

The dialectal differentiations in the old and modern English

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Abstract

Middle English was characterized by significant changes in vocabulary, grammar and pronunciation. His vocabulary greatly increased because of French borrowings after the Norman Conquest. Middle English has lost most of the endings, which led to a significant simplification of grammar. Its syntax became more strict, and the word order was mostly fixed.

Аннотация

Среднеанглийский язык характеризовался значительными изменениями в словарном составе, грамматике и произношении. Его словарь сильно увеличился из-за французских заимствований после норманнского завоевания. Среднеанглийский язык претерпел утрату большинства окончаний, что привело к значительному упрощению грамматики. Его синтаксис стал более строгим, а порядок слов был в основном фиксированным.

Key words: enabling, ability, expressing, aspects, advertising

Ключевые слова: мочь, навык, выражение, аспекты, объявление

Germanic dialects

English began as a dialect of Germanic, the language of the ancient Germans. The origins of English go back to the middle of the fifth century when the Germanic tribes (the Angles, the Saxons, the Jutes, the Frisians) began to settle in Britain. English received its name from the name of the Angles. The languages of the Celtic tribes (the Britons, the Scots, the Picts) who settled in Britain before that were the basis on which Welsh, Scottish and Irish developed. The Anglo-Saxons who settled in Britain in the fifth and sixth centuries spoke Germanic. With time, their speech patterns and pronunciation changed, and their language (Anglo-Saxon, i.e., Old English), became very different from the language spoken by the continental Germanic tribes. But many English and German words are still quite similar. Compare: Friday – Freitag; daughter – Tochter; son – Sohn; field – Feld. It is interesting to note that early borrowings from the Celtic language can be found mostly in some English geographical names. For example, the word "avon" means "river" in Celtic and has remained in the names of several rivers in England (the Avon, the Avon River). The name "Britain" was originally formed from "Britons", the name of one of the Celtic tribes. In the course of its history, English was influenced by other languages and borrowed from them. Such languages as Latin, Old Norse and French had great influence on the development of the English language and were major sources of loanwords.

A brief outline of the history of English

The history of English is divided into three main periods: Old English (before 1100); Middle English (from 1100 till 1500); Modern English (after 1500). (The dates are approximate.) The changes that the English language underwent in each historical period did not start or end simultaneously throughout the country. Old English was heavily inflected and had a complex system of declension of nouns and adjectives, a complex system of conjugation of verbs, flexible syntax, and rather free word order. Words were usually spelled the way they were pronounced; as a result, words could have several spelling variants depending on differences in pronunciation.

Early Old English (until the 9th century) used the runic alphabet; some of the runic letters were used almost until the twelfth century. Transition to the [1,15] Latin alphabet took place in the Late Old English period.

Middle English

Middle English was characterized by significant changes in vocabulary, grammar, and pronunciation. Its vocabulary greatly increased due to French borrowings after the Norman Conquest. Middle English underwent the loss of most inflections, which resulted in significant simplification of grammar. Its syntax became stricter, and its word order was mostly fixed.

A series of changes in the quality of the long vowels, known as the Great Vowel Shift, started in the 15th century. Most of the long vowels changed their articulation; some of them became diphthongs; in some cases the vowel sounds

were shortened, merged, etc. For the most part, these phonetic changes were not reflected in spelling, which led to considerable differences between the pronunciation of English words and their spelling.

The Middle English period ended in the second half of the 15th century when printing was introduced in England in 1476. Printing preserved the spelling of English words in print and gradually led to uniformity in English spelling.

The earliest attestations of London English are in Latin documents and are as a rule proper and personal names, above all street names. From these sources one can conclude that early London English showed a close affinity with that of Essex which is immediately north-east of the city (Samuels 1972: 165). This assumption is confirmed by documents such as the proclamation of Henry III in 1258 which is written in English and which shows the typical distinction of late Old English /æ:/ which is characteristic of Essex. There are also features which point to the counties of Middlesex and Surrey (in the south).

In the late 13th and in the course of the 14th century a re-orientation would seem to have occurred away from southern forms towards those typical of the midlands. The transition, inasmuch as it is [1,18] attested, is characterized by mixed varieties which show various features of surrounding dialects (Samuels 1972: 166). For instance the ending -and(e) is found for the present participle in London texts, something which is probably due to the influence of Norfolk and Suffolk. Nonetheless by the time of Chaucer — late 14th century — there is a

preponderance of midland forms. These in fact increase in the 15th century, especially after English replaced Latin and French as an official language (after 1430). Among the forms of midland origin which entered London English were many of ultimately northern origin but which had spread into the south. For instance Chaucer still has a /j-/ at the beginning of the verb 'give', e.g. yaf 'gave'. This is replaced in the 15th century by an initial /g-/ which has its source in a Scandinavian pronunciation in the north of the country. The same is true of an initial /ð-/ in forms of the third person plural (Chaucer has hir(e) which corresponds to the later their(e)).

The relative significance of dialects in the formation of London English is determined by the [2,19]immigration for different directions into the city. For example there were connections with Essex to begin with, later in the 14th century movements from the relatively thickly populated areas of Norfolk and Suffolk are to be seen. By the late 14th century the relationship was shifted in favour of migrants from the central midlands. Such demographic movements can be quoted as evidence for details of language change in this period which have no apparent motivation (Samuels 1972: 169). This would appear to hold especially for the forms of suffixes which indicated the present participle and which went through a change from -ind(e) to and(e) and finally to yng(e), ing(e). A language internal reason for the adoption of a regional variant of a form can be seen in the case of the pronouns of the third person plural as the midland forms in th- (from Scandinavian) were helpful in disambiguating the pronouns of the third person, singular and plural, [3,20]the supremacy of midland forms in the formation of the late Middle English London dialect had a reason which should not be underestimated: the midland variety of Middle English, because of its central

position in the country, represented a comprehensible form for a large number of speakers. Leith (1983: 38f.) views the east midland variety as a kind of lingua franca in a triangle between London, Oxford und Cambridge, which was also used as a means of communication between the students who travelled to these cities to study. This function as a means of communication would seem to have held less for the geographically peripheral forms such as East Anglia and Surrey or Kent (Wakelin 1977: 26), a fact which would explain the decreasing influence of these varieties in the capital. A side effect of the demographic movements of the late Middle English period is an increased awareness of dialect differences and conversely of the notion of a standard. This awareness can be seen with Chaucer, who caricatured speakers from the north in the Reeve's Tale, and it continued to develop in the early modern period and is attested by many authors including Shakespeare for instance in the three nations scene in Henry the Fifth in which he shows awareness of the English of the Celtic regions of Britain.

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