
ME Phonology.
ME Morphology.

Lecture 3

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- I. Main historical events of the ME period.
 - II. ME dialects. Rise of the London dialect.
 - III. ME vowel system. General characteristics.
 - IV. ME Noun.
 - V. ME Verbal System
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Middle English (1066-1485)

- **1066** the Norman Conquest.
 - the **Normans** were descendants of Danish Vikings who settled in northern France (Normandy) in the 9th and 10th c.
 - **1485** – the accession of Henry VII, the first Tudor monarch
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1066 the Norman Conquest

- The new overlords spoke a dialect of Old French known as **Anglo-Norman**.
 - Anglo-Saxon earls were deprived of property, killed; many French nobles made their home in Britain;
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- **French** was used in official documents, court; was the language of upper class (till the 13th c.)
 - **Latin** was the language of the church, of scholarship, and of international communication;
 - **English** - at the spoken level (except in court), among lower classes (peasants and slaves) (the 14th c. its triumph).
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- **1204 King John Lackland** lost Normandy to the French;
 - **1215 Magna Carta** (Latin "Great Paper") was written in Latin;
 - **1258** the first royal proclamation of Henry III issued in English since the conquest;
 - **the Hundred Year's War** (1337-1453);
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- **The Black Death** (the Plague. 1348-1351);
 - By 1362 CE, **the Statute of Pleading** (although written in French) declared English as the official spoken language of the courts;
 - **Geoffrey Chaucer** (1343-1400), an English author, poet, diplomat, the father of English language, his narrative *Canterbury Tales* (1386-1400).
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- **War of the Roses** (1455-1485), York (white rose) vs. Lancaster (red rose);
 - **1476 William Caxton** brought a printing press to England from Germany. Beginning of the long process of standardization of spelling.
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ME dialects. Rise of the London dialect.

- the Northern
- The Central
- the Southern

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- In England the new standard language which arose in the late Middle Ages was not descended from the West Saxon literary language. It was based on the **East Midland dialect** (OE Mercian)
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ME vowel system. General characteristics.

French influence:

- The new digraphs of French origin: “ou” (ME *double*), “ie” (ME *chief*), “ch”. The two-fold use of “g” and “c” owes its origin to French (ME *mercy*).
 - Replacement of final *-i* by *-y*, which is more ornamental (ME *very*).
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Shortening

- the vowels are shortened before 2 consonants, but remain long in other environment. Exception: **-ld, -nd, -mb**:
 - OE cēpan – ME kēpen
 - OE cēpte – ME kepte
 - OE wēnde – ME wēnde
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Shortening

- A long vowel is shortened before one consonant in some 3 syllable words.

OE sūperne – ME superne

Lengthening

- in the 13th c. short vowels were lengthened in open syllables.
 - OE **ta**lu – **tā**le
 - Lengthening affected “a”, “e”, “o”.
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Qualitative changes: Dialect Changes OE hlāf

- ME lāf (Northen)
 - ME lōf (other dialects)
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Y,y (long and short)

OE **fyllan**

- ME **fillen** (Northern and East Midland groups)
 - ME **fullen** (West Midland and South Western)
 - ME **fellen** (South-Eastern group)
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å (nasal, before “m”, “n”)

OE m^ån

- ME m^an (Northern, Southern, East Midland dialects)
 - ME m^on (West Midland)
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Æ (short)

OE wæ^s

- ME we^s (West Midland and South Eastern)
 - ME wa^s (other dialects)
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Æ (long)

- OE slæpan – ME slēpen

Levelling of unstressed vowels

- All unstressed vowels were weakened and reduced to a neutral /ə/, which was denoted by the letter “e”.

OE bindan – ME binden

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- New diphthongs arose during the transition from OE to ME from **vocalisations** of OE **w, g, h**, such as:
 - ME **dai** (cf. WS **dag**),
 - ME **drawe(n)** (WS **dragan**),
 - ME **spewe(n)** (cf. WS **speowian**),
 - ME **saugh** (OE **seah**)
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- French loanwords supplied the inventory with the two new diphthongs **ui**, **oi**

ME **p**uint,

ME **r**oyal .

- All OE diphthongs were monophthongized in ME.
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ME Morphology

- The ME period is marked by a great reduction in the inflectional system inherited from OE, so that ME is often referred to as the period of **weakened** inflections.
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Reasons for these changes:

- 1) the mixing of OE with Old Norse. Frequently, the English and Scandinavian words were sufficiently similar to be recognizable, but had different sets of inflections (e.g. OE *sunu* – OScan. *sunr*);
- 2) phonological cause. The loss and weakening of unstressed syllables at the end of words destroyed many of the distinctive inflections of OE (OE endings *-an, -on, -un, -um* all became *-en*, which was later reduced to *-e*).

ME Noun

The number of declensions was reduced to two:

- **ME Strong declension:** Nom. Pl. **–es**; Gen. Sg. **–es** (OE strong a-stem declension);
 - **ME Weak declension:** Nom. Pl. **–en**; Gen. Sg. **–en** (OE weak n-stem declension).
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- In PDE we still have a few relics of other declensions: there are the mutated plurals like *feet*, *geese*, *mice*, and *men*, where the vowel of the plural was changed by **front mutation**, and there is no plural ending.
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- *The number of cases was reduced to two: Common and Genitive.*
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The grammatical categories of the Noun:

- **the category of case** (Common and Genitive);
 - **the category of number** (Singular and Plural);
 - **the category of gender** (masculine, feminine and neuter)
 - **types of declension:** strong and weak.
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The category of Gender

- a shift from 'grammatical' to 'natural' gender;
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The Definite Article

- In OE the DA showed **three genders** (*sē* masculine, *sēo* feminine, *þæt* neuter), and was declined through all four cases, singular and plural.
- The form *the* arose as Late OE *þe*, which supplanted *sē* and *sēo*.
- By the end of the ME period we have reached the modern position, in which *the* is the only form of the definite article.

The Verb

- Old English marked **two tenses** (past vs present), **three moods** (indicative vs imperative vs subjunctive), and **three persons** (first, second, third) and **two numbers**.
 - **4 classes** of OE verbs.
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- **The principle of analogy**— the tendency of language to follow certain patterns and adapt a less common form to a more familiar one—is well exemplified in the further history of the strong verbs.
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Classes of ME Verbs

- At a time when English was the language chiefly of the lower classes, it was natural that many speakers should apply the pattern of weak verbs to some which were historically strong.
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- The two key changes which affected ME verbs:

- 1) the reduction of inflectional endings,
 - 2) the shift of strong verbs to the weak paradigm.
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The ME Verbal System

- In ME the system of inflections became much reduced, but a complicated system of tenses is built up by means of the primary auxiliaries (*be, have, do*) and the modal auxiliaries (*shall, should, will, etc.*).
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The Future Tense

- The future tense with *shall* and *will* is established in ME.
 - In OE these verbs had the connotation of obligation and desire respectively:
 - OE *ic sceal meant* “I am obliged to”
 - OE *ic wille meant* “I wish to”.
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The Perfect Tenses and Passive Forms

- The Perfect tenses with habban or bēon and the passive forms with bēon and weorþan already existed in OE, but they came to be used more frequently in ME.
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The Continuous Tenses

- The Continuous tenses, formed with be + the present participle, also arise in ME, but are not at all common until the Modern English period.
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- By the end of ME the **perfect**, **passive**, and **continuous** markings of the verb were all well established, though much less frequently used than today.
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ME Syntax

- As the inflectional system decayed, other devices were increasingly used to replace it.
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- Word-order became more important: **S-V-O word-order** became the dominant one.
 - The use of prepositions to perform the functions formerly carried out by word-endings. E.g. prepositions like *in, with, by*.
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