

Old English lexicon: derivation

Derivation was not as extensive in OE as it was in later stages of the language

Three examples: *-had*, *for-*, and *forð-*

OE *mægden*, “girl” + *-had* = *mægdenhad*, “virginity”

OE *wundian*, “to wound” + *for-* = *forwundian*, “to wound severely”

OE *feran*, “to go, travel” + *forð-* = “to travel forth, die”

Old English lexicon: compounding

Compounding is a distinctively Germanic means of lexical creation

Frequently in the form of *determinative* compounds (first element determines the second)

- *Meodosetla*, “mead benches”

Often such compounds were used to create semantic abstractions

- OE *bochord* (lit. “book-hoard”) = library
- OE *wordhord* = vocabulary

Overtime some became amalgamated

- E.g., *lord* (*hlaf-weard*, the bread-guard), *daisy* (*dæges-eye*, the eye of the day)

Old English lexicon: compounding

Some compounds were created by authors for poetic use

This allowed poets to maintain alliterative verse and develop a sense of variation

Thus many compounds in OE poems are *hapax legomenon*, a word that appears only once in written records:

- E.g., *sweordplega*, “sword-play, battle”

Other poetic compounds, called kennings, were much more deliberately metaphoric

- *Hronrade* = “whale-road” = ocean
- *Banlocan* = “bone-locker” = body

Old English illustrated

Hwæt, wē Gār-Dena in geārdagum,

þēodcyninga þrym gefrūnon,

hū ðā æpelingas ellen fremedon.

Oft Scyld Scēfing sceapena þrēatum,

Monegum mægþum mēodosetla oftēah,

eġsode eorl[as], syððan ærest wearð

fēasceaft funden.

Fæder ure

Fæder ure þu þe eart on heofonum
si þin nama gehalgod
tobecume þin rice
gewurþe þin willa
on eorðan swa swa on heofonum
urne gedæghwamlican hlaf syle us to dæg
and forgyf us ure gyltas
swa swa we forgyfað urum gyltendum
and ne gelæd þu us on costnunge
ac alys us of yfele soþlice.

The Middle English period: 1100-1500

1066: Norman Invasion

- French becomes prestige language
- Nobility has French as first language, peasantry speaks English

Compare:

- English *cow* vs. French *beef*
- English *swine* vs. French *pork*

No king of England (NOT English king) with English as native language for 200 years

The Middle English period: 1100-1500

1204: King John loses Normandy to the French

- First step in differentiation of English and French identities

1337-1458: Hundred Years' War

- Fosters and reinforces English national identity
- and English as the proper linguistic expression of that identity

1348-50: The Black Death in England

- 1/3 of the population dies

1362: The Statute of Pleadings

- Requires all court proceedings to be conducted in English

The Middle English period: 1100-1500

1381: The Peasants' Revolt

- Greater social mobility, rise in wages results

1476: William Caxton sets up a printing press in London

- Leads to the establishment of a prestige dialect
- and an accepted standard based on that dialect

The Middle English period

England becomes a *de facto* trilingual nation:

- English for the lower classes
- French for the aristocracy
- Latin for the clergy

Both French and Latin had a powerful influence on Middle English, but French much more so than Latin

Latin borrowings increase in the 14th and 15th centuries

The Middle English period

Major linguistic developments:

Massive borrowing from Norman French after the Norman Invasion

- Parisian borrowings in the 13th century
- These French borrowings accelerate the already degrading inflectional system of Old English
- Thus word order becomes much more important for grammatical understanding

Distinctive English dialects arise

The rise of the East Midlands dialect and the London standard

Middle English

Areas with significant French borrowings during the Middle English period:

Government and administration:

- *Majesty, governor, manor, oppress, mayor*

Ecclesiastical terms:

- *Penance, prayer, homily, chaplain, passion*

Law:

- *Justice, attorney, perjury, bail, gaol/jail*

Military terms:

- *Peace, soldier, to arm, siege, battle*

Middle English

Fashion, Food, Social Life:

- *Garment, jewel, feast, appetite, goblet, melody, leisure, pavilion*

Arts, Learning, and Medicine:

- *Music, poet, tragedy, surgeon, pain,*

Middle English

TWO waves of French borrowings:

- Norman French in the late 11th/early 12th centuries
- Parisian French in the 13th century

Thus we have many French borrowings that are *doublets*

Compare:

- Norman *cattel* and Parisian *chattel*
- Norman *warranty* and Parisian *guarantee*
- (compare that to Modern English *war* and French *guerre*)

Old English remnants in Middle English

So what remains of English?

- Basic, everyday words tend to remain in the language
- Words that we tend to view as homey, plain, or unsophisticated
- French-derived words are still viewed as having a greater level of elegance or sophistication
- And Latin-derived words are viewed as more educated

Compare:

- *Walk* (English)
- *Saunter* (French)
- *Ambulate* (Latin)

Old English remnants in Middle English

Many words conveying abstract meanings in OE through compounding and derivation are replaced

But this is neither a systematic nor regular process

Duplicate terms would have existed for some time

When duplicate terms both survived, meaning often became differentiated

Compare:

- *Doom* and *judgement*
- *Hearty* and *cordial*

Middle English Dialects

Northern

Southern

Kentish

West Midland

East Midland

Significant differences between these dialects in terms of

- Phonology
- Orthography
- Lexicon

The rise of “standard” languages

Several factors come together in the development of a standardized version of a language

- 1. It's spread over a large geographic area
- 2. It's respected and users recognize its usefulness (it's a prestige dialect)
- 3. It's codified and described

The Middle English period does not end with the establishment of a “standard” version of English per se

But all the elements are in place for that to happen in the Early Modern English period

So, which version of English (read: dialect) eventually becomes the standard?

The East Midland dialect/London standard

The version of English spoken in east central England and the London area

London is the commercial capital

- Major port and center of trade
- England had a thriving proto-capitalist state and growing middle class

London is the political capital

- Home of Parliament and royal authority
- Provenance of legislation

Thus, this will be the dialect of both trade and politics, with the level of respect commensurate with those activities