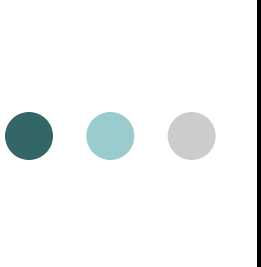Lecture 1

# Subject and Aims of the History of English. Chronological divisions in the History of English
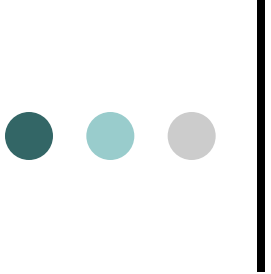
Every living language is subjected to growth and decay. Its modern state is the result of manifold changes and transformations, which it underwent in the course of its history, in the course of its development.

In the structure of every language: both diachronic elements (remnants of old conjugations, declensions), and new elements reflecting the latest trends in its development.
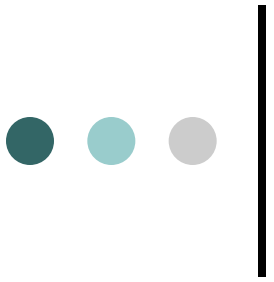
Old words die out, fall out of the vocabulary, new words are added, often due to external influences, borrowings or to the development of science and culture.

- **telephone** + –ed  - a new element
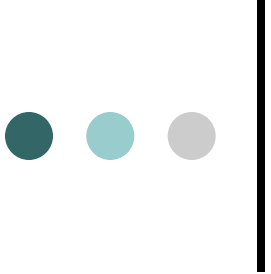- **write, fight, take** - a diachronic element

The history of the language is that branch of linguistic science

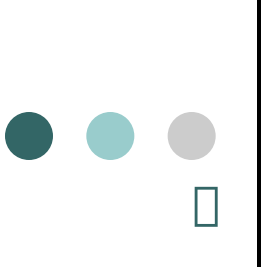- which gives you an insight into the origin of modern English,

- which explains to you the history of its phonological structure,
- the difficulties of its spelling,
- the composition of its vocabulary,
- the peculiarities of its grammatical structure.

- A language can be considered from different angles.

- In studying Modern English (Mod E) we regard the language as fixed in time and describe each linguistic level – phonetics, grammar or lexis – *synchronically*, taking no account of the origin of present-day features or their tendencies to change.
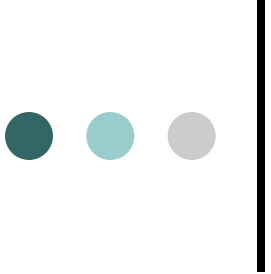
The ***synchronic*** approach can be contrasted to the ***diachronic***.

When considered ***diachronically***, every linguistic fact is interpreted as a stage or step in the never-ending evolution of language.

The English language of today reflects many centuries of development => one of the **aims** of this course is to provide the student with a knowledge of linguistic history sufficient to account for the principal features of present-day English and to show how modern linguistic features can be explained by resorting to history.
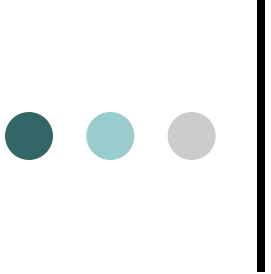
Any student of English is well aware of the difficulties of reading and spelling English. The **written form** of the English word is *conventional* rather than *phonetic*.
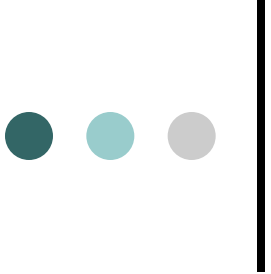
- *bit* **[bit]** – (three letters – three sounds) full correspondence between Latin letters and English sounds
- *bite* **[bait]** – ( four letters – three sounds) no correspondence between the vowels and their graphic representation
- *knight*  [nait] – (six letters – three sounds) the letters *k* and *gh* do not stand for any sounds but *gh* evidently shows that *i* stands for [ai].
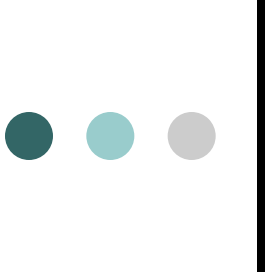
# The illustration from the vocabulary

English belongs to the Germanic group of languages =>  it has many words or roots in common with cognate Germanic languages:

- **English**  *give*
- **Other Germanic languages** G *geben* Sw *giva*
- **Romance languages** — no

- **English**   *peace*  (OE *frið)*
- **Other Germanic languages** G *Frieden* Sw *fred* Dutch *vrede*
- **Romance languages**  Fr *paix* L *pace* It *pace* Sp *paza*

- **English** army (OE (OE *here)*
- **Other Germanic languages** G *Heer* Sw *har*
- **Romance languages** Fr *armee* It *armata*

# History of Grammar

- explanations both for the general, regular features of the grammatical structure and for its specific peculiarities and exceptions

- why English has so few inflections;

- how its "analytical" structure arose – with an abundance of compound forms and a fixed word order;

- why modal verbs, unlike other verbs, take no ending **-s** in the 3rd p. sg.;

- why some nouns add *-en* or change the root-vowel in the plural instead of adding **-s** (e.g. *oxen, feet)* and so on and so forth.

# Theoretical nature of the history of English

- a number of theoretical questions such as
- the relationship between statics and dynamics in language,

- the role of linguistic and extralinguistic factors,
- the interdependence of different processes in language history.
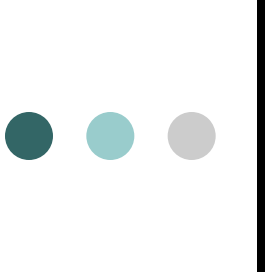
# A wider philological outlook

- The history of the English language shows the place of English in the linguistic world;

- it reveals its ties and contacts with other related and unrelated tongues.

# **Sources of Language History**
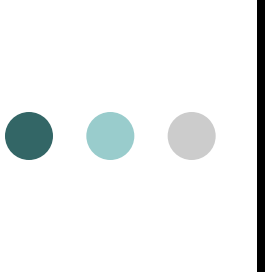
- Every living language as a means of human communication is a social and historical phenomenon and it changes through time: especially subjected to change in the older periods of its history until it became fixed by the rapid spread of literature, press, radio and constant human intercourse.

no records of linguistic changes have ever been kept, as most changes pass unnoticed by contemporaries.

The history of the English language has been reconstructed on the basis of written records of different periods

- The earliest extant written texts in English are dated in the 7th c;
- the earliest records in other Germanic languages go back to the 3rd or 4th c A. D.

- The development of English, however, began a long time before it was first recorded.

- where the English language came from, to what languages it is related, when and how it has acquired its specific features <= some facts of the pre-written history of the Germanic group.

Certain information about the early stages of English and Germanic history <= the works of ancient historians and geographers, especially Roman:  descriptions of Germanic tribes, personal names and place-names.

- Some data are also provided by early borrowings from Germanic made by other languages, e.g. the Finnish and the Baltic languages.

- But the bulk of our knowledge comes from scientific study of extant texts.

# The pre-written history of English and cognate languages

- first studied by methods of comparative linguistics evolved in the 19th c.: linguists discovered the kinship of what is now known as the Indo-European (IE) family of languages and grouped them into Germanic, Slavonic, Romance, Celtic, and others.

It is one of the intentions of this course to show how comparison of existing and reconstructed forms can demonstrate differences and similarities in languages, and how reconstructed forms help to understand later developments.

# Modern linguistics

- has improved on the methods of comparative linguistic research applied in the 19th c.
- external reconstruction based on comparing different languages + the recently formulated method of internal reconstruction

# The evolution or historical development of language:
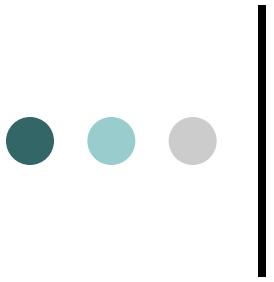
- is made up of diverse facts and processes.
- In the first place it includes the internal or structural development of the language system, its various sub-systems and component parts.

# The description of internal linguistic history

- is usually presented in accordance with the division of language into linguistic levels.
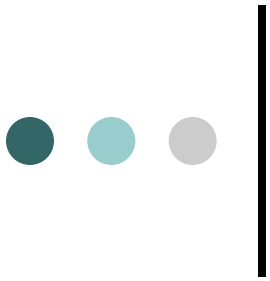
- The main, commonly accepted levels are:

- the phonetic and phonological levels,
- the morphological level,
- the syntactic level,
- and the lexical level.
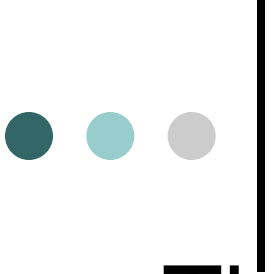
Accordingly, the history of the language can be subdivided into *historical phonetics (phonology), historical morphology, historical syntax* and *historical lexicology.*

The evolution of language includes also many facts which pertain to the functioning of language in the speech community.

These functional aspects constitute what is known as the "external" (or "outer") history of the language and embrace a large number of diverse matters:

- the spread of the language in geographical and social space,
- the differentiation of language into functional varieties (geographical variants, dialects, standard and sub-standard forms, etc.),
- contacts with other languages.

- The concept of *language space* the geographical and social space occupied by the language (known as its horizontal and vertical dimensions);
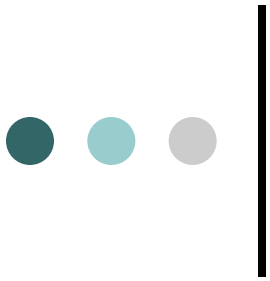
- the concept of *linguistic situation* = the functional differentiation of language and the relationships between the functional varieties.

Most of these features are connected with the history of the speech community, e.g. with the structure of society, the migration of tribes, economic and political events, the growth of culture and literature.

## Statics and Dynamics in Language History

- Although certain changes constantly occur at one or another linguistic level, the historical development of language cannot be regarded as permanent instability.

Many features of the language remain static in diachrony: these constant features do not alter through time or may be subject to very slight alteration.

# Universal properties

- Certain permanent, universal properties to be found in all languages at any period of time, such as

- e.g. the division of sounds into vowels and consonants,

- the distinction between the main parts of speech

- and the parts of the sentence
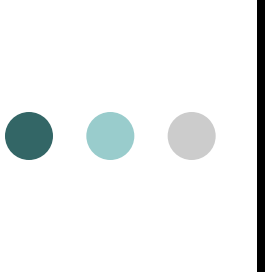
# Many stable characteristics

- For instance, some parts of the English vocabulary have been preserved through ages;

- to this stable part belong most of the pronouns, many form-words and words indicating the basic concepts of life.

- Many ways of word-formation have remained historically stable.

Some grammatical categories, e.g. number in nouns, degrees of comparison in adjectives, have suffered little alteration while other categories, such as case or gender, have undergone profound changes.

The proportion of stable and changeable features varies at different historical periods and at different linguistic levels but there is no doubt that we can find **statics** and **dynamics** both in **synchrony** and in **diachrony.**

# Dynamics in diachrony = *linguistic change*

- Linguistic changes are usually slow and gradual. They proceed in minor, imperceptible steps unnoticed by the speakers.

Unlike human society, language undergoes no revolutions or sudden breaks. The slow rate of linguistic change is seen in the gradual spread of new features in language space.

# Different parts or levels of language develop at different rates

- vocabulary of a language can change very rapidly.

- This is true only if we compare lexical changes with changes at other linguistic levels, e.g. grammatical

- Lexical changes are easy to observe

# The system of phonemes

- cannot be subjected to sudden or rapid changes since it must preserve the oppositions between the phonemes required for the distinction of morphemes.

Sometimes phonetic changes affect a whole set of sounds – a group of vowels or a group of consonants, – but as a rule they do not impair the differentiation of phonemes.
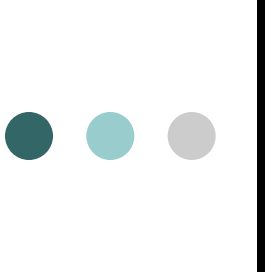
# The grammatical system is very slow to change

- Being the most abstract of linguistic levels it must provide stable formal devices for arranging words into classes and for connecting them into phrases and sentences.

# ENGLISH AMONG OTHER LANGUAGES OF THE WORLD

- Languages can be classified according to different principles. The historical, or genealogical classification, groups languages in accordance with their origin from a common linguistic ancestor.
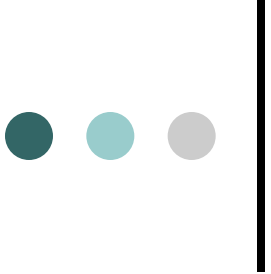
Genetically, English belongs to the Germanic or Teutonic group of languages, which is one of the twelve groups of the IE linguistic family
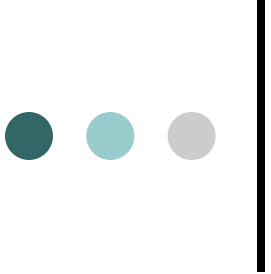
# The Germanic Group of Languages
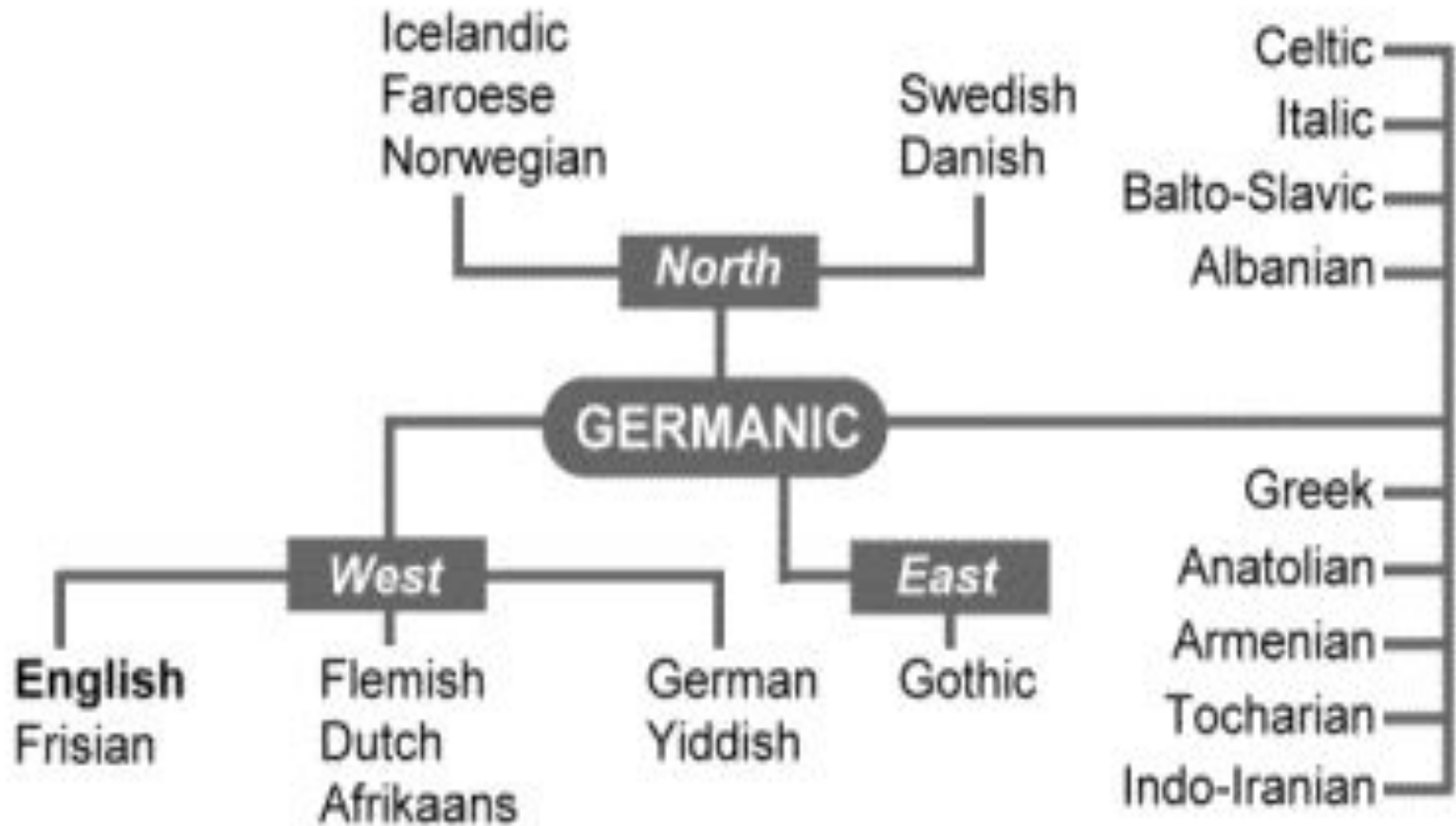
The Germanic languages as a uniform group possess some important characteristic features that distinguish them (single them out) from other IE languages:

- 1) a fixed stress accent,
- 2) a regular shifting of IE consonants,

- 3) a regular shifting of IE vowels,

- 4) a twofold conjugation (strong and weak),

- 5) a two-fold declension of nouns and adjectives,
- 6) the presence of a Germanic layer in the vocabulary.

# The Germanic languages in the modern world

- **English –** in Great Britain, Ireland, the USA, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, the South African Republic, and many other former British colonies and dominions;

- **German –** in the Federal Republic of Germany, Austria, Luxemburg, Liechtenstein, part of Switzerland;

- **Netherlandish –** in the Netherlands and Flanders (Belgium) (known also as Dutch and Flemish respectively);

- **Afrikaans –** in the South African Republic;
- **Danish – in** Denmark;
- **Swedish – in** Sweden and Finland;
- **Norwegian – in** Norway;
- **Icelandic – in** Iceland;
- **Frisian –** in some regions of the **Netherlands and the Federal** Republic of Germany;
- **Faroese –** in the Faroe Islands;
- **Yiddish –** in different countries.
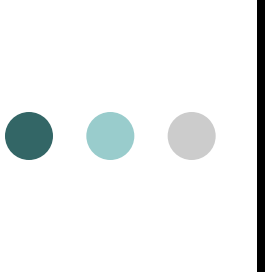
# The number of people speaking Germanic languages

- It is difficult to estimate the number of people speaking Germanic languages, especially on account of English, which in many countries is one of two languages in a bilingual community, e.g. in Canada.
- The estimates for English range from 250 to 300 million people who have it as their mother tongue.
- The total number of people speaking Germanic languages approaches 440 million.
- To this rough estimate we could add an indefinite number of bilingual people in the countries where English is used as an official language (over 50 countries).

# CHRONOLOGICAL DIVISIONS IN THE HISTORY OF ENGLISH.
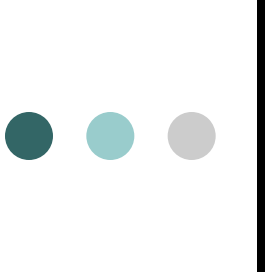
- The historical development of a language is a continuous uninterrupted process without sudden breaks or rapid transformations => any periodisation imposed on language history by linguists, with precise dates, might appear artificial, if not arbitrary.

Yet in all language histories divisions into periods and cross-sections of a certain length, are used for teaching and research purposes.

## The commonly accepted, traditional periodisation of English history

- Three periods:

- Old English (OE), Middle English (ME) and New English (NE), with boundaries attached to definite dates and historical events affecting the language. Each period preserves some infirmity of language.

- OE begins with the Germanic settlement of Britain (5th c.) or with the beginning of writing (7th c.) and ends with the Norman Conquest (1066);

- ME begins with the Norman Conquest and ends on the introduction of printing (1475),
- which is the start of the Modern or New English period (Mod E or NE); the New period lasts to the present day.

# A brief chronology of English

Local inhabitants speak Celtish (*Prewritten OE*):

- **BC 55** Roman invasion of Britain by Julius Caesar.
- **BC 43** Roman invasion and occupation. Beginning of Roman rule of Britain.
- **436** Roman withdrawal from Britain complete.
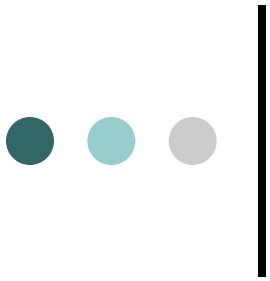- **449** Settlement of Britain by Germanic invaders begins.

# 450-1066 Old English

- **450-480** Earliest known Old English inscriptions.

- **1066** William the Conqueror, Duke of Normandy, invades and conquers England.

## 1066 - 1660 Middle English

- **1150** Earliest surviving manuscripts in Middle English.

- **1348** English replaces Latin as the language of instruction in most schools.
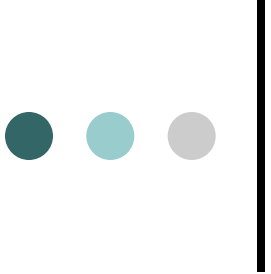
- **1362** English replaces French as the language of law. English is used in Parliament for the first time.
- **1388** Chaucer starts writing *The Canterbury Tales*.
- **1400** The Great Vowel Shift begins.

# Modern English 1660 -

*Early Modern English*:

- **1476** William Caxton establishes the first English printing press
- **1564** Shakespeare is born.

- **1604** *Table Alphabeticall*, the first English dictionary, is published.
- **1607** The first permanent English settlement in the New World (Jamestown) is established.
- **1616** Shakespeare dies.
- **1623** Shakespeare's First Folio is published

# 1660- 1880  Normalisation Period (also: Age of Correctness)

- **1755** Samuel Johnson publishes his English dictionary.
- **1776** Thomas Jefferson writes the American Declaration of Independence.

- **1782** Britain abandons its American colonies.

- **1828** Webster publishes his American English dictionary.

# Late Modern English 1800 -

- **1922** The British Broadcasting Corporation is founded.
- **1928** The *Oxford English Dictionary* is published.
- **Since 1945** - Present-Day English

## SHORT SURVEY OF PERIODS

- The invading Germanic tribes spoke similar languages, which in Britain developed into what we now call OE.
- OE did not sound or look like E today.

In terms of the general history of Germanic languages OE represents the stage of Old Germanic dialects in the history of English =  the initial period of its separated history, when common Germanic features still prevailed over its newly-developed individual characteristics.

# Old English (450-1066 AD)

- The earliest surviving written documents (the 8th century).

- Native English speakers now would have great difficulty understanding Old English.

- Nevertheless, about half of the most commonly used words in Modern English have Old English roots. The words *be*, *strong* and *water*, for example, derive from Old English.

- Old English was spoken until around 1100.

# Part of *Beowulf*, a poem written in OE
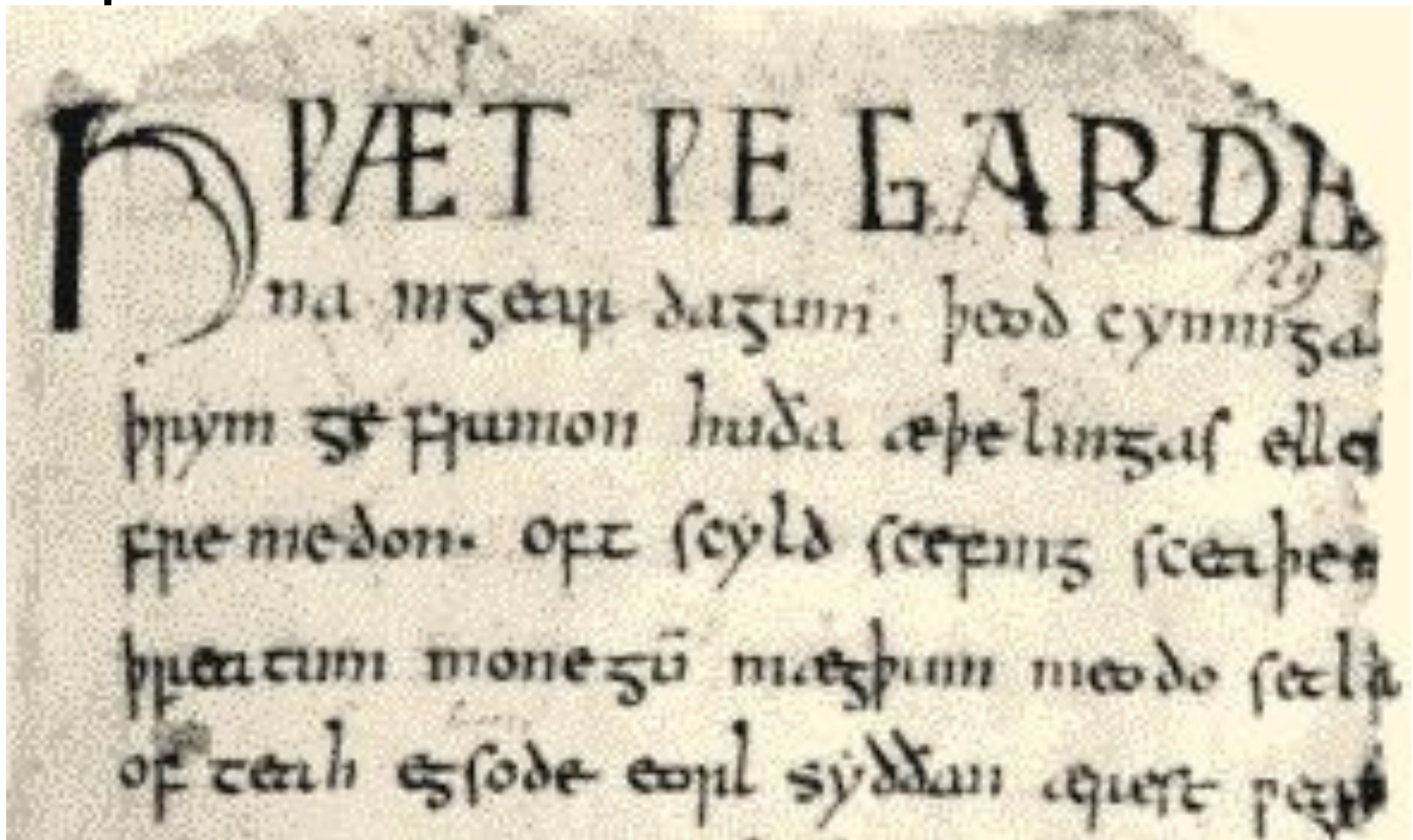
# Middle English (1066 -1500)

- In 1066 William the Conqueror, the Duke of Normandy (part of modern France), invaded and conquered England.

- The new conquerors (the Normans) brought with them a kind of French: the language of the Royal Court, and the ruling and business classes.

- For a period a kind of linguistic class division, where the lower classes spoke English and the upper classes spoke French.
- In the 14th century - English dominant in Britain again, but with many French words added.
- Middle English was the language of the great poet Chaucer (c1340-1400), but difficult for native English speakers to understand today

# An example of Middle English by Chaucer

And whan I sawgh he wolde never fine
To reden on this cursed book al night,
Al sodeinly three leves have I plight
Out of his book right as he redde, and eke
I with my fist so took him on the cheeke
That in oure fir he fil bakward adown.
And up he sterte as dooth a wood leon
And with his fist he smoot me on the heed
That in the floor I lay as I were deed.
And whan he swagh how stille that I lay,
He was agast, and wolde have fled his way,
Till atte laste out of my swough I braide:
"O hastou slain me, false thief?" I saide,
"And for my land thus hastou mordred me?
Er I be deed yit wol I kisse thee."

# Modern English
## Early Modern English (1500-1800)

- **Towards the end of MidE, a sudden and distinct change in pronunciation (the Great Vowel Shift) started**

- **From the 16th century contact with many peoples from around the world + the Renaissance of Classical learning => many new words and phrases entered the language.**

- The invention of printing = now a common language in print. Books became cheaper and more people learned to read.

- Printing also brought standardization to English. Spelling and grammar became fixed, and the dialect of London, where most publishing houses were, became the standard. In 1604 the first English dictionary was published.
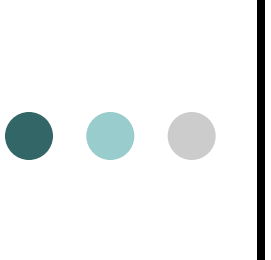
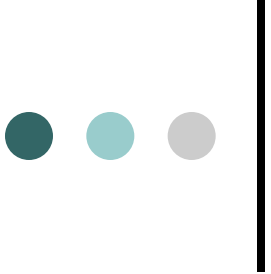# Hamlet's famous "To be, or not to be" lines, written in Early Modern English by Shakespeare.



Enter Hamlet.

Cor. Madame, will it pleafe your grace
To leaue vs here?
Que. With all my hart. exit.
Cor. And here Ofelia, reade you on this booke,
And walke aloofe, the King fhal be vnfeene.
Ham. To be, or not to be, I there's the point,
To Die, to fleepe, is that all? I all:
No, to fleepe, to dreame, I mary there it goes,
For in that dreame of death, when wee awake,
And borne before an euerlafting Iudge,
From whence no paffenger euer retur'nd,
The vndifcouered country, at whofe fight
The happy fmile, and the accurfed damn'd.
But for this, the ioyfull hope of this,
Whol'd beare the fcornes and flattery of the world,
Scorned by the right rich, the rich curffed of the poore?

## Late Modern English (1800-Present)

- The main difference between Early ModE and Late ModE is vocabulary.

- Late ModEhas many more words, arising from two principal factors:

- firstly, the Industrial Revolution and technology created a need for new words;

- secondly, the British Empire at its height covered one quarter of the earth's surface, and the English language adopted foreign words from many countries.

# Henry Sweet, an outstanding English linguist

has characterized these periods from the phonological and grammatical point of view in the following way:

- OE – the period of full endings
- ME – the period of leveled endings
- MnE – the period of lost endings.