



EARLY MODERN ENGLISH PHONOLOGICAL AND MORPHOLOGICAL SYSTEM

LECTURE 4

I. Historical background to the New Standard

II. NE Vowel System:

- 1) Quantitative changes;
- 2) The Great Vowel Shift;
- 3) Development of ME short vowels;

III. NE Consonant System:

- Vocalisation of 'r';

IV. NE Morphology and Syntax.

- 1476 Caxton introduced the printing press to England;
- 1492 Columbus reached the ‘new World’;
- By 1500, the English language was such that native speakers of Modern English generally need no translations to understand it.

- The late Middle Ages (14th c.) had seen the triumph of the English language over French, and the establishment of a standard form of written English.
- A standard language is a taught language which each individual has to learn whatever his or her own pronunciation.

- Nonetheless **Latin** still had great prestige as the language of international learning;
- the three greatest scientific works published by Englishmen between 1600 and 1700 were all in Latin: **Gilbert's** book on magnetism (1600), **Harvey's** on the circulation of the blood (1628), and **Newton's Principia** (1689).

The reasons for the defeat of Latin

- **The Reformation period** (the establishment of Protestantism, VI-VII c.). **The translation of the Bible into English**, and the changeover from Latin to English in church services, raised the prestige of English. The more extreme Protestants regarded Latin as a “Popish” language, designed to keep ordinary people in ignorance and to maintain the power of priests.

- The increase in national feeling (XV-XVI c.) that led to a great interest and pride in the national language.
- The rise of social and occupational groups (skilled craftsmen, explorers, soldiers) which were eager to read and to learn in English. The spread of literacy among them.

But, while English was thus establishing its supremacy over Latin, it was at the same time more under its influence:

- the introduction of Latin loan-words into English, e.g. *vacuum*, *area*, *radius*;
- many words borrowed from French were given a Latin dress, e.g. NE *debt* and *doubt* (cf. Lat. *debitum* and *dubitare*).

Principal Quantitative Changes

a) **lengthening** before *-ss*, *-st*, *-ni*, *-ft*,

but the change didn't take place if
the voiceless fricative was
immediately followed by a vowel:

Cf. *pass* and *passage*.

b) **Shortening** before [ə, d, t, k]

- When ME ē was shortened before [ə, d, t, k], it became [ɛ], as in *breath*, *bread*, *sweat*.
- When ME ō was shortened before [k, t], it became [ʊ], as in *look* and *foot*.

The Great Vowel Shift (15-late 17th c.)

- the Great Vowel Shift (GVS) is a chain-like transformation of the whole ME long vowel system.
- The GVS affected only ME long vowels (e.g. *keep* vs *kept*).

- The changes were “independent” and effected regularly any stressed vowel in any position.
- The GVS didn’t add any new sounds to the vowel system. Thus, the modification of the words under the GVS was not reflect in their written forms.

Change illustrated			Examples	
ME	(Intermediate stage)	NE	ME	NE
i:		aɪ	<i>time</i> ['ti:mə] <i>finden</i> ['fi:ndən]	<i>time</i> <i>find</i>
e:		i:	<i>kepen</i> ['ke:pən] <i>field</i> ['fi:ld]	<i>keep</i> <i>field</i>
ɛ:	e:	i:	<i>street</i> [strɛ:t] <i>east</i> [ɛ:st] <i>stelen</i> ['stɛ:lən]	<i>street</i> <i>east</i> <i>steal</i>
a:		eɪ	<i>maken</i> ['ma:kən] <i>table</i> ['ta:blə]	<i>make</i> <i>table</i>
ɔ:	o:	ou	<i>stone</i> ['stɔ:n] <i>open</i> ['ɔ:pən] <i>soo</i> [sɔ:]	<i>stone</i> <i>open</i> <i>so</i>
o:		u:	<i>moon</i> [mo:n] <i>goos</i> [go:s]	<i>moon</i> <i>goose</i>
u:		au	<i>mous</i> [mu:s] <i>founden</i> ['fu:ndən] <i>now</i> [nu:]	<i>mouse</i> <i>found</i> <i>now</i>
au		ɔ:	<i>cause</i> ['kauz(ə)] <i>drawen</i> ['drauən]	<i>cause</i> <i>draw</i>

Rounding of vowels after /w /

- (18th c.), as in NE *swan* and *watch*.
- The change didn't take place if the vowel was followed by a velar consonant, as in *twang*, *wag*, *wax*.

NE Consonant System

Vocalisation of [r] = the weakening of [r]

- The sonorant [r] began to produce a certain influence upon the preceding vowels in Late ME.
- [r] made the preceding vowel more open and retracted:

- the cluster [er] changed to [ar]: e.g. OE *deorc* – Early ME *derk* – Late ME *dark*;
- although the change of [er] to [ar] was fairly common, it didn't affect all the words with the given sounds: cf. ME *servent*, *person*.

The vocalisation of [r] took place in the 16th or 17th c.

1) diphthongization.

In Early NE [r] was vocalised when stood after vowels, either finally or followed by another consonant. Losing its consonant character [r] changed into [ə], which was added to the preceding vowel as a glide to form a diphthong: e.g. ME *there* [θɛ:re] NE *there*.

2) lengthening

- Sometimes the only trace left by the loss of [r] was the compensatory lengthening of the preceding vowel: e.g. ME *arm* [arm] – NE *arm*.

3) change of quality

- under the influence of [r], vowels [e, i, u] became [ə]
- In the final unstressed position: ME *ridere* – NE *rider*.

- If [ə] produced by vocalisation of [r] was preceded by a diphthong, it was added to the diphthong to form a **triphthong**: e.g. ME *shour* [ʃu:r] – NE *shower*.
- [r] was not vocalised when doubled after consonants and initially: e.g. NE *errand*, *dry*, *read*.
- This process didn't take place in all varieties of English. Those varieties in which it was retained are called **rhotic**, (cf. *non-rhotic*)

Vocalisation of r and Associated Vowel Changes

Change illustrated		Examples	
	ME NE	ME	NE
After short vowels	o + r ɔ:	<i>for</i> [fɔr]	<i>for</i>
	a + r a:	<i>thorn</i> [θɔrn]	<i>thorn</i>
		<i>bar</i> [bar]	<i>bar</i>
		<i>dark</i> [dark]	<i>dark</i>
	i + r e + r u + r æ + r	<i>first</i> [first]	<i>first</i>
		<i>serven</i> ['servən]	<i>serve</i>
After long vowels		<i>fur</i> [fur]	<i>fur</i>
		<i>brother</i> ['brɒðər]	<i>brother</i>
	i: + r e: + r e: + r e: + r	<i>shire</i> ['ʃi:rə]	<i>shire</i>
		<i>beer</i> [be:r]	<i>beer</i>
		<i>ere</i> ['ɛ:r(ə)]	<i>ear</i>
		<i>there</i> ['θɛ:r(ə)]	<i>there</i>
		<i>beren</i> ['berən]	<i>bear</i>
	a: + r ɔ: + r o: + r u: + r	<i>hare</i> ['ha:rə]	<i>hare</i>
		<i>floor</i> [flɔ:r]	<i>floor</i>
		<i>moor</i> [mɔ:r]	<i>moor</i>
		<i>flour</i> [flu:r]	<i>flower</i>

Early Modern English Grammar

- In morphology the trend towards simplification continues.
- EME is characterized by an increase in the number of prepositions and auxiliaries (grammaticalization), as expected of a language becoming more analytic.

Nouns

- the *-es* of plurals and Gen Sg. was established;
- Plurals in *-en* and zero plurals are reduced to their modern extent by the end of the 17th c.;
- The *-es* Genitive was interpreted as *his* and this led to forms like *for Christ his sake*.

Personal pronouns:

- new forms arose: *it* and *its*;
- the use of *you* with a singular meaning was prompted by politeness and the influence of French.

Demonstrative pronouns:

- - *this* ‘close to the speaker’, *that* ‘close to the hearer’, *yon* ‘distant from both speaker and hearer’

The inflectional system of the verb underwent further simplification:

- in the 3d person the *–eth* ending is found in writing until the 17th c., but it is increasingly restricted to poetry. The *–s* form was already the usual form in speech by the 16th c.;
- There was a more limited use of the progressive and auxiliary verbs than there is now, however.

- **Adjectives** lost all endings except for in the comparative and superlative forms.

- In **syntax** the period (15th -17th c.) sees the continued movement towards an analytical language.
- Equally the influence of Latin grammar encourages more logic in the construction of a sentence. The idea that each sentence should have a subject and a predicate become dominant.