

Introduction to English Linguistics

12: Early Modern English



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Cultural Context

Renaissance, Reformation, Enlightenment

- ▶ Return to classical texts and languages
- ▶ Encouragement of lay education
- ▶ Scientific advances
- ▶ Religious polemics

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Sociopolitical Context

- ▶ Rise of lay literacy in the lower classes
- ▶ Rise of political engagement in the lower classes
- ▶ Rise of nationalism

Inflectional Loss

Verbs

OE	ME	eMnE
hȳran	hēren	hear
wē hȳraþ	wē hēren	we hear
þæt wē hȳren	þat wē hēren	that we hear

Nominals

OE	ME	eMnE
þā dagas	þē daies	the days
þāra daga	of þē daies	of the days
on þāem dagum	in þē daies	in the days

(Strong) Verbs

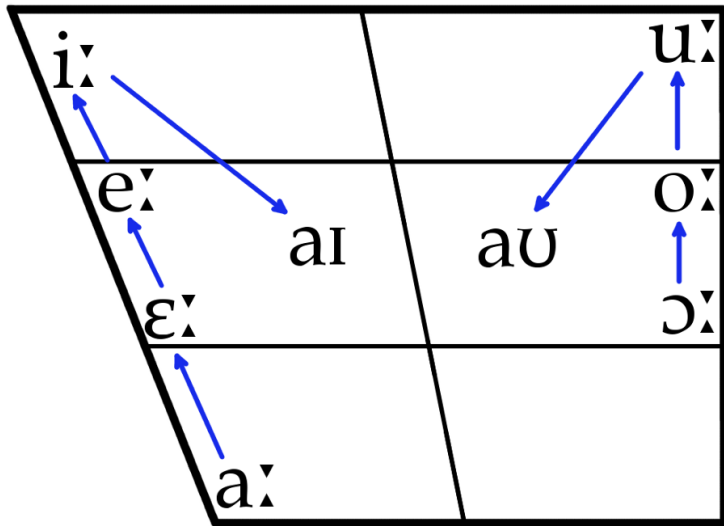
	OE Present	OE Past	eMnE Present	eMnE Past
1sg	ic gefe	ic geaf	I give	I gave
2sg	þū gifest	þū gēafe	thou givest	thou gavest
3sg	hēo gifep	hēo geaf	she giveth	she gave
pl	wē gefap	wē gēafon	we give	we gave

Nouns

Sg	OE	ME	MnE
Nom.	stān	stōn(e)	stone
Acc.	stān	stōn(e)	stone
Gen.	stānes	stōnes	stone's
Dat.	stāne	stōn(e)	stone

Pl	OE	ME	MnE
Nom.	stānas	stōnes	stones
Acc.	stānas	stōnes	stones
Gen.	stāna	stōnes	stones'
Dat.	stānum	stōnes	stones

The Great Vowel Shift (c. 1350–c. 1700)



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Leaving out intermediary stages:

1. /u:/ diphthongized to /aʊ/: /hu:s/ > /haus/
 - ▶ Consequent raisings:
 - ▶ /o:/ > /u/: /fo:de/ > /fu:d/
 - ▶ /ɔ:/ with diphthongization to /ou, əʊ/: /hɔ:m/ > /həʊm/
2. /i:/ diphthongized to /aɪ/: /wri:ten/ > /rait/
 - ▶ Consequent raisings:
 - ▶ /e:/ > /i/: /re:den/ > /ri:d/
 - ▶ /ɛ:/ > /e/: /mɛ:tə/ > /me:te/ (now /mi:t/)
 - ▶ /a:/ > /eɪ/: /makan/ > /meɪk/

Word Order

The servant seeketh the king

Do as a Dummy Auxiliary

OE	Hē hȳrþ	Hyrst þū?	þū ne hyrst
ME	He hereth	Herest thou?	Thou herest nat
eMnE	He heareth / He doth heare	Hearest thou? / Dost thou heare?	Thou hearest not / Thou dost not heare
PDE	He hears	Do you hear?	You do not hear

Achieved widespread use in eMnE; today survives in

- ▶ Interrogative clauses
- ▶ Negated clauses
- ▶ Emphatic assertions

Do: Progressive Aspect

Abraham	Do you bite your thumb at us, sir?
Sampson	I do bite my thumb, sir.
Abraham	Do you bite your thumb at us, sir?
Sampson [Aside]	Is the law of our side, if I say ay?
Gregory	No.
Sampson	No, sir, I do not bite my thumb at you, sir, but I bite my thumb, sir.
Gregory	Do you quarrel, sir?
Abraham	Quarrel sir! no, sir.
Sampson	If you do, sir, I am for you: I serve as good a man as you.

(Romeo and Juliet, act 1 scene 1)

Lexicon

c. 650–c. 1150	Old English	3%
c. 1150–c. 1300	Early Middle English	8.5%
c. 1300–c. 1500	Late Middle English	21.2%
c. 1500–c. 1700	Early Modern English	45%
c. 1700–today	Present-Day English	70+%

Table: Loanwords as a Percentage of Total Lexicon

Inkhorn Terms

- ▶ “Needless” new borrowings, esp. from Greek and Latin
- ▶ Sparked a backlash, leading some writers to seek Germanic alternatives
- ▶ Controversy from mid-16th to mid-17th century
- ▶ Cf. now every language borrowing from English

The 1611 Authorized Version or King James Version of the Bible

- ▶ Translation committee convened by King James
- ▶ Became the standard in the Church of England
- ▶ Became the most-printed work in the world
- ▶ Uses a lexicon of c. 7,000 words
- ▶ Today's printings use modernized spelling

The 1611 Authorized or King James Bible

Psalm 1

1. Blessed is the man that walketh not in the counsell of the vngodly, nor standeth in the way of sinners nor sitteth in the seat of the scornewfull.
2. But his delight is in the Law of the Lord, and in his Law doeth he meditate day and night.
3. And he shal be like a tree planted by the riuers of water, that bringeth foorth his fruit in his season, his leafe also shall not wither, and whatsoeuer he doeth, shall prosper.
4. The vngodly are not so: but are like the chaffe, which the winde driueth away.
5. Therefore the vngodly shall not stand in the iudgement, nor sinners in the Congregation of the righteous
6. For the Lord knoweth the way of the righteous but the way of the vngodly shall perish.

Early Modern English

To the Reader

This Figure, that thou here seest put,
It was for gentle Shakespeare cut;
Wherein the Grauer had a strife
with Nature, to out-doo the life:
O, could he but haue drawne his wit
As well in brasse, as he hath hit
His face; the Print would then surpassse
All, that was euer writ in brasse.
But, since he cannot, Reader, looke
Not on his Picture, but his Booke.

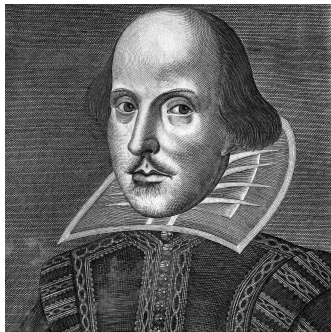


Figure: Engraving from the 1623 edition of Shakespeare's Plays (**public domain / Martin Droeshout**)

From *The Tempest* (act 1 scene 2)

Miranda:

If by your Art (my deerest father) you haue
Put the wild waters in this Rore; alay them:
The skye it seemes would powre down stinking pitch,
But that the Sea, mounting to th' welkins cheeke,
Dashes the fire out. Oh! I haue suffered
With those that I saw suffer: A braue vessell
(Who had no doubt some noble creature in her)
Dash'd all to peeces: O the cry did knocke
Against my very heart: poore soules, they perish'd.
Had I byn any God of power, I would
Haue suncke the Sea within the Earth, or ere
It should the good Ship so haue swallow'd, and
The fraughting Soules within her.