

# **History of English (2): Middle English to Shakespeare and the Bible**

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# England around 1400

- Three languages were spoken in England in 1400:

- **Latin**

- The language of the Church

- **French (Norman French)**

- Chaucer's prioress:

French she spoke

After the school of Stratford atte Bowe

For French of Paris was to her unknowe.

- **English**

- The language of the common people
- And of Chaucer

# Language change is regular

- **Phonetic change:** Grimm's law, Verner's law
  - Suprasegmentals too: e.g. rising intonation
- **Morphological change:** e.g. loss of inflections in ME
- **Syntactic:** e.g. the simple/continuous aspect distinction
  - Polonius (to Hamlet): “*What do you read, my lord?*”
  - Modern: “*What are you reading?*”
  - applies to **all** tenses of **all** process verbs
- **Semantics:** words ‘carve up’ semantic fields differently at different times: cf. J. Trier, *The Linguistic Field* and H. Gipper, *Sessel oder Stuhl*, both in Hanks (2008): *Lexicology*.
- But **lexical** changes (changes in word meaning) are not predictable.

# Grimm's Law

- IE /p/ → Germanic /f/
  - Latin *pedem, pater* : Gmc *foot, father*
- IE /k/ → Germanic /h/
  - Latin *canem*, Greek *kuon*, Irish *cu* : Gmc *Hund, hound*
- IE /g/ → Germanic /k/
  - Latin *gelidus* : English *cold*, German *kalt*

But not if preceded by /s/

Importance of describing the environment precisely and accurately

# The Great Vowel Shift

	Chaucer	Shakespeare	Modern
• Write	/i:/	/aɪ/	/aɪ/
• Meet	/e:/	/i:/	/i:/
• Meat	/ɛ:/	/e:/	/i:/
• Make	/a:/	/e:/	/eɪ/
• House	/u:/	/aʊ/	/aʊ/
• Food	/o:/	/u:/	/u:/
• Boat	/ɔ:/	/o:/	/əʊ/

# Lost Consonants

- Before another consonant:
  - initial /k/, initial /w/ (*know, write*)
- Gutteral fricative /x/
  - *bough, cough*
- Pre-consonantal and final /r/ :
  - *farmer*
  - But America, Scotland, Devon, parts of S Lancashire, and elsewhere ... remain ‘rhotic’

# Borrowings from French

- 12<sup>th</sup> century, a trickle of French words came to be used in English:
  - E.g. *service, justice, prison*
- In the 13<sup>th</sup>-14<sup>th</sup> centuries, the trickle became a flood:
  - *abase, abbey, able, abolish, abuse, accident, accord, account, accrue, accuse, ace, ... apply, approach, apron* [*> un naperon*, by misdivision], *arch, army, art, assemble, assure, ...*
- More than 70% of the Modern English vocabulary is from French or Latin.
  - French is derived from Latin, so often it is impossible to say with certainty whether an English word was taken directly from Latin, or came in via Old French

# Resources for studying Middle English

- Kurath, Hans, Sherman Kuhn, Robert Lewis, and others. 1951-2001. *Middle English Dictionary*. University of Michigan Press.
  - available free on line at <http://quod.lib.umich.edu/m/med/lookup.html>
- Horobin, S., and J. J. Smith. 2002. *An Introduction to Middle English*. Edinburgh University Press.
- McIntosh, Angus, M. L. Samuels, and M. Benskin. 1986. *A Linguistic Atlas of Late Medieval*. Aberdeen University Press.
- McIntosh, Angus, M. L. Samuels, and M. Laing. 1988. *Middle English Dialectology: Principles and Problems*. Blackwell.
- Denison, D. 1993. *English Historical Syntax*. Longman.
- Fisiak, J. 1968. *A Short Grammar of Middle English*. Warsaw: Panstwowe Wydaun, Nauhowe.



# The Older Scottish Tongue

- Up to the 17<sup>th</sup> century, the English language in Scotland (centred on Edinburgh) developed independently of the English of England
- This language is called *Scots* or *Lallans* (= Lowlands) – not to be confused with the language of the Highlands and Islands, which is Scottish Gaelic.
- In 1603, King James VI of Scotland became James I of England. Edinburgh ('Auld Reekie'), the former royal capital of Scotland, declined in power, wealth, and importance.
- Standard Scottish English since 1603 has been influenced (for better, for worse) by standard Southern British English
  - The language of ordinary people is a profusion of dialects
  - Influence of Scottish Gaelic in western Scotland further complicates matters

# A C14 Scottish legal document

Renunciation by Alexander Lindsay, Lord of Glenesk, of certain lands to Margaret Countess of Marr and her sister Elizabeth. 1379.

- Till all þat þir lettres herys or seis Alysandre lyndessay lorde of glennesk knyght gretyng in god euer lestand. Wete yhe [that I] haue releissit quytclymit & for euer mare remittyt till ... Mergarete contesse of Marr & to Elyzabeth hir systir dachteris & ayres ... all my ryght clayme persuit chalenge or askyng þat I or myn ayres has or may haue or our assignes in tyme to come be ony ways to fourty markis worth of land in ye qwilkes ye foresaid Erle of Angous was obligit be his lettres to gyve me heritably ...

# Robert Henrysoun (d. c. 1508)

The nuttes schell, thocht it be hard and teuch,

Haldis the kirnill, and is delectabill.

Sa lysis thair ane doctrine wyse aneuch,

And full of fruit, under ane fenyeit fabill.

And clerkis sayis it is richt profitabill

Amangis ernist to ming ane merie sport,

To light the spreit, and gar the tyme be schort.

- *The nut's shell, though it be hard and tough, holds the kernel and is delightful. So there lies a doctrine wise enough – and fruitful – under a feigned [imagined] fable. And learned men say it is very profitable among earnest things to mingle a merry sport, to lighten the spirit and make the time be short [= go quickly].*

# William Dunbar: *Lament for the makaris* (=makers = poets), c.1508

I that in heil was and gladnes  
Am trublit now with gret seiknes  
And feblit with infirmitie.

*Timor mortis conturbat me.*

*I, who was in health and gladness, am troubled now with  
great sickness and enfeebled with infirmity.*

*The fear of death disturbs me.*

# The glottal stop

- /glɒʔəl stɒʔ/
- A regular consonant in Arabic and certain other languages
- In English well established in certain non-standard English
  - But always regarded as an error
  - E.g. *better* pronounced /bɛʔə/
- Also common in most Scottish dialects, though not in standard Scottish speech

# The rise of surnames

- A widespread phenomenon from the C11 onwards, associated with feudal bureaucracy – court proceedings, tax collection, etc.
- By 1350, most people outside Wales had a hereditary surname.
- Started with Norman French barons taking the names of the estates in northern France from which they came:
  - *Sinclair* > *Ste Claire*
  - *Craker, Croaker* > *Crevecouer*
  - *Daubeny* > *D'Aubigny*
- Also Norman French nicknames, e.g. *Russell* ‘red-head’, *Corbett* ‘crow’

# Typology of surnames

- Patronymics: *Roberts, Robertson, Robson, Robinson, Hobbs, Hobson, Dobbs, Dobson* all > ‘son of Robert’
- Occupational names: *Smith, Wright, Shepherd, Baker, Baxter, Weaver / Webster / Webb / Webber*
  - Status names: *Knight, Squire, Reeve*
- Nicknames: *Long, Short, Round, Daft, Tiplady, Nunn*
- Local names:
  - Habitational: *Bradford, Bingley, Blakeway, Coplestone, Stapleton, Comerford*
  - Topographic: *Hill, Ford, Gates / Yeats, Wall, Abbey*

# Surnames as evidence for medieval dialect variation

- In spelling, reflecting medieval pronunciation:
  - *Heard* (southwestern), *Hurd* (midland), *Hird* (northern - Yorkshire), *Herd* (Scottish).
- In choice of vocabulary word:
  - *Fuller* (southeastern), *Tucker* (southwestern), and *Walker* (northern and Scottish) all denote the same occupation – someone who ‘fulled’ or ‘tucked’ newly made cloth (i.e. strengthened it) by walking up and down on it in a tray of lye.
- There is still a statistically significant association between localities or regions and the modern distribution of many surnames.
- For some words, surnames provide earlier citations than the OED editors found in general vocabulary.



# Resources for studying surnames

- G. Redmonds. 2004. *Names and History: People, places and things*. Hambledon.
- G. Redmonds. 1997 (2003). *Surnames and Genealogy: a New Approach*. Federation of Family History Societies.
- D. Hey. 1993. *The Oxford Guide to Family History*. Oxford University Press.
- R. W. McKinley. 1990. *The History of English Surnames*. Longman.
- P. H. Reaney. 1960. *The Origins of English Surnames*. Routledge.
- P. H. Reaney. 1958, 3<sup>rd</sup> edition 1991. *Dictionary of English [formerly, British] Surnames*. Routledge / Oxford University Press.
- P. Hanks and F. Hodges. 1988. *A Dictionary of Surnames*. Oxford University Press.
- P. Hanks (ed.). 2003. *Dictionary of American Family Names*. 3 volumes. Oxford University Press.

# Inkhorn terms

In the 16<sup>th</sup> century, many new words came into English from Latin and Greek. Many survived; others did not.

- The Renaissance humanist Roger Ascham (1515-68) called them "inkhorn terms" – words that were coined by writers at their ink pots.
- His contemporary Sir John Cheke (1514-57) wrote:
- “I am of this opinion, that our own tung should be written cleane and pure, unmixt and unmangeled with borrowing of other tunges; wherein if we take not heed by tiim, ever borrowing and never paying, she shall be fain to keep her house as bankrupt.”

## Some inkhorn terms that did not survive into modern English

- **anacephalize**: to summarize the main headings.
- **eximious**: excellent, distinguished, eminent.
- **exolete**: disused, obsolete; effete, insipid; faded.
- **fatigate**: to fatigue; tire out.
- **illecebrous**: alluring, enticing, attractive.
- **ingent**: immense, very great.
- **obtestate**: to bear witness, call upon as witness.

# Some inkhorn terms that became part of modern English

- *Ingenious, idiosyncrasy, capacity, mundane, celebrate, extol, dexterity, illustrate, superiority, fertile, contemplate, invigilate, pastoral, confidence, compendious, perfidious, relinquish, frivolous, verbosity, ...*

# Robert Cawdrey (1604)

- The first monolingual English dictionary
- A tiny book (120 pages) with a long title
  - *A table alphabeticall conteyning and teaching the true writing, and vnderstanding of hard vsuall English wordes, borrowed from the Hebrew, Greeke, Latine, or French, &c. With the interpretation thereof by plaine English words, gathered for the benefit & helpe of ladies, gentlewomen, or any other vnskilfull persons. Whereby they may the more easilie and better vnderstand many hard English wordes, vvhich they shall heare or read in scriptures, sermons, or elsewhere ...*

# Shakespeare's vocabulary

- Some words first recorded in Shakespeare:
- *addiction, amazement, arouse, bandit, bedroom, beached, besmirch, blanket, bump, cater, champion, countless, fixture, flawed, generous, hint, lonely, mimic, negotiate, obscene, meditated, rant, summit, varied, worthless, zany.*
- Shakespeare did not 'invent' all these words (though he surely invented some of them). But he took words from Latin, French, and Italian and elsewhere, and anglicized them without fuss whenever it suited him to do so.
- Other 'Shakespearean coinages' were probably already around in the spoken language at the time. We have no way of knowing.

# Shakespeare's influence on English phraseology

*It's (all) Greek to me, fair play, more sinned against than sinning, more in sorrow than in anger, the wish is father to the thought, vanish into thin air, won't budge an inch, the green-eyed monster (jealousy), be a tower of strength, be hoodwinked, be in a pickle, make a virtue of necessity, stand on ceremony, dance attendance on someone, get cold comfort, have too much of a good thing, have seen better days, live in a fool's paradise, be that as it may, a foregone conclusion, early days, (move out) bag and baggage, it's high time (to do something), that's the long and short of it, the game is up, truth will out, (your children are) your own flesh and blood, ...*

# The Bible in English

- John Wycliff (c. 1325-85) translated parts of the (Latin) Vulgate into English.
- William Tyndale (1494-1536), burned at the stake as a heretic (and a trouble-maker)
- The “King James Bible” or “Authorized Version” (1611) became standard reading in most English household for over 350 years. It was greatly indebted to Tyndale’s translation.



# Hebrew-based phraseology of the Old Testament

- Ye shall eat the fat of the land –*Genesis* 45: 18
- Let my people go –*Exodus* 7: 16
- a life for a life, an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth –  
*Exodus* 21: 21
- a stiff-necked people –*Exodus* 33: 3
- a man after my own heart –*I Samuel* 13:14
- “Behold, I have played the fool, and have erred exceedingly” –*I Samuel* 26: 21
- “Woe is me, for I am undone” –*Isaiah* 6: 5

## □ Old Testament (ctd.)

- Job's comforters: "Ye are miserable comforters" –*Job* 16:2
- They shall see eye to eye. –*Isaiah* 52: 8
- Thou art weighed in the balance and found wanting. –  
*Daniel* 5:25
- Remember mine affliction and my misery, the wormwood  
and the gall –*Lamentations* 3:18

# The Greek base of the New Testament

- Take no thought for the morrow. ... Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof. –*Matthew 6: 34*
- Some [seed] fell upon stony ground. *Matthew 13: 3*
- *Hiding one's light under a bushel:*
- No man, when he hath lighted a candle, putteth it in a secret place, neither under a bushel, but on a candlestick, that they which come in may see the light.  
– *Luke 11: 33*
- And now abideth faith, hope, and charity, these three; but the greatest of these is charity. –*I Corinthians 13: 1*

# Intertextuality

- The English Bible and Shakespeare were the two greatest formative influence on the conventional phraseology of the language
- Formal, old-fashioned register – but many phrases are still in widespread general use
- The idiosyncratic phraseology used in any widely read text is often picked up and replicated (or exploited) by other writers and speakers, even in subsequent generations.
- The study of intertextuality is a major part of literary stylistics.

# Babylon

- By the waters of Babylon we sat down and wept, when we remembered thee, Oh Sion. ... They that led us away captive required of us a song. ... How shall we sing the Lord's song in a strange land? –Psalm 137
- By the waters of Babylon we sit down and weep, when we think of thee, Oh America. – Horace Walpole, letter, 1775
- *By Grand Central Station I sat down and wept.* –title of a novel by Elizabeth Smart [a Canadian], 1945.
- *Babylon* –film, 1980, Franco Rosso (about Rastafarians in London)
- In West Indian English, Babylon is a generic term denoting any oppressive social group or institution (e.g. the British Empire, the White establishment, the police).

# Johnny Too-bad (UB40, 1980)

You say dat you bad, gwan on like you mad;

You terrorize de people an' you make 'em sad.

You are the babylon.

Tink dat you tough, gwan like you rough,

In team wit other man jus call him bluff.

Why, why, you are the babylon.

Jus' a-robbin an' a-stabbin an' a-lootin and a-shootin; boy you're too bad.

Jus' a-robbin an' a-stabbin an' a-lootin and a-shootin; boy you're too bad.

You stop and you search, and you break in de house,

You turn it upside down like a damn ... louse

You set up the man any way you can,

You double-cross the man according to plan.

Why, why, you are the babylon.