

1 The History of English

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1.1 Introduction

This chapter provides an overview of the development of the English language from its beginnings as a West Germanic dialect in the Old English period to the present day. In this first section, the traditional chronological division of the history of English, including major political and socio-economic developments, is outlined (Section 1.1.1), followed by a brief description of literacy levels and text production in the history of English (Section 1.1.2) and a section outlining the empirical bases for investigations of the history of the English language (Section 1.1.3). The final section in the Introduction, which may be seen as a transition to the following chapters, views the development of the English language from a typological perspective. Thereafter, sections are dedicated to the Old English (Section 1.2), Middle English (Section 1.3), Early Modern English (Section 1.4), and Later Modern English (Section 1.5) periods, including discussions of the major orthographic, lexical, phonological and morphosyntactic developments. These are viewed in relation to other languages that were spoken or written on the British Isles. Moreover, the chronological chapters include recent historical sociolinguistic findings that complement traditional accounts of the development of English. Finally, closing comments (Section 1.6) present selected relevant publications on the history of English.

1.1.1 Chronology, Including Political and Socio-Economic Developments

The history of the English language has traditionally been divided into three periods (based on inflectional characteristics), whose starting and end points are associated with historical landmark events that had a (long-term) effect on the development of the English language, notably the Old English, the Middle English and the Modern English periods. The historical events demarcating the periods did not have an immediate effect on the language, which is why the dates of the periods related to the history of English often vary somewhat (see Beal 2004:1–2) and particularly Curzan (2012 [2017]) for a detailed discussion

of chronological divisions). As the traditional division has left a lacuna covering the twenty-first century, the current chapter, in line with Beal (2004:1–2), considers the Later Modern English period to last until the end of World War II.

In terms of landmarks, the Old English period starts in 449 CE with the settlement of the Angles, Saxons and Jutes, who had arrived in Britain from the north-western part of the European continent. The somewhat differing but closely related West Germanic dialects of these settlers served as the basis for the – retrospectively termed – Old English language or the Anglo-Saxon dialects. According to the *Oxford English Dictionary* (OED) online,¹ the name *Englisc* was first recorded in relation to the language in an Old English translation of Bede's *Historia ecclesiastica gentis Anglorum*. The earliest substantial texts written in Old English have been dated to the eighth century. As regards contact with other languages, the Old English period is marked by influence of Celtic, Roman and Old Norse (Viking incursions) that also left their mark on the vernacular language. The end of the Old English and the start of the Middle English period is marked by the Norman Conquest in 1066. The death of Edward the Confessor (c. 1003–1066) led to conflicts regarding his succession, from which William of Normandy (c. 1028–1087) emerged successfully. His becoming king of England in 1066 had a great effect on the vernacular language, particularly at the level of the lexicon, with many Norman French words entering the English language, as well as changed patterns of word formation and phonological effects on the language. The starting point of the Modern English period is linked to the introduction of the printing press with movable type by William Caxton in 1476. This period is sub-divided by language historians into the Early Modern English (1476/1500–1700) and the Later Modern English periods (1700–1945). The year 1700 as a dividing point can be linked to the Acts of Union (1707) that united the Kingdom of England and the Kingdom of Scotland into one kingdom that is Great Britain. Moreover, it lies before the Industrial Revolution, which had enormous effects on demography and introduced new manufacturing processes linked to technical inventions. Other important events that had a significant impact on the English language during the Early Modern English period are (a) the Reformation in the sixteenth century, when the Church of England broke with the Catholic Church and the Pope, replacing the latter with the king as the head of the Church, (b) the Renaissance during the Elizabethan era (1558–1603) that saw a renewed interest in classical learning and a change of perspective on science, (c) the first colonial ventures under the reign of Elizabeth I, (d) the publication of the King James Bible (1611), and (e)

¹ *Oxford English Dictionary* (OED) Online: <http://oed.com>.

conflicts based on religio-political disagreements like the English Civil War (1642–1651), the Commonwealth (1649–1653, 1659–1660), the Protectorate (1653–1659), and the Restoration of the Stuart monarchy in 1660. During the Late Modern English period (1700–1900), the second Act of Union in 1801 saw the annexation of Ireland to Great Britain. The period is also particularly marked by the Industrial Revolution (c. 1760–1830), including the revolution in transportation, as well as demographic developments like continued urbanisation, which led to higher rates of literacy. A landmark event was the Elementary Education Act (1870), which set the framework for compulsory elementary schooling for children aged between five and twelve. The rise of literacy rates (in combination with technological developments) also had an impact on the publishing market, leading to the availability of mass media. In 1922, the Irish Free State became independent from the United Kingdom. Despite these developments, English has obviously continued to play an important role in the Republic of Ireland, as well as Scotland and Wales, given that it is the mother tongue of the majority of the population. A factor that has had more of an effect on English since World War II is the immigration of people from former British colonies and other countries, particularly in the private sphere. As Gramley (2012:182) notes, in numerical terms, the most frequently spoken immigrant languages in the United Kingdom are ‘Punjabi, Bengali, Saraiki, Urdu, Sylheti, Cantonese, Greek, Italian, Black British English/Creole, Gujarati, and Kashmiri’ (see also Karatsareas, this volume).

1.1.2 Literacy Levels and Text Production in the History of English

The study of the history of the English language is largely based on written documents. As the production of documents is dependent on whether one was able to write, the texts and text types from different periods at our disposal for investigation reflect which members of society were literate at the time and what the contemporary socio-political concerns were. In the history of English, literacy rates were socially stratified, and determining these rates is challenging due to literacy being a rather imprecise concept: are we focusing on the ability to read and/or the ability to write, and at what level were people able to do so? Until the Elementary Education Act in 1870, writing skills were determined based on so-called signature literacy, namely the ability to write one’s name. Early statistical overviews were moreover based on signature literacy in marriage registers (that only capture part of the population), which already indicates that the evidence is incomplete and does not allow for generalisations to be made (cf. Lawson and Silver 1973:34; see also Reay 1998). Despite not being accurate, the statistical overviews allow us to observe an increase in literacy rates (ability to write) over time.

In Anglo-Saxon England, two languages – Latin and Old English – were used for reading and writing. Texts written in the vernacular Old English can be found from the eighth century onwards and increased in volume in the following centuries. Godden (2012:586) states that documents in Old English were produced soon after the conversion to Christianity and Old English remained associated with legal texts such as law-codes and charters in the first instance. There are indications of English having been used for education as early as the seventh century, with English glossing Latin in some early glossaries (Godden 2012:586). Old English was also increasingly used for religious and philosophical texts (many linked to King Alfred's educational reform around 890); moreover, vernacular poetry exists from the ninth century and survives in manuscripts from the tenth and eleventh centuries. As far as the audience for these works and its implications for literacy is concerned, the bulk of the texts produced were aimed at clerics who had no Latin, as well as the landowning laity. The period is also characterised by an oral culture, as reflected in the reading aloud of Old English texts such as royal writs, charters, sermons and poetry (Godden 2012:589–90).

During the Middle English period (c. 1066–1476/1500), English vernacular literacy is also best considered in relation to other languages (i.e. Latin and French). After the Norman Conquest (1066), French was associated with the court and the aristocracy, as well as with literature (Wright 2020a), while Latin served for governmental and administrative purposes. Throughout the period, education was still largely in the hands of religious houses. In the fifteenth century, public schools were established in all English counties which then existed, alongside education offered in religious houses and great households, and private learning, such as merchants training their apprentices (Orme 2006). It may be argued that education was characterised by a wide range of different 'literacies'. According to Rees Jones (2014:220), literate behaviour in urban centres (that had higher levels of text production) was influenced by the complexity of social organisation and its occupations. It can generally be noted that literacy was socially stratified during the Middle English period, that is, the elite, the clergy, the gentry and merchants were able to produce different kinds of texts, such as administrative and legal texts, scientific and medical handbooks, philosophical and religious works, historical accounts, travel-ogues, fiction, and correspondence.

During the Early Modern English period (c. 1476/1500–1700), literacy continued to be socially stratified in that the variety of training opportunities (that did not include the lower social strata at the time) led to different levels of literacy. For instance, boys from the elite received a classical training where Latin was taught alongside the English vernacular. A common path thereafter was to attend a university like Oxford or Cambridge, or to train in the Inns of Court (Brooks 1994:54; Lawson and

Table 1.1 *Male and female occupational literacy in England 1700–1770 (per cent, based on Houston 1985 in Sanderson 1995:11)*

	Male	Female
Professional	100	100
Gentry	100	
Craft and trade	74	31
Yeoman, tenant	74	32
Husbandman	58	
Labourer	36	12
Servant	50	25
Soldier	54	
Unknown	70	

Silver 1973:91–152). Boys from the middling orders tended to do an apprenticeship (Lawson and Silver 1973:122–5). In contrast, girls from well-off families received their education at home or, from the early seven-teenth century onwards, also in private boarding schools. As regards liter-acy rates, Cressy (1980:177) notes that in 1500, more than 10 per cent of the male population was able to read.² Reay (1998:40) observes that literacy rates for men varied according to occupation and geography. While, in 1580–1700, the gentry and professionals were almost fully literate in many areas, yeomen, traders and craftsmen had higher literacy levels in the south than in the north (c. 70 per cent in London and Middlesex, c. 60 per cent in East Anglia, and c. 54 per cent in the North). Husbandmen and labourers had the lowest rates, ranging from 15 to 25 per cent. As regards text production, an increase in text types can be observed, such as trial proceed-ings, diaries, drama and biographies.

For the earlier part of the Later Modern English period (c. 1700–1945), the signatures in marriage registers were considered as signs of literacy by educa-tion historians (linked to the Hardwicke Marriage Act of 1753; cf. Houston 1982:200).

Even though an increase in literacy rates can be determined in comparison to the Early Modern English period, as illustrated in Table 1.1, which presents male and female occupational literacy in England in 1700–70, literacy rates increased rapidly after 1840 (More 2000: 58) as a result of the Elementary Education Act (1870) (see for instance Altick 1957:171 for literacy rates in

² Reading and writing were considered separate skills, with reading being taught before writing.

England and Wales 1841–1900).³ As illustrated for the Early Modern English period, education opportunities varied according to sex and social class before this landmark event. While the education and training of the male elite was considered of great importance for the country, the opinion of the elite was that ‘too much literacy among the population at large was a danger to the established order’ (Lawson and Silver 1973:179). In other words, elementary education for the labouring poor should be limited and ‘designed to inculcate mainly practical religion, social obedience and low-level occupational skills’ (Lawson and Silver 1973:180). Nevertheless, the lower social groups were able to receive some schooling in Sunday and charity schools, as well as through self- and peer-schooling (for more details regarding education opportunities in Late Modern England, see Auer 2014, 2015; Auer and Hickey in press). As regards text production, while a wide range of text types were produced by the elite and the middling sort, ego documents including diaries and letters (including petitions) were sometimes produced by the lower layers of societies. It is thus in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries that we have autograph texts by the labouring poor.⁴

1.1.3 *Empirical Bases for Investigations of the History of the English Language*

Investigations of the English language in different periods as well as language change over time have largely been based on electronic text corpora and databases, the creation and availability of which has been increasing at great speed since the late twentieth century. This is in line with the development of the field of corpus linguistics, which has had a great impact on the fields of diachronic and synchronic English linguistics. An important source for the history of the English language is the *Helsinki Corpus of English Texts: Diachronic and Dialectal* (HC), which covers the period c. 750 to 1710 and contains a range of different text types (that were available in different periods).⁵ Another diachronic corpus that was constructed in a similar manner is *ARCHER: A Representative Corpus of Historical English Registers*. This is a multi-genre corpus containing British and American English texts from the period 1600–1999.⁶ Many corpora available today focus on a particular genre

³ Belich (2009: 121) observed that literacy remained a prerogative of the upper and middle classes in the English-speaking world until c. 1800, with the exceptions of Scotland and New England.

⁴ The voices of the lower social orders had until then been expressed through intermediaries, e.g. an author/playwright that portrayed a lower-class character or a scribe who wrote depositions.

⁵ https://varieng.helsinki.fi/series/volumes/14/rissanen_tyrkko/. For more details, see <http://icame.uib.no/hc/>.

⁶ ARCHER-X = *A Representative Corpus of Historical English Registers*. 1990–1993/2002/2007/2010/2013/2016. Originally compiled under the supervision of Douglas Biber and Edward

and/or text type (e.g. newspapers, scientific texts, plays, depositions, novels, letters)⁷ There is a recent trend to create corpora based on manuscript (rather than edited) material from archives, thereby emphasising the combination of historical linguistics, textual history and philology. Selected examples are *The Middle English Grammar Corpus* (MEG-C), a multi-genre corpus covering the period 1325–1500,⁸ an *Electronic Text Edition of Depositions 1560–1760* (ETED; Kytö, Grund and Walker 2011), and the *Bluestocking Corpus* containing letters by Elizabeth Montagu written between the 1730s and the 1780s.⁹ As regards online databases, printed material can be accessed via *Early English Books Online* (EEBO),¹⁰ *Eighteenth Century Collections Online* (ECCO),¹¹ and *Nineteenth Century Collections Online* (NCCO),¹² to name a few examples. As previously pointed out, literacy rates throughout the history of English determine the availability of written sources from different social groups. Within this context, historical sociolinguistic studies that cover the entire social stratum can only be carried out from the Late Modern English period onwards.

1.1.4 English from a Typological Perspective

The English language belongs to the Indo-European language family, which groups many languages in Europe and parts of Asia that have structural relationships. Within that family, English is part of the Germanic – and more precisely the West Germanic – branch. Other languages belonging to the latter branch are Frisian, Dutch, Afrikaans, German and Yiddish; these are thus the languages that are structurally most similar to English (cf. Henriksen and van der Auwera 1994). A feature that can be found in these (and other Germanic) languages is, on a morphological level, the distinction between present and preterite forms in the verbal system. More precisely, strong verbs that form the past tense with ablaut, that is, a system of regular vowel variations in the same root (*give* ~ *gave*), contrast with a system of weak verbs whose past-tense

Finegan at Northern Arizona University and University of Southern California; modified and expanded by subsequent members of a consortium of universities. Current member universities are Bamberg, Freiburg, Heidelberg, Helsinki, Lancaster, Leicester, Manchester, Michigan, Northern Arizona, Santiago de Compostela, Southern California, Trier, Uppsala, Zurich. For more details, see www.projects.alc.manchester.ac.uk/archer/.

⁷ For a broad overview, see for instance <https://sites.google.com/site/helontheweb/corpora> and <https://varieng.helsinki.fi/CoRD/>.

⁸ Version 2011.1, compiled by Merja Stenroos, Martti Mäkinen, Simon Horobin and Jeremy J. Smith, March 2011, University of Stavanger. For more details, see www.uis.no/en/middle-english-grammar-corpus-meg-c-0.

⁹ For more details, see <http://bluestocking.ling.helsinki.fi/>.

¹⁰ <https://about.proquest.com/en/products-services/eebo/>.

¹¹ www.gale.com/primary-sources/eighteenth-century-collections-online.

¹² www.gale.com/intl/primary-sources/nineteenth-century-collections-online.

forms contain an alveolar or dental suffix (*like ~ liked*). Concerning syntax, the Germanic languages have V2 (verb second) order in declarative main clauses. In line with the S(ubject)-V(erb)-O(bject) word order, prepositions (rather than postpositions) occur in the languages. As regards lexicon, while migration and contact with other languages have led to different lexicons, a commonality of the Germanic languages is the formation of new words by combining nominal, verbal and adjectival stems with derivational suffixes such as *-dom* and *-ly* in English today (cf. Hilpert 2011:709; for more detailed discussions, see Lass 1994 and Harbert 2007).

Like other languages in use, the English language has changed since its beginnings. Factors that explain these changes have been categorised by Labov as (a) internal factors, such as linguistic reasons for change including chain shifts or lexical diffusion (1994), (b) social factors such as social class, age, gender, neighbourhood or ethnicity (2001), and (c) cognitive and cultural factors (2010). Further reasons for language change are dialect and language contact (for English see for instance Schreier and Hundt 2013; see also Sharma, this volume; Fox, this volume). Language change can also be the result of a combination of these factors. The English language has undergone many changes that have affected its structure and sounds since the Old English period. For instance, while Old English is considered to be a synthetic language with a high number of inflections for case, number, gender, tense and mood as well as other grammatical categories, present-day English has become an analytic language with a much more simplified inflectional morphology. The loss of inflections has led to a greater importance of the role of prepositions and the establishment of a fixed word order (i.e. S(ubject)-V(erb)-O(bject)). Contact with other languages throughout history (e.g. with Latin, Old Norse and Norman French) has also had a great impact on the lexicon of English. The Germanic lexical basis has been expanded through the addition of words from Italic and Romance languages, and others, as well as the creation of new words (for details, see for instance Durkin 2014). Examples of changes related to different linguistic levels, notably phonology, morphology, syntax and lexicon, that have had an important effect on the language will be provided in the diachronic sections below.

1.2 Old English (449–1066)

1.2.1 General Background

Before the arrival of the Germanic tribes in Britain, Celtic tribes had settled on the island (c. first millennium BCE), and the Romans invaded in 43 CE and expanded their control before leaving around 410 CE to defend their empire against invaders. The linguistic traces can particularly be found in place

names, so-called toponyms, for example *Kent* ‘border’, *Avon* ‘river’ from Celtic, or Latin *castrum* ‘camp, fort’ that we find in *Lancaster* or *Manchester* (palatalised form). The West Germanic dialects that were brought to Britain in the fifth century were first documented in runic inscriptions. From the eighth century onwards, legal, religious, documentary and literary texts were written in the Roman alphabet, which was introduced by Christian missionaries. The majority of manuscripts containing Old English texts that have survived until today originated from the so-called West Saxon area. This is due to King Alfred’s educational reform which strongly supported the translation of texts from Latin into Old English, for political reasons (i.e. Viking raids), and other circumstances like the preservation of manuscripts. The raids by the Vikings that started in the late eighth century eventually led to them settling in the eastern part of England in the ninth century, where the so-called ‘Danelaw’ (i.e. the area where the laws of the Danes prevailed) was established. The contact between the Anglo Saxons and the Norsemen also had an effect on the English language, especially the lexicon (cf. Henriksen and van der Auwera 1994:16).

The arrival of the Germanic peoples in England was followed by the rise of regionally different Old English dialects, which eventually replaced Common Brittonic and Latin. The Old English language, which is recorded from the eighth century onwards, can be divided into four main dialects that are associated with Anglo-Saxon kingdoms, notably (a) Northumbrian (north of the Humber) and (b) Mercian (between the Humber and the Thames), which are often grouped together as Anglian, (c) West Saxon (south) and (d) Kentish (south-east). As previously indicated, the majority of the extant texts are in the West Saxon scribal tradition. As this region did not come under Danish rule, which affected the Anglian areas, West Saxon was less influenced by Old Norse.

1.2.2 *The Old English Language*

1.2.2.1 *Orthography*

The introduction of Christianity in the late sixth century caused the replacement of the German runic alphabet (*futhorc*) by the Latin alphabet in most written sources. The Latin alphabet, combined with certain Germanic runes, notably *thorn* <þ>, *eth* <ð>, *wynn* <ƿ>, *ash* <æ> and *yogh* <ȝ>, served as the basis for written Old English. The runic characters were gradually replaced in modern times (cf. Scragg 1974).

1.2.2.2 *Phonology*

Old English phonology and related changes, which have been described from different theoretical perspectives, are often viewed in contrast to the earlier West (Germanic) and the following Middle English phonology. Some Germanic characteristics that Old English phonology inherited are the result

of what is now known as Grimm's law, a set of sound changes concerning the Proto-Indo-European (PIE) plosive system that took place in the first millennium BCE, and the more recent *i*-mutation (*i*-Umlaut) that affected vowels in various Germanic languages from the fifth century onwards (thus before Old English emerged as a separate language). Grimm's law, or the first Germanic sound shift, describes regular correspondences that are found between early Germanic plosives and fricatives, and plosives found in other Indo-European languages like Italic, Greek and Celtic. The sound change consists of three parts (that may be seen as consecutive phases): PIE voiceless plosives became voiceless fricatives (/p t k/ → /f θ x/), PIE voiced plosives became voiceless plosives (/b d g/ → /p t k/), and voiced aspirated plosives became voiced plosives (/b^h d^h g^h/ → /b d g/). These correspondences explain the differences between *pater* in Latin and *father* in English (where p → f can be seen initially and t → þ medially). The sound change of *i*-mutation consisted of back vowels being fronted and front vowels being raised if the following syllable contained /i/ or /j/. The latter trigger often disappeared at a later stage, which can be illustrated through the variation found in *man* – *men* (Germanic **manwaz* (sg) > Old English *mann* vs. Germanic **manniz* (pl) > Old English *menn*). Other examples in English that were affected by *i*-mutation and therefore display vowel variation are *foot* ~ *feet*, *tooth* ~ *teeth*, *goose* ~ *geese*.

Selected sound changes that took place during the Old English period and affected consonants were fricative voicing and palatalisation, while breaking affected the vowels. As regards the fricative system, it consisted of only the three voiceless phonemes /f θ s/, which occurred at the beginning or at the end of a word. The voiced allophones /v ð z/ were found in complementary distribution, notably when they occurred between vowels or before voiced consonants (e.g. *smiþ* 'blacksmith' /smiθ/ versus *smiþas* 'blacksmiths' /'smiðas/). The phonemic voiceless ~ voiced contrast in the fricative system only developed in the Middle English period (Lass 1992:36). In the Old English period, the velar consonants /k sk g/ became palatalised (in this case, a change in the place of articulation of the consonants) when occurring before front vowels; they would become /tʃ ʃ j/. This change becomes visible through a comparison with Old Norse: compare Old English *scip* 'ship' with /ʃ/ vs. Old Norse *skip* with /sk/ and Old English *ċirċe* 'church' with /tʃ/ vs. Old Norse *kirkja* with /k/, for example. A sound change that affected vowels is so-called breaking, which happened when the front vowels /æ e i/ were diphthongised, thus broken into two sounds, when they occurred before certain consonants (e.g. i → io/eo, e → eo, æ → ea before *l* or *r* and a consonant, or before *h*, which is for instance reflected in the change from *æld* 'old' into *eald*).

The examples given here indicate that the Old English phonological system differed to some degree from today's phonological system of English (for extensive and detailed studies, see Hogg 1992a; Lass 1992).

Table 1.2 *Old English stān ‘stone’ (strong noun endings, a-stem, masculine)*

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

1.2.2.3 Morphology

The morphology of Old English illustrates the language when it was still highly inflected (*synthetic language*), which is best explained in terms of paradigms (i.e. a set of linguistic items that illustrates the variety of forms of a given word). To start with nouns, they were categorised in terms of number (singular, plural), case (nominative, genitive, accusative, dative), and grammatical gender (masculine, neuter, feminine)¹³. This is illustrated in Table 1.2 through the noun *stān* ‘stone’, which is masculine and is considered a strong noun (it belongs to a class that has a vowel stem, in contrast to the consonantal stems or weak nouns; see Hogg 1992a for details on noun classes).

In comparison, today’s *stone* paradigm consists of *stone* ~ *stones*, that is, purely a number difference, and the genitive remnant *stone*’s. The inflectional endings in Old English inform us of the function of the word in the sentence, that is, the subject is in the nominative and the object the accusative case. As a result, word order could have been more variable.

The noun system was also supported by the demonstrative system. A demonstrative to point out is Old English *se*, which was used both as a demonstrative meaning ‘that’ and as the definite article ‘the’. The paradigm also differentiated case and gender in the singular, but there was no gender distinction in the plural (Hogg 2002:19). The set of personal pronouns was also more extensive in Old English in comparison to present-day English, with distinctions in terms of number and case for the first and second persons, and also for gender in the third person.

Like nouns, adjectives were also inflected in terms of number, case and gender. In addition, a definiteness distinction was made (strong vs. weak). This is illustrated in Table 1.3 with the adjective *gōd* ‘good’ in Old English.

As regards verbs, the inflectional endings depended on the tense (past vs. present), the person and number of the subject, as well as the mood (indicative,

¹³ Grammatical gender does not necessarily correspond to natural gender, as can be illustrated with the Old English word *wīf* ‘woman, female’, which is in fact neuter.

Table 1.3 *The adjective gōd ‘good’ in Old English*

Strong				Weak		
Singular	Masculine	Feminine	Neuter	Masculine	Feminine	Neuter
Nominative	gōd	gōd	gōd	gōda	gōde	gōde
Accusative	gōdne	gōde	gōd	gōdan	gōdan	gōde
Genitive	gōdes	gōdre	gōdes	gōdan	gōdan	gōde
Dative	gōdum	gōdre	gōdum	gōdan	gōdan	gōdan
Plural	Masculine	Feminine	Neuter	M / F / N		
Nominative	gōde	gōda	gōd	gōdan		
Accusative	gōde	gōda	gōd	gōdan		
Genitive	gōdra	gōdra	gōdra	gōdra/gōdena		
Dative	gōdum	gōdum	gōdum	gōdum		

Table 1.4 *The paradigms of the weak verb lufian ‘love’ and the strong verb drīfan ‘drive, push’ (Hogg 2002:41, 56–7)*

<i>lufian</i>	Present	Past	<i>drīfan</i>	Present	Past
Indicative			Indicative		
1 Singular	lufie	lufode	1 Singular	drīfe	drāf
2 Singular	lufast	lufodes	2 Singular	drīfst	drife
3 Singular	lufað	lufode	3 Singular	drīfð	drāf
Plural	lufiað	lufodon	Plural	drifað	drifon
Subjunctive			Subjunctive		
Singular	lufie	lufode	Singular	drīfe	drife
Plural	lufien	lufoden	Plural	drīfen	Drifen
Imperative			Imperative		
2 Singular	lufa	–	2 Singular	drīf	
2 Plural	lufiað	–	2 Plural	drifað	
Participle	lufiende	ġelufod	Participle	Drīfende	ġedriften

imperative, subjunctive). Moreover, verbs were divided into strong verbs (change of stem vowel in the past tense and past participle) and weak verbs (regular ending), which is reflected in today’s *sing* ~ *sang* ~ *sung* and *like* ~ *liked* ~ *liked* respectively. An example of the weak class 2 verb *lufian* ‘love’ and the strong class 1 verb *drīfan* ‘drive, push’ is provided in Table 1.4.

The example in Table 1.4 illustrates the vowel alternation in *drīfan* in the first- and third-person singular indicative and the lack thereof in the verb *lufian*.

Another characteristic of Old English morphology is the auxiliaries, which were not very frequent at the time. In fact, today's auxiliaries *can*, *could*, *will*, *would* were regular verbs in English expressing a full lexical meaning like *wille* 'want' or *cunnan* 'can, know'. Since the Old English period, these verbs have changed in function, that is, they have moved from lexical to grammatical and with that they lost their meaning and became syntactically attached to another verb with a full (lexical) meaning, a process known as grammaticalisation. More information on Old English morphology can be found in Hogg (1992b) and Campbell (1959).

1.2.2.4 Syntax

In contrast to Modern English, Old English word order was largely variable, notably because the language was highly inflected (synthetic). In Old English, there was no distinction between definite article and demonstrative, and the subject pronouns could be omitted. Despite the possibility of variable word order, certain patterns can be observed. For instance, SVO order was usually found in main clauses (e.g. *God lufode middangeard* 'God loved [the] realm'). In relative or subordinate clauses of time, place, condition and result, the verb tended to occur at the end (SOV order) (e.g. *þæt ðec dryhtguma deap oferswiþeþ* 'lit. that you mighty ruler death overpowers' (Beowulf 1768 in van Gelderen 2006:57)). A VS order was common in interrogatives and commands, as well as in declarative clauses introduced by adverbials (e.g. *þā* 'then/where') or object noun phrases. An interrogative VS example is *Hæfst þū ænigne gefēran?* 'lit. have you any companion?' (Barber, Beal and Shaw 2009:127).

As already indicated, subject pronouns were optional in Old English, as is illustrated in the first line of the Old English poem *Cædmon's Hymn* (West Saxon version given here): *Nu we sculan herian heofonrices weard* (lit. 'Now [we] shall praise heaven-kingdom's guardian'). Also, in contrast to Modern English, so-called pleonastic subjects like *there* and *it* did not exist. Neither was auxiliary DO used in questions and negations (as this was a later development in the language). It may also be pointed out that negative adverbs often preceded the verb in Old English (e.g. *hleopre ne miþe* 'lit. sound not conceal' (Riddle 8, line 4, van Gelderen 2006:71)). A final observation regarding syntactic style is that Old English often used coordination with *and* (paratactic style, replaced by the symbol 7 in manuscripts) in situations where Modern English would use subordination; see for instance this example from the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle (A-version, anno 755) in van Gelderen (2006:69, ex. 37):

7 þy ilcan geare mon ofslog Æþelbald Miercna cyning on Seccandune
and the same year man killed Æþelbald Mercian king at Seckington

7 his lic liþ on Hreapadune 7 Beornræd feng to rice 7 . . .
and his body lies in Repton and Beornræd ascended the throne and . . .

And the same year when Æpelbald, the Mercian king, was killed at Seckington, with his body buried in Repton, Beornræd took the throne; and . . . (from Thorpe's 1861 edition)

The change in inflectional morphology since the Old English period has had a great impact on English word order, as the following sections will show.

1.2.2.5 *Lexicon*

Like the grammar described above, the Old English lexicon was also largely Germanic, with the bulk being West Germanic. According to Minkova (2005), only 3 per cent of the 30,000 words in Old English are non-Germanic. The Germanic vocabulary is characterised by its word formation, that is, words are generally created through compounding and affixation. This is well illustrated in the words *wordhoard* 'vocabulary' and *frēondlīc* 'friendly' respectively. Kay (2012:317) notes that many Old English words can be clustered around a shared root, for example *sorg* 'sorrow, distress' with *cearu* 'care' in *sorgcearu* 'anxiety' and with *byrðen* 'burden' in *sorg-byrðen* 'burden of sorrow'. Another example is the word *mōd* 'mind', which can be found in *mōdhord* 'secret thoughts', *mōdcraftig* 'intelligent', *mōdful* 'arrogant' or *heahmōd* 'proud'. Regarding affixation, while prefixes had an effect on the meaning (e.g. negation or intensification, as found in *oferfull* 'too full' and *misdæd* 'misdeed'), suffixes often created different parts of speech (e.g. from *līf* 'life' (n) to *līflēas* 'lifeless' (adj)). For instance, the suffixes *-e* and *-lice* were used to create adverbs from adjectives such as *dēop* 'deep' vs. *dēope* 'deeply'. While agent nouns were formed with *-end* and *-ere* (e.g. *lærend* 'teacher' and *leornere* 'pupil, disciple'), abstract nouns were often created by affixing *-dōm* (*wīsdōm* 'wisdom'), *-hād* (*ċildhād* 'childhood'), *-nes* (*yfelines* 'evilness'), *-scipe* (*frēondscipe* 'friendship'). It is thus possible to determine clear affixation patterns for Old English (for more details, see for instance Kay 2012).

According to Baugh and Cable (1993:53), only approximately 15 per cent of words recorded in Old English are still used in Modern English. Some of these words are *mōdor* 'mother', *gōd* 'good', and *eorðe* 'earth'. Reasons for the limited transmission of Old English words are the influx of Norman French linked to the Norman Conquest, as well as the borrowing of terms from Latin, Greek, and other languages (see OED online for a detailed overview of words borrowed at different stages of the English language).

1.3 Middle English (1066–1476)

1.3.1 *General Background*

The Norman Conquest in 1066 led to a greater Norman French presence in England, particularly at the upper level of society. It is noteworthy that due to

Edward the Confessor's (1041–1066) Norman origins, French had already been used at the Royal Court, which was then continued under the reign of William the Conqueror (1066–1087). According to the Domesday Book, which recorded landowners in 1086, the majority of feudal overlords at the time originated from Normandy. Similarly, a lot of high church leaders were French. Overall, however, the Normans did not exceed 5 per cent of the population (cf. Kibbee 1991:9), and the majority of the inhabitants in England therefore remained English-speaking. Due to the association of Anglo-Norman (i.e. the variety into which Norman French developed in England after the Norman Conquest) with the upper layers of society, the variety gained the prestige that English had previously held. The effect of Anglo-Norman on English varied depending on the geographical location, for example Norman influence was stronger in the south and south-east, and on the type and amount of contact (for more details regarding Anglo-Norman, see for instance Ingham 2010, 2012; Timofeeva and Ingham 2018). In addition to Anglo-Norman, continental French was also introduced through the arrival of groups of continental French speakers from the middle of the twelfth century onwards. At that point in time, the descendants of the Anglo-Norman conquerors had already started to shift to English, which may be taken as an indication that the status of English had changed. Another historical event that had an effect on the growing status of English was the loss of Normandy under the reign of King John (1199–1216) in 1204. As a result, Normans holding fiefs in both countries had to decide on one or the other country, and the connection to Normandy lessened severely, and the status of French was therefore also affected. The existence of different languages in the first half of the Middle English period is reflected in written records as the languages took on different functions. While French was firmly established as the language of the legal system and also of literature until the mid thirteenth century, English was gradually used in different domains from the early fourteenth century onwards. Schendl (2012:508) notes that 'the extent of English–French bilingualism in the thirteenth century is a matter of controversy' but that 'English had become the first language even for the vast majority of English–French bilinguals' by the end of the century. Latin also played an important role during the Middle English period, particularly as the language of administration/recording, scholarship and the church. The shift to English in administration took some time, notably following a period of multilingualism that was maintained by professional clerks. The rise of English as the dominant language was fostered by demographic and social changes such as the increased urbanisation until the mid fourteenth century and the plague (Schendl 2012:508).

In the earlier part of Middle English, written sources displayed a lot of regional variation. The traditional distribution of the Middle English dialects is between Kentish (south-eastern part of England), Southern (west of Sussex,

south and south-west of the Thames), Northern, West Midland, and East Midland, with the latter having had a stronger Old Norse influence due to the previously mentioned Danelaw. As a written standard did not exist at the time, dialectal differences are reflected in writing, with distinctions between the North and the South being particularly striking: for example Southern /tʃ/ (*church*) vs. Northern /k/ (*kirk*), the Southern third-person singular present tense verbal suffix *-th* (*goeth*) vs. Northern *-s* (*goes*), Old English *ā* being realised as /ɔ:/ in the South (*stone*) and as /e:/ in the North (*stane*), as well as third-person plural pronouns *they/them* in the North and *hi/hem* in the South. The gradual rise of supralocal norms from the fifteenth century onwards led to dialect levelling, and the variation of forms was further reduced (at different speeds in different text types) with the promotion of norms that would standardise written English. While the regional factor plays an important role in the Middle English period, social factors explaining language change become more relevant from the Early Modern English period onwards.

1.3.2 *The Middle English Language*

1.3.2.1 *Orthography*

In contrast to Old English, the non-Latin letters in the alphabet, thus those based on Germanic runes, gradually fell into disuse during the Middle English period, so that *yogh* <ȝ> was gradually replaced by <g> and <i> (but could still be found in texts for at least another 200 years), and *thorn* <þ> and *eth* <ð>, which had indicated a voice difference (voiceless and voiced respectively), no longer indicated that difference and were then eventually replaced by <th>. Another development concerned *ash* <æ>, which was interchanged with <a> or <e>. Finally, *wynn* <ƿ> fell into disuse around 1300, having varied with and then gradually been replaced by <u> and <uu> (Blake 1996:117–18).

1.3.2.2 *Phonology*

As the Middle English sound system can only be reconstructed based on written sources, comparisons to modern dialects, and language reconstruction, the previously mentioned dialectal differences help to shed some light on the phonology. As different changes were going on at the time, it is also not possible to describe ‘the Middle English phonological system’. I will thus illustrate some of the changes that took place during the period. To start with developments from Old to Middle English, *g/ȝ* became [w] or [j], followed by a merger with a preceding vowel which resulted in a diphthong (e.g. *dæg* → *day* or *ploga* → *plow* (van Gelderen 2014:122)). A well-known phenomenon that started in the Middle English period and continued thereafter is H-dropping. This can be illustrated through an example from Layamon’s *Brut* (line 223; van Gelderen 2014:122): *Ich abbe i min castlen seoue þusend*

kempen ‘I have in my castles seven thousand fighters’. H-loss can also be observed in consonant clusters such as *hnacod* ‘naked’ and *hlaf* ‘loaf’ (cf. Lass 1992:61–3). Other consonants that were frequently deleted during the period are the glide [w], notably between consonants like [s] or [t] and a (back) vowel (e.g. *swa* → *so* and *sweord* → *sword*), nasals like *hwilum* → *while*, and liquids as in *swilce* → *such*. In contrast to Old English, the borrowing of French words starting with a [v] is believed to have introduced the sound to the Middle English consonant system in word-initial position. Van Gelderen (2014:124) also observes that the velar nasal sound [ŋ] is restricted to use before other velars, and that [ʒ] has disappeared since the Middle English period.

The Middle English period also saw some changes to the vowel system, notably linked to vowel length and vowel height. As for vowel length, for instance, Old English short vowels lengthened before a nasal, liquid or a voiced plosive, as in *lamb* or *mild*. This did not, however, affect short vowels preceding clusters of three consonants, as in *children*; in fact, this explains the contrast between *child* (lengthened from short i to long ī, and later diphthongised) and *children* (non-lengthened i). An example illustrating vowel height is the West Saxon ā sound, which was spelled and pronounced <a> in the North but <o> in the other dialect areas, thus *most* ‘most’, *ham* ‘home’ or *ane* ‘one’ in the North in contrast to the forms with <o>, which are nowadays found in the written standard. In contrast, short a, as in *man* and *land*, can be found spelled with an ‘o’ in the North (van Gelderen 2014:123). For a more detailed account of phonological developments in the Middle English period, see Lass (1992).

1.3.2.3 Morphology

A number of important changes to the morphological system occurred during the Middle English period, such as the reduction of vowels in unstressed syllables, which is seen as explanation for the loss of grammatical gender as well as the levelling of the article forms. Similarly, case markers in nouns (except for the genitive case) and adjectives, and partly in pronouns, were affected. In fact, in comparison to Old English, the adjective in Middle English lost gender and case, as well as the weak–strong declension. The loss of grammatical gender also affected the nouns. Smith (2012:418) notes that this development, which is an effect of the loss of inflections, started in the North around 1200 and reached the South around 1400. At the same time, natural gender had gradually been increasing since late Old English.

The Middle English pronoun system, which contained personal, possessive, demonstrative, interrogative, indefinite, and the newly acquired reflexives, retained the cases. Some interesting developments concern the introduction of feminine *she* and plural *they* (with many variant spellings), and a change in the second-person pronoun system, notably the spread of singular *you* for *thou*; as the use of the two forms often reflected status differences (with *you*

expressing distance and *thou* familiarity), an influence from French may be detected here. Moreover, interrogatives like *who* and *what* started to be used as relative pronouns (Smith 2012:420).

Verbs were more resistant to the changes than adjectives and nouns, which can be explained through the inflectional markers containing obstruent consonants that cannot be vocalised, *-st* in the second-person singular, *-eth* in the third-person singular and *-ed* in the past tense, for example (in contrast to nasal sonorants that were vocalised and then dropped) (Smith 2012:415). A decline in inflections can, however, also be observed. This is considered to have started in the Northern dialect with the loss of the endings of the infinitive, the first-person plural indicative, subjunctive, and imperative. Similarly, the Northern dialect removed the prefix *ȝe-* that marked the past participle (*i-/y-* in the South) but kept the suffix *-en*. Smith (2012:423) observes that other dialects also had an effect on the new inflectional paradigm, with verbs in the Midlands replacing the present plural *-eth* with *-en*, which then spread to the South, and the West Midlands introducing the present participle form *-ing(e)*. Generally, the grammatical categories of Old English verbs (i.e. person, number, tense, and mood) still existed in Middle English. The distinction between strong and weak verbs also continued, but some movement can be observed, with certain strong verbs acquiring weak endings (i.e. the *-ed* suffix in the past tense).

The study of Middle English morphology is particularly interesting as it illustrates the gradual shift of the English language from synthetic to analytic.

1.3.2.4 Syntax

The gradual loss of inflectional endings for case, gender and number, particularly on nouns, adjectives, demonstratives and pronouns, marks a transition period in which the English language became more analytic. Some syntactic developments during the Middle English period that are testament to this shift are the increase in demonstratives before a noun and the indefinite articles *a* and *an*, as well as the increased use of the periphrastic forms of the comparative and superlative of the adjective (e.g. *more* and *most* interesting). The periphrastic structure can also be found in relation to verbs. For example, auxiliary *have* and *be* occurred with the past participle in periphrastic constructions, as in *The Flemmynges* [. . .] *habbeth y-left here strange speche* (Trevisa 1387 in Gramley 2012:96). In addition to the perfect, the progressive and the future also developed quickly during the period. The inflectional subjunctive mood got competition from the indicative and then also from the modal auxiliaries (see Moessner 2020 for details). Similarly, auxiliary DO started to be used around 1400, as evidenced in Chaucer's *The Monk's Tale*, 441–442 (van Gelderen 2014:135): *His yonge sone, that three was of age / Un-to-him seyde, fader, why **do** ye wepe?* During the Middle English and Early Modern English periods, periphrastic DO tended to function as an affirmative; its use in

questions and negations developed later (for more details, see Section 1.4.2.4 Syntax). Pleonastic subjects like *there* can also be found more frequently in Middle English texts (e.g. *With hym **ther** was his sone, a yong squire* (Canterbury Tales, Prologue 79; van Gelderen 2014:134)). In the course of the Middle English period, an increase in embedded sentences can be observed, which led to an increase in the use of complementisers and relative pronouns. Also, while Old English displayed different word order patterns, Middle English became a firmly SVO language (on this issue and for a broader overview of Middle English syntax, see for instance Fischer 1992).

1.3.2.5 *Lexicon*

The lexicon of Middle English is considered to be very different from the Old English lexicon. Socio-political changes like the Norman Conquest in 1066 led to the borrowing of many words, while the formation of new words based on existing resources in English continued.

Sources for borrowing were particularly Latin and French, where the influence of the latter may be divided into two phases, notably 1066–1250 and 1250–1500. While the first phase saw the introduction of words like *baron*, *servant*, and *messenger*, the second phase, which was much stronger, saw c. 10,000 words being borrowed, notably nouns, verbs, adjectives, and some adverbs. Generally, the borrowed words in both periods included the fields of government (*royal*, *state*, *authority*, *duke*, *tax*), law (*judge*, *verdict*, *evidence*), food (*bacon*, *pork*, *pastry*, *orange*), art and fashion (*poet*, *fashion*, *lace*), learning (*study*, *grammar*, *surgeon*, *doctrine*), and religion (*temptation*, *divine*, *sanctity*) (see van Gelderen 2014:104–5), which also provides insight into the social and political function of (Norman) French.

As regards word formation, compounding, which was very productive during the Old English period, continued as a strategy for the creation of new words, particularly noun compounds such as *bagpipe*, *schoolmaster*, *bloodhound* and *birthday*. Adjective–noun compounds like *grandfather*, *shortbread* and *highroad* were also created in the Middle English period, as were nouns in which a verbal stem compounds with a nominal (e.g. *leap-year*). Other combinations like adjectives including two adjectival elements, like *light-green*, *icy-cold*, noun and past participle combined, as in *moss-grown*, *moth-eaten*, *book-learned*, and adjective and past participle combined, as in *new-born*, also existed (Sylvester 2012:460). As regards derivation as a process of word formation, Sylvester (2012:461) notes that Middle English may have been the starting point of a development that led to a restructuring of the word-formation system, notably through borrowing from French and Latin. As a result, two derivational strata (i.e. a native one and a foreign one) can be found. While the native one is best described as word-based and base-invariant (e.g. *allow-able*), the foreign one is stem-based and reflects morphophonemic

alternations (e.g. *navig-able* and *pirate/piracy*, *infant/infancy* respectively). As regards prefixes, many Old English prefixes disappeared and therefore made room for borrowings from French and Latin (see for instance Dalton-Puffer 1996). Romance suffix innovations are, for instance, *-ant* and *-arie*, as in *servant* and *secretary* respectively, and *-able*, *-al*, *-ous*, as in *measurable*, *moral*, and *jealous*, for adjectives.

Due to the borrowing of many words, Middle English contains a number of synonyms, such as *to begin* vs. *to commence*. Moreover, semantic changes continued to take place, which can be well traced in the OED online.

1.4 Early Modern English (1476–1700)

1.4.1 General Background

The many socio-political developments during the Early Modern English period, including the Reformation, the Renaissance and the beginning of colonisation, as well as important socio-cultural landmarks such as the introduction of the printing press with movable type in 1476 and the publication of the Book of Common Prayer (1549) and the King James Bible (1611), had a great impact on the English language. While the printing press, the Book of Common Prayer and the King James Bible had a normative effect on the written language, the Renaissance and colonisation introduced new lexicons from other languages. As previously discussed in relation to literacy levels and text production, the development of English vernacular literacy during the Middle English period (c. 1066–1500) is often viewed in relation to other languages, notably Latin, Anglo-Norman and French for the latter period. From 1500 onwards, the classical languages played an important role, particularly regarding lexicon, and in certain domains, Latin as the language of learning, for instance. This is also the period during which English became more dominant again and acquired a wide range of different functions, such as in administration and also learning. Moreover, the previously observed regional variation in English was gradually superseded by supralocal forms: the language underwent processes of standardisation.

1.4.1.1 The Emergence of a Supralocal Written Norm

According to Benskin (1992:71), a standard form of written English did not exist before the end of the fourteenth century. Rather, the language was characterised by local and regional dialects as writing systems. These had largely disappeared by the beginning of the sixteenth century. This indicates that dialect levelling and supralocalisation processes leading to the development of a linguistic norm for a written supra-regional variety must have largely taken place during the fifteenth century. This process was likely reinforced by the introduction of the printing press. While an important role in the

development of an emerging written norm has for a long time been attributed to a London-based ‘(Chancery) Standard’ that then spread across England, this so-called ‘orthodox version’ of an emerging written norm (Wright 2020b:3) has been convincingly challenged in several studies (e.g. Benskin 2004; Wright 1994, 2000; 2020a). It was likely a combination of many factors, and particularly the increased mobility and role of socially important people like members of trade and craft guilds, that led to a reduction of linguistic variants, which paved the way for a more uniform written norm (see Wright 2020c:530).

1.4.2 *The Early Modern English Language*

1.4.2.1 *Orthography*

The introduction of the printing press had a great effect on the regulation of orthography during this period. Even though the spelling looks different from today and often seems irregular, a certain degree of uniformity can be noticed, alongside alternative spellings. Some of these alternatives are <y> for earlier <þ> (e.g. *ye* for *the*), <v> and <u> as well as <y> and <i> in certain positions in the word. Generally, a distinction between printed (public) and private writings can be observed, for instance concerning capitalisation and contractions. Moreover, archaic forms could occur alongside newer forms, as well as phonetic spellings; these variations continued into the Late Modern English period (cf. Osselton 1998a, b).

1.4.2.2 *Phonology*

The Early Modern English period is characterised by several sound changes, the most important of which is the so-called Great Vowel Shift. This shift, which started in the late Middle English period and led to a mismatch between spelling and pronunciation, was a chain shift that affected the long vowels. More precisely, a whole set of sounds underwent change: the high vowels /i:/ and /u:/ diphthongised to [ɛɪ] and [əʊ] and then to [aɪ] and [aʊ] in Modern English (e.g. *time* ~ *time* [ti:mə] → [təɪm] and *fūl* ~ *foul* [fu:l] → [fəʊl]). The long front vowels moved up one articulatory slot, so that /ē/ in *meet* [mēt] became [mi:t], for example. As regards the long back vowels, in Southern England, they also moved up one articulatory slot (e.g. *fool* [fo:l] → [fu:l]), while in the Northern part of the island /o:/ became /ø:/ and /ø:/ became /y:/, and /u:/ did not diphthongise, as reflected in the pronunciation of *about* and *house* (i.e. /əbu:t/ and /hu:s/ respectively). Two theories exist concerning the starting point of the shift: (1) a pull chain whereby the highest long vowels /i:/ and /u:/ diphthongised first and the empty articulatory slots that they left behind were then filled by pulling the other long vowels upwards, or (2) a push chain whereby the high-mid vowels /e:/ and /o:/ started to rise first and then pushed the higher vowels up, leading the top ones to diphthongise.

In addition to discussions concerning the starting point of the chain shift, different scenarios providing socially plausible explanations also exist. It is generally agreed that the sound change was largely complete by 1700 (for a more detailed discussion of the sound change, see for instance Fennell 2001:160–1; Krug 2012). In contrast to the long vowels, the short vowel system remained comparatively stable except for some small shifts (see Lass 2000 for details). Some other sound changes to be mentioned are the addition of [ʒ], as in *vision*, and [ŋ], as in *sung*, as phonemes to the consonant inventory. Some sounds were also lost, for example [r] in words like *parcel*, [k] and [w] in initial clusters like *knight* and *write* respectively. Moreover, H-dropping continued in initial position. Finally, stress should be mentioned briefly as the Germanic stress rules (i.e. typically on the first syllable, except for prefixes), which were dominant in Old and Middle English, were affected by the introduction of multi-syllable words borrowed from French and Latin with stress on the antepenultimate syllable. Due to these new words, the general rule changed and stress often occurred on later syllables (cf. van Gelderen 2014:169).

1.4.2.3 Morphology

The loss of inflections continued into the Early Modern English period, resulting in an inflectional system that largely resembles that of today. Many of the linguistic changes taking place during this period have also been viewed with regard to sociolinguistic variation (see particularly Nevalainen and Raumolin-Brunberg 2017 [2003] based on the *Corpus of Early English Correspondence*¹⁴). As regards case marking of nouns, only genitive *-s* and its allomorphs /ɪz/, /s/, /z/ as the plural morpheme survived after 1500. After late Middle English, the *of*-genitive was also increasingly used. The two variants could often be found in different contexts, with the *-s*-genitive on human nouns and on modifiers in subjective relation to the head (*the mother's return*) and the *of*-genitive on inanimate nouns and on modifiers in objective relation to the head (*the return of the mother*). Another related construction is the so-called '*his*-genitive' (e.g. *the Count his gallies* in Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night*), which emerged in the twelfth century due to homophony of genitive *-s* and weak forms of *his* where the /h/ was deleted, which was widespread during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries (Cowie 2012:604–5). As for the pronouns, one of the most important developments concerned the previously mentioned second-person *you/thou* distinction, whereby *you* as the polite form in a social hierarchy and as a neutral form among the upper layers of society started to spread downwards, with the result that *you* became the unmarked

¹⁴ CEEC, compiled by Terttu Nevalainen, Helena Raumolin-Brunberg, Jukka Keränen, Minna Nevala, Arja Nurmi and Minna Palander-Collin at the Department of Modern Languages, University of Helsinki.

form by 1600. *Thou* continued to be used to illustrate asymmetrical relationships, particularly to express intimacy, and sometimes contempt (Cowie 2012:606). When *thou* gradually fell into disuse in the seventeenth century, so did the second-person verbal marker *-st* (e.g. *thou walkest*). Another much-researched change concerns the third-person singular present tense variants, notably *-s* and *-th*, which were in competition with each other throughout the period under discussion. While the *-s* variant was the Northern form that gradually spread southwards, the southern variant *-th* was associated with literary language, likely also supported by the printers. Nevalainen and Raumolin-Brunberg (2017:122–3) illustrate the change based on correspondence and observe that the initial change to *-s* in the second half of the fifteenth century was led by the lowest ranks of those who were literate, while a second change around 1600 was led by the middle or upwardly mobile ranks, particularly women (for regional spread, see Nevalainen and Raumolin-Brunberg 2017:177 and Gordon, Oudesluijs and Auer 2020). As regards internal factors, it has been shown that lexical verbs adopted *-s* faster than auxiliaries HAVE and DO, which tend to retain the *-th* inflection much longer, particularly in certain text types. Within the context of language standardisation, the study of language change involving the interplay of different factors makes the Early Modern English period particularly interesting.

1.4.2.4 Syntax

The development towards a more analytic language continued during this period, with the word order becoming increasingly fixed, and more grammatical words entering the English language, with prepositions and determiners starting to replace cases. With the fixing of the word order, syntactic punctuation was introduced in the seventeenth century, particularly through the works of the playwright and poet Ben Jonson (1572–1637) (van Gelderen 2014:177). Relatedly, subjects largely became obligatory, with only a few examples illustrating a lack thereof (e.g. Milton's *Paradise Regained* (I, 85, in van Gelderen 2014:175): *This is my Son belov'd, in him am pleas'd.*). Moreover, the grammaticalisation of lexical verbs continued, which led to the availability of more auxiliary verbs that were syntactically bound, frequently contracted, and whose meaning was bleached. In contrast to Old and Middle English, where negation was expressed by one or two negatives, multiple negation was reduced in the Early Modern English period, with *not* or *nothing* being used.

As previously pointed out, auxiliary DO had developed further during this period, being used in questions and negations, and had almost become the rule by 1700. It is important to point out that the development differed from text type to text type, but its rise seems to have been associated with more informal registers such as family letters (Nurmi 1999). As for the role of different social layers of society, Nurmi (1999:189) notes that 'social aspirers show greater reluctance than other informants in accepting the construction', which may be

interpreted as indicating that the change was driven by the lower layers of society. Another construction that increased in frequency during the Early Modern English period is the progressive (*She is writing a letter*). As for other developments during the period, a detailed overview and discussion can be found in Denison (1993), amongst others.

1.4.2.5 *Lexicon*

The Early Modern English period is of great interest when it comes to lexical borrowing. The renewed interest in the classical languages led to many new borrowings, particularly in the fields of science, medicine and religion. In the later part of the period, there was some opposition to the great number of borrowings, which were called ‘inkhorn terms’, indicating that these classical words needed much ink due to their polysyllabic nature. The tension between native (i.e. Germanic) and non-native vocabulary also reflected a status distinction whereby inkhorn terms were considered ‘learned’ and ‘bookish’ or ‘hard words’. The latter term continued to be used and also served as the basis for the earliest monolingual dictionaries such as Robert Cawdrey’s *A Table Alphabeticall, contayning and teaching the true writing and vnderstanding of hard vsuall English words, borrowed from the Hebrew, Greeke, Latine, or French &c* (1604). In addition to providing words like *quadrable*, *sporadic*, *invitation* and *susceptible*, Greek and Latin also served as a model for coining new words, (e.g. *blatant*, *episcopal*). In addition to Latin and Greek as sources for words, the OED reveals that words were also still borrowed from French, and then from Dutch, Italian, Spanish and others. After all, trade and colonisation brought different countries and their languages into closer contact. Generally, changes to the lexicon during the period were particularly due to borrowing and coinage of words, while meaning shifts continued to take place (see for instance Durkin 2014).

1.5 Later Modern English (1700–1945)

1.5.1 *General Background*

This period was characterised by many important socio-political developments, notably political changes like the Acts of Union (1707), passed by the English and Scottish Parliaments, that led to the creation of the United Kingdom of Great Britain, as well as the second Act of Union (1801) that added Ireland to the United Kingdom. In 1922, Ireland left the United Kingdom and became a Free State within the British Commonwealth, followed by the creation of the Republic of Ireland outside the Commonwealth in 1949. As Beal (2004:10) notes, ‘the period between 1700 and 1945 saw the rise and fall of the British Empire, the American War of Independence [in 1776] [...], and the rise of the USA as the most powerful nation on earth’. The late

twentieth century saw political autonomy movements of Scotland and Wales that put a greater focus on Scots, Scottish Gaelic and Welsh (see Smith et al., Nance, and Willis, respectively, this volume).

Other important developments during the period were the Industrial Revolution (c. 1760–1830), including the revolution in transportation, as well as demographic developments like continued urbanisation. The effect of industrialisation led to labour-force mobility to the cities and towns. As the movement was more rapid than jobs available, an impoverished urban class developed that required support. London was particularly affected by the migration and therefore grew on a large scale during that period (cf. Hobsbawm 1990:43; also see Lawton 1986). It is noteworthy that a large number of people resettled in the colonial territories, particularly North America and later the Southern Hemisphere. Industrialisation also saw the emergence of new centres in the North East (due to mining) and the North West/Midlands (due to textile manufacture and commerce) (cf. Beal 2004:6–7). On a linguistic level, the movements also had an effect on the traditional rural dialects, notably dialect levelling and the development of new urban dialects. Nevertheless, general dialect distinctions, particularly in the North and the South, but also in the East and West Midlands, were retained (see for instance Wales 2006; Kerswill 2018). Other important developments, as previously already pointed out (see Section 1.1.1), such as the rise in literacy rates, in combination with the technological changes and the introduction of elementary compulsory schooling, had an effect on the publishing market and the development of mass media. Related to communications, another important development was the introduction of the Penny Post in 1840, which led to a steep increase in the sending of letters, both within Britain and to countries overseas. Further technical inventions and introductions concerned the electric telegraph in 1837 and the introduction of the telephone in 1876. Spoken communication was revolutionised through the invention of radio in 1895, as well as the establishment of the BBC in 1927 (Beal 2004:9).

1.5.1.1 The Codification and Prescription of Written and Spoken Norms

Changes to selected linguistic features during the Later Modern English period, particularly during the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, are often viewed within the context of ongoing language standardisation, notably the codification stage, which is followed by the prescription stage that may be regarded as still ongoing (Haugen 1966; Milroy and Milroy 1999; for proposed stages of standardisation, see also Deumert and Vandenbussche 2003 and Ayres-Bennett 2021).

In contrast to codification processes in other languages like French, Italian or Spanish, England did not have an academy that fixed the written and spoken norms. Instead, well-educated individuals took it upon themselves to codify

the English language in the form of grammar books, spelling books, dictionaries, pronunciation guides, and similar. Selected examples of these normative works that enjoyed great popularity in the Late Modern English period are Samuel Johnson's *Dictionary of the English Language* (1755), Robert Lowth's *Short Introduction to English Grammar* (1762), and John Walker's *Critical Pronouncing Dictionary* (1791). The written variety promoted was strongly associated with a high level of education and social position, notably the polite language of educated gentlemen from London. Similarly, the 'standard' pronunciation to appeal to was the language spoken at the Court in the early eighteenth century, according to Sheridan (1780: Preface). Interestingly, Sheridan, an Irishman, and Walker, a Scot, pointed out pronunciation mistakes by people from Ireland and Scotland, as well as Wales (in the case of Sheridan) and Cockney speakers (in the case of Walker) (cf. Beal 2004:172). More generally, it may be argued that changes in society during the Industrial Revolution provided possibilities for social climbing, which may be linked to linguistic insecurity (cf. Crowley 1991:73). The linguistic manuals available could range from descriptive, prescriptive to proscriptive in nature, including variation depending on the specific linguistic features under discussion. Since early 2000 much research has been concerned with the systematic investigation of these normative works (see e.g. Tiekens-Boon van Ostade 2008, 2010) as well as the effect that precepts in normative works had on actual language usage, which has been tested on linguistic corpora (cf. Auer 2009; Auer and González-Díaz 2005; Anderwald 2016). The type of data at researchers' disposal is no longer focused only on the upper layers of society but also increasingly covers the entire social stratum (see Section 1.1.2 on literacy rates).

1.5.2 *The Later Modern English Language*

1.5.2.1 *Orthography*

Orthography had been largely codified by 1700 (cf. Scragg 1974:80), but variation nevertheless continued. A distinction needs to be made here between printed and handwritten texts. While a high degree of orthographic uniformity can be found in printed texts by the beginning of the Late Modern English period, variation continues to be found in handwritten, and particularly in private, documents such as letters and diaries. Well-educated writers in Late Modern England would have tended to follow the norms presented in reference works, but stylistic differences could still be found (see for instance Tiekens-Boon van Ostade's study of Jane Austen's language 2014: ch. 5). The language of unschooled writers, like many of the labouring poor, was often not in line with the norm, and spelling variation was found until the introduction of compulsory elementary schooling (and beyond). For instance, Auer, Gardner and Iten (2023) show that long 's', which first disappeared from

print around 1800 and thereafter gradually in the letters of educated writers (cf. Fens-de Zeeuw and Straaijer 2012), can frequently be found in pauper letters in the first quarter of the nineteenth century.

1.5.2.2 Phonology

In contrast to previous periods where it was more difficult to describe the phonology, the codification processes that are reflected in pronouncing dictionaries and phonetic commentaries, as well as later dialect descriptions, have allowed for a better reconstruction of contemporary phonology. Within this context, it is also important to point out that the development of Received Pronunciation (RP) took place during the Late Modern English period (cf. Mugglestone 1995). While ‘proper’ pronunciation in the eighteenth century was based on educated speakers in London, the nineteenth century attached a sociolinguistic status to this model of pronunciation, which was at the time no longer only associated with London (see Beal 2004:170–1, 184). Factors fostering the sociolectal status of RP are considered to be the expansion of the public school system linked with teacher and peer pressure as well as the creation of close-knit social networks (see Beal 2004:186). Despite the non-localised nature of RP, its sociolectal status has led to accent discrimination that is still felt today (cf. Accentism Project¹⁵) (see also Levey, this volume). A comprehensive discussion of Late Modern English phonology is not possible here (for a detailed discussion, see Jones 2003). To illustrate one phonological change, Jones (2012:827) notes that the raising of [ee] to [ii] was completed in the eighteenth century, which led to a merger reflected in *meat/meet* and *beat/beet*.

1.5.2.3 Morphology

As regards morphological developments, the greatest simplifications had taken place prior to Late Modern English, but regularisation – also linked to codification and prescription processes – can be observed during the period (cf. Denison 1998; Görlach 1999, 2001).¹⁶ A good amount of variation can be found in participial verb forms during the period (e.g. *lighted* vs. *lit*), notably linked to different text types, as well as printed versus handwritten texts. Similarly, regularisation can be found in preterite and past participle forms (cf. Gustafsson 2002). The Late Modern English period also saw different developments of the inflectional subjunctive in different constructions. While the function of the subjunctive in adverbial clauses such as *if he go* has largely been taken over by the indicative (*if he goes*) and modal verbs (*if he should go*) (see Auer 2006:44), a slight increase of the subjunctive in mandative contexts

¹⁵ See <https://accentism.org/> for related publications; accessed 12 March 2023.

¹⁶ British–American linguistic contrasts that emerged during the Late Modern English period have received some attention by historical linguists, e.g. Rohdenburg and Schlüter (2009).

in British English has been observed (see Crawford 2009). Mondorf (2012:846) points out that the spread of the third-person singular *-s* inflection, which had largely propagated during the Early Modern English period at the expense of the Northern *-th* inflection, eventually supplanted high-frequency forms like *hath*, *doth* and *saith* in the Late Modern English period. The period also saw important changes to the reflexive structures, including the replacement of the reflexive by zero forms, such as *indulge (oneself) in something*, as well as the replacement of *-self* by the way construction (e.g. *wound itself* vs. *wound its way* (Mondorf 2012:846–50)).

Moreover, an interesting variation can be observed between possessive noun phrases and objective noun phrases preceding verbal gerunds, which is illustrated in one and the same sentence in Elizabeth Gaskell's novel *Wives and Daughters* (1866): '*I don't mind **your** calling me a clog, if only we were fastened together. But I do mind **you** calling me a donkey,*' he replied. While prescriptivists attempted to ban the objective variant (*you* in the above example), both variants are considered grammatically correct today, with the possessive variant (*your* in the above example) having become associated with more formal contexts (Mondorf 2012:857–8). A couple of other morphological variations/developments of interest are variable adverb marking (e.g. *great* vs. *greatly* (Rohdenburg 2004)), and the development of the adjectival comparative form from synthetic to analytic (e.g. *worthier* vs. *more worthy* (González-Díaz 2008)). More detailed accounts of Late Modern English morphology, in addition to specialised, often corpus-based studies, can be found in Denison (1998), Görlach (1999, 2001) and Mondorf (2012).

1.5.2.4 Syntax

Even though most syntactic changes in the history of English took place during the Middle English period (Denison 1993:x), some changes that have received some scholarly attention to date concern the period after 1700. The rise of electronic corpora like ARCHER and specialised genre corpora have allowed for increased research on syntactic changes. Generally, English continued to become more analytic, and the word order of Modern English was fixed as SVO. While the prescriptivist movement, which is nowadays often associated with pedagogical grammars and the education system, may have tried to prevent some syntactic changes on a formal level, variation has continued in different text types and contexts. A typical example of such a linguistic feature is preposition-stranding (e.g. *The couch which I sat on*), which has been stigmatised while so-called pied-piping has been favoured (i.e. *The couch on which I sat*) (see Yáñez-Bouza 2015 for a detailed study on the effect of normative works on actual preposition placement during the period 1500–1900). In her diachronic study, Yáñez-Bouza (2015) observes that the trend to stigmatise preposition-stranding was started by John Dryden in the seventeenth century, and was then continued in proscriptions by

eighteenth-century grammarians. As a result, preposition-stranding immediately declined (see 2015:306). In addition to the effect of prescriptivism, Yáñez-Bouza also shows that preposition-stranding (in contrast to pied-piping) is associated with informal language use (see also Levey, this volume).

An example of a grammatical innovation in the Late Modern English period is the progressive passive construction (e.g. *The music is being played on the street*), which emerged at the end of the eighteenth century. The progressive was previously avoided or expressed through an active progressive that had a passive meaning (e.g. *But **are** there six labourers' sons **educating** in the universities at this moment?* (1850 Kingsley, *Alton Locke* xiii.138, as given in Denison 1998:151)). Like preposition-stranding, the progressive passive construction was condemned by nineteenth-century prescriptivists (see Bailey 1996:222–3). Despite attempts to stop the development of the construction, it is now part of the English language. Another passive construction that emerged and consolidated during the Late Modern English period is the *get*-passive construction (*The flowers got stolen last night*). Hundt (2001:85) traces the increase and firm establishment of the construction in ARCHER from the eighteenth to the twentieth century (see Aarts et al. 2012:871–2 for more details). Aarts et al. (2012:873) note that the Late Modern English period saw not only the emergence of new linguistic features but also the completion and regulation of a range of changes in syntactic domains such as the progressive, the perfect, and auxiliary DO linked to the verb phrase, and complementation and relative clauses linked to subordination. To briefly illustrate the progressive construction, the feature has existed since Old English times, it became established in Early Modern English (see Denison 1998:130), and was firmly integrated into the English language during the nineteenth century (see Smitherberg 2005:57–8), notably particularly in the genres of letters and drama. The increase in this linguistic feature continued in the twentieth century (see Hundt 2004). Like the progressive construction, relativisers were also regulated during the Late Modern English period: the *wh*-forms (*which*, *whom*, *whose*, *who*), *that* and 'Ø' (null) had become established and several constraints had been imposed on them (e.g. the animacy parameter that distinguishes between animate *who* and inanimate *which* (see Aarts et al. 2012:882 for details)).

While only a snapshot of some of the syntactic changes could be presented here, the increasing availability of text corpora has led to a significant growth of research in the field of syntax.

1.5.2.5 *Lexicon*

With regard to the lexicon, this period was not only of great importance concerning the creation of norms (including orthography), such as the previously mentioned *Dictionary of the English Language* (1755) by Samuel Johnson, and thereafter the creation of the *Oxford English Dictionary* (OED;

Table 1.5 *OED online timeline overview (1700–1945) including number of words and sample words*

Sub-period	Number of new words	Sample words
1700–1749	31,178	<i>mock-nightingale, monitum, nefastous, open-minded, opera glass</i>
1750–1799	48,486	<i>heads up, mitout, newsreader, otter-board, overhunting</i>
1800–1849	108,927	<i>Methow, New Year's, miscreating, mobed, obsequience</i>
1850–1899	155,646	<i>Mordva, monometrically, nucleaus ambiguous, nucleus pulposus, untraditional</i>
1900–1949	92,029	<i>gal pal, megaphylly, ncoardial, nucleaus accumbens, sevika</i>

cf. Gilliver 2016), but socio-political changes and innovations in science and technology led to the creation of new words and the introduction of words from other languages. This is illustrated in the timeline of the OED online (selection 1700–1945) in Table 1.5.

The numbers in Table 1.5 clearly show that the nineteenth century saw a great number of new words being introduced into the English language. When zooming in on the first half of the nineteenth century (with 108,927 new words) regarding subject areas, it is striking that the majority of words, notably 23,368, were categorised under Sciences, while 3,831 came under Crafts and Trades, 3,717 under Arts, 2,850 under Sport and Leisure, 2,345 under Transport, and 2,378 under Religion and Belief. The bulk (52,003) of these new words note ‘English’ as the language of origin, suggesting that these are newly created words, with 49,350 coming from other Indo-European languages. While this is merely a brief case study, it sheds new light on the development of the lexicon in modern times.

It is noticeable that new words entering the language can have a great variety of sources. They can be (a) loanwords from other languages (*wanderlust, fait accompli, pasta*), (b) new compounds (*junkfood, green butcher*), (c) new affixes (*ex-ex-husband, prewoman*), (d) clippings, mergers and inventions (*dancercise, veggie-burger, hacktivist*), (e) phrase words (*a nobody-cares attitude*), (f) conversion (*a show-off* (V to N)), (g) slang (*depresso city*), (h) acronyms and initialisms (FAQ for ‘frequently asked questions’ or LOL ‘laughing out loud’), (i) retronyms (*landline phone, paper copy*), or (j) *onomatopoeia* (*tweet, Twitter*) (van Gelderen 2014:226).

In addition to the creation and introduction of new words, words can also change their meanings over time. An example is the word *silly*, which means ‘foolish’ or ‘mentally incapable’ today.¹⁷ The word derives from Old English

¹⁷ oed.com [lemma: *silly*]; accessed 14 January 2023.

**sælig*, a cognate to the modern German *selig* and the Dutch *zalig*, which both mean ‘blissful’, ‘extremely happy’. The meaning of ‘blissful’ in English can be traced from the Old English period to the mid sixteenth century (meaning 2). During the same period, the OED also lists meanings ‘5. Innocent, harmless. Often as an expression of compassion for persons or animals suffering’ and ‘6.a. Deserving of pity or sympathy; pitiable, miserable, “poor”; helpless, defenceless’. In the early sixteenth century, the meaning of ‘foolish, simple, silly’ (meaning 8) was first recorded. The different semantic examples suggest that the ‘blissful’ or ‘blessed’ meaning of *silly* became interpreted as ‘innocent, harmless’ (i.e. eliciting compassion), but at the same time ‘helpless’ with the meaning of weak. From there, it would have gradually developed the meaning of ‘foolish’. This type of semantic change can best be described as *pejoration*. Other types of semantic change include *amelioration* (the meaning becomes more positive), *widening* (the meaning increases), *narrowing* (the meaning becomes narrower), *metaphor* (meaning change due to perceived similarity), *metonymy* (inclusion of additional meanings), *hyperbole* (meaning shift due to exaggeration), and *taboo replacement*. It is notable that these are not fixed categories, in that different scholars may use more categories while others conflate them (cf. Durkin 2009; see Traugott and Dasher 2001:51–104 for an overview of prior work on semantic change).

1.6 Closing Comments

This chapter has provided an overview of the development of the English language from the eighth to the twentieth century. Tracing more than a thousand years of language history within one chapter necessarily leads to simplification and the omission of details regarding different linguistic features. For further reading on the history of English, many detailed case studies regarding linguistic features have been carried out. In addition, grammars covering specific periods, and volumes focusing on English historical phonology, morphology, syntax, lexicography provide a great amount of detailed information (see selected references in this chapter and dedicated chapters in the handbooks below). As regards overviews, a great many student text and resource books have recently been published, as well as handbooks and series like *The Oxford History of English* (2006), edited by Lynda Mugglestone, *The Handbook of the History of English* (2009), edited by van Kemenade and Los, *The Oxford Handbook of the History of English* (2016), edited by Nevalainen and Traugott, and Brinton and Bergs’ *The History of English series* (2017, Mouton de Gruyter). A *New Cambridge History of the English Language* (6 volumes), edited by Raymond Hickey, is in press. Moreover, edited volumes focusing on linguistic developments in specific centuries have increased, for

example Hickey (2010) on the eighteenth century, and Kytö, Rydén and Smitherberg (2006) on the nineteenth century.

Generally, the increasing availability of corpora covering different text types across the history of English (available in manuscript form and/or print), including texts produced in different regions and across different layers of society, continues to allow English historical linguists to better understand how the English language has developed over time and what linguistic and social factors affected different linguistic changes.

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