

**LECTURE 7.**



# **CHARACTERISTICS OF ME GRAMMAR**

# OE –ME -MnE



- ME Period was a transitional one from OE to Modern English
- a period of comparatively swift changes in the language
- the grammatical type of the language has changed.
- synthetic → analytical type with the analytical means of word connection (WO, auxiliary verbs, prepositions) prevailing over inflexions, ablaut, suppletive formation, prefixes.
- grammatical prefixes practically went out of use;
- suppletive form-building was confined to a few words;
- sound alternations were not productive;
- inflexions continued to be used in all the changeable parts of speech, but they became much less varied.

# OE - full endings, ME – levelled endings, MnE – lost endings



- ? due to the **stress** which fell on the first syllable which gradually changed its position and became free
- ? the change was precipitated by the **Scandinavian** conquest
- ? the main influence was produced by **French loans**
- Professor Smirnitsky considers all 3 reasons could have brought about the changes in the language.

# Nominal Parts of Speech



- The morphology of the Nominal parts of speech became simpler;
- Many grammatical categories were lost (Gender in Noun, Case in Adjective);
- The number of forms diminished (number of cases reduced to 2);
- The division into declensions disappeared.

# Verbal System



- the evolution was less uniform:
- many simplifying changes in the verb conjugation (the loss of some person and number distinctions, the loss of declensions of participles)
- the enrichment of the morphological system and the growth of **new grammatical categories** (aspect, voice, tense, mood, etc.)

# Changes within the Noun System in ME



- **GENDER** is a purely lexical category
- **CASE** four-case system turned into two. A distinct form of the Dative (e) can still be found in the texts of 11<sup>th</sup>-12<sup>th</sup> centuries. Soon it fell together with the Nominative and Accusative into which is generally called **Common Case**.
- Only the **Genitive Case** was kept separate. It was not restricted yet to nouns of certain meanings.  
Genitive Singular **m/n -s**, **f -a(e)**; Genitive Plural **-a(e)**.
- **NUMBER** In 13<sup>th</sup> century ending **-s** spreads to **feminine** and **neuter** nouns. In the Northern dialect this process was very intensive. Later penetrated the London dialect and became the norm. By the 15<sup>th</sup> century only some nouns of weak declension had the ending **-en**. Thus there were 2 groups: Plural m **-es** (and only some **-en**), f **-en**, n **-es**.

# Changes within the Adjective System

	strong	Weak
Sg	gōd	gode
Pl	gōde	gōde

- **OE** adjective was declined, had 5 cases, gender, number

In the 12<sup>th</sup> century the adjective had 4 forms (see table)

- As many ME adjectives had the ending **-e**, it could not show the difference between the types of declensions, that's why these endings were lost.

- Case and gender endings disappeared up to the 12<sup>th</sup> century, number and the difference between weak and strong - up to the end of the ME period.

- In OE degrees of comparison were formed by ra/ost/est, sometimes alternation of root vowel.

- In ME **ra>er/ost>est**.

- the sound alternation became less frequent.

- parallel forms with or without alternation. *E.g. old-elder-oldest/eldest.*

- The new system of comparison with '**more**' appeared. These forms are preferable with mono or disyllabic words. *E.g. (Chaucer): '...more sweter, better worthy....'*

- Several adjectives preserve suppletive degrees.

# Changes within the Pronoun System in ME

- **OE** Personal pronouns had 3 persons, 4 cases and 3 numbers. In ME the system of the Personal Pronouns changed
- OE pronoun heo(he) is replaced by gradually by ME **sho**(she) - first recorded in the North-Eastern regions - The origin of '**she**' is not clear: either from the Scandinavian or from the masculine pronoun '**seo**' which was demonstrative
- The Objective Case '**hir**' is the result of the coalescence of the Accusative and Dative form.
- The second change OE **hie** > ME **they** came from Scandinavian. The Objective Case forms of it are: OE **hem** > **them** (Scandinavian).
- the pronoun '**ye**' was occasionally used already in addressing 1 person but '**thou**' is still used.
- dual is disused
- The system of cases is changed. Already in OE the forms of Dat.and Acc. were sometimes mixed up. In ME they fell together into 1 case, which was used as Object; that's why it is called **Objective**.
- The Gen. Case splits from others forming a special group **possessive**.
- '**Its**' is formed by analogy with other possessive pronouns, replacing the former neuter pronoun 'His' (which was homonymous with masculine)
- On the basis of the oblique (Acc.+Dat.) case forms there appeared 1 more class: **reflexive**



# Rise of the Article system in ME



- In ME demonstrative pronouns began to lose number distinction, bearing no stress in the sentence, the form weakened into **be**
- The indefinite article developed from the numeral ‘**ān**’. In ME it had the form **ōn**. But it was left for the numeral and **ān** was for the article.
- The system of articles came to a new level.
- In ME the new opposition appeared: definiteness/indefiniteness.

# STRONG VERBS



- In CG there were 75 strong verbs, in OE – 300, in ME their number greatly reduced, only **67** are preserved
- Went out of use: OE *zewitan* (go), *liðan* (go), *hatan* (call), *beodan* (order)
- About 70 strong verbs passed into the group of weak
- 7 classes of strong verbs underwent multiple changes: Phonetic (qualitative, quantitative), which led to almost complete destruction of ablaut. The borders between classes became indistinct and more often confused and influenced by **analogy**.
- In ME the endings of the Infinitive, Past Plural, PII were reduced to **-en**. That is why in a few classes the Infinitive fell together with PII.
- The strong verbs in OE had 4 forms (Inf, Past Pl, Past SG, PII). Many forms coincided, that is why the 4 forms changed into **3 (Inf, Past, PII)**.

# Weak verbs



- show a strong tendency to regularity
- In OE there were 3 classes of Weak verbs. In ME the 3<sup>rd</sup> class ceased to exist altogether. The verbs of this class either joined other classes of Weak verbs (libban – liven 1cl.w.v.) or became irregular.

Class I	Inf	kepen	Class II	hopen;
	Past	kepte		hapede;
	PII	kept		hoped.

- The number of Weak verbs greatly increased in ME, because
  - 1) practically all the borrowed verbs and new verbs built their forms like weak;
  - 2) a great many strong verbs passed into weak.

There are, however, a few borrowed words which build their basic forms as strong. E.g. *take – took - taken*, *strive – strove - striven*. The reverse process is very rare.

# PRETERITE-PRESENT VERBS



- mainly changed their forms due to phonetic changes
- 4 forms of verbs were reduced to 3, sometimes 2

*OE witan (disappeared) – ME wit;*

*OE āzan – ME ouh, oughte;*

*OE duzan – ME doughthe;*

*OE cunnan – ME can, couthe;*

*OE durran – ME dar, dourste;*

*OE sculan – ME shal, sholden,*

*OE mazon – ME may, mighte*

# The Development of Analytical forms in



- **Future tense** - descriptive phrases . The verbs **shylle** and **wylle** began to lose their lexical meaning, they became auxiliary later and bared ONLY grammatical meaning.
- **The perfect tense** - when Participle lost its case, gender and number there appeared the possibility to change the word-order and new forms appeared. The Present Perfect and Past Perfect were used indiscriminately. Perfect forms could be built with the help of **habban** and **beon**.
- **Passive Voice** developed from a Compound Nominal Predicate (eg. він був вбитий). The forms were rudimentary, however, combinations of finite forms with **'beon'** **'wesan'** (suppletive) or **'weorban'** (ставати, робитися) were followed by **PII**; at the beginning of ME the PII lost its agreement with the subject and the construction meant the action directed towards the subject.
- **Continuous forms** - combination **beon +PI** was sometimes used in OE to denote a quality or an action qualifying the subject. The origin of the continuous forms can be better understood if we consider it together with the development of PI, the Gerund and the Verbal noun. The forms on **-inde** and **-inge**, when **e** was lost began to be mixed up, the resulting form was preserved: **-ing**. Thus, in ME there were three **-ing** forms:
  - ✓ The Verbal Noun (which existed formerly);
  - ✓ The Gerund (new verbal forms);
  - ✓ Participle IParticiple I began to be used in the new analytical form Present (Past) Continuous.