ME Phonology.
ME Morphology.

Lecture 3

- 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

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

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;

- **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 thriumph).

- **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);

- **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).

- **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.

ME dialects. Rise of the London dialect.

- the Northern
- The Central
- the Southern

■ 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)

ME vowel system. General characteristics.

French influence:

- The new diagraphs 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*).

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

Shortening

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

OE sūþerne – ME suþerne

Lengthening

- in the 13th c. short vowels were lengthened in open syllables.

- OE t**a**lu – t**ā**le
- Lengthening affected "a", "e", "o".

Qualitative changes: Dialect Changes

OE hlāf

- ME lāf (Northen)
- ME lōf (other dialects)

Y,y (long and short)

OE f**y**llan

- ME f**i**llen (Northen and East Midland groups)

- ME f**u**llen (West Midland and South Western)

- ME f**e**llen (South-Eastern group)

å (nasal, before "m", "n")
OE mån

- ME man (Northen, Southern, East Midland dialects)
- ME mon (West Midland)

Æ (short)

OE w**æ**s

- ME w**e**s (West Midland and South Eastern)

- ME w**a**s (other dialects)

Æ (long)

- OE sl**æ**pan – ME sl**ē**pen

Levelling of unstressed vowels

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

OE bind**a**n – ME bind**e**n

- New diphthongs arose during the transition from OE to ME from **vocalisations** of OE **w**, **g**, **h**, such as:
- ME **d<u>ai</u>** (cf. WS **dag**),
- ME **dr<u>aw</u>e(n)** (WS **dragan**),
- ME **sp<u>ew</u>e(n)** (cf. WS **speowian**),
- ME **s<u>au</u>gh (OE seah)**

- French loanwords supplied the inventory with the two new diphthongs **ui**, **oi**

ME **puint**,

ME **royal** .

- All OE diphthings were monophthongized in ME.

ME Morphology

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

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).

- 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.

- *The number of cases was reduced to two: **Common and Genitive.***

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.

The category of Gender

- a shift from **'grammatical'** to **'natural'** gender;

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.

- **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.

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.

■ The two key changes which affected ME verbs:

1) the reduction of inflectional endings,

2) the shift of strong verbs to the weak paradigm.

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 auxilaries (*be*, *have*, *do*) and the modal auxiliaries (*shall*, *should*, *will*, etc.).

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".

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.

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.

- 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.

ME Syntax

- As the inflectional system decayed, other devices were increasingly used to replace it.

- Word-order became more important: S-V-O word-order became the dominant one.

- The use of prepositions to perform the functions formely carried out by word-endings. E.g. prepositions like *in, with, by*.