Middle English

12th-15th centuries

A hand-written page from «The Canterbury Tales» **by Geoffrey Chaucer**, around 1400

Whan that Aprille with his shoures soote
The droghte of Marche hath perced to the roote,
And bathed every veyne in swich licour,
Of which vertu engendred is the flour;

Whan Zephirus eek with his sweete breeth
Inspired hath in every holt and heeth
The tendre croppes, and the yonge sonne
Hath in the Ram his halfe cours y-ronne,
And smale fowles maken melodye,

That slepen al the night with open yë,
(So priketh hem nature in hir corages):
Than longen folk to goon on pilgrimages
(And palmers for to seken straunge strondes)
To ferne halwes, couthe in sondry londes;

And specially, from every shires ende
Of Engelond, to Caunterbury they wende,
The holy blisful martir for to seke,
That hem hath holpen, whan that they were seeke.

General Characteristics of Middle English Phonetics

1. **All unstressed vowels were reduced to either /ə/ or /e/**

Compare: writ**a**n – wrat – writ**o**n – writ**e**n (Old English) and

writ**e**n – wrot – writ**e**n – writ**e**n (Middle English)

2. **Three long monophthongs underwent the changes:**

a: > o: æ: > e: y: > i:

3. Two short monophthongs changed:

æ > a   y > i

4. **All old English diphthongs were contracted:**

Bread /bre:ad/ > bread /bred/

5. **Appeared new diphthongs: /ai/, /ei/, /au/, /ou/**

Old English:

daʒ > d**ai**   greʒ > gr**ei**   draʒan > dr**au**en (draw)

boʒa > b**ou**e (bow)

6. **No parallelism between long and short monophthongs**

7. **Vowel sounds /a/, /o/, /e/ become always long in open syllables or before ld, mb, nd. All vowels before two consonants become short (except ld, mb, nd)**

6. **/g'/ sound disappears**

Spelling

1. Old runic letters æ, þ, ð, ʒ disappeared. **New letters j, w, v and z were introduced.**

ð > th   þ > w   æ > e   ʒ > y or g

2. Spelling stopped being exclusively phonetic and became closer to present day spelling, when the written form of the word differs from its pronunciation.

3. Appeared digraphs:

Ch (child); dg (bridge); gh (night); th (thunder); sh (shoe); ph (philosophy)

Ea (meal); ee (feet); oa (boat); oo (foot); ie (field); ou/ow (house)

4. Some words changed spelling: boc > book; mi > my; nou > now

Cumen > come   Sunu > sone   Lufu > love

Vocabulary

Over 10000 words were borrowed from French:

1. abstract nouns ending in the suffixes "-age", "-ance/-ence", "-ant/-ent", "-ment", "-ity" and "-tion", or starting with the prefixes "con-", "de-", "ex-", "trans-" and "pre-".

2. many nouns related to crown and nobility: *crown, castle, prince, count, duke, viscount, baron, noble, sovereign, heraldry*

3. government and administration: *parliament, government, governor*

4. court and law: *court, judge, justice, accuse, arrest, sentence, appeal, condemn, plaintiff, bailiff, jury, felony, verdict, traitor, contract, damage, prison*

- war and combat: *army, armour, archer, battle, soldier, guard, courage, peace, enemy, destroy*

- authority and control: *authority, obedience, servant, peasant, vassal, serf, labourer, charity*

- fashion and high living: *mansion, money, gown, boot, beauty, mirror, jewel, appetite, banquet, herb, spice, sauce, roast, biscuit*

- art and literature: *art, colour, language, literature, poet, chapter, question*

- more skilled trades adopted French names: *mason, painter, tailor, merchant*

- *Meals from meat: beef, mutton, pork, bacon, veal, venison*

- *Also, some English and French words merged to form new words:*

Gentle + man = gentleman

Often both English and French word stayed to form Synonyms:

Often both English and French word stayed to form synonyms:

infant - child, amity - friendship, battle - fight, liberty - freedom, labour - work, desire - wish, commence - start, conceal - hide, divide - cleave, close - shut, demand - ask, chamber - room, forest - wood, power - might, annual - yearly, odour - smell, pardon - forgive, aid – help

Sometimes French word and English word both stayed, but the meaning became not identical:

Hearty – cordial

House – mansion

Doom – judgement

Grammar

THE LANGUAGE BECOMES MORE ANALYTICAL, MANY SYNTHETICS FORMS DISAPPEARED.

1.   Appear perfect tenses:

   hath perced to the roote
   Inspired hath in every holt and heeth
   Hath in the Ram his halfe cours y-ronne
   hath holpen

2. Prepositions instead of suffixes:

droghte of Marche

Of Engelond

Changes in nominal system

 Nouns have only **2 cases**: common and genitive

(In Old English: *Nominative, Genitive, Dative, Accusative*)

More nouns begin to be declined as **a-stem** nouns, adding **–es (s)** in plural forms.

Middle English: a Closer Look

Early Middle English, the 13th century

þah **cleannesse** of **chasteté** <u>ne beo nawt</u> bune ed Godd,
   Though purity of chastity is no purchase from God,
ah beo geove of **grace, ungraciuse** stonde**ð** þer togeines
   but is given out of grace, ungraciously (they) stand there against
and mak**ieð** ham unwurðe to halden se heh þing,
   and make themselves unworthy to hold so high (a) thing,
þe null**eð** swinc þervore **bliðeliche polien**.
   who will not effort for it joyfully suffer.
                          (*Ancrene Wisse*, Part VI)

Late Middle English

Our Hoste **saugh** that he was dronke of ale,

And **seyde**: 'abyd, Robin, my leve brother,

Som bettre man shal telle us first another:

Abyd, and lat us werken thriftily.'

By goddes soul,' quod he, 'that wol nat I;

For I wol speke, or elles go my wey.'

Our Hoste answerde: 'tel on, a devel wey!

The Reve answerde and seyde, 'stint thy clappe,

Lat be thy lewed dronken harlotrye.

It is a sinne and eek a greet folye

To apeiren any man, or him diffame,

And eek to bringen wyves in swich fame.

Thou mayst y-nogh of othere thinges seyn.'

Thou art a fool, thy wit is overcome.'

Late Middle English – Early Modern English

- "Whan lucas the botteler **sawe** Gryflet soo lye";
- "telle me yf thow **sawest** a straunge best passe this waye"
- "That shalle be done **said** Arthur / and more by the feith of my body that neuer man shalle haue that office but he whyle he and I lyue"
- "thenne was there no more to saye"
- "loke eueryche of yow kynges **lete** make suche ordinaunce that none breke vpon payne of dethe"

Changes in verbal system

- **Appears category of aspect and order:**
  - "hadde he riden";
  - "whan the sonne was to reste / So hadde I spoken with hem everichon"
  - "Lord, to whom Fortune hath yiven Victorie"
  - "Singinge he was, or floytinge, al the day"
- Appears voice:
  - "whan it was wonne"

- **"Will" begins to be used increasingly as an auxiliary for Future:**

"thenne was Arthur wroth & saide to hym self / I will ryde to the chircheyard / & take the swerd with me that stycketh in the stone" (early Modern English, 15th century, Th. Malory).

New parts of speech

- **Gerund** emerges in Middle English as a development of Old English verbal noun with –ing ending and Old English present participle. This development wasn't complete by the end of the ME period, still lacking categories of tense and voice.

    I.   *"Al was fee simple to him in effect, / His purchasing mighte nat been infect."*

    II.   *What folk ben ye, that at myn hoom-**cominge** / Perturben so my feste with **cryinge***

Gerund in Early Modern English:

- *"and hadde their ansuere by mouthe and by **wrytynge** that tho two Kynges wold come vnto Arthur in all the hast that they myʒte"*

- **Participle I**, which existed in Old English, loses its ending –ende and acquires –inge.

    1.   *"His eyen stepe, and rollinge in his heed".*

    2.   *"His resons he spak ful solempnely, / Souninge alway thencrees of his **winning**".*

Strong and Weak Verbs

There starts migration of many strong verbs into the class of weak verbs:

	Old English	*New English*
I class	gripan	to grip
	glidan	to glide
II class	crēopan	to creep
	lēoȝan	to lie
III class	climban	to climb
	helpan	to help
VI class	bacan	to bake
	wæcnan	to wake

- **Weak verbs become more and more numerous**.
- **All <u>borrowed</u> words enter the group of weak verbs:**

to call
to want   Scandinavian borrowings
to guess

to pierce
to punish   French borrowings
to finish

to contribute
to create   Latin borrowings
to distribute

Most OE weak verbs finally become regular:

Deman – demde – demed ▢ to deem – deemed

Loocian – loocoed – loocod ▢ to look – looked

Fyllan – fyllde – fyllan ▢ to fill – filled

However, some weak verbs of the 1st class become irregular
modern verbs: cepan – cepte – cept (to keep – kept)

Etymology

Germanic	Scandinavian	Latin	French
Lord	Boy	Apple	Table
King	Earl	**Street**	Count
Deer	To give	**monk**	Royal
To read		**Formula**	Venison
When		**antenna**	Pork
Sun *(common Indo-European)*		**nucleus**	Liquor
understand			To inspire
			To comprehend

How to distinguish words of Latinate origin and native English or Scandinavian words?

- **80% of one-syllable** words are Germanic (either native or Norse)
- **80% of polysyllabic** words are Latinate
- **About 95% of academic** vocabulary is Latinate

Words with a **Romance** origin tend to have:

1. prefixes:

- a- (when it has a stressed pronunciation), ex-, in-, im-, e-, de-, ad-, ab-, ob-

2. suffixes:

- -ious, -ion, -ity, -ety, -us, -ous, -o, -que, -ic, -ude, -ia, -as, -ant, -ate, -ize, -em, -is, -ence, -ance, -ency, -ancy, -ine, -ent, -ant;

3. letter combinations:

- -ct-; -mps-; -ips-

Words with a **Germanic** origin tend to have

1. prefixes:

- be-, a- (when it has an unstressed pronunciation), for-, **wh**-,

2. suffixes:

- -ish, -some, -ly, -ing, -ful, -less, -red, -the, -lf, -mb, -hood, -dom, -ye

3. letter combinations:

- **kn, gh, ck.** Also: ow (there are exceptions), th (if the word doesn't show any signs of being Greek instead, like *"theme"*)

4. *k* is usually in words of Old Norse origin *(but „pork" is French)*

Give the correct dates for the main periods of English Language

Old English: 5th – 11th centuries

Middle English: 12th – 15th centuries

Early Modern English: The end of 15th – 18th centuries

Late Modern English: 18th century – present

The main characteristics of the noun system in Old English:

- Gender (род): Masculine, Feminine, Neuter

- Case (падежи): Nominal, **genitive**, dative, accusative and 8 **declensions**: a-stem, n-stem, s-stem, root-stem and others

- Number: singular and plural

Differences between the English of the Old English period and 13th-14th century English:

- **In Phonetics:**

1. Parallelism between long and short sounds ceased to exist!

2. Old English diphthongs all were contracted; 3. appeared modern diphthongs; 4. disappeared g' sound

- **In spelling:**

Appeared: letter "w", digraphs gh, th, ch, sh,

Disappeared: runic letters

- **In vocabulary:**

arrived a lot of new words from Old French, some of them replaced old English words (like council replaced witan), some became synonyms.