

Chapter 8

Early Modern English

1. Standard English:

The dialects of Middle English differed greatly from each other, and these differences were reflected in the various forms of writing the language until about 1500. At about this time one form of written English began to displace all the others. This form of writing, which we may call Standard Written English was based on the spoken dialect of London.

When we speak now of Standard English, we mean that dialect of English, which may sometimes be called the Literary Dialect usually based on Standard written English. This does not mean that dialects do not exist in Modern spoken English. In fact, there are dialect areas in England today which correspond roughly to the four main dialect divisions of Old and Middle English although the R.P. (Received Pronunciation) is considered by many English people as the Standard spoken language of England. This R.P. is actually based on the pronunciation of the inhabitants of the Southern and Southwestern parts of England.

The situation in the United States also presents many dialectal differences. We cannot talk of one dialect spoken by people all over the United States since one can distinguish at least three dialect areas there.

So, this dialectal diversity of English has always been there. In fact, such a diversity is characteristic of all living languages.

The Standard English we mean here is that variety of English based on the literary or written language.

This standard language began to develop in the course of the fifteenth century, based on the Midland variety of Middle English centered around the London area.

The main factors that led to the emergence of this standard dialect were:

1- The East Midland dialect was spoken by a greater number of people than any other dialect of Middle English.

2- This standard dialect was the dialect of London, the capital and commercial center of England. Its prestige spread to all the other counties as it was the seat of the court, the upper class, and the center of the social and intellectual activities of the whole country.

3- Among the minor factors that helped in the establishment of this standard are: Cambridge, Wycliffe; and Chaucer. The two universities of Cambridge and Oxford were at this period important centers of learning. But the influence that may have been exerted by Cambridge was greater than that of Oxford, because Cambridge was in the East Midland area and Oxford was on the border between the Midland and Southern dialect areas. Wycliffe was a translator of the Bible and the author of a great number of prose writings, which had more in common with the Oxford dialect than the dialect of the Midlands.

Chaucer was the greatest poet of Middle English, and the best known of the English authors in the pre-Shakespearean era. But

Chaucer's language, though important, does not reflect the characteristics of the Midland dialect as clearly as do the records, letters, and papers by business men.

Among the other contributing factors to the establishing of Standard English were the introduction of printing, the spread of education, the increase in communication, and the development of Social consciousness.

Caxton was the first English printer, and he used the English of London in printing many translations. The spread of Standard English may be attributed to Caxton more than to any other single person.

Education was influential in spreading Standard English through the formal teaching of grammar at schools as well as through the acquiring of many traits of this standard dialect by the great number of readers of books, newspapers, and magazines.

The increase in communication, like education, acted as an influential means of bringing this standard dialect within the reach of an evergrowing number of the native speakers of English.

With the growth of social consciousness, social mobility becomes more possible, and the lines between social classes become less and less rigid. This makes it possible for members of one class to move to a higher one, mainly through the adoption of its speech habits.

II. The Phonology:

1. The Consonants:

Fricatives:

The fricative consonant [Ø] become [ð] in some words:

	<i>Middle English</i>	<i>Ear. Modern English</i>
The	[Øə]	[ðə]
Them	[Øem]	[ðem]
That	[Øat]	[ðæt]

The two fricative consonants [f] and [s] suffered the same change that occurred to [Ø]: they became - v and - z respectively in some cases:

His	[his]	[hiz]
Faces	[fa : səs]	[feysiz]
Of	[ɔf]	[əv]

The fricatives [s] and [z] became [ʃ] and [ʒ] respectively when they were followed by [y], usually in words borrowed from French:

	<i>E. Modern English</i>	<i>Modern English</i>
special	[spesyal]	[speʃəl]
vision	[vizyun]	[viʒən]

The affricates [tʃ] and [dʒ] in Modern English were in early Modern English [t] and [d] followed by [y]:

fortune	[fɔrtyun]	[fɔ: (r) tʃən]
cordial	[kɔrdyal]	[kɔrdʒəl] (US.)

The voiceless velar fricative [x] of Middle English has been completely lost to Modern English:

Modern English

saugh	[sawx]	[sɔ:] "saw"
night	[nixt]	[nayt]

In some cases Middle English [x] became [f]:

laughen	[lawxən]	[la : f] or [læf]
tough	[tu : x]	[tə f]

The consonant [r] was trilled in Middle English, but it has become a fricative in some words in British English:

red, and write.

In American English it has become a glide.

bird, and teacher.

The Consonant: [l]

The consonant [l] has been lost in Modern English if it occurred in Middle English before [k], or [f]:

E. Modern English

Modern English

Talk	[tɔlk]	[tɔ: k]
Folk	[fɔlk]	[fowk]
Palm	[palm]	[pa : m]
Half	[half]	[ha : f] or [hæf]

Cluster Simplification:

The Middle English consonants which occurred in identical clusters of two (geminate) were either initial (at the beginning of a word), medial (in the middle of a word), or final (at the end of a word).

The medial clusters which have been simplified ever since the Middle English period were geminates. Gemination or تشدید was characteristic of the consonants in both Old and Middle English.

	<i>E. Modern English</i>	<i>Modern English</i>
frogge	[frɔgga]	[frɔg], or [frag]
Sitten	[sittən]	[sit]

Initial clusters were simplified through the loss of the first consonant. The double consonants [gn-], [kn-], and [wr-] became [n-], [n-], and [r-] in that order.

	<i>E. Modern English</i>	<i>Modern English</i>
ganwen	[gnawaən]	[nɔ:]
knight	[knixt]	[nayt]
writen	[wri : tən]	[rayt]

Finally the clusters [-mb] and [-ŋg] become [-m] and [ŋ] respectively:

domb	[dumb]	[dəm]
thing	[Øiŋg]	[Øiŋ]

2. The Vowels:

In tracing the development of vowels from Middle English to Modern English, we have to bear these considerations in mind:

1- Short vowels did not change much ever since the Old English period. The following five short vowels were a part of Old English phonology in the same way that they form the majority of short vowels that make up any dialect of present - day English.

<i>Vowel</i>	<i>Old English</i>	<i>Middle English</i>	<i>Modern English</i>
æ	catte [kætte]	catte [kattə]	cat [kæt]
e	bedd [bedd]	bed [bedd]	bed [bed]
i	scip [šip]	schip [šip]	ship [šip]
o	folc [fɔlk]	folk [fɔlk]	folk [fowk]
u	full [full]	full [full]	full [ful]

It will be noticed that the vowel [æ] underwent some change in the Middle English period. It became [a] during the Middle English period (in Chaucer's writings), and was changed again to [æ] in Modern English. The Old English [ɔ] did not change in Middle English, but in Modern English it changed to the diphthong [ow].

2- Long vowels changed from Old English to Middle English; but the greatest change suffered by long vowels occurred in the period between Middle and Early Modern English. This accounts for the fact that Shakespear's pronunciation (if interpreted correctly) would sound much nearer to present - day English than the sounds of Chaucer's poetry or prose. This great change in the long vowels of English has been called by Jespersen "The Great Vowel Shift"; and this great change is supposed to have been completed by the beginning of the sixteenth century.

This vowel change has been reflected even in the names given to the vowels of the English alphabet. The first letter of the alphabet in English (written a) is called [ey], while it is called [a] in most European languages. The fifth letter of the alphabet is called [iy] (written e) instead of [ey] or [e:] as in most West

European languages. Finally, the ninth letter i (pronounced [i:] in most languages in Western Europe, is called an [ay] in English.

If we take Chaucer's writings as representative of Middle English, Shakespeare's works may also be taken as illustrative of Early Modern English.

The Great Vowel Shift:

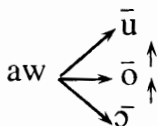
What happened during the Great Vowel Shift may be described in terms of the two processes of Raising and Diphthongization. A long vowel was raised, and if it could not be raised it was diphthongized. These two processes will be dealt with first in the back vowels, then in the front vowels, and finally in a and æ:

1- The Back Vowels:

The low back vowel [ɔ] was raised to [o], the mid back vowel, and the mid back was raised to the high back vowel [ū].

In most cases, the high back vowel was diphthongized: [ū] became [aw]. Sometimes [aw] was again simplified and became [ɔ] .

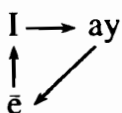
This may be illustrated by the following diagram:



<i>Middle English sound</i>	<i>Chaucer</i>	<i>Shakespeare</i>	<i>Now</i>
ō in “goat”	[gōta]	[gōt]	[gowt]
ō in “food”	[fōdə]	[fud]	[fuwd]
ū in “house”	[hūs]	[haws]	[haws]
aw in “fought”.	[fawxt]	[fōt]	[fōt] or [fɔt]

2- The Front Vowels:

The change in the back vowels seems to have proceeded more regularly than it occurred with the front vowels. Here we have one vowel raised and the other diphthongized; and the simplification of the diphthong did not always take place.



<i>Middle English sound</i>	<i>Chaucer</i>	<i>Shakespeare</i>	<i>Now</i>
ē in “sweet”	[swētə]	[swīt]	[swiyt]
ī in “five”	[fīf]	[fayv]	[fayv]
æy in “sail”	[sæyl]	[seil]	[seyl]

The mid front vowel [ē] was raised to [ī] before Shakespeare's time. The high front [ī] was diphthongized to become [ay]. The Middle English diphthong [æy], which may have alternated with [ay], was simplified to a “pure” long [ē], which later became [ey].

3. The Vowels ā and æ:

The Middle English vowel [ā] sometimes developed into [ē] in Early Modern English, and then to [ey]:

ā in “name” [nāmə] [nēm] [neym]

The Middle English vowel [æ] also developed first into [ē] before it became [ī], and then [iy]:

æ in "deed" [dæd] [dēd] [dīd] [diyd]

But both [ā] and [æ] have had sometimes similar courses of development, and each changed to [ea].

ā in "spare" [sparə] [speə(r)]

æ in "bear" [bæra] [beə(r)]

Still sometimes [æ] has changed into [e]; and [ā] into [e:] or [e]

æ in "death" [dæθ] [deθ]

ā in "small" [smālə] [smawl] [smɔl]

Unstressed Vowels:

The final unstressed - e [-ə] was lost in words like:

E. Middle English *Modern English*

sune [sunə] son [sən]

wente [wentə] went [went]

The unstressed -e- in - es of plural nouns, and in -ed of past verbs was lost in most cases:

	things	[θɒŋgəs]	things	[θɪŋz]
	bokes	[bo ; kəs]	books	[buks]
but	classes	[kla: səs]	classes	[kla: siz]
	loved	[luvəd]	loved	[lɒvd]
	loked	[lɔ:kəd]	looked	[lukt]
But	wedded	[weddəd]	wedded	[wedid]

Finally, some vowels were stressed in Middle English, but have lost their stress ever since; many of these words came from French:

corage	[kura : dʒə]	courage	[kəridʒ]
kingdom	[hiŋɡdɔ: m]	kingdom	[hiŋdəm]
welcome	[welkumə]	welecme	[welkəm]

3. Phonetic Notation:

Following are the first 18 lines of Hamlet's soliloquy, with a phonetic notation representing what is understood by historians of English to have been the pronunciation of English in Shakespear's days. The line numbers follow the Globe and Cambridge editions.

I. ii. 129 - 143:

Oh that this too too solid flesh, would melt

O: ðæt ðis tu: tu: sɒlid flɛʃ wu: ld melt

Thaw, and ,resolve itselſe into a Dew:

θə ænd rɪzɒlv ɪtsɛlf ɪntu:ə dyu:

or that the everlasting had not fixt

ɔr ðæt di evərlæstiŋ hæd nɒt fɪkst

His Cannon gainst Selfe-slaughter. O God, O God!

hɪz kænən ɡæɪnst self slɔ:tr o; ɡɒd o : ɡɒd

How weary, stale, flat, and unprofitable

hæw we: ri stæ: l flæt ənd ʌnpɹɒfɪtəbl

Seemes to me all the uses of this world?

si: mɪz təmi :ɔ: l ðəyu : siz əv ðis world

Fie on't2 Oh fie,fie, tis an unweeded Garden
 Fæont o: fæy fæy tizæn unwi:did gærdn
 That grows to Seed: Things rank and grosse in Nature
 ðæt gro:z tæsi:d θinnz ræŋkænd gro:s in ne:tjæ
 Possesse it meerely. That it should come to this:
 Pæzes it mi:rli ðæt it ŝu:ld Kum tæ ðis.
 But two months dead: Nay, not so much; not two,
 but tu: munθs ded næy nɔt so: mutʃ nɔt tu:
 So excellent a king, that was to this
 so: eksələnt a kiŋ ðæt wæz tɔ ðis
 Hiperion to a Satyre so loving to my Mother
 hæype:ry æn tu:ə sætir so: luviŋ tæ mæy muðæ
 That he might not beteeme the windes of heaven
 ðæt hi: mæyt nɔt biti:m ðə windz əv hevn
 Visit her face too roughly. Heaven and Earth
 Vizit ær fe:s tu: rufli hevn and erθ
 Must I remember : why she would hang on him
 must æy rimembr hwæy ŝi: wu:ld hæŋ æn im
 As if encrease of Appetite had growne
 əz if inkre:s əv æpətæyt had gro:n
 By what if fed on; and yet within a month?
 bæy hwæt it fed ən ənd yet wiðin əmonθ

Let me not thinke on't: Frailty, the name is woman.

Let mi:nɒt θɪnkɒnt fræylti ðæy ne:m iz wumən

The seventeenth and eighteenth centuries saw a few vowel changes, which may be summarized as follows:

1. The O.E. vowel [æ] in the words cleene [Klæne] “clean” and see [sæ], and similar words, became [ē] in Middle English. Later the vowel [ē] became [i:] during the seventeenth or the eighteenth century.

So, While the word cleene was pronounced [klæne] in Chaucer’s time, it came to be pronounced [klēn] in Shakespeare’s days. Now it is pronounced [kliyn]. This may be represented as follows

<i>O. E</i>	<i>Chaucer</i>	<i>Shakespeare</i>	<i>Present day</i>
Clæne	cleene	clene	clean
[klæne]	[klænə]	[klēn]	[Kliyn]
sæ	see	sea	sea
[sæ]	[sæ]	[sē]	[siy]

2. About the same time the vowel [u] became [a] in words like blood. It was pronounced [blōd] in Middle English, then it became [blūd]. In shakespeare’s time it was [blud]; and it was probably during the second half of the eighteenth century that it was pronounced [bləd]. It has continued to be pronounced in this way until the present day among educated native speakers of English.

3. The eighteenth century also saw the diphthongization of long vowels:

		<i>Early Modern</i>	<i>Modern</i>
[ū]	[uw]	goose [gūs]	[guws]
[ō]	[ow]	stone [stōn]	[stown]
[ē]	[ey]	name [nēm]	[neym]
[ī]	[iy]	deed [dīd]	[diyd]

It is an accepted fact among historians of English that Old and Middle English had long vowels that were “pure” and did not have any of the two glides [y] or [w] as a second element. Now most American linguists agree that there are no “pure” long vowels in Modern Standard English, and that such vowels actually have as a second element a glide: either [y] or [w].

III. The Morphology and Syntax:

There are no radical differences between the morphology and syntax of Middle English as compared with those of the Early Modern English period. The great grammatical changes which simplified the inflections of Old English had already taken place. Shakespeare's language, as well as that of the Authorized Version of the Bible (1611), does not differ from Modern English in the same way that Chaucer's language does. Nor does Shakespeare's language differ much from that of Chaucer in so far as morphology and syntax are concerned, in spite of the many phonological differences already referred to in the preceding section of this chapter.

1. Nouns:

In early Modern English nouns were inflected for the genitive and for the plural. There was the suffix - s for the genitive

singular and for the plural. Nouns with a final voiced consonant (except [z], [ʒ], and [dʒ]) had [-z] as the genitive singular suffix and the plural suffix.

	<i>Middle English</i>	<i>Early Modern English</i>
Sing.	son [sunə]	son [sən]
Sing Gen.	sons [sunə s]	son's [sənz]
Pl.	sones [sunə s]	sons [sənz]

Nouns with a voiceless final consonant (except [s], [ʃ], and [tʃ]) had [-s] as a suffix for the genitive singular and the plural:

Sing.	book [bo : k]	book [buk]
Sing Gen.	bookes [bo : kəs]	book's [buks]
Pl.	bookes [bo : kəs]	books [buks]

Other nouns (with the final consonants [s], [z], [ʃ], [ʒ], [tʃ], and [dʒ]) had [-əz] or [-iz] as the suffix for the genitive singular and the plural.

Sing.	bush [buʃ]	bush [buʃ]
Sing Gen.	bushes [buʃəs]	bush's [buʃiz]
Pl.	bushes [buʃəs]	bushes [buʃiz]

Nouns like wife and life had the genitive singular the same as the other singular forms and distinct from the plural, in so far as the final consonant of the word is concerned:

	<i>Middle English</i>	<i>Early Modern English</i>
Sing.	wif [wi : f]	wife [wayf]
Sing Gen.	wives [wi : vəs]	wife's [wayvz]
Pl.	wives [wi : vəs]	wives [wayvz]

Nouns like man, foot, and goose had the plural with a different vowel from that of the singular form:

Sing.	man [man]	man [mæn]
Sing Gen.	mennes [mannəs]	man's [mænz]
Pl.	men [men]	men [men]
Gen.	mennes [mennəs]	men's [menz]

Some nouns had the plural in [-ən]. Such forms have been reduced to three in present-day English; but even in Shakespeares time they were at least double that number. The forms eyen (eyes), shoon (shoes), and kine (cows) were used by Shakespeare side by side with the more usual forms. Today, we have oxen, children, and brethren.

In Modern English the genitive singular has the apostrophe and (s) as a writing symbol for [-s, -z, -əz]. This -s originally comes from Old English his, marking the genitive.

The Early Modern English period also saw the frequent use of the group possessive (= or the periphrastic genitive) as may be seen from such constructions:

The King of England's niece.

The Chief actor in the play's illness.

It was commoner before that time to see the first phrase in a different shape:

"The king's niece of England"

Adjectives:

Comparative adjectives in Early Modern English had forms that had different vowels from the first degree adjectives: lenger (long), and strengier (strong).

Shakespeare's language had some comparative and superlative forms of adjectives which are no longer used today: e.g. *honester* (= more honest) and *violentest* (= most violent).

Double comparatives and double superlatives are also found in Shakespeare's words:

more larger = larger
 most boldest = boldest
 most unkindest = most unkind

Pronouns:

The Early Modern English period saw the disappearance of these forms of the second person singular *thou*, *thy*, and *thee* during the sixteenth century; and the originally nominative plural form *ye* disappeared in the seventeenth century.

First Person:

The development of the vowels of the First Person from Middle English proceeded according to the same changes that occurred to long vowels: [i :] became [ay].

	<i>Middle English</i>	<i>Early Modern English</i>
Sing.Nom.	I [i :]	I [ay]
Gen.	my [mi :] myn [mi : n]	my [may] mine [mayn]
Obj.	me [me :]	me [me:]
Pl. Nom.	we [we :]	wi [wi :]
Gen.	oure [u : rə] or our [u : r]	our [awə (r)] or [aə (r)]

Second Person:

In the thirteenth century the singular forms thou, thee were used usually for addressing people of lower rank, and the plural forms ye, your and you were for superiors. The plural form ye was originally the nominative case, and you the accusative or the objective.

	<i>M.E.</i>	<i>E.Mn.E.</i>	<i>Mn. E.</i>
Now	thou [øu:]	[ðaw], [yi:]	
		[yu:]	[yuw]
Gen.	thyn [øi:n]	[ðay], [ðayn]	
	thyn [øi:n]	[yu:r]	[yuə(r)]
obj.	[ø:]	[ði:], [yu:]	[yuw]
Pl.	<i>M.E.</i>	<i>E. Mn. E.</i>	<i>Mn. E.</i>
Nom.	ye [ye:]	[yi:], [yu:]	[yuw]
	your [yu:r]	[yu:r]	[yuə(r)] or
Gen.			[y əa]
Obj.	you [yu:]	[yu:]	[yuw]

Third Person:

The masculine form of the Third person singular was he [he :] in Middle English, and the feminine form was she [ʃe :]. The first form became [hiy], and the second [ʃiy] in Modern English. The most important new development in the neuter form of the Third person singular was the appearance of its during the early Modern English period. Before the introduction of its, the form his was sometimes used instead, Thus Portia in “The Merchant of Venice” says “How far that little candle throws his beams”, instead of the modern form its.

Sometimes Shakespeare used it (and not his) instead of its. Thus, when Horatio describes the ghost in “Hamlet”, he says, “It lifted up it head”.

The first recorded instance of the use of its is dated 1597. The development of Third Person Singular (neuter) may be shown as follows:

	<i>Middle English</i>	<i>Modern English</i>
Nom.	hit [hit] it [it]	[it]
Gen.	his [his]	[hit], [it], [hiz], [its]

The pronoun its was spelled with an apostrophe (it's) until about the beginning of the nineteenth century.

The Pronoun “Who”:

In Early Middle English dæt (that) was used as a relative pronoun. In the sixteenth century which was also used as a relative pronoun; sometimes where we would use who in present-day English. This use survives in “Our Father which art in heaven”. This use of who as a relative pronoun has not been discovered before the sixteenth century. In Chaucer whos (whose) and whom were used as relative pronouns (but not who as a relative pronoun).

Verbs:

The third person singular in the southern parts of England had the suffix-eth all through the Middle English period. In the fifteenth century, verbs with the suffix-s began to appear. In the “Trial Scene” in “The Merchant of Venice”, Portia says of mercy:

It blesseth him that gives and him that takes...

At the end of the sixteenth century, the suffix-s was sometimes used with the third person plural. In "The Merchant of Venice", again we find:

"Whose own hard dealings teaches them suspect the deeds of others".

The Old English verbs are divided into "strong" and "weak" verbs. During the Middle English period many strong verbs became weak. In Shakespeare's writings we find that these verbs are "weak" : crow - crowed, crowd - crowded, dread - dreaded, sprout - sprouted, and wade - waded.

The verbs in the Bible which were sometimes weak and sometimes strong are:

sow - sowed (and sew), gnaw - gnawed (and gnew), and help - helped (and holp)

These "weak" forms were also common in the seventeenth century: blowed (instead of blew), growed (instead of grew), shined (instead of shone), shrinked (instead of shrank), and swunged (instead of swang).

These verbs had different past tenses from the forms of the past in Modern English:

E.Mn.E. brake spake drave tare bare bote bernt sware.

Mn. En. broke spoke drove tore bore bit burnt swore.

The development of the two verbs "shall" and "will" from Middle English to Modern English is given below:

	<i>Middle English</i>	<i>Modern English</i>
Pres. Ind. Sing	1 shal [ʃal]	[ʃæl]
	2 shalt [ʃalt]	[ʃæl]
	3 shal [ʃal]	[ʃæl]
Pl.	shulle (n) [ʃullan]	[ʃæl]
	shul [ʃul], shal [ʃal]	[ʃæl]
Past. Ind. Sing	1 sholde [ʃo : ldə]	[ʃud]
	2 sholdest [ʃo : ldeəst]	[ʃud]
	3 sholde [ʃo : ldə]	[ʃud]
Pl.	sholde (n) [ʃo : ldən]	[ʃud]
	<i>Middle English</i>	<i>Modern English</i>
Pres. Ind. Sing	1 wil [wil] wol [wul]	[wil]
	2 wilt [wilt] wolt [wult]	[wil]
	3 wil [wil] wol [wul]	[wil]
Pl.	wille (n) [willan] will	[wil]
	wol [wul] [wil]	
Past. Ind. Sing	1 wolde [wo : ldə]	[wud]
	2 woldest [wo : ldəst]	[wud]
	3 wolde [wo : ldə]	[wud]
Pl.	wolde (n) [wo : ldən]	[wud]

Finally, there are four syntactic differences between Early Modern English and English of the present-day:

1. The absence of the auxiliary (or the helping verb) in such constructions : "Goes the King hence today?" (Macbeth).
Modern English : "Does the King go hence today?"

2. The occurrence of the Impersonal construction like:

"It dislikes me" instead of

"I dislike"

3. The scarcity of the Progressive forms of the verb, or the forms with the suffix-ing:

Polonius asks: "What do you read, my Lord?" instead of :

"What are you reading, my Lord?"

4. The development of the auxiliaries, most of which were used in Old English as full verbs: will, shall, can, could, may, and ought.