:  
I say, that in the fieldes walked we,  
Till truely we had such dalliance,  
This clerk and I, that of my purveyance  
I spake to him, and told him how that he,  
If I were widow, shoulde wedde me.  
For certainly, I say for no bobance,  
Yet was I never without purveyance  
Of marriage, nor of other thinges eke:  
I hold a mouse's wit not worth a leek,  
That hath but one hole for to starte to,  
And if that faile, then is all y-do.  
[I bare him on hand he had enchanted me  
(My dame taughte me that subtilty);  
And eke I said, I mette of him all night,  
He would have slain me, as I lay upright,  
And all my bed was full of very blood;  
But yet I hop'd that he should do me good;  
For blood betoken'd gold, as me was taught.  
And all was false, I dream'd of him right naught,  
But as I follow'd aye my dame's lore,  
As well of that as of other things more.]  
But now, sir, let me see, what shall I sayn?  
Aha! by God, I have my tale again.  
When that my fourthe husband was on bier,  
I wept algate and made a sorry cheer,  
As wives must, for it is the usage;  
And with my kerchief covered my visage;  
But, for I was provided with a make,  
I wept but little, that I undertake  
To churche was mine husband borne a-morrow  
With neighebours that for him made sorrow,  
And Jenkin, oure clerk, was one of tho:  
As help me God, when that I saw him go  
After the bier, methought he had a pair  
Of legges and of feet so clean and fair,

That all my heart I gave unto his hold.  
 He was, I trow, a twenty winter old,  
 And I was forty, if I shall say sooth,  
 But yet I had always a colte's tooth.  
 Gat-toothed I was, and that became me well,  
 I had the print of Sainte Venus' seal.  
 [As help me God, I was a lusty one,  
 And fair, and rich, and young, and well begone:  
 For certes I am all venerian  
 In feeling, and my heart is martian;  
 Venus me gave my lust and liquorishness,  
 And Mars gave me my sturdy hardiness  
 Mine ascendant was Taure, and Mars therein:  
 Alas, alas, that ever love was sin!  
 I follow'd aye mine inclination  
 By virtue of my constellation:  
 That made me that I coulde not withdraw  
 My chamber of Venus from a good fellow.  
 [Yet have I Marte's mark upon my face,  
 And also in another privy place.  
 For God so wisly be my salvation,  
 I loved never by discretion,  
 But ever follow'd mine own appetite,  
 All were he short, or long, or black, or white,  
 I took no keep, so that he liked me,  
 How poor he was, neither of what degree.]  
 What should I say? but that at the month's end  
 This jolly clerk Jenkin, that was so hend,  
 Had wedded me with great solemnity,  
 And to him gave I all the land and fee  
 That ever was me given therebefore:  
 But afterward repented me full sore.  
 He woulde suffer nothing of my list.  
 By God, he smote me ones with his fist,  
 For that I rent out of his book a leaf,  
 That of the stroke mine eare wax'd all deaf.  
 Stubborn I was, as is a lioness,  
 And of my tongue a very jangleress,  
 And walk I would, as I had done befor,  
 From house to house, although he had it sworn:  
 For which he oftentimes woulde preach  
 And me of olde Roman gestes teach  
 How that Sulpitius Gallus left his wife  
 And her forsook for term of all his lif  
 For nought but open-headed he her say  
 Looking out at his door upon a day.

Another Roman told he me by name,  
That, for his wife was at a summer game  
Without his knowing, he forsook her eke.  
And then would he upon his Bible seek  
That ilke proverb of Ecclesiast,  
Where he commandeth, and forbiddeth fast,  
Man shall not suffer his wife go roll about.  
Then would he say right thus withoute doubt:  
“Whoso that buildeth his house all of sallows,  
And pricketh his blind horse over the fallows,  
And suff'reth his wife to go seeke hallows,  
Is worthy to be hanged on the gallows.”  
But all for nought; I sette not a haw  
Of his proverbs, nor of his olde saw;  
Nor would I not of him corrected be.  
I hate them that my vices telle me,  
And so do more of us (God wot) than I.  
This made him wood with me all utterly;  
I woulde not forbear him in no case.  
Now will I say you sooth, by Saint Thomas,  
Why that I rent out of his book a leaf,  
For which he smote me, so that I was deaf.  
He had a book, that gladly night and day  
For his disport he would it read alway;  
He call'd it Valerie, and Theophrast,  
And with that book he laugh'd alway full fast.  
And eke there was a clerk sometime at Rome,  
A cardinal, that highte Saint Jerome,  
That made a book against Jovinian,  
Which book was there; and eke Tertullian,  
Chrysippus, Trotula, and Heloise,  
That was an abbess not far from Paris;  
And eke the Parables of Solomon,  
Ovide's Art, and bourdes many one;  
And alle these were bound in one volume.  
And every night and day was his custume  
(When he had leisure and vacation  
From other worldly occupation)  
To readen in this book of wicked wives.  
He knew of them more legends and more lives  
Than be of goodde wives in the Bible.  
For, trust me well, it is an impossible  
That any clerk will speake good of wives,  
(But if it be of holy saintes' lives)  
Nor of none other woman never the mo'.  
Who painted the lion, tell it me, who?



By God, if women haddde written stories,  
As clerkes have within their oratories,  
They would have writ of men more wickedness  
Than all the mark of Adam may redress  
The children of Mercury and of Venus,  
Be in their working full contrarious.  
Mercury loveth wisdom and science,  
And Venus loveth riot and dispence.  
And for their diverse disposition,  
Each falls in other's exaltation.  
As thus, God wot, Mercury is desolate  
In Pisces, where Venus is exaltate,  
And Venus falls where Mercury is raised.  
Therefore no woman by no clerk is praised.  
The clerk, when he is old, and may not do  
Of Venus' works not worth his olde shoe,  
Then sits he down, and writes in his dotage,  
That women cannot keep their marriage.  
But now to purpose, why I tolde thee  
That I was beaten for a book, pardie.  
Upon a night Jenkin, that was our sire,  
Read on his book, as he sat by the fire,  
Of Eva first, that for her wickedness  
Was all mankind brought into wretchedness,  
For which that Jesus Christ himself was slain,  
That bought us with his hearte-blood again.  
Lo here express of women may ye find  
That woman was the loss of all mankind.  
Then read he me how Samson lost his hairs  
Sleeping, his leman cut them with her shears,  
Through whiche treason lost he both his eyen.  
Then read he me, if that I shall not lien,  
Of Hercules, and of his Dejanire,  
That caused him to set himself on fire.  
Nothing forgot he of the care and woe  
That Socrates had with his wives two;  
How Xantippe cast piss upon his head.  
This silly man sat still, as he were dead,  
He wip'd his head, and no more durst he sayn,  
But, "Ere the thunder stint there cometh rain."  
Of Phasiphae, that was queen of Crete,  
For shrewedness he thought the tale sweet.  
Fy, speak no more, it is a grisly thing,  
Of her horrible lust and her liking.  
Of Clytemnestra, for her lechery  
That falsely made her husband for to die,

He read it with full good devotion.  
He told me eke, for what occasion  
Amphiorax at Thebes lost his life:  
My husband had a legend of his wife  
Eryphile, that for an ounce of gold  
Had privily unto the Greekes told,  
Where that her husband hid him in a place,  
For which he had at Thebes sorry grace.  
Of Luna told he me, and of Lucie;  
They bothe made their husbands for to die,  
That one for love, that other was for hate.  
Luna her husband on an ev'ning late  
Empoison'd had, for that she was his foe:  
Lucia liquorish lov'd her husband so,  
That, for he should always upon her think,  
She gave him such a manner love-drink,  
That he was dead before it were the morrow:  
And thus algates husbands hadde sorrow.  
Then told he me how one Latumeus  
Complained to his fellow Arius  
That in his garden growed such a tree,  
On which he said how that his wives three  
Hanged themselves for heart dispiteous.  
"O leve brother," quoth this Arius,  
"Give me a plant of thilke blessed tree,  
And in my garden planted shall it be."  
Of later date of wives hath he read,  
That some have slain their husbands in their bed,  
And let their lechour dight them all the night,  
While that the corpse lay on the floor upright:  
And some have driven nails into their brain,  
While that they slept, and thus they have them slain:  
Some have them given poison in their drink:  
He spake more harm than hearte may bethink.  
And therewithal he knew of more proverbs,  
Than in this world there groweth grass or herbs.  
"Better (quoth he) thine habitation  
Be with a lion, or a foul dragon,  
Than with a woman using for to chide.  
Better (quoth he) high in the roof abide,  
Than with an angry woman in the house,  
They be so wicked and contrarious:  
They hate that their husbands loven aye."  
He said, "A woman cast her shame away  
When she cast off her smock;" and farthermo',  
"A fair woman, but she be chaste also,

Is like a gold ring in a sowe's nose.  
 Who coulde ween, or who coulde suppose  
 The woe that in mine heart was, and the pine?  
 And when I saw that he would never fine  
 To readen on this cursed book all night,  
 All suddenly three leaves have I plight  
 Out of his book, right as he read, and eke  
 I with my fist so took him on the cheek,  
 That in our fire he backward fell adown.  
 And he up start, as doth a wood lion,  
 And with his fist he smote me on the head,  
 That on the floor I lay as I were dead.  
 And when he saw how still that there I lay,  
 He was aghast, and would have fled away,  
 Till at the last out of my swoon I braid,  
 "Oh, hast thou slain me, thou false thief?" I said  
 "And for my land thus hast thou murder'd me?  
 Ere I be dead, yet will I kisse thee."  
 And near he came, and kneeled fair adown,  
 And saide", "Deare sister Alisoun,  
 As help me God, I shall thee never smite:  
 That I have done it is thyself to wite,  
 Forgive it me, and that I thee beseek."  
 And yet eftsoons I hit him on the cheek,  
 And saidde, "Thief, thus much am I awreak.  
 Now will I die, I may no longer speak."  
 But at the last, with mucche care and woe  
 We fell accorded by ourselves two:  
 He gave me all the bridle in mine hand  
 To have the governance of house and land,  
 And of his tongue, and of his hand also.  
 I made him burn his book anon right tho.  
 And when that I had gotten unto me  
 By mast'ry all the sovereignty,  
 And that he said, "Mine owen true wife,  
 Do as thee list, the term of all thy life,  
 Keep thine honour, and eke keep mine estate;  
 After that day we never had debate.  
 God help me so, I was to him as kind  
 As any wife from Denmark unto Ind,  
 And also true, and so was he to me:  
 I pray to God that sits in majesty  
 So bless his soule, for his mercy dear.  
 Now will I say my tale, if ye will hear. —  
 The Friar laugh'd when he had heard all this:  
 "Now, Dame," quoth he, "so have I joy and bliss,

This is a long preamble of a tale.”  
And when the Sompnour heard the Friar gale,  
“Lo,” quoth this Sompnour, “Godde’s armes two,  
A friar will intermete him evermo’:  
Lo, goode men, a fly and eke a frere  
Will fall in ev’ry dish and eke mattere.  
What speak’st thou of perambulation?  
What? amble or trot; or peace, or go sit down:  
Thou lettest our disport in this mattere.”  
“Yea, wilt thou so, Sir Sompnour?” quoth the Frere;  
“Now by my faith I shall, ere that I go,  
Tell of a Sompnour such a tale or two,  
That all the folk shall laughen in this place.”  
“Now do, else, Friar, I beshrew thy face,”  
Quoth this Sompnour; “and I beshrewe me,  
But if I telle tales two or three  
Of friars, ere I come to Sittingbourne,  
That I shall make thine hearte for to mourn:  
For well I wot thy patience is gone.”  
Our Hoste cried, “Peace, and that anon;”  
And saide, “Let the woman tell her tale.  
Ye fare as folk that drunken be of ale.  
Do, Dame, tell forth your tale, and that is best.”  
“All ready, sir,” quoth she, “right as you lest,  
If I have licence of this worthy Frere.”  
“Yes, Dame,” quoth he, “tell forth, and I will hear.”

## Key Concepts from Chapter 6:

- The Normans invaded and conquered England beginning in the year 1066.
- William the Conqueror claimed to be the rightful ruler of England.
- Papal support went to the Normans.
- Many French words came into English after the Norman conquest.

## Key Terms and People from Chapter 6:

- *Canterbury Tales*
- Chaucer
- Edward the Confessor
- Harold Godwinson
- Norman Conquest
- Pope Alexander II
- *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*
- William the Conqueror

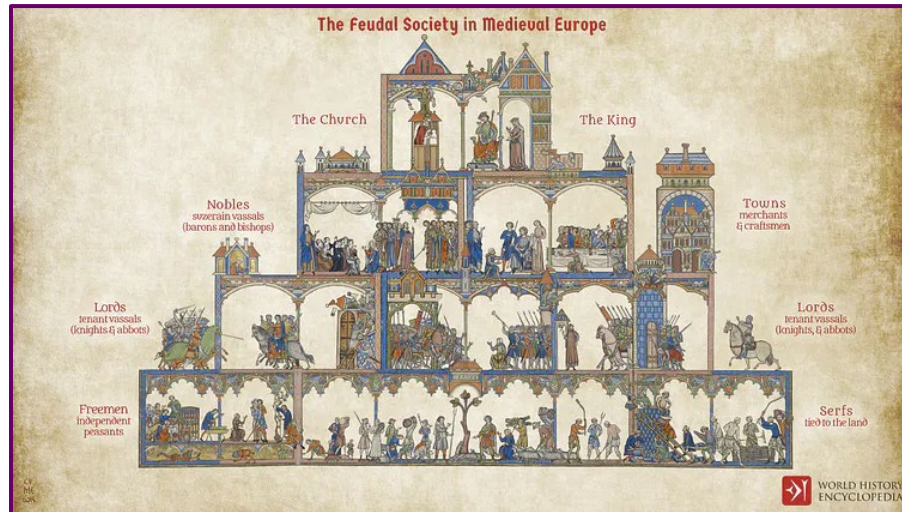
## Materials for Chapter 6 adapted from the following:

Stroud, Kevin. [\*The History of English Podcast\*](#). Episode 67: *1066 The Year that Changes English*. (Material was used and adapted with permission.)

Robinson, B. & Getty, L. [\*British Literature: Middle Ages to the Eighteenth Century and Neoclassicism\*](#). University of North Georgia Press. CC BY

# Chapter 7

## Middle English – Inner History



*Figure 7.1 Feudal Society in Europe*

Source: World History

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## Connections to PDE

As with the description of the inner history of OE in Chapter 5, it is difficult to write an exhaustive list of language features of ME. Like OE, ME had numerous dialects. And during the traditional the period of ME (1066 - 1500), numerous changes would have taken place in the grammar and lexicon of the language. Nonetheless, a general description of ME is useful, and this description helps us to see connections to PDE. I will describe several aspects of the language: the sound system, the grammatical system, the lexicon, and silent letters. The last item in this list will show direct connections to PDE because many silent letters in the PDE writing system trace their roots to ME. In addition, the Bubonic Plague had a dramatic influence on ME even though it occurred toward the end of the ME period. In addition, keep in mind that the



feudal system, depicted in Figure 7.1, played a major role in ME because as the feudal system broke down, there was more mingling of dialects throughout England. Both the Bubonic Plague and the breakdown of the feudal system would help to reestablish English (instead of French) in England as the primary language, though the influence of French, particularly on the lexicon, would remain strong.

Just to understand how ME has diverged from OE but is starting to resemble PDE English, [here is the Our Father prayer in ME](#). It is very different from the version in OE which was highlighted in Chapter 5, and it is increasingly recognizable to speakers of PDE.

## The Sound System of ME

### Consonants

The sound system of ME is very similar to PDE. Figure 7.2 shows the ME consonants.

Manner of Articulation	Place of articulation						
	voiceless and voiced	Labial	Labiodental	Dental	Alveolar	Alveopalatal	Velar
Stops	- V + V	p b			t d		k g
affricates	- V + V					č ǰ	
fricatives	- V + V		f v	θ ð	s z	š	h
nasals	- V + V	m			n		
lateral	- V + V				l		
retroflex	- V + V				r		
semivowels (glides)	- V + V	w				j	

Figure 7.2 Consonants of ME

It only lacks the phonemic /ŋ/ and /ʒ/ to be identical to PDE. The shaded area in the figure shows that the only phonemic additions were the voiced fricatives. ME added the voiced fricatives as phonemes for a number of reasons. The influx of French loan words after the Battle of Hastings triggered a need for these additions. French already had a phonemic distinction between /f/ and /v/. When loan words such as *few/view* and *file/vile* entered the language, there was a need to distinguish these words. Languages can only handle a small number of homophones before communication is affected (Millward and Hayes, 2012).

In addition, during the ME period dialects were mixing more. And some dialects (particularly in the south) had already begun using voiced fricatives in word-initial position. Another reason for the introduction of phonemic fricatives is that ME began losing more of its inflections at the end of words. Voiceless fricatives had been voiced when between vowels. For example, the ME word *husian* ('to house') had a voiced fricative [z] because it occurred between two vowels. But when the *-ian* ending was lost, the /s/ was in final position. However, it retained its voicing. This became the origin of PDE *house* (no voicing) and *to house* (voiced). Finally, function words with voiceless fricatives converted to voiced fricatives: *is, of, the, then, that*. The usual explanation is that such voicing required less energy. And while these voiced fricatives were added, the /f/, /ð/, and /v/ remain much more restricted even in PDE.

One other interesting note concerning consonants is the loss of the initial /h/ sound. It was typically lost in clusters such as /hl/, /hn/, and /hr/. In some dialects /h/ was also lost before /w/, but in some dialects, it was retained. In PDE, some dialects retain the /h/ sound in words such as *what, what, and whimper*. Though there was an obvious spelling change.

Another change in ME was the loss of simplification of certain some consonant clusters. But PDE spelling often retains the lost consonant. Two examples are the loss of /w/ after /s/ and /t/ are the words *sword* and *two*.

A second example is the loss of /b/ after /m/ in certain words, but, again, it was retained in spelling: *lamb*, *comb*, and *climb*. This intrusive /b/ after /m/ was retained in some words: OE brēmēl ‘bramble’, nāēmēl ‘nimble’, æmerge ‘ember’ became *bramble*, *nimble*, and *nimble* in ME. But it was lost in *lamb*, *comb*, and *climb*.

## Vowels

The vowels system in English has always been less stable than its consonants regarding language change. It has been the vowels that have changed more than the consonants throughout the history of English. However, since the English writing system has always lacked enough symbols for all the vowels, it is difficult to ascertain the exact vowel phonological system from written records during ME. It is some guess work as to what the vowels sounded like.

Nonetheless, Figure 7.3 shows a rough approximation of the vowel system in ME.

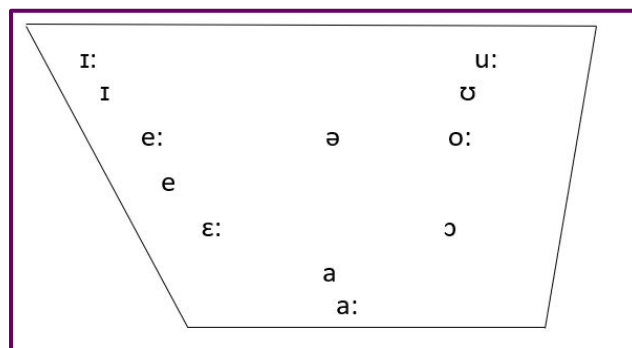


Figure 7.3 Vowels of ME

Here are few comments about the changes occurred from OE to ME as the vowel system became more similar to that of PDE. (This list is taken from Millward and Hayes, 2012)

- OE had a rounded front vowel [y] similar to that of modern-day French. However, this became unrounded in ME and became [ɪ].
- During ME, the reduced vowels /a/, /ɜ/, /ɔ/, and /ʊ/ became /ə/ in unstressed syllables. This, in part, was responsible for the loss of most English inflections during ME.
- During ME, vowel length ceased to be phonemic.
- Many ME long vowels were reduced in a stressed closed syllable. A closed syllable is one ending in one or more consonants. However, this shortening did not occur before the combination of *-st*. But it did occur if two or more syllables followed the stressed syllable. This explains the ME pronunciation of *Christ/Christmas*. (ME *Chrīst/Christesmesse*).

## The Grammatical System of ME

### Loss of inflections

The major change from OE to ME was the loss of the inflectional system. ME became more *analytic* (dependent on word order to convey grammatical information) and less *synthetic* (dependent on inflections to convey grammatical information). This change was gradual. But by 1500, most inflections as well as grammatical gender were lost.

It is not clear what caused this loss of inflections in ME. But its importance cannot be understated. As Millward and Hayes (2012) note, the loss of the inflections during the ME period was “cataclysmic.” Despite not having clear reasons, there are several possible explanations. One reason could be that the introduction of other inflections from French and Scandinavian languages resulted in some linguistic confusion among speakers, and there was an unconscious elimination of all endings over time. In addition, the reduction of all unstressed final vowels to

/ə/ contributed to the loss of distinctions between inflection endings. This contributed heavily to the loss of inflections and increased dependency on word order.

Some scholars note that these reasons are insufficient to completely explain the loss of inflections, in part because the breakdown of the inflectional system had started before the Norman conquest, and the Scandinavian influence was only heavy in the north. Despite the exact reasons being somewhat mysterious, the result was the same: ME lost inflectional endings.

As an example, note in Figure 7.4 and Figure 7.5 that more inflections existed in OE than in ME in the word *hund* ('dog') (Millward and Hayes, 2012, p. 167). While there were still some inflections in ME, the inflections began to coalesce. And it becomes obvious that the plural ending became settled on /s/ during ME.

**Declension of *hund* (singular)**

Case	OE	ME
Nominative	<i>hund</i>	<i>hund</i>
Accusative	<i>hund</i>	<i>hund</i>
Genitive	<i>hundes</i>	<i>hundes</i>
Dative	<i>hunde</i>	<i>hund</i>

Figure 7.4

**Declension of *hund* (singular)**

Case	OE	ME
Nominative	<i>hundas</i>	<i>hundes</i>
Accusative	<i>hunda</i>	<i>hundes</i>
Genitive	<i>hunda</i>	<i>hundes</i>
Dative	<i>hundum</i>	<i>hundes</i>

Figure 7.5

## Pronouns

The pronoun system in ME saw the development of the third-person feminine. Ironically, while the rest of ME was dropping gender, the pronoun system developed and retained the third-person

singular. The origins of the third-person feminine pronoun remain mysterious and there were competing forms: *heo*, *shce*, *ho*. But eventually *she* became the accepted version.

At one point, *thou* and *thee* were the subject and object form for second person singular pronoun. But overtime, *ye* and *you* (which were originally plural) became to be used for polite or respectful forms in addressing only one person.

Another interesting note about pronouns involves the neuter, third person. The form was originally *hit*, but during ME, the initial /h/ was lost and the result was the form *it*. However, *hit* remains even today in some dialects of Appalachia in American English.

## Syntax

As inflections were lost, word order became more rigid in ME. A few additional notable characteristics of ME syntax are the following:

- Articles became more prevalent: *an* and *the*.
- Adjectives were increasingly placed before their noun. OE often had adjectives following their nouns.
- The perfect tense became common in ME.
- Modal verbs became more common in ME: *shall*, *will*, *may*, *might*.
- The use of *do* became much more commonly used. In particular, *do* came to be used for negative statements and interrogative clauses.

## The Lexicon

The lexicon during ME underwent major changes. Scholars have commented that “two very salient features of PDE are its highly analytic grammar and its immense lexicon” (Millward and

Hayes, 2012, p. 191). Both of these characteristics are a result of the ME period. During the ME period, there was an enormous amount of borrowing from other languages. And a large percentage of these came from the Normans. The loss of inflections (as noted above) increased the analytic nature of English, and it also facilitated the easier incorporation of loan words into ME because speakers did not have worry about what inflectional classes the word words belonged to – whether they were weak or strong, masculine or feminine, or what declension the new words belong to.

The Normans bequeathed over 10,000 words to English (about three-quarters of which are still in use today), including a huge number of abstract nouns ending in the suffixes *-age*, *-ance/-ence*, *-ant/-ent*, *-ment*, *-ity*, and *-tion*, or starting with the prefixes *con-*, *de-*, *ex-*, *trans-*, and *pre-*. Perhaps predictably, many of them related to matters of crown and nobility (e.g., *crown*, *castle*, *prince*, *count*, *duke*, *viscount*, *baron*, *noble*, *sovereign*, *heraldry*); of government and administration (e.g., *parliament*, *government*, *governor*, *city*); of court and law (e.g., *court*, *judge*, *justice*, *accuse*, *arrest*, *sentence*, *appeal*, *condemn*, *plaintiff*, *bailiff*, *jury*, *felony*, *verdict*, *traitor*, *contract*, *damage*, *prison*); of war and combat (e.g., *army*, *armour*, *archer*, *battle*, *soldier*, *guard*, *courage*, *peace*, *enemy*, *destroy*); of authority and control (e.g., *authority*, *obedience*, *servant*, *peasant*, *vassal*, *serf*, *labourer*, *charity*); of fashion and high living (e.g., *mansion*, *money*, *gown*, *boot*, *beauty*, *mirror*, *jewel*, *appetite*, *banquet*, *herb*, *spice*, *sauce*, *roast*, *biscuit*); and of art and literature (e.g. *art*, *colour*, *language*, *literature*, *poet*, *chapter*, *question*). Curiously, though, the Anglo-Saxon words *cyning* ('king'), *cwene* ('queen'), *erl* ('earl'), *cniht* ('knight'), *ladi* ('lady') and *lord* persisted.

While humble trades retained their Anglo-Saxon names (e.g. *baker*, *milller*, *shoemaker*), the more skilled trades adopted French names (e.g. *mason*, *painter*, *tailor*, *merchant*). While the

animals in the field generally kept their English names (e.g., *sheep, cow, ox, calf, swine, deer*), once cooked and served their names often became French (e.g., *beef, mutton, pork, bacon, veal, venison*). Figure 7.6 shows an image of farmers. Rural work often retained the OE word while the French words were more “sophisticated.”



*Figure 7.6 From the Luttrell Psalter (rural work in ME times)*

Source: British Library

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Sometimes a French word completely replaced an OE word (e.g., *crime* replaced *firen*, *place* replaced *stow*, *people* replaced *leod*, *beautiful* replaced *wlitig*, *uncle* replaced *eam*).

Sometimes French and OE components combined to form a new word, such as the French *gentle* and the Germanic *man* combined to form *gentleman*. Sometimes, both English and French words survived, but with significantly different senses (e.g., the Old English *doom* and French *judgement*, Old English *hearty* and French *cordial*, Old English *house* and French *mansion*).

But, often, different words with roughly the same meaning survived, and a whole host of new, French-based synonyms entered the English language (e.g., the French *maternity* in addition to the Old English *motherhood*, *infant* to *child*, *amity* to *friendship*, *battle* to *fight*, *liberty* to *freedom*, *labor* to *work*, *desire* to *wish*, *commence* to *start*, *conceal* to *hide*, *divide* to *cleave*, *close* to *shut*, *demand* to *ask*, *chamber* to *room*, *forest* to *wood*, *power* to *might*, *annual* to *yearly*, *odor* to *smell*, *pardon* to *forgive*, *aid* to *help*). Over time, many near synonyms acquired subtle differences in meaning (with the French alternative often suggesting a higher level of refinement than the Old English), adding to the precision and flexibility of the English language.



Even today, phrases combining Anglo-Saxon and Norman French doublets are still in common use (e.g., *law and order*, *lord and master*, *love and cherish*, *ways and means*). Bilingual word lists were being compiled as early as the 13th Century.

The addition of nearly synonymous words meant that semantic narrowing occurred. This is logical because when two different words mean the same thing, there is a tendency to narrow one of the words to a more specific meaning (See Chapter 1 concerning narrowing). For example, OE had the word *feðer* meaning ‘feather’ or ‘wing’ (if used in the plural). When ME borrowed *wing* from Scandinavian languages, *feðer* narrowed to refer to the plumage of birds. Thus, ME and PDE came to have a large lexicon capable of subtle distinctions often absent in languages that lacked sustained contact with another language or languages through their history.

But French was not the only language to contribute words to ME. Many more Latin-derived words came into use (sometimes through the French, but often directly) during this period, largely connected with religion, law, medicine and literature, including *scripture*, *collect*, *meditation*, *immortal*, *oriental*, *client*, *adjacent*, *combine*, *expedition*, *moderate*, *nervous*, *private*, *popular*, *picture*, *legal*, *legitimate*, *testimony*, *prosecute*, *pauper*, *contradiction*, *history*, *library*, *comet*, *solar*, *recipe*, *scribe*, *scripture*, *tolerance*, *imaginary*, *infinite*, *index*, *intellect*, *magnify* and *genius*. But French words continued to stream into English at an increasing pace, with even more French additions recorded after the 13th Century than before, peaking in the second half of the 14th Century, words like *abbey*, *alliance*, *attire*, *defend*, *navy*, *march*, *dine*, *marriage*, *figure*, *plea*, *sacrifice*, *scarlet*, *spy*, *stable*, *virtue*, *marshal*, *esquire*, *retreat*, *park*, *reign*, *beauty*, *clergy*, *cloak*, *country*, *fool*, *coast*, and *magic*.

In addition to Norman French and Latin, Scandinavian languages contributed words. Here are some examples of Scandinavian words that became English words: *anger*, *awe*,

*awkward, birth, cake, call, die, egg, ransack, sky, snub, thrive, wassail, and weak.* Interestingly enough, Scandinavian words often replaced OE words rather than be incorporated along side them as many Norman French words did. For instance, Norse *call* replaced OE *hātan*, both replaced OE *bā*, and *take* replaced OE *fōn*. Sometimes the Norse word took over part of the meaning of the OE word so that PDE now has two words for related but distinct meaning. Norse *sky* was added for the upper atmosphere and OE *heofon* ('heaven') was retained but its meaning became exclusive for the dwelling of God.

In summary, the ME period saw an enormous influx of lexicon from French, Latin, and Scandinavian languages. As David Crystal notes:

The real importance of the Middle English period was the way in which this additional vocabulary became the primary means of introducing new concepts and new domains of discourse into the language, as well as giving novel ways of expression to familiar concepts within old domains of discourse. The period was offering people a much greater linguistic choice. In 1200, people could only *ask*; by 1500 they could *question* (from French) and *interrogate* (from Latin) as well. At one extreme there was a learned, literary style, typically formal and elaborate, characterized by a lexicon of French and Latin origin, and employed by the aristocratic and well-educated. At the other, there was an everyday, popular style, typically informal and casual, full of words with Germanic roots, and used by ordinary folk. The stage was set for the 16th-century literary exploitation of these resources, notably in the poems and plays of Shakespeare.

It is estimated that up to 85% of Anglo-Saxon words were lost as a result of the Viking and particularly the Norman invasions, and at one point the very existence of the English lexicon looked to be in dire peril. But as the ME period progressed, English reasserted itself to be the dominate language of England.

## Where Did all the Silent Letters Come From?

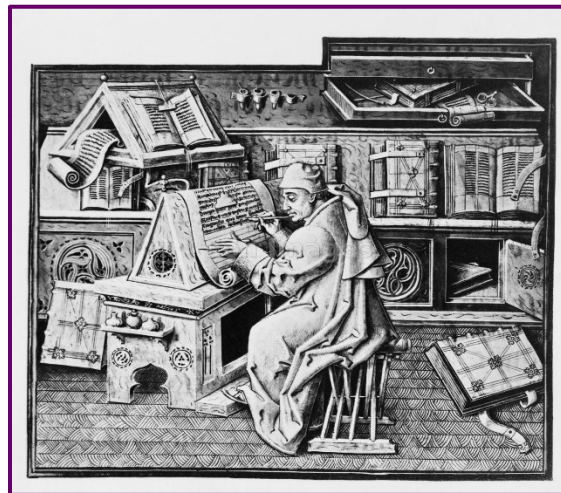
Middle English changes also helped usher in silent letters in the spelling system. Let's explore these. The English spelling system is famous for not making sense. The phonetic ideal of having each letter represent exactly one sound and each sound represented by exactly one letter is impossible when English has about forty-five phonemes and only twenty-six letters to represent them. But more than that, any language that's been written for a long enough time will have spellings that haven't caught up with modern pronunciations because pronunciations change.

English has been written for about 1300 years, which is plenty of time for these mismatches to accumulate. One of the more frustrating signs of these spelling mismatches is English's abundance of silent letters. With a conservative definition of silent letter, more than half of the letters the PDE alphabet are silent in at least some words. In alphabetical order, they are "b, d, e, g, h, k, l, m, n, o, p, r, s, t, w, x, z." Let's explore some of the reasons for these silent letters. I will mostly discuss silent consonant letters, but we can't talk about silent letters without acknowledging the most famous silent letter in English: silent "e."

Some silent letters appear in just a few words, but silent "e" appears so regularly that there's even a spelling rule about it. A silent "e" at the end of a word makes the preceding vowel long. A long vowel sounds like its name, like the "a" in the word *name*, and a short vowel sounds weaker, like the "a" in the word *car*,

According to *The Cambridge Encyclopedia of the English Language* by David Crystal (2003), this rule has its origins in the early part of the ME period. In other words, in the 11th century. As we've seen, OE used suffixes much more than PDE does to show if a word was singular or plural or if it was being used as the subject of a sentence or an object. For example, *hus* just meant 'house.' But *huse* meant 'to a house.' However, in the ME period, that final /ə/ sound on *huse* got dropped completely, so whether the word was spelled "h-u-s" or "h-u-s-e", it was pronounced [hūs]. Still, that didn't stop people from writing that final "e". As Crystal (2003) writes, "Although the final [ə] sound disappeared, the "e" spelling remained, and it gradually came to be used to show that the preceding vowel was long." This is the origin of the modern spelling rule about silent "e" in such words as "name" and "rose" (p. 42).

Figure 7.8 serves as a reminder that most of the ME period had scribes who handwrote texts. There was not printing press until the later stages of ME. Scribes often introduced spelling innovations.



**Figure 7.8 Medieval Scribe**

Source: History has a Face

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Many silent consonant letters represent consonants that were actually pronounced at one time but fell victim to changing phonotactic rules. What's a phonotactic rule? It's a rule that

describes the way sounds can be arranged in the words of a language. Let me elaborate a little bit more. Phonotactic rules are the rules in our head that tell us which combination of sounds are legal, "legal" in the language. Here is a quick example. We cannot start a word in PDE with the /ŋ/. We can end words with that sound, but we can't start words. That's one sample example, every speaker of PDE knows this rule, even if on an unconscious level. That's a phonotactic rule. There's other combination of sounds that are, again, "illegal."

Here is another example. In PDE, you don't have a [u] sound before the [ŋ] sound. So although *ring*, *rang*, and *rung* are all good English words, [ruŋ] is not only not an English word, it's not even a possible English word. One phonotactic rule that changed has to do with where you can have an [h] sound. Say the word *hug*. It begins with the [h] sound. Now say the word *huge*. What sound does it begin with? [h] again? Well, yes and no. It's true that we hear it as an [h], but it is not the same kind of [h] that we have in *hug*. That [h] is made by just letting air flow past your vocal chords down in your neck.

However, the [h] in *huge* is made by raising the body of your tongue up close to your palate and forcing air through that constriction. Say them again: *hug* and *huge*. Notice how your mouth is formed and where the air goes. In PDE, we only pronounce [h] at the beginnings of words, but in Old English, the [h] pronounced with your tongue close to your palate could also appear in the middle of a word or at the end. It was spelled as an "h" in Old English and as "gh" in Middle English. And even after English speakers stop pronouncing the palatal [h], the spelling remained. We know it today as the silent "gh" in words such as *thought*, *knight*, and *through*.

Phonotactic rules also deal with consonant clusters, and in English, these rules are pretty picky. With twenty-three consonant sounds, more than five hundred consonant clusters are possible, but English uses only about forty. And some of those appear only in proper nouns such

as *Gwen* or in borrowed words such as *schlep*. But in Old English and early Middle English, English used to have quite a few more consonant clusters than it does now. One cluster that has disappeared is "kn," which gives us the silent "k" in words such as *knife*, *knee*, and *knowledge*. *Knife*, for example, used to be pronounced [kni:f].

Another long-lost cluster is [wr], which has given way to the silent "w" in words such as *wrong*, *wreaths*, and *wrestle*. Yet another consonant cluster that PDE doesn't have any more is [gn], which is the source of the silent "g" in words such as *gnaw*, *gnat*, and *gnarly*.

All the clusters we've talked about so far come at the beginning of a word, but there are also phonotactic rules about clusters coming at the end of a word. The word *hymn* has a silent "n" at the end of it, it gets revealed in the right phonetic environment. In this case, when it's followed by a vowel in the word *hymnal*.

Latin provides a few of these "now you hear them, now you don't" ends too, in words such as *condemn* and *condemnation*. In the original Latin and Greek, these words had suffixes following those consonant letters, but those suffixes got deleted when the words entered English, leaving a phonotactically unacceptable cluster at the ends of the words, thus giving us the silent "n" and at the end.

Some letters are silent in English words because we borrow the words from another language and they're silent in that language too, such as French. *Rendezvous* and *coup d'état* are two examples. Why does French have so many silent final consonant letters? Just as an English, the spellings have been fixed for a long time and haven't changed with the language's pronunciation. The name for the deletion of sounds from the end is known as apocope.

The last group of silent letters we'll talk about came from some misguided spelling reforms. We've been talking about how silent letters can result from not removing a letter that

represents a sound that isn't pronounced. However, in some cases, a silent letter has come from putting in a letter for a sound that isn't pronounced. Now, why would anyone do such a thing? As is often the case, someone had good intentions. In his book *The Fight for English* from 2006, David Crystal explains that, during the Renaissance, some spelling reformers thought it would be a good idea to insert letters to make a word's origin clear. This is where the silent "b" in *debt* comes from. At the time, the word was spelled without a "b," but reformers began to insert it to show its relation to the Latin source *debitum*. Crystal writes that this tinkering also resulted in the silent "s" in *island*, because the reformers were sure that this word came from the Latin word for island *insula*. But in reality, the origin was different. In short, many silent letters in PDE come from ME.

## The Great Vowel Shift

To conclude this look at Middle English, I would like to discuss the Great Vowel Shift (GVS). This famous change began at the end of the Middle English Period, and it was extremely important in the history of the English language.

The GVS was a massive change in the vowel system of ME. It occurred during the later part of the ME period and extended into the Early Modern English period. Its effect on English was profound. Otto Jespersen, a Danish linguist, discovered the GVS, and he coined the term.



*Figure 7.5: Otto Jespersen*  
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Here is a quick overview of the GVS. Millward and Hayes (2012) define it this way: (the GVS was) “the sound change of the fifteenth through the eighteenth centuries under which all the ME long vowels qualitatively changed by moving upward in their articulation” (p. 445). Let’s unpack that definition a bit.

First, it is important to understand that the GVS shift was not a quick event. It happened over several centuries. During the gradual change, the entire vowels system in ME was restructured. However, after it started, the changes gained momentum. As we’ve seen, innovations often come from younger generations. And with each successive generation, the vowel changes became more widespread and entrenched.

In a nutshell, here is what historical linguists say about the GVS. During this period (1400-1700), long vowels rose in the mouth. This means that the vowels that were elongated a bit rose in the mouth to the next position. And the highest vowels (/i/ and /u/) became diphthongs (/ai/ and /au/). Figures 7.6, 7.7, and 7.8 give illustrations of the changes.



Figure 7.6 demonstrates that the mid-vowels /e:/ and /o:/ began to rise. And the high vowels /i:/ and /u:/ became diphthongs during the 1500s, but they were not quite the diphthongs of PDE.

Word	Vowel pronunciation	
	1400	1500
<i>bite</i>	/i:/	/ɛi/
<i>meet</i>	/e:/	/i:/
<i>out</i>	/u:/	/ɔu/
<i>boot</i>	/o:/	/u:/

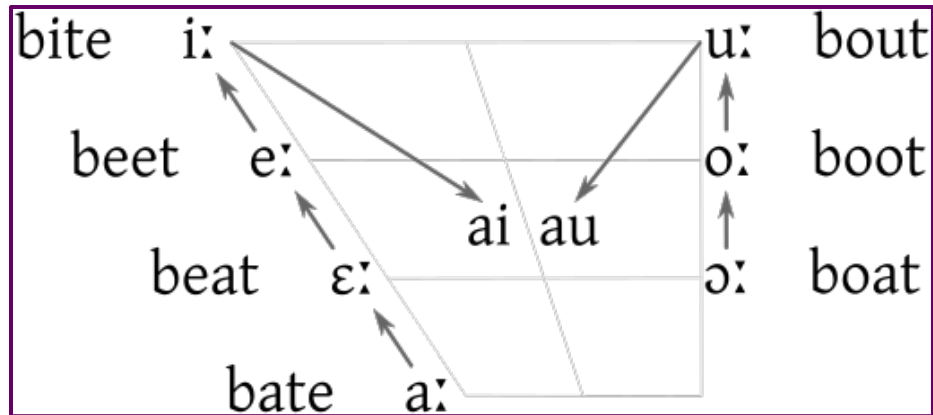
*Figure 7.6: First Phase of the Great Vowel Shift*

The second phase of the GVS affected the ME vowels /a:/, /ɛ:/, and /ɔ:/. Figure 7.6 shows how these vowels ultimately rose as well.

Word	Vowel pronunciation			
	1400	1550	1640	PDE
<i>meat</i>	/ɛ:/	/ɛ:/	/e:/	/i:/
<i>mate</i>	/a:/	/a:/, /æ:/	/ɛ:/	/e:/
<i>boat</i>	/ɔ:/	/ɔ:/	/o:/	/o:/
<i>bite</i>	/i:/	/ɛi/	/ɛi/	/aɪ/
<i>out</i>	/u:/	/ɔu/	/ɔu/	/aʊ/

*Figure 7.7: First Phase of the Great Vowel Shift*

I included two separate tables to give a sense of the GVS shift occurred in stages. Figure 7.8 is more visual representation of the GVS. It illustrates that the GVS shift was a chain reaction. As a vowel moved up, it displaced or “crowded” the vowel above it out of the way.



*Figure 7.8: Visual Representation of the GVS*

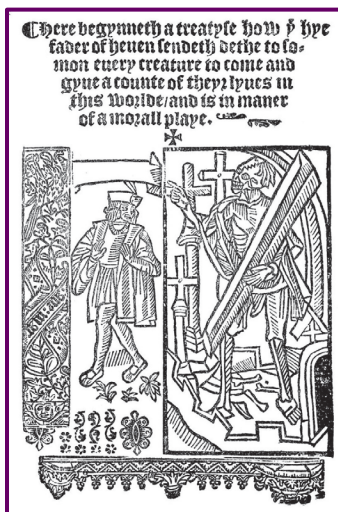
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The causes of the GVS shift are not fully understood. However, scholars speculate that the infusion of French loan words during ME contributed to the GVS. Equally plausible is that the Bubonic Plague and its effect on migration patterns contributed as well.

# Everyman



*Figure 7.9: Frontispiece from Everyman*

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Link: [here](#)

I pray you all give your audience,  
And hear this matter with reverence,  
In form a moral play.  
The Summoning of Everyman it is called so,  
That of our lives and ending maketh show  
How transitory we be every day.  
This matter is wondrous precious,  
But the meaning of it is more gracious  
And sweet to bear away.  
The story saith: Man, in the beginning  
Watch well, and take good heed of the ending.  
Be you never so gay!  
Ye think sin in the beginning full sweet,  
Which, in the end, causeth the soul to weep,  
When the body lieth in clay.  
Here shall you see how Fellowship and Jollity,  
Both Strength, Pleasure, and Beauty,  
Will fade from thee as flower in May,  
For ye shall hear how our Heaven's King  
Calleth Everyman to a general reckoning.  
Give audience and hear what he doth say.

[The Messenger goes.]

GOD SPEAKETH:

I perceive, here in my majesty.  
How that all creatures be to me unkind,  
Living, without fear, in worldly prosperity.

In spiritual vision the people be so blind,  
Drowned in sin, they know me not for their God;  
In worldly riches is all their mind.  
They fear not my righteousness, the sharp rod.  
My law that I disclosed, when I for them died,  
They clean forget, and shedding of my blood red.  
I hung between two it cannot be denied,  
To get them life I suffered to be dead,  
I healed their feet, with thorns was hurt my head.  
I could do no more than I did truly.  
And now I see the people do clean forsake me;  
They use the seven deadly sins damnable  
In such wise that pride, covetousness, wrath, and lechery.  
Now in this world be made commendable.  
And thus they leave of angels the heavenly company.  
Every man liveth so after his own pleasure,  
And yet of their lives they be nothing sure.  
The more I them forbear, I see  
The worse from year to year they be;  
All that live grow more evil apace;  
Therefore I will, in briefest space,  
From every man in person have a reckoning shown.  
For, if I leave the people thus alone  
In their way of life and wicked passions to he,  
They will become much worse than beasts, verily.  
Now for envy would one eat up another, and tarry not,  
Charity is by all clean forgot.  
I hoped well that every man  
In my glory should make his mansion,  
And thereto I made them all elect.  
But now I see, like traitors abject,  
They thank me not for the pleasure that I for them meant.  
Nor yet for their being that I them have lent.  
I proffered the people great multitude of mercy.  
And few there be that ask it heartily.  
They be so cumbered with worldly riches, thereto  
I must needs upon them justice do, —  
On every man living without fear.  
Where art thou, Death, thou mighty messenger?

[Death enters.]

DEATH.

Almighty God, I am here at your will,  
Your commandment to fulfil.

GOD.

Go thou to Everyman,  
And show him in my name  
A pilgrimage he must on him take,  
Which he in no wise may escape.  
And that he bring with him a sure reckoning  
Without delay or any tarrying.

DEATH.

Lord, I will in the world go run over all.  
And cruelly search out both great and small.  
Every man will I beset that liveth beastly  
Out of God's law, and doth not dread folly.  
He that loveth riches I will strike with my dart  
His sight to blind and him from heaven to part —  
Except if Alms be his good friend —  
In hell for to dwell, world without end.  
Lo, yonder I see Everyman walking.  
Full little he thinketh on my coming!  
His mind is on fleshly lusts and his treasure.  
And great pain it shall cause him to endure  
Before the Lord, of Heaven the King.  
Everyman, stand still ! Whither art thou going  
Thus gayly? Hast thou thy Maker forgot?

[Everyman enters.]

EVERYMAN.

Why askest thou?  
Wouldest thou know? For what?

DEATH.

Yea, sir, I will show you now.  
In great haste I am sent to thee  
From God, out of his majesty.

EVERYMAN.

What, sent to me!

DEATH.

Yea, certainly.  
Though thou hast forgot him here.  
He thinketh on thee in the heavenly sphere,  
As, ere we part, thou shalt know.

EVERYMAN.

What desireth God of me?

DEATH.

That shall I show thee.  
A reckoning he will needs have  
Without any longer respite

EVERYMAN.

To give a reckoning longer leisure I crave.  
This blind matter troubleth my wit.

DEATH.

Upon thee thou must take a long journey,

Therefore, do thou thine accounting-book with thee bring.  
For turn again thou canst not by no way,  
And look thou be sure in thy reckoning.  
For before God thou shalt answer, and show true  
Thy many bad deeds and good but a few,  
How thou hast spent thy life and in what wise  
Before the Chief Lord of Paradise.  
Get thee prepared that we may be upon that journey,  
For well thou knowest thou shalt make none for thee attorney.

EVERYMAN.  
Full unready I am such reckoning to give.  
I know thee not. What messenger art thou?

DEATH.  
I am Death that no man fear,  
For every man I arrest and no man spare,  
For it is God's commandment  
That all to me should be obedient.

EVERYMAN.  
O Death, thou comest when I had thee least in mind!  
In thy power it lieth to save me yet; —  
Thereto of my goods will I give thee, if thou wilt be kind, —  
Yea, a thousand pounds shalt thou get! —  
And defer this matter till another day.

DEATH.  
Everyman, it may not be in any way.  
I set no store by gold, silver, riches, or such gear,  
Nor by pope, emperor, king, prince, or peer.  
For, if I would receive gifts great.  
All the world I might get,  
But my custom is clean the contrary way.  
I give thee no respite. Come hence, nor delay!

EVERYMAN.  
Alas, shall I have no longer respite!  
I may say Death giveth no warning!  
To think on thee, it maketh my heart sick,  
For all unready is my book of reckoning.  
But if I might have twelve years of waiting,  
My accounting-book I would make so clear  
That my reckoning I should not need to fear.  
Wherefore, Death, I pray thee, for God's mercy.  
Spare me till I be provided with a remedy!

DEATH.  
It availeth thee not to cry, weep, and pray,  
But haste thee lightly, that thou mayest be on thy journey.  
And make proof of thy friends, if thou can,

For, know thou well, time waiteth for no man,  
And in the world each living creature  
Because of Adam's sin must die by nature.

EVERYMAN.

Death, if I should this pilgrimage take,  
And my reckoning duly make.  
Show me, for Saint Charity,  
Should I not come again shortly?

DEATH.

No, Everyman, if once thou art there,  
Thou mayest nevermore come here,  
Trust me, verily.

EVERYMAN.

O gracious God, in the high seat celestial,  
Have mercy on me in this utmost need!  
Shall I no company have from this vale terrestrial  
Of mine acquaintance that way me to lead?

DEATH.

Yea, if any he so hardy  
As to go with thee and bear thee company.  
Haste thee that thou mayest be gone to God's magnificence,  
Thy reckoning to give before his presence,  
What, thinkest thou thy life is given thee,  
And thy worldly goods also?

EVERYMAN.

I had thought so, verily.

DEATH.

Nay, nay, it was but lent to thee,  
For, as soon as thou dost go,  
Another awhile shall have it and then even so.  
Go therefore as thou hast done.  
Everyman, thou art mad! Thou hast thy wits five,  
And here on earth will not amend thy life,  
For suddenly I do come!

EVERYMAN.

O wretched caitiff, whither shall I flee  
That I may escape this endless sorrow!  
Nay, gentle Death, spare me until to-morrow  
That I may amend me  
With good avisement!

DEATH.

Nay, thereto I will not consent,  
Nor no man respite, if I might,

But to the heart suddenly I shall smite  
Without any "advisement."  
And now out of thy sight I will me hie,  
See that thou make thee ready speedily,  
For thou mayest say this is the day  
Wherefrom no man living may escape away.

EVERYMAN.

Alas, I may well weep with sighs deep!  
Now have I no manner of company  
To help me on my journey and me to keep,  
And also my writing is all unready.  
What can I do that may excuse me!  
I would to God I had never been begot!  
To my soul a full great profit it would be,  
For now I fear pains huge and great, God wot!  
The time passeth — help, Lord, that all things wrought!  
For, though I mourn, yet it availeth naught.  
The day passeth and is almost through,  
I wot not well of aught that I may do.  
To whom were it best that I my plaint should make?  
What if to Fellowship I thereof spake,  
And what this sudden chance should mean disclosed?  
For surely in him is all my trust reposed —  
We have in the world so many a day  
Been good friends in sport and play.  
I see him yonder certainly —  
I trust that he will bear me company;  
Therefore to him will I speak to ease my sorrow.  
Well met, good Fellowship, and a good morrow!

[Enter Fellowship]

FELLOWSHIP SPEAKETH:

I wish thee good morrow, Everyman, by this day!  
Sir, why lookest thou so piteously?  
If anything be amiss, prithe to me it say  
That I may help in remedy.

EVERYMAN.

Yea, good Fellowship, yea,  
I am in great jeopardy!

FELLOWSHIP.

My true friend, show to me your mind.  
I will not forsake thee to my live's end,  
In the way of good company.

EVERYMAN.

That was well spoken and lovingly.

FELLOWSHIP.

Sir, I must needs know your heaviness.



I have pity to see you in any distress.  
If any have wronged you, revenged ye shall be.  
Though I upon the ground be slain for thee,  
Even should I know before that I should die.

EVERYMAN.  
Verily, Fellowship, gramercy!

FELLOWSHIP.  
Tush! By thy thanks I set not a straw.  
Show me your grief and say no more.

EVERYMAN.  
If I my heart should to you unfold,  
And you then were to turn your heart from me,  
And no comfort would give when I had told,  
Then should I ten times sorrier be.

FELLOWSHIP.  
Sir, I say as I will do indeed!

EVERYMAN.  
Then you be a good friend at need.  
I have found you true heretofore.

FELLOWSHIP.  
And so ye shall evermore,  
For, in faith, if thou goest to hell,  
I will not forsake thee by the way.

EVERYMAN.  
Ye speak like a good friend — I believe you well.  
I shall deserve it, if so I may!

FELLOWSHIP.  
I speak of no deserving, by this day,  
For he that will say, and nothing do.  
Is not worthy with good company to go.  
Therefore show me the grief of your mind,  
As to your friend most loving and kind.

EVERYMAN.  
I shall show you how it is:  
Commanded I am to go a journey,  
A long way hard and dangerous.  
And give a strict account without delay  
Before the High Judge, Adonai.  
Wherefore, I pray you, bear me company,  
As ye have promised, on this journey.

FELLOWSHIP.

That is matter, indeed! Promise is duty —  
But if I should take such a voyage on me,  
I know well it should be to my pain;  
Afeard also it maketh me, for certain.  
But let us take counsel here as well as we can,  
For your words would dismay a strong man.

EVERYMAN.  
Why, if I had need, ye said  
Ye would never forsake me, quick nor dead,  
Though it were to hell truly!

FELLOWSHIP.  
So I said certainly,  
But such pleasant things be set aside, the truth to say;  
And also, if we took such a journey,  
When should we come again?

EVERYMAN.  
Nay, never again till the day of doom.

FELLOWSHIP.  
In faith, then, will I not come there.  
Who hath you these tidings brought?

EVERYMAN.  
Indeed, Death was with me here.

FELLOWSHIP.  
Now, by God that all hath bought,  
If Death were the messenger,  
For no man living here below  
I will not that loathly journey go —  
Not for the father that begat me!

EVERYMAN.  
Ye promised otherwise, pardy!

FELLOWSHIP.  
I know well I do say so, truly,  
And still, if thou wilt eat and drink and make good cheer.  
Or haunt of women the merry company,  
I would not forsake you while the day is clear,  
Trust me, verily.

EVERYMAN.  
Yea, thereto ye would be ready!  
To go to mirth, solace, and play.  
Your mind would sooner persuaded be  
Than to bear me company on my long journey.

FELLOWSHIP.

Now, in good sooth, I have no will that way —  
But if thou would'st murder, or any man kill,  
In that I will help thee with a good will.

EVERYMAN.

Oh, that is simple advice, indeed!  
Gentle Fellowship, help me in my necessity!  
We have loved long, and now I am in need!  
And now, gentle Fellowship, remember me!

FELLOWSHIP.

Whether ye have loved me or no.  
By Saint John, I will not with thee go!

EVERYMAN.

Yea, I pray thee, take this task on thee and do so  
much for me.  
As to bring me forward on my way for Saint  
Charity,  
And comfort me till I come without the town.

FELLOWSHIP.

Nay, if thou wouldest give me a new gown,  
I will not a foot with thee go.  
But, if thou hadst tarried, I would not have left thee so.  
And so now, God speed thee on thy journey,  
For from thee I will depart as fast as I may!

EVERYMAN.

Whither away, Fellowship? Will you forsake me?

FELLOWSHIP.

Yea, by my faith! I pray God take thee.

EVERYMAN.

Farewell, good Fellowship, — for thee my heart is sore.  
Adieu forever, I shall see thee no more!

FELLOWSHIP.

In faith, Everyman, farewell now at the ending.  
For you I will remember that parting is grieving.  
[Fellowship goes.]

EVERYMAN.

Alack! Shall we thus part indeed?  
Ah, Lady, help! Lo, vouchsafing no more comfort,  
Fellowship thus forsaketh me in my utmost need.  
For help in this world whither shall I resort?  
Fellowship heretofore with me would merry make,  
And now little heed of my sorrow doth he take.  
It is said in prosperity men friends may find  
Which in adversity be full unkind.  
Now whither for succor shall I flee.

Since that Fellowship hath forsaken me?  
To my kinsmen will I truly.  
Praying them to help me in my necessity.  
I believe that they will do so  
For “Nature will creep where it may not go.”  
[Kindred and Cousin enter.]  
I will go try, for yonder I see them go.  
Where be ye now, my friends and kinsmen, lo?

KINDRED.  
Here we be now at your commandment.  
Cousin, I pray you show us your intent  
In any wise and do not spare.

COUSIN.  
Yea, Everyman, and to us declare  
If ye be disposed to go any whither,  
For, wit you well, we will live and die together I

KINDRED.  
In wealth and woe we will with you hold,  
For “with his own kin a man may be bold.”

EVERYMAN.  
Gramercy, my friends and kinsmen kind!  
Now shall I show you the grief of my mind.  
I was commanded by a messenger  
That is a High King’s chief officer.  
He bade me go a pilgrimage to my pain,  
And I know well I shall never come again;  
And I must give a reckoning strait,  
For I have a great enemy that lieth for me in wait,  
Who intendeth me to hinder.

KINDRED.  
What account is that which you must render? —  
That would I know.

EVERYMAN.  
Of all my works I must show  
How I have lived and my days have spent,  
Also of evil deeds to which I have been used  
In my time, since life was to me lent.  
And of all virtues that I have refused.  
Therefore, I pray you, go thither with me  
To help to make my account, for Saint Charity!

COUSIN.  
What, to go thither? Is that the matter?  
Nay, Everyman, I had liefer fast on bread and water  
All this five year and more!

EVERYMAN.

Alas, that ever my mother me bore!  
For now shall I never merry be,  
If that you forsake me!

KINDRED.

Ah, sir, come! Ye be a merry man!  
Pluck up heart and make no moan,  
But one tiling I warn you, by Saint Anne,  
As for me, ye shall go alone!

EVERYMAN.

My cousin, will you not with me go?

COUSIN.

No, by our Lady! I have the cramp in my toe.  
Trust not to me, for, so God me speed,  
I will deceive you in your utmost need.

KINDRED.

It availeth not us to coax and court.  
Ye shall have my maid, with all my heart.  
She loveth to go to feasts, there to make foolish sport  
And to dance, and in antics to take part.  
To help you on that journey I will give her leave willingly,  
If so be that you and she may agree.

EVERYMAN.

Now show me the very truth within your mind —  
Will you go with me or abide behind?

KINDRED.

Abide behind? Yea, that I will, if I may —  
Therefore farewell till another day!

EVERYMAN.

How shall I be merry or glad? —  
For fair promises men to me make,  
But, when I have most need, they me forsake!  
I am deceived — that maketh me sad!

COUSIN.

Cousin Everyman, farewell now, lo!  
For, verily, I will not with thee go.  
Also of mine own an unready reckoning,  
I have to give account of, therefore I make tarrying.  
Now God keep thee, for now I go!  
[Kindred and Cousin go.]

EVERYMAN.

Ah, Jesus, is all to this come so?  
Lo, "fair words make fools fain,"  
They promise, and from deeds refrain.  
My kinsmen promised me faithfully  
For to abide by me stedfastly.  
And now fast away do they flee.  
Even so Fellowship promised me.  
What friend were it best for me to provide?  
I am losing my time longer here to abide.  
Yet still in my mind a thing there is.  
All my life I have loved riches.  
If that my Goods now help me might,  
He would make my heart full light.  
To him will I speak in my sorrow this day.  
My Goods and Riches, where art thou, pray?  
[Goods is disclosed hemmed in by chests and bags.]

GOODS.

Who calleth me? Everyman? Why this haste thou hast?  
I lie here in corners trussed and piled so high.  
And in chests I am locked so fast,  
Also sacked in bags, thou mayest see with thine eye,  
I cannot stir; in packs, full low I lie.  
What ye would have, lightly to me say.

EVERYMAN.

Come hither. Goods, with all the haste thou may.  
For counsel straightway I must ask of thee.

GOODS.

Sir, if ye in this world have sorrow or adversity,  
That can I help you to remedy shortly.

EVERYMAN.

It is another disease that grieveth me;  
In this world it is not, I tell thee so,  
I am sent for another way to go,  
To give a strict account general  
Before the highest Jupiter of all.  
And all my life I have had joy and pleasure in thee,  
Therefore I pray thee go with me,  
For, peradventure, thou mayest before God Almighty on high  
My reckoning help to clean and purify,  
For one may hear ever and anon  
"That money maketh all right that is wrong."

GOODS.

Nay, Everyman, I sing another song —  
I follow no mail on such voyages,  
For, if I went with thee,  
Thou shouldest fare much the worse for me.  
For, because on me thou didst set thy mind.

Thy reckoning I have made blotted and blind.  
So that thine account thou canst not make truly —  
And that hast thou for the love of me.

EVERYMAN.

That would be to me grief full sore and sorrowing,  
When I should come that fearful answering.  
Up, let us go thither together!

GOODS.

Nay, not so! I am too brittle, I may not endure,  
I will follow no man one foot, be ye sure.

EVERYMAN.

Alas! I have thee loved, and had great pleasure  
All the days of my life in goods and treasure.

GOODS.

That is to thy damnation, I tell thee a true thing,  
For love of me is to the love everlasting contrary.  
But if thou hadst the while loved me moderately,  
In such wise as to give the poor a part of me,  
Then would'st thou not in this dolor be.  
Nor in this great sorrow and care.

EVERYMAN.

Lo, now was I deceived ere I was ware,  
And all I may blame to misspending of time.

GOODS.

What, thinkest thou I am thine?

EVERYMAN.

I had thought so.

GOODS.

Nay, Everyman, I say no.  
Just for a while I was lent to thee,  
A season thou hast had me in prosperity.  
My nature it is man's soul to kill,  
If I save one, a thousand I do spill.  
Thinkest thou that I will follow thee?  
Nay, from this world not, verily!

EVERYMAN.

I had thought otherwise.

GOODS.

So it is to thy soul Goods is a thief.  
For when thou art dead I straightway devise  
Another to deceive in the same wise  
As I have done thee, and all to his soul's grief.

EVERYMAN.

O false Goods, cursed may thou be!  
Thou traitor to God that hast deceived me,  
And caught me in thy snare.

GOODS.

Marry, thou broughtest thyself to this care, —  
Whereof I am glad!  
I must needs laugh, I cannot be sad!

EVERYMAN.

Ah, Goods, thou hast had long my hearty love.  
I gave thee that which should be the Lord's above.  
But wilt thou not go with me, indeed? —  
I pray thee truth to say!

GOODS.

No, so God me speed!  
Therefore farewell, and have good-day.  
[Goods is hidden from view.]

EVERYMAN.

Oh, to whom shall I make my moan  
For to go with me on that heavy journey!  
First Fellowship, so he said, would have with me  
gone,  
His words were very pleasant and gay,  
But afterwards he left me alone;  
Then spake I to my kinsmen, all in despair,  
And they also gave me words fair.  
They lacked not fair speeches to spend,  
But all forsook me in the end;  
Then went I to my Goods that I loved best.  
In hope to have comfort, but there had I least,  
For my Goods sharply did me tell  
That he bringeth many into hell.  
Then of myself I was ashamed.  
And so I am worthy to be blamed.  
Thus may I well myself hate.  
Of whom shall I now counsel take?  
I think that I shall never speed  
*TILL I GO TO MY GOOD DEEDS.*  
But, alas! she is so weak,  
That she can neither move nor speak.  
Yet will I venture on her now.  
My Good Deeds, where be you? [Good Deeds is shown]

GOOD DEEDS.

Here I lie, cold in the ground.  
Thy sins surely have me bound  
That I cannot stir.



EVERYMAN.

Good Deeds, I stand in fear!  
I must pray you for counsel,  
For help now would come right well!

GOOD DEEDS.

Everyman, I have understanding  
That ye be summoned your account to make  
Before Messias, of Jerusalem King.  
If you do my counsel, that journey with you will I take.

EVERYMAN.

For that I come to you my moan to make.  
I pray you that ye will go with me.

GOOD DEEDS.

I would full fain, but I cannot stand, verily.

EVERYMAN.

Why, is there something amiss that did you befall?

GOOD DEEDS.

Yea, Sir, I may thank you for all.  
If in every wise ye had encouraged me.  
Your book of account full ready would be.  
Behold the books of your works and your deeds thereby.  
Ah, see, how under foot they lie  
Unto your soul's deep heaviness.

EVERYMAN.

Our Lord Jesus his help vouchsafe to me,  
For one letter here I cannot see.

GOOD DEEDS.

There is a blind reckoning in time of distress!

EVERYMAN.

Good Deeds, I pray you help me in this need,  
Or else I am forever damned indeed.  
Therefore help me to make reckoning  
Before him, that Redeemer is of everything,  
That is, and was, and shall ever be. King of All.

GOOD DEEDS.

Everyman, I am sorry for your fall.  
And fain would I help you, if I were able.

EVERYMAN.

Good Deeds, your counsel, I pray you, give me.

GOOD DEEDS.

That will I do, verily.  
Though on my feet I may not go,  
I have a sister that shall with you be, also.  
Called Knowledge, who shall with you abide,  
To help you to make that dire reckoning.

[Knowledge enters.]

KNOWLEDGE.

Everyman, I will go with thee and be thy guide,  
In thy utmost need to go by thy side.

EVERYMAN.

In good condition I am now in everything.  
And am wholly content with this good thing,  
Thanks be to God, my creator!

GOOD DEEDS.

And when he hath brought thee there.  
Where thou shalt heal thee of thy smart,  
Then go with thy reckoning and thy good deeds together,  
For to make thee joyful at heart  
Before the Holy Trinity.

EVERYMAN.

My Good Deeds, gramercy!  
I am well content, certainly,  
With your words sweet.

KNOWLEDGE.

Now go we together lovingly  
To Confession, that cleansing river fair.

EVERYMAN.

For joy I weep — I would we were there!  
But, I pray you, give me cognition,  
Where dwelleth that holy man, Confession?

KNOWLEDGE.

In the House of Salvation,  
We shall find him in that place,  
That shall us comfort by God's grace.

[Confession enters.]

Lo, this is Confession. Kneel down, and ask mercy,  
For he is in good favor with God Almighty.

EVERYMAN.

O glorious fountain that all uncleanness doth clarify,  
Wash from me the spots of vice unclean.  
That on me no sin be seen!  
I come with Knowledge for my redemption.

Redeemed with heartfelt and full contrition,  
For I am commanded a pilgrimage to take,  
And great accounts before God to make.  
Now I pray you, Shrift, Mother of Salvation,  
Help my good deeds because of my piteous exclamation!

CONFESSION.

I know your sorrow well, Everyman,  
Because with Knowledge ye come to me.  
I will you comfort as well as I can,  
And a precious stone will I give thee.  
Called penance, wise voider of adversity.  
Therewith shall your body chastened be  
Through abstinence and perseverance in God's service.  
Here shall you receive that scourge of me  
That is penance stronge, that ye must endure.  
To remember thy Saviour was scourged for thee  
With sharp scourges, and suffered it patiently —  
So must thou ere thou escape from that painful pilgrimage.  
Knowledge, do thou sustain him on this voyage.  
And by that time Good Deeds will be with thee.  
But in any case be sure of mercy.  
For your time draweth on fast, if ye will saved be.  
Ask God mercy, and he will grant it truly.  
When with the scourge of penance man doth him bind,  
The oil of forgiveness then shall he find.  
[Confession goes.]

EVERYMAN.

Thanked be God for his gracious work,  
For now will I my penance begin.  
This hath rejoiced and lightened my heart,  
Though the knots be painful and hard within.

KNOWLEDGE.

Everyman, see that ye your penance fulfil.  
Whatever the pains ye abide full dear.  
And Knowledge shall give you counsel at will.  
How your account ye shall make full clear.

EVERYMAN.

O eternal God, O heavenly being,  
O way of righteousness, O goodly vision,  
Which descended down into a virgin pure  
Because he would for every man redeem  
That which Adam forfeited by his disobedience —  
O blessed God, elect and exalted in thy divinity,  
Forgive thou my grievous offence!  
Here I cry thee mercy in this presence.  
O spiritual treasure, O ransomer and redeemer,  
Of all the world the hope and the governor,

Mirror of joy, founder of mercy.  
Who illumineth heaven and earth thereby.  
Hear my clamorous complaint, though late it be,  
Receive my prayers, unworthy in this heavy life!  
Though I be a sinner most abominable,  
Yet let my name be written in Moses' table.  
Mary, pray to the Maker of everything  
To vouchsafe me help at my ending.  
And save me from the power of my enemy,  
For Death assaileth me strongly! —  
And, Lady, that I may, by means of thy prayer,  
In your Son's glory as partner share.  
Through the mediation of his passion I it crave.  
I beseech you, help my soul to save!  
Knowledge, give me the scourge of penance;  
My flesh therewith shall give acquittance.  
I will now begin, if God give me grace.

KNOWLEDGE.

Everyman, God give you time and space!  
Thus I bequeath you into the hands of our Saviour,  
Now may you make your reckoning sure.

EVERYMAN.

In the name of the Holy Trinity,  
My body sorely punished shall be.  
Take this, body, for the sin of the flesh.  
As thou delightest to go gay and fresh.  
And in the way of damnation thou didst me bring,  
Therefore suffer now the strokes of punishing.  
Now of penance to wade the water clear I desire.  
To save me from purgatory, that sharp fire.

GOOD DEEDS.

I thank God now I can walk and go.  
And am delivered of my sickness and woe!  
Therefore with Everyman I will go and not spare;  
His good works I will help him to declare.

KNOWLEDGE.

Now, Everyman, be merry and glad.  
Your Good Deeds comet h now, ye may not be sad.  
Now is your Good Deeds whole and sound,  
Going upright upon the ground.  
[Good Deeds rises and walks to them,]

EVERYMAN.

My heart is light and shall be evermore.  
Now will I smite faster than I did before.

GOOD DEEDS.

Everyman, pilgrim, my special friend.  
Blessed be thou without end!  
For thee is prepared the eternal glory.  
Now thou hast made me whole and sound this tide,  
In every hour I will by thee abide.

EVERYMAN.

Welcome, my Good Deeds! Now I hear thy voice,  
I weep for sweetness of love.

KNOWLEDGE.

Be no more sad, but ever rejoice!  
God seeth thy manner of life on his throne above.  
Put on this garment to thy behoof,  
Which wet with the tears of your weeping is,  
Or else in God's presence you may it miss,  
When ye to your journey's end come shall.

EVERYMAN.

Gentle Knowledge, what do you it call?

KNOWLEDGE.

A garment of sorrow it is by name,  
From pain it will you reclaim.  
Contrition it is,  
That getteth forgiveness,  
Passing well it doth God please.

GOOD DEEDS.

Everyman, will you wear it for your soul's ease?  
[Everyman puts on the robe of contrition.]

EVERYMAN.

Now blessed be Jesu, Mary's son.  
For now have I on true contrition!  
And let us go now without tarrying.  
Good Deeds, have we all clear our reckoning?

GOOD DEEDS.

Yea, indeed, I have them here.

EVERYMAN.

Then I trust we need not fear.  
Now, friends, let us not part in twain!

KNOWLEDGE.

Nay, Everyman, that will we not, for certain.

GOOD DEEDS.

Yet must thou lead with thee

EVERYMAN.

Who should they be?

GOOD DEEDS.

Discretion and Strength they hight.  
And thy Beauty may not abide behind.

KNOWLEDGE.

Also ye must call to mind  
Your Five Wits as your counsellors beside.

GOOD DEEDS.

You must have them ready at every tide.

EVERYMAN.

How shall I get them hither?

KNOWLEDGE.

You must call them all together,  
And they will hear you immediately.

EVERYMAN.

My friends, come hither and present be.  
Discretion, Strength, my Five Wits, and Beauty.  
[They enter.]

BEAUTY.

Here at your will be we all ready.  
What will ye that we should do?

GOOD DEEDS.

That ye should with Everyman go,  
And help him in his pilgrimage.  
Advise you — will you with him or not, on that voyage?

STRENGTH.

We will all bring him thither,  
To help him and comfort, believe ye me

DISCRETION.

So will we go with him all together.

EVERYMAN.

Almighty God, beloved mayest thou be!  
I give thee praise that I have hither brought  
Strength, Discretion, Beauty, Five Wits — lack I  
nought —  
And my Good Deeds, with Knowledge clear,  
All be in my company at my will here.  
I desire no more in this my anxiousness.

STRENGTH.

And I, Strength, will stand by you in your distress,  
Though thou wouldest in battle fight on the ground.

FIVE WITS.

And though it were through the world round,  
We will not leave you for sweet or sour.

BEAUTY.

No more will I unto Death's hour,  
Whatsoever thereof befall.

DISCRETION.

Everyman, advise you first of all.  
Go with a good advisement and deliberation.  
We all give you virtuous monition  
That all shall be well.

EVERYMAN.

My friends, hearken what I will tell.  
I pray God reward you in his heavenly sphere.  
Now hearken all that be here.  
For I will make my testament  
Here before you all present.  
In alms, half my goods will I give with my hands  
twain.  
In the way of charity with good intent,  
And the other half still shall remain  
In bequest to return where it ought to be.  
This I do in despite of the fiend of hell,  
Out of his peril to quit me well  
For ever after and this day.

KNOWLEDGE.

Everyman, hearken what I say.  
Go to Priesthood, I, you advise,  
And receive of him in any wise  
The Holy Sacrament and Unction together,  
Then see ye speedily turn again hither.  
We will all await you here, verily.

FIVE WITS.

Yea, Everyman, haste thee that ye may ready be.  
There is no emperor, king, duke, nor baron bold,  
That from God such commission doth hold  
As he doth to the least priest in this world consign,  
For of the Blessed Sacraments, pure and benign,  
He beareth the keys, and thereof hath the cure  
For man's redemption, it is ever sure.  
Which God as medicine for our souls' gain  
Gave us out of his heart with great pain,  
Here in this transitory life for thee and me.

Of the Blessed Sacraments seven there be.  
Baptism, Confirmation, with Priesthood good.  
And the Sacrament of God's precious Flesh and Blood,  
Marriage, the Holy Extreme Unction, and Penance.  
These seven are good to have in remembrance,  
Gracious Sacraments of high divinity.

EVERYMAN.

Fain would I receive that holy body.  
And meekly to my spiritual father will I go.

FIVE WITS.

Everyman, that is best that ye can do.  
God will you to salvation bring,  
For Priesthood exceedeth every other thing.  
To us Holy Scripture they do teach,  
And convert men from sin, heaven to reach.  
God hath to them more power given  
Than to any angel that is in heaven.  
With five words he may consecrate  
God's body in flesh and blood to make,  
And handleth his Maker between his hands.  
The priest bindeth and unbindeth all bands  
Both in earth and heaven. —  
Thou dost administer all the Sacraments seven.  
Though we should kiss thy feet, yet thereof thou worthy wert.  
Thou art the surgeon that doth cure of mortal sin the hurt.  
Remedy under God we find none  
Except in Priesthood alone. —  
Everyman, God gave priests that dignity,  
And setteth them in his stead among us to be,  
Thus be they above angels in degree.

KNOWLEDGE.

If priests be good, it is so surely;  
But when Jesus hung on the cross with grievous smart,  
There he gave out of his blessed heart  
That same Sacrament in grievous torment. —  
He sold them not to us, that Lord omnipotent.  
Therefore Saint Peter the apostle doth say  
That Jesus' curse have all they  
Which God their Saviour do buy or sell.  
Or if they for any money do "take or tell."  
Sinful priests give sinners bad example in deed and word,  
Their children sit by other men's fires, I have heard,  
And some haunt of women the company,  
With life unclean as through lustful acts of lechery—.   
These be with sin made blind.

FIVE WITS.

I trust to God no such may we find.



Therefore let us do Priesthood honor,  
And follow their doctrines for our souls' succor.  
We be their sheep, and they shepherds be,  
By whom we all are kept in security.  
Peace! for yonder I see Everyman come.  
Who unto God hath made true satisfaction.

GOOD DEEDS.

Methinketh it is he indeed.

EVERYMAN.

Now may Jesus all of you comfort and speed!  
I have received the Sacrament for my redemption,  
And also mine extreme unction.  
Blessed be all they that counselled me to take it!  
And now, friends, let us go without longer respite.  
I thank God ye would so long waiting stand.  
Now set each of you on this rood your hand,  
And shortly follow me.  
I go before where I would be.  
God be our guide!

STRENGTH.

Everyman, we will not from you go,  
Till ye have gone this voyage long.

DISCRETION.

I, Discretion, will abide by you also.

KNOWLEDGE.

And though of this pilgrimage the hardships be  
never so strong,  
No turning backward in me shall you know.  
Everyman, I will be as sure by thee,  
As ever I was by Judas Maccabee.

EVERYMAN.

Alas! I am so faint I may not stand,  
My limbs under me do fold.  
Friends, let us not turn again to this land.  
Not for all the world's gold.  
For into this cave must I creep,  
And turn to the earth, and there sleep.

BEAUTY.

What — into this grave! Alas! Woe is me!

EVERYMAN.

Yea, there shall ye consume utterly.

BEAUTY.

And what, — must I smother here?

EVERYMAN.

Yea, by my faith, and never more appear!  
In this world we shall live no more at all,  
But in heaven before the highest lord of all.

BEAUTY.

I cross out all this! Adieu, by Saint John I  
I take “my cap in my lap” and am gone.

EVERYMAN.

What, Beauty! — whither go ye ?

BEAUTY.

Peace! I am deaf, I look not behind me.  
Not if thou wouldest give me all the gold in thy chest.  
[Beauty goes, followed by the others, as they speak in turn.]

EVERYMAN.

Alas! in whom may I trust?  
Beauty fast away from me doth hie.  
She promised with me to live and die.

STRENGTH.

Everyman, I will thee also forsake and deny,  
Thy game liketh me not at all!

EVERYMAN.

Why, then ye will forsake me all!  
Sweet Strength, tarry a little space.

STRENGTH.

Nay, Sir, by the rood of grace,  
I haste me fast my way from thee to take,  
Though thou weep till thy heart do break.

EVERYMAN.

Ye would ever abide by me, ye said.

STRENGTH.

Yea, I have you far enough conveyed.  
Ye be old enough, I understand,  
Your pilgrimage to take in hand.  
I repent me that I thither came.

EVERYMAN.

Strength, for displeasing you I am to blame.  
Will ye break “promise that is debt”?

STRENGTH.

In faith, I care not!  
Thou art but a fool to complain.

You spend your speech and waste your brain.  
Go, thrust thyself into the ground!

EVERYMAN.

I had thought more sure I should you have found,  
But I see well, who trusteth in his Strength,  
She him deceiveth at length.  
Both Strength and Beauty have forsaken me,  
Yet they promised me fair and lovingly.

DISCRETION.

Everyman, I will after Strength be gone —  
As for me, I will leave you alone.

EVERYMAN.

Why, Discretion, will ye forsake me!

DISCRETION.

Yea, in faith, I will go from thee,  
For when Strength goeth before  
I follow after, evermore.

EVERYMAN.

Yet, I pray thee, for love of the Trinity  
Look in my grave once in pity of me.

DISCRETION.

Nay, so nigh will I not come, trust me well!  
Now I bid you each farewell.

EVERYMAN.

Oh, all things fail save God alone —  
Beauty, Strength, and Discretion!  
For when Death bloweth his blast,  
They all run from me full fast.

FIVE WITS.

Everyman, my leave now of thee I take.  
I will follow the others, for here I thee forsake.

EVERYMAN.

Alas! then may I wail and weep,  
For I took you for my best friend.

FIVE WITS.

I will thee no longer keep.  
Now farewell, and here's an end!

EVERYMAN.

Jesu, help! All have forsaken me.

GOOD DEEDS.

Nay, Everyman, I will abide by thee,  
I will not forsake thee indeed!  
Thou wilt find me a good friend at need.

EVERYMAN.

Gramercy, Good Deeds, now may I true friends see.  
They have forsaken me everyone,  
I loved them better than my Good Deeds alone.  
Knowledge, will ye forsake me also?

KNOWLEDGE.

Yea, Everyman, when ye to death shall go,  
But not yet, for no manner of danger.

EVERYMAN.

Gramercy, Knowledge, with all my heart!

KNOWLEDGE.

Nay, yet will I not from hence depart.  
Till whereunto ye shall come, I shall see and know.

EVERYMAN.

Methinketh, alas! that I must now go  
To make my reckoning, and my debts pay,  
For I see my time is nigh spent away.  
Take example, all ye that this do hear or see,  
How they that I love best do forsake me,  
Except my Good Deeds that abideth faithfully.

GOOD DEEDS.

All earthly things are but vanity.  
Beauty, Strength and Discretion do man forsake,  
Foolish friends and kinsmen that fair spake.  
All flee away save Good Deeds, and that am I!

EVERYMAN.

Have mercy on me, God most mighty,  
And stand by me, thou Mother and Maid, holy Mary!

GOOD DEEDS.

Fear not, I will speak for thee.

EVERYMAN.

Here I cry God mercy!

GOOD DEEDS.

Shorten our end and minish our pain,  
Let us go and never come again.

EVERYMAN.

Into thy hands, Lord, my soul I commend —  
Receive it, Lord, that it be not lost!  
As thou didst me buy, so do thou me defend,  
And save me from the fiend's boast  
That I may appear with that blessed host  
That shall be saved at the day of doom.  
*In manus tuas, of might's the most,*  
*Forever commendo spiritum meum.*  
[Everyman goes into the grave.]

KNOWLEDGE.

Now that he hath suffered that we all shall endure,  
The Good Deeds shall make all sure;  
Now that he hath made ending,  
Methinketh that I hear angels sing.  
And make great joy and melody,  
Where Everyman's soul shall received be!  
[The Angel appears.]

THE ANGEL.

Come, excellent elect spouse to Jesu!  
Here above shalt thou go.  
Because of thy singular virtue.  
Now thy soul from thy body is taken, lo!  
Thy reckoning is crystal clear.  
Now shalt thou into the heavenly sphere,  
Unto which ye all shall come  
That live well before the day of doom.  
[The Angel goes and the Doctor enters.]

DOCTOR.

This moral men may have in mind, —  
Ye hearers, take it as of worth, both young and old,  
And forsake Pride, for he deceiveth you in the end, as ye will find,  
And remember Beauty, Five Wits, Strength, and Discretion, all told.  
They all at the last do Everyman forsake  
Save that his Good Deeds there doth he take.  
But beware, if they be small,  
Before God he hath no help at all,  
None excuse for Everyman may there then be there.  
Alas, how shall he then do and fare!  
For after death amends may no man make.  
For then Mercy and Pity do him forsake.  
If his reckoning be not clear when he doth come,  
God will say, *Ite, maledicti, in ignem ceternum.*  
And he that hath his account whole and sound,  
High in heaven he shall be crowned.  
Unto which place God bring us all thither  
That we may live, body and soul, together!  
Thereto their aid vouchsafe the Trinity —  
Amen, say ye, for holy Charity!

FINIS.

*Thus endeth this moral play of Everyman.*

## Key Concepts from Chapter 7:

- After 1066, French's influence on English's grammar, phonology, and particularly lexicon was profound.
- The loss of the feudal system and the bubonic plague contributed to English's reemergence and French's decline as the language of England.
- ME developed voiced phonemic fricative consonants.
- The vowel system introduced more sound changes than the consonant system during the ME period. Notably was the introduction of /ə/ in unstressed syllables and new diphthongs.
- The most significant grammatical change in ME was the loss of most inflection from OE. ME became a much more analytic language.
- The ME pronoun system added *she* and *it*.
- ME syntax had the following changes: addition of *an/the*, addition of perfect tense, increased use of modals, use of *do* for negative statements and interrogative clauses.
- The Norman invasion brought thousands of French words into ME.
- Silent letters in PDE result from pronunciations changing but spelling remaining the same.

## Key Terms from Chapter 7:

- **feudal system**
- **analytic vs. synthetic grammar**
- **apocope**
- **Great Vowel Shift**
- **phonotactic rule**
- **synthetic grammar**
- **modal auxiliaries**



## Materials for Chapter 7 adapted from the following:

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[Middle English Phonology](#) (Wikipedia contributors, 2022)

Whitman, N. (2015). [Why English has words with silent letters](#). *Podcast on Quick and Dirty*

*Tips: Grammar Girl* (Used with permission).

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# Chapter 8

## Early Modern English – Outer History



*Figure 8.1 The Darnley Portrait of Elizabeth I*

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### Influence on Early Modern English

The traditional starting date for Early Modern English (EMnE) is 1500. As we've seen, the Great Vowel Shift was taking place and it stretched from the last part of ME into EMnE. But there were a number of *external* events that shaped English during this period. This chapter will examine a few of the critical events that shaped EMnE.

One of the fascinating aspects about this period has been how “English speakers stand back and take a serious look at their language” (Millward and Hayes 2012, p. 219). In other words, speakers wanted to “refine” their language because many of the educated elite and even

the emerging middle class wanted to “fix” their language because they deemed it as falling into some sort of decay. This desire to fix English will be a guiding theme in this chapter.

## Printing Press

A major influence in the development of EMnE was the advent of the printing press, one of the world’s great technological innovations, introduced into England by William Caxton in 1476 (Johann Gutenberg had originally invented the printing press in Germany around 1450). The printing press helped moved ME to EMnE. And it also contributed to an urgency to “fix” English in its spelling and grammar.

The first book printed in the English language was Caxton's own translation, *The Recuyell of the Historyes of Troye*, actually printed in Bruges in 1473 or early 1474. Up to 20,000 books were printed in the following 150 years, ranging from mythic tales and popular stories to poems, phrasebooks, devotional pieces and grammars. Caxton himself became quite rich from his printing business (among his best sellers were Chaucer’s *Canterbury Tales* and Thomas Malory’s *Tales of King Arthur*). As mass-produced books became cheaper and more commonly available, literacy mushroomed, and soon works in English became even more popular than books in Latin.

At the time of the introduction of printing, there were five major dialect divisions within England - Northern, West Midlands, East Midlands (a region which extended down to include London), Southern and Kentish - and even within these demarcations, there was a huge variety of different spellings. For example, the word *church* could be spelled in 30 different ways. The printing press necessitated a more standardized spelling. The early publishers had to decide on spelling. Previously, scribes handwrote documents and often used spelling based on their local

dialect. However, as books became widely published and disseminated, an agreed upon spelling system was necessary.

The Chancery of Westminster made some efforts from the 1430s onwards to set standard spellings for official documents, specifying *I* instead of *ich* and various other common variants of the first-person pronoun, *land* instead of *lond*, and modern spellings of *such*, *right*, *not*, *but*, *these*, *any*, *many*, *can*, *cannot*, *but*, *shall*, *should*, *could*, *ought*, *thorough* (all of which previously appeared in many variants). Chancery Standard contributed significantly to the development of a Standard English, and the political, commercial, and cultural dominance of the "East Midlands triangle" (London-Oxford-Cambridge) was well established long before the 15th Century, but it was the printing press that was really responsible for carrying through the standardization process. With the advent of mass printing, the dialect and spelling of the East Midlands (and, more specifically, that of the national capital, London, where most publishing houses were located, became the de facto standard and, over time, spelling and grammar gradually became more and more fixed.

Some of the decisions made by the early publishers had long-lasting repercussions for the language. One such example is the use of the northern English *they*, *their*, and *them* in preference to the London equivalents *hi*, *hir* and *hem* (which were more easily confused with singular pronouns like *he*, *her*, and *him*). Caxton himself complained about the difficulties of finding forms which would be understood throughout the country, a difficult task even for simple words like *eggs*. But his own work was far from consistent (e.g., *booke* and *boke*, *axed* and *axyd*) and his use of double letters and the final "e" was haphazard at best (e.g., *had/hadd/hadde*, *dog/dogg/dogge*, *well/wel*, *which/whiche*, *fellow/felow/felowe/fallow/fallowe*). Many of his successors were just as inconsistent, particularly as many of them were Europeans and not native

English speakers. Sometimes different spellings were used for purely practical reasons, such as adding or omitting letters merely to help the layout or justification of printed lines.

A good part of the reason for many of the vagaries and inconsistencies of English spelling has been attributed to the fact that words were fixed on the printed page before any orthographic consensus had emerged among teachers and writers. Printing also directly gave rise to another strange quirk: words that had been written for centuries as *þe*, using the thorn character of Old English, changed. As no runic characters were available on the European printing presses, the letter “y” was used instead (being closest to the handwritten thorn character of the period), resulting in the word *ye*, which should therefore technically still be pronounced as /ði/. It is only since the archaic spelling was revived for store signs (e.g., *Ye Olde Pubbe*) that the "modern" pronunciation of *ye* has been used.

As the EMnE period progressed, there was an increased use of double vowels (e.g., *soon*) or a silent final "e" (e.g., *name*) to mark long vowels, and doubled consonants to mark a preceding short vowel (e.g., *sitting*), although there was much less consensus about consonants at the end of words (e.g., *bed, glad, well, glasse*). The letters "u" and "v", which had been more or less interchangeable in ME, gradually became established as a vowel and a consonant respectively, as did "i" and "j". Also during the 16<sup>th</sup> century, the virgule (an oblique stroke /), which had been a very common mark of punctuation in ME, was largely replaced by the comma; the period was restricted to the end of sentences; semicolons began to be used in addition to colons (although the rules for their use were still unclear); quotation marks were used to mark direct speech; and capital letters were used at the start of sentences and for proper names and important nouns.

But as Millward and Hayes (2012) note, EMnE was undergoing massive sound changes and these changes continued well past the standardization of spelling, and “hence, in the twentieth century we are still spelling a language that has not been spoken since the fifteenth century” (p. 220).



*Figure 8.2 William Caxton Showing Printing Press to King Edward IV and Queen Elizabeth*

Source: Wikipedia  
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Link: [here](#)

The printing press made books widely available even to individuals from lower socioeconomic classes who did not know Latin or French. These people wanted books in English. Classical works from Greek, Latin, and French were translated into English and this introduced thousands of new loan words into English as well as secure English’s position as the de facto language of the land. And since the first printing presses were established in London, the books were printed using the London dialect, and as books were distributed throughout the country, the London dialect spread.

# The English Renaissance

Another important influence on EMnE was the English Renaissance. The English Renaissance roughly covers the 16<sup>th</sup> and early 17<sup>th</sup> century (the European Renaissance had begun in Italy as early as the 14<sup>th</sup> century), and it is often referred to as the “Elizabethan Era” or the “Age of Shakespeare” after the most important monarch and most famous writer of the period. The additions to English vocabulary during this period were deliberate borrowings, and not the result of any invasion or influx of new nationalities or any top-down decrees. With the Renaissance was a revival in classical learning and an interest in authors such as Caesar, Plato, Virgil, and Homer. Before the Renaissance, these authors had to be read in Latin; however, their works were increasingly being translated into English. This gave English a slew of new classical loanwords. A huge number of classical works were being translated into English during the 16th Century, and many new terms were introduced where a satisfactory English equivalent did not exist.

The translation of these works resulted in a renewed status to the English language. And English writers at this time benefited by incorporating features of classical rhetoric into English. At the same time, many writers started comparing English to Latin and concluded that English was a “poor” language in comparison to Latin. Thus, the English language needed improvement in their eyes.

Words from Latin or Greek (often via Latin) were imported wholesale during this period, either intact (e.g., *genius*, *species*, *militia*, *radius*, *specimen*, *criterion*, *squalor*, *apparatus*, *focus*, *tedium*, *lens*, *antenna*, *paralysis*, *nausea*) or, more commonly, slightly altered (e.g., *horrid*, *pathetic*, *pungent*, *frugal*, *anonymous*, *dislocate*, *explain*, *excavate*, *meditate*, *adapt*, *enthusiasm*, *absurdity*, *area*, *complex*, *concept*, *invention*, *technique*, *temperature*, *capsule*). A whole

category of words ending with the Greek-based suffixes “-ize” and “-ism” were also introduced around this time.

Some scholars adopted Latin terms so excessively and awkwardly at this time that the derogatory term “inkhorn word” was coined to describe pedantic writers who borrowed the classics to create obscure and opulent terms, many of which have not survived. Inkhorn was the term used because critics claimed these Latin borrowings required too much ink from the inkhorn to write out. Examples of inkhorn terms include *revoluting*, *ingent*, *devulgate*, *attemptate*, *obtestate*, *fatigate*, *deruncinate*, *subsecive*, *nidulate*. However, it is interesting to note that some words initially branded as inkhorn terms have stayed in the language and now remain in common use (e.g., *dismiss*, *disagree*, *celebrate*, *encyclopedia*, *commit*, *industrial*, *affability*, *dexterity*).



**Figure 8.3 An Inkwell Made of a Horn**

Source: Wikipedia

Link: [here](#)

The so-called Inkhorn Controversy was the first of several such ongoing arguments over language use which began to erupt in the salons of England (and, later, America). An indication of the arbitrariness of this process is that *impede* survived while its opposite, *expede*, did not; *commit* and *transmit* were allowed to continue, while *demit* was not; and *disabuse* and *disagree* survived, while *disaccustom* and *disacquaint*, which were coined around the same time, did not.



Whichever side of the debate one favors, however, it is fair to say that, by the end of the 16<sup>th</sup> century, English had finally become widely accepted as a language of learning, equal if not superior to the classical languages. Vernacular language, once scorned as suitable for popular literature and little else - and still criticized throughout much of Europe as crude, limited and immature - had become recognized for its inherent qualities

## Protestant Reformation

Beginning with Martin Luther's posting of his 95 Theses, the Protestant Reformation had a profound influence on Europe. When Henry VIII decided to break from the Catholic Church during the 16<sup>th</sup> century, the effect on the English language would be enormous. The most obvious effect was emergence of translations of the Bible into English so that more people could read it.

William Tyndale printed his New Testament, which he had translated directly from the original Greek and Hebrew into English. Tyndale printed his Bible in secrecy in Germany, and smuggled them into his homeland, for which he was hounded down, found guilty of heresy, and executed in 1536. By the time of his death, he had only completed part of the Old Testament, but others carried on his labors. Ironically, a scant few years after Tyndale's execution, Henry VIII's split with Roman Catholicism completely changed official attitudes to an English Bible, and by 1539 the idea was being wholeheartedly encouraged, and several new English language Bibles were published (including the *Coverdale Bible*, the *Matthew Bible*, the *Great Bible*, the *Geneva Bible*, the *Bishops Bible*). This culminated in the King James Bible in 1611.

The *King James Bible* was compiled by a committee of 54 scholars and clerics, and published in 1611, in an attempt to standardize the plethora of new Bibles that had sprung up

over the preceding 70 years. It appears to be deliberately conservative, even backward-looking, both in its vocabulary and its grammar, and presents many forms which had already largely fallen out of use, or were at least in the process of dying out (e.g., *digged* for *dug*, *gat* and *gotten* for *got*, *spake* for *spoke*, *holpen* for *helped*), and several archaic forms such as *brethren*, *kine* and *twain*. The "-eth" ending is used throughout for third person singular verbs, even though "-es" was becoming much more common by the early 17<sup>th</sup> century, and *ye* is used for the second person plural pronoun, rather than the more common *you*. Nonetheless, the language in the *King James Bible* had enormous influence on the English language; its style was praised and recommended for emulation ever since its publication in 1611” (Millward and Hayes, 2012, p. 231).



**Figure 8.4 Henry the VIII**

Source: Wikipedia

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In addition to Bible translations in English, the Reformation also led to a decrease in the use of Latin as the language of instruction in education. Before the Reformation, most educators were Catholic clergy who relied on Latin to instruct students. During the Reformation, educators

were laypersons who relied on English. This gave English even more status as a language. And since English was now being used in religious contexts, this added to the feeling that English needed “repair” to increase its inherent qualities.

## Nationalism, Economy, Colonialism, and Dictionaries

During the 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> centuries, national states began to emerge in Europe. England was no exception. It is somewhat disputed when this nationalism emerged. Some historians claim it began as early as the 8<sup>th</sup> century. However, it gained momentum during the EMnE period. Below are some key events that increased a sense of nationalism in England:

- Henry VIII (ruled from 1509 – 1547) is best known for his six marriages, and for his efforts to have his first marriage (to Catherine of Aragon) annulled. His disagreement with Pope Clement VII about such an annulment led Henry to initiate the English Reformation, separating the Church of England from papal authority.
- Elizabeth I had a long (1558 – 1603) and popular reign. This long reign and Elizabeth’s excommunication by Pope Pius V in 1570 increased a desire for a strong sense of nationalism in English.
- During the 15<sup>th</sup>, 16<sup>th</sup>, and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries, writers such as Ben Johnson, William Shakespeare, and John Milton gave England a unique literature.

In addition to a growing nationalism, changes to the economy would also affect English. As the economy in the late 15<sup>th</sup> century shifted, more and more workers moved to cities. This affected the English language in several ways. One way was the distinct dialects from around

England began to meld together. In addition, there was a burgeoning middle class, and they viewed “correct and refined” English as a way to rise in social and economic standing. Latin and French were no longer the markers of high social standing. The breaking from the Catholic Church and the rise of English literature gave assurance to the people that English was indeed a “real” language. This desire for clear-cut answers to grammatical questions and issues led to a rise in linguistic prescriptivism as well a new market for grammar books and dictionaries. While it is true that Latin was still held in high regard in much of Europe, English was gaining traction. And producers of grammar books and other scholars began to supplement English’s “deficiencies” by borrowing words and some structures from Latin. Again, it must be noted that part of what fueled this desire for English and its improvement was economic in nature since the economy was shifting to urban centers.

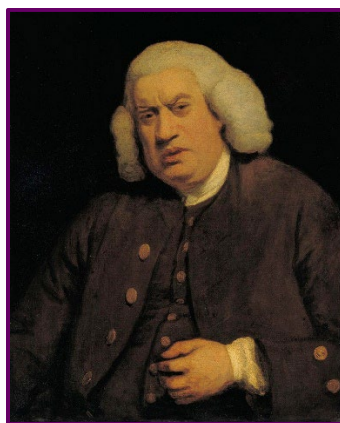
Another shift towards the end of the EMnE period was the Industrial Revolution. This increased wealth and capital for many in England. However, it also decreased literacy because many children were working in factories instead of attending school. The Industrial Revolution along with the American Revolution and colonialism would increase the varieties of English within England and around the world. English colonies in Bermuda, Jamaica, Canada, India, Gambia, Australia, New Zealand, Nigeria, Kenya, and many other countries would add to growing numbers of dialects and grammatical systems in English. It would also increase the desire to have authoritative control over English.

While there was some call for an American English Academy (like the French Academy) to regulate the language. This movement eventually died in part because the French Academy had not be too successful. There was also the notion that such an academy would work counter to

the English idea of liberty. Ultimately, scholars looked to dictionaries to mark what should and should not be in the language.

The first English dictionary, *A Table Alphabeticall*, was published by English schoolteacher Robert Cawdrey in 1604 (8 years before the first Italian dictionary, and 35 years before the first French dictionary, although admittedly some 800 years after the first Arabic dictionary and nearly 1,000 after the first Sanskrit dictionary). Cawdrey's little book contained 2,543 of what he called "hard words", especially those borrowed from Hebrew, Greek, Latin and French, although it was not actually a very reliable resource (even the word words was spelled in two different ways on the title page alone, as *wordes* and *words*).

Several other dictionaries, as well as grammar, pronunciation, and spelling guides, followed during the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries. The first attempt to list all the words in the English language was *An Universall Etymological English Dictionary*, compiled by Nathaniel Bailey in 1721 (the 1736 edition contained about 60,000 entries). But the first dictionary considered anything like reliable was Samuel Johnson's *Dictionary of the English Language*, published in 1755.



**Figure 8.5** *Portrait of Samuel Johnson*

Source: Wikipedia  
License: Public Doman  
Link: [here](#)

An impressive academic achievement in its own right, Johnson's 43,000-word dictionary remained the pre-eminent English dictionary until the much more comprehensive *Oxford English Dictionary* 150 more years later, although it was actually riddled with inconsistencies in both spelling and definitions. Johnson's dictionary included many flagrant examples of inkhorn terms which have not survived, including *digladdation*, *cubiculary*, *impossibility*, *clancular*, *denominable*, *opiniatry*, *ariolation*, *assation*, *ataraxy*, *deuteroscopy*, *disubitary*, *esurine*, *estuation*, *indignate* and others. Johnson also deliberately omitted from his dictionary several words he disliked or considered vulgar (including *bang*, *budge*, *fuss*, *gambler*, *shabby* and *touchy*), but these useful words have clearly survived intact regardless of his opinions. Several of his definitions appear deliberately jokey or politically motivated.

In the wake of Johnson's dictionary, a plethora of other dictionaries appeared, peaking in the period between 1840 and 1860, as well as many specialized dictionaries and glossaries. In addition to dictionaries, many English grammars started to appear in the 18th Century, the best-known and most influential of which were Robert Lowth's *A Short Introduction to English Grammar* (1762) and Lindley Murray's *English Grammar* (1794). In fact, some 200 works on grammar and rhetoric were published between 1750 and 1800, and no less than 800 during the 19th Century. Most of these works, Lowth's in particular, were extremely prescriptive, stating in no uncertain terms the "correct" way of using English. Lowth was the main source of such "correct" grammar rules as a double negative always yields a positive, never end a sentence with a preposition and never split an infinitive. A refreshing exception to such prescriptivism was the "Rudiments of English Grammar" by the scientist and polymath Joseph Priestley, which was unusual in expressing the view that grammar is defined by common usage and not prescribed by self-styled grammarians.

Since the 16<sup>th</sup> century, there had been calls for the regulation and reform of what was increasingly seen as an unwieldy English language, including John Cheke's 1569 proposal for the removal of all silent letters, and William Bullokar's 1580 recommendation of a new 37-letter alphabet (including 8 vowels, 4 "half-vowels" and 25 consonants) in order to aid and simplify spelling. There were even attempts (similarly unsuccessful) to ban certain words or phrases that were considered in some way undesirable, words such as *fib*, *banter*, *bigot*, *fop*, *flippant*, *flimsy*, *workmanship*, *selfsame*, *despoil*, *nowadays*, *furthermore* and *wherewithal*, and phrases such as *subject matter*, *drive a bargain*, *handle a subject* and *bolster an argument*.

## Conclusion

The emergence of English nationalism, the Protestant Reformation, the rise of linguistic prescriptivism by both scholars and the middle class assured that English would take its place as the language in England. Colonialism spread English around the globe and today English has numerous dialects which emerge from the events of the EMnE period.

## Key Concepts from Chapter 8:

- The traditional starting date for Early Modern English is 1500.
- The EMnE period was marked by an interest in refining and perfecting English.
- William Caxton brought the printing press to England in 1476. The press had an enormous influence on the spread and renewed interest in the English language.
- The London dialect became established as the standard.
- The English Renaissance provided the English language with a new source of vocabulary.
- The Protestant Reformation influenced the development of English. In particular, Latin was not longer considered as the only language for education. English was used for religious and education purposes.
- A rise in nationalism in England solidified the place of the English language in all areas of society.
- Dictionaries and not a language academy became the means to “regulate” the English language.



## Key Terms from Chapter 8:

- **William Caxton**
- **standardization**
- **English Renaissance**
- **Inkhorn Controversy**
- **Protestant Reformation**
- **Martin Luther**
- **Henry the VIII**
- **William Tyndale**
- **King James Bible**
- **Elizabeth I**
- **William Shakespeare**
- **John Milton**
- **English nationalism**
- **Industrial Revolution**
- **Samuel Johnson**
- **Robert Lowth**

## Materials for Chapter 8 adapted from the following:

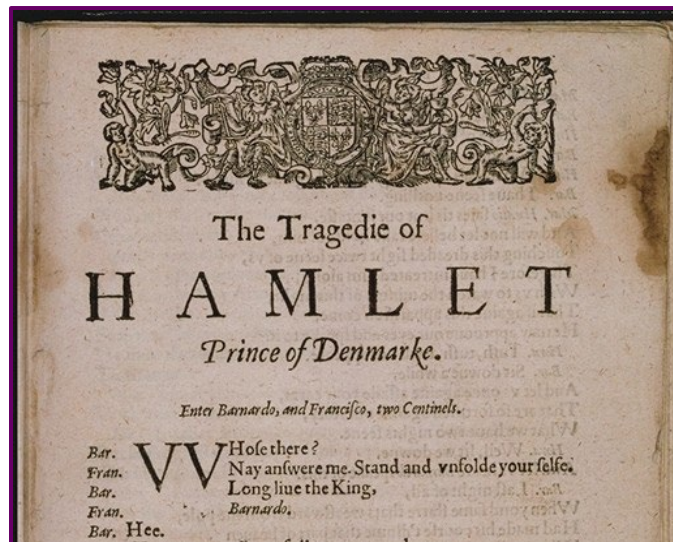
Mastin, Luke. [\*The History of English\*](#). (Material was used and adapted with permission.)

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# Chapter 9

## Early Modern English – Inner History



**Figure 9.1 Hamlet**  
Source: *The History of English*  
Attribution: Public Domain

## Introduction

During the Early Modern English (EMnE) period, more written documents were produced than in previous periods of English, and this gives some clear insight into the sound system. However, since spelling was often done phonetically in the late Middle English Period and there were many dialects, it can be difficult to ascertain a clear picture of the exact phonological system. In addition, the EMnE covers roughly three hundred years (1500-1800). Nonetheless, the language was transitioning to what would become Present-Day English (PDE).

By the 16<sup>th</sup> century, English spelling was becoming increasingly different from pronunciation. Printers in EMnE began to settle on a standard spelling, but pronunciation was shifting. As Weiner (2012) notes, “In the late-fifteenth century printers began printing books

written in the form of London English which had already become a kind of standard in manuscript documents. Between 1475 and about 1630 English spelling gradually became regularized.” However, while spelling may have been regularized, pronunciation and dialect shifting meant that spelling was distinct from pronunciation. Speakers of PDE are left with a legacy of a mismatch between spelling and pronunciation. Despite this, we can sketch out a rough picture of EMnE in this chapter.

## The Sound System of EMnE

### Consonants

The consonant inventory became similar to that of PDE during this time. Figure 9.1 shows the consonants of this period. EMnE added two consonants: /ŋ/ (*ring*) and /ʒ/ (*vision*).

Manner of Articulation	Place of articulation						
	voiceless and voiced	Bilabial	Labiodental	Interdental	Alveolar	Alveopalatal	Velar
Stops	- V + V	p b			t d		k g
affricates	- V + V					tʃ dʒ	
fricatives	- V + V		f v	θ ð	s z	ʃ ʒ	h
nasals	- V + V	m			n		ŋ
lateral	- V + V				l		
retroflex	- V + V				r		
semivowels (glides)	- V + V	w				j	

Figure 9.2 Consonants of EMnE

While only two consonants were added, there were a number of changes in the distribution of individual consonants. In other words, the environment of some consonants caused the consonants to change. Here are some examples of changes during this period. This is adapted from Millward and Hayes (2012):

- The post-vocalic [x] allophone disappeared (except in Scotland). Thus, PDE has spelling that does not match pronunciation. Examples include *sight*, *straight*, and *caught*. In final position, this sound became /f/: *tough*, *laugh*, *cough*.
- The consonant /l/ was lost after low back vowels and before velar consonant: *half*, *palm*, *folk*, *talk*. But was retained in other environments: *film*, *silk*, *hulk*.
- The consonants /t/ and /d/ were often dropped in clusters involving /s/: *castle*, *hasten*, *handsome*, *landscape*.
- The consonants /g/ and /k/ were lost in initial position before /n/: *gnaw*, *gnome*, *know*, *knee*, *knight*.
- Word-final “ng”, as in *sing*, was still pronounced [ŋg] until the late 16<sup>th</sup> century, when it began to coalesce into the usual modern pronunciation, [ŋ]. The original pronunciation [ŋg] is preserved in parts of England.
- EMnE was rhotic. However, during this period /r/ was being dropped before vowels. This is evidenced by spelling such as *quater*, *Mach*, and *brothe*.

## Vowels

The changes to the consonantal system during EMnE was relatively minor in comparison to the massive changes to the vowel system during this time. Let me note two major changes.

- As noted in chapter seven, the Great Vowel Shift (GVS) began in Middle English and continued through the EMnE period. It is difficult to pinpoint dates for the different

aspects of the GVS shift because spelling had been standardized early in the EMnE period and future changes were not reflected in spelling. However, the GVS was complete by the beginning 1800.

- Many of the diphthongs from ME changed into monophthongs in EMnE. For example, ME /ai/ became /e/ as in *day*, *pay*, and *eight*.

## The Syntax of EMnE

The grammatical system of EMnE became increasingly similar to Present-Day English (PDE).

Below are points that highlight how the English system was transforming to what we know today. Many of the points below were taken from Weiner (2012).

### Inflections

- Most inflections on nouns were lost. The only remnants were the plural *-s* and possessive apostrophe *'s*. Though the apostrophe *'s* did not become standard until the 17<sup>th</sup> century.
- Adjectives were changing. At the beginning of the EMnE period, polysyllabic words could accept the comparative and superlative (*-er*, *-est*). However, by the end of the EMnE period it was more common to use *more*: *complicatedier* vs. *more complicated*.

### Pronouns

- Early Modern English had two second-person personal pronouns: *thou*, the informal singular pronoun, and *ye*, the plural (both formal and informal) pronoun and the formal singular pronoun. *Thou* had fallen into disuse during the 17<sup>th</sup> century. *You*, which was originally formal, became the standard singular and plural pronoun.

- During this period, *that* was the most common relative pronoun. Eventually, *which* and *who* were used increasingly. Even today, there is an ongoing debate about the use of *that* vs. *which* in relative clauses.

## Verbs

There are a number of general trends that happened to verbs during the EMnE period: the reduction of inflections, changing of strong verbs to weak verbs, and the gradual decline of the subjunctive. Below are some example of these trends during this time period.

- ME had the indicative first person singular of verbs in the present tense ends in *-e* (*ich here*, 'I hear'), the second person in *-(e)st* (*bou spekest*, 'thou speakest'), and the third person in *-ep* (*he comeþ*, 'he cometh/he comes'). However, these ending disappeared during the EMnE period, “giving giving rise to the current arrangement whereby in the present tense only the third singular is marked and all other persons take the base form” (Weiner 2012).
- During the EMnE period, the division between strong and weak verbs was no longer a viable distinction. “The majority of OE strong verbs had disappeared, become weak, or lost separate past and past participle forms” (Millward and Hayes, 2012, p. 265). Though, ironically, several weak verbs moved to becoming strong verbs: *dig*, *spit*, and *stick*. However, it is important to remember that strong verbs that convert to weak verbs often have competing forms for generations. For instance, *drank* and *drunk* competed as the accepted past tense form. Similarly, in certain dialect today *sneaked* and *snuck* are competing.

## Prepositions and adverbs

Since most inflections on nouns were lost, prepositions became much more important. They became an integral part of the syntax. However, much like PDE, prepositions were idiomatic and varied by dialects. Consider the following phrases in PDE:

- *Meet you at the restaurant* vs. *Meet you in the restaurant* (Both can mean the same thing.)
- *Log on* vs. *log in*

EMnE began to rely on prepositions and even added new prepositions such as *in spite of*, *with regard to*, and *in accordance with*.

EMnE also began using the affix *-ly* for most new adjectives. And intensifiers such as *very* and *pretty* became much more commonly used.

## Lexicon



*Figure 9.3 Borrowing*  
Source: [Wikiimages](#)  
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During this period, there was a great increase in English vocabulary. Most of the increase came from borrowing and many borrowings came from Latin. However, it is sometime difficult to determine if a word was period directly from Latin or entered from a Romance language,



especially French. The substantial borrowing of Latin and sometimes Greek words for abstract concepts, begun in Middle English, continued unabated, often terms for abstract concepts not available in English. Below are some general principles about lexical growth during the EMnE Period.

- Many of the borrowing from Latin (or Romance languages) were “sophisticated” words: *ambiguous, census, identical, navigate zone.*
- A number of words that are still in common use in Modern English have undergone semantic narrowing. The use of the verb *to suffer* in the sense of "to allow" survived into EMnE, as in the phrase "suffer the little children" of the King James Version, but it has mostly been lost in Modern English. This use still exists in the idiom "to suffer fools gladly.”
- While EMnE has many word of ultimate Greek origin, many came into English by way of Latin: *analysis, anathema, anonymous, archetype, and autograph.*
- The excessive borrowing (sometimes from different sources) created many instances of English having two words that fairly synonymous, e.g., *weird* (OE), *odd* (Old Norse), *strange* (Old French).
- Naturally during this period, many words were “lost.” Although, defining lost is a bit problematic. Some words have been retained in some dialects. So, it is difficult to determine lost words because some are still used in specified dialects. Other words were never written down in ME, so we have no way of knowing that such word existed.

## Key Concepts from Chapter 9:

- EMnE syntax became more analytic due to loss of inflections.
- Two consonants were added during the EMnE period: /ŋ/ (*ring*) and /ʒ/ (*vision*).
- EMnE verbs became regularized. The distinction between strong and weak verbs disappeared, though PDE has some remnants.
- EMnE added many words from Latin (and other languages) as English spread throughout the world.

## Materials for Chapter 9 adapted from the following:

Mastin, Luke. [\*The History of English\*](#). (Material was used and adapted with permission.)

[Early Modern English](#) (Wikipedia contributors, 2022)

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