

Chapter 5

Modern English

The following presentation is based on the descriptive analysis of English in terms of its basic features of phonology, morphology, and syntax.

1. Phonology:⁽¹⁾

Modern English may be adequately described in terms of these consonant phonemes:

	<i>Bi-labial</i>	<i>Labio-dental</i>	<i>Dental</i>	<i>Alveo-lar</i>	<i>Alveo-palatal</i>	<i>Velar</i>	<i>Glottal</i>
Stops	p b			t d		k g	
Affricates					tʃ dʒ		
Fricatives		f v	θ ð	s z	ʃ ʒ		h
Nasals	m			n		ŋ	
Lateral				l			
Semi-vowels				r	y	w	

The vowel phonemes of Modern English, from the point of view of a comparative study of Old and Modern English, may be presented as follows:

(1) For a more detailed presentation see "English Phonetics" by Albert G. Abdalla and Muhammad M. Ghaly. Anglo-Egyptian Bookshop 1962.

	<i>Front</i>	<i>Central</i>	<i>Back</i>
High	i		u
Mid.	e	ə	o
Low	æ	a	ɔ

The high central vowel (the barred i) has been left out because its occurrence in conversational speech is much less common than the other eight vowels. It is true that the two vowels /o/ and /ɔ /do not have a very high functional load, but they do occur in various other combinations in speech; with the semivowels and the mid central vowel / ə /as second elements.

Besides these simple vowels, there are these other complex vowels (or diphthongs):

/iy/	as	in	seek	/siyk/
/ey/	as	in	came	/keym/
/ay/	as	in	eye	/ay/
/ɔy/	as	in	oil	/ɔyl/
/aw/	as	in	cow	/kaw/
/ow/	as	in	so	/sow/
/uw/	as	in	food	/fuwd

Although the differences between the varieties of Modern English as spoken in Britain and the United States do not belong to the main discussion in this book, it is of importance here to point out that the following four centering diphthongs (or complex vowels) are of common occurrence in the standard dialect of Modern English in Britain:

/iə/	as	in	tear (n)	/tiə/
/eə/	as	in	tear (v)	/teə/
/ɔə/	as	in	tore	/tɔə/
/uə/	as	in	tour	/tuə/

Besides the consonants and vowels or the segmental phonemes, English speech has phonemes of stress and pitch (or suprasegmental phonemes).

There are four stress phonemes in English which may be represented in the following sentence:

“Bring me the book:”

bring miy də buk/.

the weakest of the four stresses being left unmarked.

Four pitch levels are distinguished in conversational English, the highest of which occurring only in excited speech. Following are examples of the basic pitch levels of spoken English.

“I don’t know.”

/ay dɔwn t ‘now/

Finally, there are four junctures in English speech: /+/ an open juncture as unknown /ən + nɔwn/, and $\uparrow \downarrow$ →the three terminal junctures, which may be represented in the following:

“He said, ‘This is Dick, the cook.’”

/hiy sed \uparrow dis iz dik → dəkuk \downarrow /.

→indicating a sustained intonation, \uparrow indicating a rising intonation, and \downarrow indicating a falling intonation.

2. Morphology:

Inflections:

Nouns:

The majority of English nouns may be represented by these three types:

Sg.	cat	dog	horse
Pl.	cats	dogs	horses
Pos.	cat's	dog's	horse's

The above list is intended to show that a noun in English has two forms, one for the singular, and another for the plural. The plural form presents a suffix which is either /-s/ in the case of cats, or /-z/ in the case of dogs, or still /iz/ in the case of horses. This suffix may be called the Plural morpheme, having the three members/ -z ~ -s ~ -iz/.

The plural morpheme is not the only suffix in the above list, since we have still another suffix morpheme indicating possession. This we may call the Genitive morpheme, and it also has these three members: /-z ~ -s~-iz/.

The Genitive morpheme is not so common as the plural morpheme in English. In fact, it is one of a very few plural suffix morphemes that have survived ever since the Old English period.

But the plural morpheme in English, unlike the Genitive morpheme, has more than three members:

/-in/ as in ox bks/ oxen /ɔksin/

child/tʃayld/children /tʃildrin/

/-Ø/ (meaning no plural suffix at all) a zero element as is sheep /ʃiyp/ sheep/ ʃiyp/.

Other types of plural nouns in English may have internal vowel change:

foot /fut/	feet /fiyt/
mouse /maws/	mice /mays/

Some other plural nouns have the plural morpheme/ -z - iz/, but final consonants which are different from final consonants for the singular:

wife /wayf/	wives/ wayvz/
house/ haws/	houses/ hawziz

Other members of the plural morpheme in English may be seen in a limited group of nouns:

crisis /kraysis/	crises /kraysiyz/
criterion /kraytieryən/	criteria /kraytiərya/

B. Adjectives:

As distinct from nouns, adjectives in English may have /-er/ / -est /-ist/ as suffixes:

clean/kliyn/	cleaner/kliynər/	cleanest /kliynəst/
few /fyuw/	fewer/fyuwər/	fewest /fyuwist/
good /gud/	better /betər/	best/best/
much /məts̩	more/ mɔər	most /mowst/

It is to be observed that the forms more, and most may come before some adjectives instead of the suffixes -er and -est.

C. Personal Pronouns:

The personal pronouns have preserved much of the complexity they had in Old English. In Modern English these pronouns may have three or four different forms:

I	me	my	mine
We	us	our	ours
You	you	your	yours
He	him	his	his
She	her	her	hers
It	it	its	
They	them	their	theirs

D. Verbs:

The English verbs have four forms:

<i>Present</i>	<i>Past</i>	
Stop	stopped	/stɒpt/
Rub	rubbed	/rəbd/
Wait	waited	/wéytid/

<i>Past Participle</i>	<i>Present Participle</i>	
Stoped	stopping	/stɒpiŋ/
Rubbed	rubbing	
Waited	waiting	

Present verbs have the morpheme/ -z ~ -s ~ -iz/ with the third person singular, which occurs with the great majority of verbs.

Past verbs have what may be called the Past morpheme, with these three main elements: /-d/, /-it/, /-id/; and the Past Participle

morpheme has also three members identical in form with the elements of the Past morpheme.

Irregular verbs have different shapes for both the Past and Past Participle morphemes. These are grouped by H.A. Gleason into 12 minor classes, and 41 subclasses. One of these subclasses is the very common English verb “be”⁽¹⁾

<i>Present Indicative</i>	<i>Preterit (Past)</i>
I am	I was
You are	You were
He, She, It is	He, She, It was
We, They are	We, They were
<i>Past Participle</i>	<i>Present Participle</i>
Been	being

The group of verbs which are traditionally called auxiliaries: can, will, and similar verbs still present a separate category, which may best be described partly under morphology and partly under syntax.

E. Stress and Intonation:

Stress and intonation of morphemes form an important part of the morphology of Modern English, but will not be dealt with here since so little is known at present of their structural significance into the system of Old English.

F. Derivation:

A. Nouns:⁽²⁾

Some of derivational affixes (prefixes and suffixes) that occur with nouns are:

(1) H.A Gleason, *An Introduction to Descriptive Linguistics*, 1955.

(2) See “English Phonetics” by Albert G. Abdalla and Mohamed M. Ghaly, pp. 73 - 113.

-ness	/nəs/	Cleverness
-er	/əɹ/	adviser
-ity	/iti/	university
-hood	/hud/	boyhood
-dom	/dəm/	kingdom
-ation	/eyʃən/	civilization
-th-	/θ/	warmth
-ism	/izəm/	mechanism

Of these the first two seem to occur with more forms (nouns) in conversational English than the other suffixes.

B. Verbs:

The most common affixes with verbs are:

-ize	/ayz/	civilize
-ate	/eyt/	complicate
-en	/in/	brighten
-fy	/fay/	testify
a-	/ə/	assure
en-	/in/	ensure
re-	/ri/	return
con-	/kən/	confirm
dis-	/dis/	disappear
mis-	/mis/	mistake

These are only some of the common affixes, some of which occur with nouns as well as with verbs:

conduct (n)	conduct (v)
mistake (n.v.)	
Distrust (n.v.)	

C. Adjectives:

The most common affixes are /-i/ -y as a suffix and /ðn/ on/ un- as a prefix : healthy, and unkind.

D. Compounds:

Compounds are usually nouns, and they usually have distinctive stress patterns; but their number has become much smaller in Modern English than in Old English.

3. Syntax:

In Modern English word order is of considerable importance to the syntactic structure of the language.

He can run

Can he run?

are a pair of English sentences whose meanings are different as a result of difference in word order accompanied by stress and intonation differences.

In the same way, the two sentences:

The cat saw the boy.

The boy saw the cat.

are two instances of differences in meaning resulting from differences of slot- filling in two sentences of identical syntactic structure.

It is this type of meaning difference due to different slot fillers that distinguishes the syntax of English as spoken today from that of Old English.

4. Vocabulary:

The study of the historical development of English vocabulary with its borrowings from other languages, especially Latin and French, is a very interesting study. Our main concern here will be the study of the linguistic changes that have occurred in the language for the last 15 hundred years. But a discussion of the many borrowings in English will be presented later on.