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**INTODUCTION**

linguistic history english language

The English language has had a remarkable history. When we first catch it in historical records, it is a language of none-too-civilized tribes on the continent of Europe along the North Sea. From those murky and undistinguished beginnings, English has become the most widespread language in the world, used by more peoples for more purposes than any language on Earth.

The early part of the Modern English saw the establishment of the Standard written English we know today. Its standardization was first due to the need of the central government for regular procedures by which to conduct its business, to keep its records and to communicate with the citizens of the land. Standard languages are often the by-products of bureaucracy, developed to meet a specific administrative need, rather than spontaneous developments of the populace or the artifice of writers and scholars .A standard language is spread widely over a the large region, is respected, because people recognize its usefulness and is codified in the sense of having been described so that people know what it is [27; 54].

A standard language has to be described before it is fully standard. The purpose of the paper in question is to retrace development of the Standard English language formation as well as to study linguistic background of its establishment.

The purpose of the research stipulated the arrangement and consecutive solving of the following tasks:

1. to review written records in an early stage of the English language development that is of Old English Period;

2. to inspect the origins of the Standard English language;

3. to analyze linguistic situation in the Middle English Age before the Standardization;

4. to consider the main factors contributing to the Standard English language development;

5. to examine changes in the English language on all levels during its standardization.

The topicality of the paper given can be explained by the following fact: in the course of its history the English language has changed a lot, in other words it has been globalized. Additionally, it gave birth to many regional varieties. And although most people nowadays speak a variety of regional English or an admixture of standard and regional Englishes, and reverse such labels as BBC English or “the Queen’s English” for what they perceive to be a pure Standard English it is still vitally important to know what the Standard English language represents as such and what is more important to use it to be able to communicate with English speakers of various ethnic backgrounds. The personal contribution to the research work lies in an attempt to integrate fundamental and modern sources on the English language formation to give a contrastive view of the issue.

The following methods were applied in the research:

1. Descriptive analysis;

2. Historical-philological analysis;

3. Comparative analysis.

This work consists of introduction, two chapters, conclusion, list of references and appendixes. The introduction covers topicality, theoretical base of research, as well as, methods of research and the structure of the work.

In the 1st chapter we are concerned with linguistic situation in Old English and Medieval period. The 2nd chapter is dedicated to the changes in the language on phonetic, lexical and grammar levels that later constituted the basis of English Standard. The conclusion colligates the main propositions and ultimate results of the research.

The results of the given work were introduced in March, 2011 at the scientific conference in the breakup group devoted to Linguistic text research at Irkutsk State Linguistic University.

The research is founded on fundamental works of well-known scholars such as A.C. Baugh [1978], K. Brunner [2008], D. Crystal [1995, 1997], O. Jespersen [1938]; Russian scientists: V.D Arakin [1985], A.A. Rastorgueva [1997], B.A. Ilyish [1972] and many others.

**CHAPTER 1. LINGUISTIC SITUATION IN OLD ENGLISH AND MIDDLE ENGLISH PERIOD**

**1.1 The development of Futhark**

The earliest form of German writing is commonly believed to be connected to the early Germanic runes. Old English was first written in the runic alphabet which was called FUTHARK. It was named after the first six letters. The reason for the unique sequences of characters in the futhark is unknown. It is proposed that this sequence was the result of some mnemonic device which is no longer retrievable, but which may have left some slight echo in the runic poems preserved in the medieval manuscripts [38].

The Old Germanic runic alphabet consisted of twenty-four letters. In England at least thirty runes were used to reflect the old English phonological changes. It can be written both horizontally in either direction. The arrangement of runic characters differs greatly from the order of letters in all other European alphabets.

The name of each rune was associated with a certain word in the Old English language. Therefore the runes can stand for these words. Besides, each rune could stand for the initial sound of the corresponding word. Thus if we read only initial letters in the words for which the runes stand in the above mentioned six stanzas, we get Futhark [41].

This alphabet was used in northern Europe – in Scandinavia, present-day Germany, and the British Isles – and it has been preserved in about 4,000 inscriptions and in a few manuscripts. It dates from around the 3rd century AD. No one knows exactly where the alphabet came from, but it seems to be a development of one of the alphabets of southern Europe, probably by the Roman, which runes resemble closely [28].

The runic alphabet is a specifically Germanic alphabet, not to be found in the languages of other groups. The letters are angular; straight lines are preferred, curved lines avoided; this is due to the fact that the runic inscriptions were cut in hard material: stone, wood or bone. The shapes of some letters resemble to those of Greek or Latin, others have not been traced to any known alphabet, and the order of the runes is certainly original [38].

An early offshoot of Futhark was employed by Goths, and so it is known as Gothic Runes. It was used until 500 CE when it was replaced by the Greek-based Gothic alphabet. One theory concerning the origin of Futhark states that the Goths were the inventors of Futhark, but there is insufficient supporting evidence to prove this theory. In England, the Anglo-Saxons brought Futhark from continental Europe in the 5th century CE and modified it into the thirty-three-letter Futharc to accommodate sound changes that were occurring in Old English, the language spoken by the Anglo-Saxons. Even the name ‘Futhorc’ is evidence to a phonological change where the long [a] vowel in Old English evolved into a later [o] vowel.

Even though Futhark continued to thrive as a writing system, it started to decline with the spread of the Latin alphabet. In England, Anglo-Saxon Futharc started to be replaced by the Latin alphabet by the 9th century, and did not survive much more past the Norman Conquest of 1066. Futhark continued to be used in Scandinavia for centuries longer, but by 1600 CE, it had become nothing more than curiosities among scholars and antiquarians [28; 38; 41; 54].

* + 1. **The runic alphabet as an Old Germanic writing tradition**

According to David Crystal what rune (OE run) means is debatable. There is a long standing tradition which attributes to it such senses as ‘whisper’, ‘mystery’, ‘secret’, suggesting that the symbols were originally used to magical or mystery rituals. Such associations were certainly present in the way the pagan Vikings (and possibly continental Germans) used to corresponding word, but there is no evidence that they were present in Old English. Current research suggests that the word run had been thoroughly assimilated in to Anglos-Saxon Christianity, and meant simply ‘sharing of knowledge and thoughts’. Any extension to the word of magic and superstitions is not part of the native tradition. Modern English word rune is not even a survival of the Old English word, but a later borrowing from Norse via Latin [28].

For the modern, magical sense of rune the English language is therefore indebted to the Scandinavian and not Anglo-Saxon tradition. In this sense which surfaced in the 19th century in a variety of esoteric publications, and which lives on the popular and fantastic imagination of the 20th century, perhaps most famously in the writing of John Ronald Tolkien.

There are less than thirty clear inscriptions in Old English, some containing only a single name .The two most famous examples both date from the 8th century, and present the Northumbrian dialect [20; 28; 38].

One of them is an inscription on a box called the “Franks Casket”. It was discovered in the early years of the 19th in France, and was presented to the British Museum by British archeologist, A.W Franks. The casket is a small box made of whale bone; the four sides are carved: there are pictures in the center and runic inscriptions around. The longest among them, in alliterative verse, tells the story of the whale bone, of which the Casket was made.

The Ruthwell Cross is a fifteen- feet tall cross inscribed and ornamented on all sides. The principal inscription has been reconstructed into a passage from an Old English poem, the dream of the Rood, which was also found in another version in a later manuscript.

Many runic inscriptions have been preserved on weapons, coins, amulets, tombstones, rings, various cross fragments [20; 28; 38; 41; 54].

**1.1.2 Old English literature in the period of Anglo-Saxon ethnic extension**

It is often postulated that there is a dark age between the arrival of the Anglo - Saxons and the first arrival of Old English manuscripts. A few scattered inscriptions in the language date from the 5th and 6th centuries, written in the runic alphabet which the invaders brought with them, but these give very little information about what the language was like. The literary age began only after the arrival of the Roman missionaries, led by Augustine, who came there to Kent in 597 AD. Because of the increasingly literary climate Оld English manuscripts also began to be written much earlier, indeed, that the earliest vernacular texts from other north European countries. The first texts dating from around 700, are glossaries of Latin words translated into English, and a few early inscriptions and poems. But very little material remains from this period. Doubtless many manuscripts were burnt during the 8th century Vikings invasion. There are a number of short poems, again almost entirely preserved in the late manuscripts, over half of them concerned with Christian subjects –legends of the saints, extracts from the Bible, and devotional pieces. Several others reflect the Germanic tradition, dealing with such topics as war, travelling, patriotism, and celebration. Most extant Old English texts were written in the period following the reign of King Alfred, who arranged for many Latin works to be translated including Bede’s Ecclesiastical History. But the total corpus is extremely small and makes about 3, 5 million – the equivalent of about 30 medium-sized modern novels. Only five per cent of this total is poetry [14; 16; 24; 28; 39; 41].

The Anglo-Saxon ethno-social system began forming as a result of British invasion at the end of the 6th century.

This brought about some considerable changes in the social structure of the Anglo-Saxon society. To get a better understanding of the Anglo-Saxon society it is worth considering the Old-English words of status. The key-words are given below in order of precedence:

cyning ‘chief’, later the founder the royal dynasty

ealdorman ‘sub-king’, a kind of hereditary aristocracy; later replaced by the

term eorl

þegn ‘warrior’

čeorl ‘a free man’, ‘farmer’

þeow ‘a slave’, ‘servant’

The given structure provided an effective functioning of considerably tough ethno-social system needed for the Anglo-Saxons during the period of their ethnic extension when the former tribal organization of the society did not meet the stereotypes evoked by military orientation of the ethnic dominant at that time. As a result, there emerged a peculiar class of professional warriors who swore to their lords in exchange for lands and gifts seized in the military campaigns. The kings and noble people belonged to the ruling upper circles, whereas professional soldiers – took an interim niche in the social hierarchy standing between noble and common people [2; 13; 15; 41].

I.V. Shaposhnikova points out that a þegn was a personal servant who was one degree higher in the ranks of freeman than a čeorl. As servants of the King the status of þegn gradually rose, until they formed the elected nobility of the Kingdom [41].

The analysis of early Old English written records allows singling out two distinct imperatives throughout the period of the Anglo-Saxon ethnic extension. On the one hand it was militancy, the orientation to the persecution of the war and submission of the person’s concerns to this imperative and on the other hand there existed an archetypal fear to be reduced to the status of social outcast, a person deprived of any kind of rights. The cowards were most commonly threatened with exile. This was the severest punishment for their ‘inglorious act’ to live a shameful life in exile. In the time of instability and violence the fear of being reduced to the position of an exile was so strong that it became one of the prevailing motives in the early Anglo-Saxon literature.

Whereas warfare for the sake of wealth provided the motive power that moulded ethnic stereotypes thus organizing the passionateness of the early Anglo-Saxons in the period of their ethnic extension. The same warfare motive underlay the ethnics justifying the prevailing stereotypes. This epoch of great deeds and brave heroes is known in literature as the Heroic Age. The folk epic Beowulf is considered to represent the most telling evidence of the outlook and temper of the Germanic mind [7; 19; 39; 41].

The epic Beowulf is of about three thousand lines. This poem seems to have originated on the Continent, but when and where are not now to be known. It may have been carried to England in the form of ballads by the Anglo-Saxons; or it may be Scandinavian material, later brought in by Danish or Norwegian pirates. At any rate it seems to have taken on its present form in England during the seventh and eighth centuries. It relates how the hero Beowulf, coming over the sea to the relief of King Hrothgar, delivers him from a monster, Grendel, and then from the vengeance of Grendel’s only less formidable mother. Returned home in triumph, Beowulf much later receives the due reward of his valor by being made king of his own tribe, and meets his death while killing a fire-breathing dragon which has become a scourge to his people. As he appears in the poem, Beowulf is an idealized Anglo-Saxon hero, but in origin he may have been any one of several other different things. Perhaps he was the old Germanic god Beowa, and his exploits originally allegories, like some of those in the Greek mythology, of his services to man; he may, for instance, first have been the sun, driving away the mists and cold of winter and of the swamps, hostile forces personified in Grendel and his mother. Or, Beowulf may really have been a great human fighter who actually killed some especially formidable wild beasts, and whose superhuman strength in the poem results, through the similarity of names, from his being confused with Beowa. This is the more likely because there is in the poem a slight trace of authentic history. Beowulf presents an interesting though very incomplete picture of the life of the upper, warrior, caste among the northern Germanic tribes during their later period of barbarism on the Continent and in England, a life more highly developed than that of the Anglo-Saxons before their conquest of the island.

Outside of Beowulf and a few fragments, the recording of Anglo-Saxon heroic story begins with a 9th century entry in The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle for the year 755 (actually 757). To this can be added a few of the annals devoted to the combats of King Alfred’s son and grandsons in the tenth century. While not a Chronicle poem, The Battle of Maldon has a place in this range, if only as an inspired response to what otherwise the Chronicle (in the Canterbury and Peterborough manuscripts) records for 991 as ealdorman Byrthnoth’s death in battle at Maldon. Typically, guides, translations and readers introducing students to Old English texts highlight three of the stories from this range of years: the story of West Saxon feud are called Cynewulf and Cyneheard (chronicle entry 755), The Battle of Brunanburh, (entry for 937), and The Battle of Maldon (sometime after 991). Traditionally, and here all introductions in Old English readers follow suit, these narratives are seen as enshrining, in some literary intensified way, heroic values reflecting their ancient, Germanic roots.

Hence, the literature of the Old English period was not notable for its diversity of literature genres. The leading place was taken by heroic romances and religious writings. Obviously, heroes of the old times had no time to think of love as in ancient epic romances love did not play any important role. However, the situation considerably changed in the subsequent period [6; 8; 17; 28; 54].

**1.2 Linguistic situation in Medieval England**

**1.2.1 Linguistic situation in England after the Norman Conquest**

It hardly can be argued that the Norman Conquest was not only a great event in British political history but also the greatest single event in the history of the English language. Its earliest effect was a drastic change in the linguistic situation.

The Norman Conquerors of England had originally come from Scandinavia. About one hundred and fifty years before they seized the valley of the Scine and settled in what was known as Normandy. They were swiftly assimilated by the French and in the 11th century came to Britain as French speakers and bearers of French culture. They spoke the Northern dialect of French, which differed in some points from Central, Parisian French. Their tongue in Britain is often referred to as ‘Anglo-French’ or ‘Anglo-Norman’, but may just as well be called French, since we are less concerned here with the distinction of French dialects than with the continuous French influence upon English, both in the Norman period of history and a long while after the Anglo-Norman language had ceased to exist.

In the early 13th century, as a result of lengthy and inefficient wars with France King John Lackland lost the French provinces, including the dukedom of Normandy. Among other consequences the loss of the lands in France cut off the Normans in Britain from France, which speeded up the decline of the Anglo-French language.

The most immediate consequence of the Norman domination in Britain is to be seen in the wide use of the French language in many spheres of life. For almost three hundred years French was the official language of administration: it was the language of the king’s court, the law courts, the church, the army and the castle. It was also everyday language of many nobles, of the higher clergy and of many townspeople in the South. The intellectual life, literature and education were in the hands of French-speaking people; French, alongside Latin, was the language of writing. Teaching was largely conducted in French and boys at school were taught to translate their Latin into French instead of English [20; 28; 38].

As A. Baugh states, England never stopped being an English-speaking country. The bulk of the population held fast to their own tongue: the lower classes in the towns, and especially in the country-side, those who lived in the Midlands and up north, continued to speak English and looked upon French as foreign and hostile. Since most of the people were illiterate, the English language was almost exclusively used for spoken communication.

At first the two languages existed side by side without mingling. Then, slowly and quickly, they began to permeate each other. The Norman barons and the French town-dwellers had to pick up English words to make themselves understood while the English began to use French words in current speech. A good knowledge of French would mark a person of higher standing giving him a certain social prestige probably many people become bilingual and had a fair command of both languages [20].

Undoubtedly, these peculiar linguistic conditions could not remain static. The struggle between French and English was bound to end in the complete victory of English, for English was the living language of the entire people, while French was restricted to certain social spheres and to writing. Yet the final victory was still a long way off. In the 13th century only a few steps were made in that direction. The earliest sign of the official recognition of English by the Norman hinges was the famous Proclamation issued by Henry III in 1258 to the councilors in Parliament. It was written in three languages: French, Latin and English.

The three hundred years of the domination of French affected English more than any other foreign influence before or after. The early French borrowings reflect accurately the spheres of Norman influence upon English life; later borrowings can be attributed to the continued cultural, economic and political contacts between the countries. The French influence added new features to the regional and social differentiation of the language. New words, coming from French, could not be adopted simultaneously by all the speakers of English; they were first used in some varieties of the language, namely in the regional dialects of Southern England and in the speech if the upper classes, but were unknown in the other varieties of the language [4; 17; 18; 20].

**1.2.2 Dialectal diversity of the Middle English**

Apparently, in the Middle English period the language differed almost from county to county, and noticeable variations are sometimes observable between different parts of the same county. The features characteristic of a given dialect do not all cover the same territory; some extend into adjoining districts or may be characteristic also of another dialect. Consequently it is rather difficult to decide how many dialectal divisions should be recognized and to mark off with any exactness their respective boundaries. In a rough way, however, it is customary to distinguish four principal dialects of Middle English: Northern, East Midland, West Midland, and Southern. Generally speaking, the Northern dialect extends as far south as the Humber; East Midland and West Midland together cover the area between the Humber and the Thames; and Southern occupies the district south of the Thames, together with Gloucestershire and parts of the counties of Worcester and Hereford, thus taking in the West Saxon and Kentish districts of Old English. Throughout the Middle English period and later, Kentish preserves individual features marking it off as a distinct variety of Southern English (for counties see APPENDIX 1, p.67) [17; 20; 24].

Middle English Dialects are partly matters of pronunciation, partly of vocabulary, partly of inflection. A few illustrations will give some idea of the nature and extent of the differences. The feature most easily recognized is the ending of the plural, present indicative, of verbs. In Old English this form always ended in th with some variation of the preceding vowel. In Middle English this ending was preserved as eth in the Southern dialect. In the Midland district, however, it was replaced by en, probably taken over from the corresponding forms of the subjunctive or from preterit-present verbs and the verb to be while in the north it was altered to es, an ending that makes its appearance in Old English times. Thus we have loves in the north, loven in the Midlands, and loveth in the south. Another fairly distinctive form is the present participle before the spread of the ending -ing. In the north we have lovande, in the Midlands lovende, and in the south lovinde. In later Middle English the ending ing appears in the Midlands and the south, thus obscuring the dialectal distinction. Dialectal differences are more noticeable between Northern and Southern; the Midland dialect often occupies an intermediate position, tending toward the one or the other in those districts lying nearer to the adjacent dialects. Thus the characteristic forms of the pronoun they in the south were hi, here (hire, hure), hem, while in the north forms with th modern they, their, them early became predominant. In matters of pronunciation the Northern and Southern dialects sometimes presented notable differences. Thus OE ā, was retained in the north, giving such characteristic forms as Southern stone and home, beside stane and hame in Scotland today. Initial f and s were often voiced in the south to v and z. In Southern Middle English we find vor, vrom, vox, vorzoþe instead of for, from, fox, forsope ‘forsooth’. This dialectal difference is preserved in Modern English fox and vixen, where the former represents the Northern and Midland pronunciation and the latter the Southern. Similarly ch in the south often corresponds to k in the north: bench beside benk, church beside kirk. Such a variety fortunately was lessened toward the end of the Middle English period by a general adoption of a Standard written (and later spoken) English [10; 20; 45].

**1.3 The Middle English corpus**

It is commonly accepted that the Middle English period has a much richer documentation than is found in Old English. This is partly a result of the post-conquest political situation. The newly centralized monarchy commissioned national and local surveys, beginning with the Domesday Book and there is a marked increase in the number of public and private documents – mandates, charters, contracts, tax-rolls, and other administrative or judicial papers. However, the early material is of limited value to those interested in the linguistic history of English because it is largely written in Latin or French, and the only relevant data which can be extracted relate to English and personal names. Most religious publication falls into the same category, with Latin maintaining its presence throughout the period as the official language of the Church [7; 28; 40]

A major difference from Оld English is the absence of a continuing tradition of historical writing in the native language, as in the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle – a function which Latin supplanted, and which was not revived until the 15th century.

Material in English appears as a trickle in the 13th century, but within 150 years it has become a flood. In the early period, we can see a great deal of religious prose writing, in the form of homilies, tracts, lives of the Saints, and the other aids to devotion and meditation. Sometimes a text was written with a specific readership in mind; the Ancrene Rewle ‘Anchorites Guide’, for example, was compiled by a spiritual director for three noblewomen who had abandoned the world to live as anchoresses. During the 14th century, there is a marked increase in the number of translated writings from French and Latin, and of the texts for teaching these languages. Guild records, proclaims, proverbs, dialogues, allegories, and the letters illustrate the diverse range of new styles and genres. Towards the end of the century, the translations of the Bible inspired by John Wycliff appear amid considerable controversy, and the associated movement produces many manuscripts. Finally, in the 1430es, there is a vast output in English from the office of the London Chancery scribes, which strongly influenced the development of the standard written language [28; 44; 49].

Poetry presents a puzzle. The Anglo-Saxon poetic tradition apparently dies out in the 11th century, to reappear patchily in the 13th. A lengthy poetic history of Britain is known as Lagamon’s Brut as we have mentioned above, one of the earliest to survive from Middle English, and in the 14th century come the important texts of Piers Plowman and Sir Gawain and the Green Knight. What is surprising in that the alliterative Old English style is still present in all these works, despite an apparent break in poetic continuity of at least a hundred years. The conundrum has generated much discussion. Perhaps the alliterative technique was retained though prose: several Middle English prose texts are strongly alliterative, and it is sometimes difficult to tell from a manuscript which genre (poetry or prose) a piece belongs to, because the line divisions are not shown. Perhaps the Old English style survived through the medium of oral transmission. Or perhaps it is simply that most poetic manuscripts have been lost. Middle English poetry was inevitably much influenced by French literary traditions, both in content and style. One of the earliest examples is the 13th century verse-contest known as The Owl and the Nightingale. Later works include romances in the French style, secular lyrics, bestiaries, biblical poetry, Christian legends, hymns, prayers and elegies [28; 35; 50].

The mystical dream vision popular in Italy and France, is well illustrated by the poem modern editors have called Pearl, in which the writer recalls the death of his two-year- old daughter, who then acts as his spiritual comforter. Drama also begins to make its presence felt, in the form of dialogues, pageants, and the famous cycles of mystery plays. Much of the Middle English literature is of unknown authorship, but the end of the period this situation has changed. Among the prominent names which emerge in the latter part of the 14th century are John Gower, William Langland, and some time later John Lydgate, Thomas Malory, William Caxton, and the poets who are collectively known as Chaucerians.

Rather than a somewhat random collection of interesting texts, there is now a major body of literature, in the modern sense. It is this which provides the final part of the bridge between Middle and Early Modern English.

The flourishing of literature, which marks the seconds half of the 14th century, apart from its cultural significance, testifies, to the complete reestablishment of English as the language of writing. Some authors wrote in their local dialect from outside London, but most of them used the London dialect or forms of the language combining London and provincial traits. Towards the end of the century the London dialect had become the principal type of language used in literature a sort of literary pattern to be imitated by provincial authors.

The literary text of the late 14th century preserved in numerous manuscripts, belong to a variety of genres. Translation continued, but original compositions were produced in abundance; poetry was more prolific than prose. This period of literary florescence is known as the “age of Chaucer”; the greatest name in English literature before William. Shakespeare other writers are referred to as “Chaucer’s contemporaries” [6; 11; 7; 28; 39].

**1.3.1 Geoffrey Chaucer and his lending support of the London Standard’s diffusion**

Geoffrey Chaucer (1340-1400) was by far the most outstanding figure of the time. A hundred years later William Caxton, the first English printer, called him the worshipful father and first founder and embellisher of ornate eloquence in our language. In many books on the history of English literature and the history of English Chaucer is described as the founder of the literary language.

His early works more of less imitative of other authors – Latin, French or Italian – though they bear abundant evidence of his skill. He never wrote in any other language than English [28; 38].

However, it is not quite correct to consider his language as a basis for Standard English. Geoffrey Chaucer wrote in a dialect which in the main coincided with that used in documents produced in London shortly before his time and for a long time after. Although he did not really create the literary language, as a poet of outstanding talent he made better use of it than contemporaries and set up two patterns to be followed in the 15th century. His poems were copied so many times that over sixty manuscripts of The Canterbury Tales have survived to this day. His books were among the first to be printed, a hundred years after their composition.

According to D. Crystal Chaucer’s literary language, based on the mixed (largely East Midland) London dialect is known as classical Middle English. In the 15th and 16th centuries it became the basis of the national literary English language.

The 15th century could produce nothing worthy to rank with Geoffrey Chaucer. The two prominent poets, Thomas Hoccleve and John Lydgate, were chiefly translators and imitators. The style of Chaucer’s successors is believed to have drawn farther away from everyday speech; it was highly affected in character, abounding in abstract words and strongly influenced by Latin rhetoric, it is also termed aureate language) [28].

The importance of Geoffrey Chaucer’s work to any history of the language can be affirmed with some conviction. It is partly matter of a quantity – one complete edition prints over 43, 000 of a poetry, as well as two of a major prose works – but more crucial is the breadth and variety of his language, which ranges from the polished complexity of high flown rhetoric to the natural simplicity of domestic chat. No previous author has shown such a range, and Chaucer’s writing – in addition to its merits – is thus unique in the evidence it has provided about the state of medieval grammar, vocabulary, and pronunciation.

Chaucer’s best-known work, The Canterbury Tales, is not of course a guide to the spoken language of the time; it is a variety of the written language which has been carefully crafted. It uses a regular metrical structure and rhyme scheme –itself a departure from the free rhythms and the alliteration of much earlier poetry. It contains many variations in word order, dictated by the demands of the prosody. There are also frequent literary allusions and turns of a phrase which make the text difficult to follow. What has impressed readers so much is that, despite the constraints, Geoffrey Chaucer has managed to capture vividly the intriguing characters of the speakers, and to reflect naturally the colloquial features of their speech. In no other author, is there better support for the view that there is an underlying correspondence between the natural rhythm of English poetry and that of English everyday conversation [21; 23; 26; 28; 40].

**1.3.2 The role of the printing in the formation of the Standard English language**

The creation of printing was, undoubtedly, one of the greatest inventions. It eased the writing process as the whole, and it also had a great deal of influence over language.

Linguists claim that one of the most important things printing brought was a development of a standard language of symbols and codes that we use today [27; 28; 34].

Printing which was introduced into England by William Caxton in 1476, helped to increase the spread of knowledge and literacy level among the British public as more and more people had better access to reading materials. Over the centuries, as more English texts were printed, such as novels, dictionaries, the Bible and other documents, the English language gradually gained popularity and established itself as the national language of England. Apart from the advent of printing, political, social and economic factors also contributed to the development of English as a national language.

Through printing Caxton played a very significant and instrumental role in establishing English as the national language of England. By adopting the dialect of London and the South-East as the English for his books, Caxton took a decisive step forward in establishing that particular variety as the English language. William Caxton as the first printer in England was highly responsible for imposing some form of uniformity to the English language simply by default. His choice of the dialect of the southeast Midlands has given us the present form of Standard English [34; 37; 46].

William Caxton was born in Kent, England and was accepted as an apprentice in London in 1438. This was not a regular apprenticeship. According to N. F. Blake, Robert Large was an important and influential merchant. Caxton had thus become apprentice to one of the more important men in the city. He became part of what was certainly a flourishing business, which would have provided him with useful contacts and future trading partners. Seven years later, in 1445, he moved to Bruges, Belgium as a mercer to take part in the trade there of the Merchant Adventurers of whom the London Mercers where prominent members. Many Englishmen were attracted to Bruges due to its production of fine cloths, which also made other textiles of import. The move to Bruges was important in the scheme of Caxton’s shift to printing. As the years progressed, so did his skills as a mercer and his career. He eventually became an important figure among his colleagues, which would again benefit him in the future with printing. In this period Caxton learned how to finance projects and he acquired considerable wealth. Both were necessary for the successful completion of his venture into printing [23].

With the trouble that ensued with the government, William Caxton began to look elsewhere for merchandise to sell. English mercers where not allowed to sell fine cloths for a while and it is assumed that Caxton supplemented his sales with manuscripts. He worked closely with many of the noble who were the only ones that could afford such luxuries as reading materials. Through his handling of manuscripts and even books, he gained an interest in literature [23; 28].

His first effort with literature was not in printing, but in translating. He knew enough Dutch, Flemish, French and Latin to translate books into English. This was unheard of before; English was not a scholarly language like French or Latin, but one used only by the common folk. The first book to be translated by him was the Latin book History of Troy (1475), that had been translated into French. However, he had such a difficult time in translating that he would almost given up on the notion. He had begun translating in 1469 and then given it up. The reason, according to Caxton, was his incompetence as a translator and his lack of command of English. It is not a convincing one, for in the centre of the European book trade he could probably have found someone else to do it for him if he had just wanted a translation. He evidently wanted to make the translation himself and was prevented from completing it for two years [23; 26].

Many of the translators in Caxton’s day stated that they attempted to stay as close to the original text as possible, even though this was more of a selling point for their work than reality. Caxton made the same claims, probably out of obligation. How would it look if everyone were doing it except him? His number one priority was not accuracy of translation, but ensuring that there was always something on the press. Because he owned it, it was up to him how many books he had available for printing and if nothing was printing, he wasn’t making money. To keep the presses working may have appeared more important than a finely wrought phrase [23].

In his closing remarks on the subject of Caxton as a translator, Henry Blake says, that in general he can hardly be distinguished from the host of translators who crowd the 15th century scene, except perhaps in the sheer quantity of his output. Of the 106 works printed by or attributed to Caxton, he translated at least twenty-five. It is hardly surprising that he did not always have time to polish his version for the press [23].

Caxton eventually resigned as the Governor within the Merchant Adventurers, a post he held for several years, so he could travel to Cologne, Germany. He lived there from 1471 – 1472, a total of eighteen months. It is assumed that his intention in traveling there was to learn how to be a printer so he could print his own book, The Recuyell of the Historyes of Troye, translated from French. Cologne, with a press dating from about 1465, was the town nearest to Bruges which had a press at that time, and Caxton had little choice where to go [18]. It had become the capital of the Low Countries because of its university, which attracted a lot of scholars and students; an important archbishopric; and strong trade, especially with English tradesmen.

An interesting aspect to the printing world is the fact that there was an immediate division of labor within the profession. There were the skilled craftsmen who actually did the work on the presses and then there were the tradesmen that already had connections to sell the books who were considered the publishers and entrepreneurs. Paper was the most expensive investment that had to be available upfront, before any books were sold, and it was the tradesmen who had the money readily available for purchasing. Surely Caxton learned how to print, for it was his responsibility to teach his assistants once he returned to Bruges and set up shop as a printer. Blake explains it thus: “Normally he would not have interfered in the actual printing operations, and it is not right to think of Caxton as a printer. He was the publisher and entrepreneur. He provided the capital, chose the books and distributed them, leaving the printing to others” [23:59].

Once he returned to Bruges, Caxton used the patronage of Margaret of Burgundy to help him publish his book. The first book he printed, and the first book to appear in English, was his own translation of the History of Troy in 1475. Before returning to England to set up a printing press there, Caxton printed six or seven other volumes while in Bruges. Two were in English, the one already mentioned and Game of Chess, and four were in French. The seventh pamphlet is attributed to him but has not been confirmed to be his work [18]. Caxton finally returned to England to set up his own printing press in 1476. Since Caxton settled in Westminster instead of his hometown of London, it was supposed that the relations between the scribes and the printers were at odds. It was thought that perhaps the scribes felt threatened by this new device that would ultimately outdate them, stealing all of their work. However, this has never been proved and, in fact, there are several accounts of printers working closely with the scribes. As an example, the first known item to be printed in England is an indulgence which must be dated prior to 13 December 1476, since that date has been entered by hand in the surviving copy. It is printed in Caxton’s type 2 with six letters in his type 3 [23; 26]. Obviously he was working with the abbots, who were also scribes, in the production of indulgences.

Caxton could not have ever hoped to have the entire publishing market of England in his hands for the rest of his life. And accordingly, rivals began to arrive, setting up their own print shops. The first few were no real threat to the well-known Caxton; however, by 1480, a real competitor entered the stage. John Lettou, a native of Lithuania, moved into London and actually had better books than Caxton. It at once became evident that the new printer had learnt his art under a much better master than Caxton had [37]. This became a wake-up call to William Caxton, letting him know that he needed to begin fixing some of the problems with his own printing so as not to lose the business entirely and this he did.

At the time of Caxton’s translations, English was a language that was still new. It had begun to change from the Old English to a more modern English but different ways of spelling and pronunciation abounded. This was bound to make any printer go insane. It is said the English vernacular was only just beginning to develop a prose form, and Caxton coped with the problem of meager vocabulary and wide variations in the spelling of even the simplest English words .As an example, the word little can be spelled several ways in Caxton’s texts. Two variants are litil and lytel. At this very period, the English language was still passing from its mediaeval pronunciation into that state with which we are familiar today, and it was precisely then that the press began to crystallize the orthography of a language still in flux. Gradually, the spelling tended to become fixed, while the pronunciation continued to evolve [23; 26].

Caxton knew of these difficulties personally and recognized the need for a remedy. Through his efforts as a printer and publisher, things began to slowly change. [26]. An interesting side note about this event in English history is the current spellings and pronunciations found in the language today. Because the written word began to take a more permanent form while the spoken word had not, many variants developed on how to pronounce the same word. For this reason, we see many differences in the pronunciation of British English and American English. Even within England there are dialects with differences in word pronunciation. This all developed due to the solidifying of the written and spoken language at different times [26; 37].

The standardization of the English language or any language is an issue which linguists always have to grapple with. Printing had brought into focus problems regarding the variations in the English language, which Caxton had observed, such as:

* Should he use foreign words in his translations or replace them with native English words?
* Which variety of English should he follow, given the existence of major regional differences?
* Which literary style should be used as a model?
* How the language should be spelled and punctuated, given the scribal variations of the previous centuries?
* In publishing native writers, should he change their language to make it is more widely understood?

Nevertheless, printing provides a way to reduce these variations in the language. As Caxton himself showed, publishers would set their own system of spelling and somewhat codify the language [28].

Hence, the introduction of the printing by William Caxton gave an unprecedented impetus to the formation of a standard language and the study of its properties. Apart from its role in fostering norms of spelling and punctuation, the availability of printing provided more opportunities for people to write, and gave their works much wider circulation. As a result, more texts of the period have survived. Within the following 150 years, it is estimated that nearly 20,000 books appeared. The story of English thus becomes more definite in the 16th century, with more evidence available about the way the language was developing, both in the texts themselves, and in a growing number of observations dealing with such areas as grammar, vocabulary, writing system, and style. In that century, scholars seriously got down to talking about their language [20; 23; 26; 28; 34; 38; 45].

**1.3.3 Principal Middle English written records as a reflection of ongoing changes in Standard**

The literature written in England during the Middle English period reflects fairly accurately the changes fortunes of English. During the time that French was the language best understood by the upper classes, the books they read or listened to were French. The rewards of patronage were seldom to be expected by those who wrote in English; with them we must look for other incentives for writing. Such incentives were most often found among members of the religious body, interested in promoting right living and in the care of souls. Accordingly, the literature in English that has come down to us from this period is almost exclusively religious or admonitory.

The Ancrene Riwle, the Ormulum, a series of paraphrases and interpretations of Gospel passages, and a group of saint’s lives and short homiletic pieces showing the survival of an Old English literary tradition in the south-west are the principal works of this class. The two outstanding exceptions are Lagamon’s Brut based largely on Wace, and the astonishing debate between The Owl and the Nightingale, a long poem in which two birds exchange recriminations in the liveliest fashion.

There was certainly a body of popular literature that circulated orally among the people, just as at a later date in the English and Scottish popular ballads did, but such literature has left slight traces in this period. The hundred years from 1150 to 1250 have been justly called the Period of religious Record [28].

The separation of the English nobility from France by about 1250 and the spread of English among the upper class are manifested in the next hundred years of English literature. Types of polite literature that had hitherto appeared in French now appear in English. Of these types most popular was the romance. Only one English romance exists from an earlier date than 1250, but from this time translations and adaptations from French begin to be made, and in the course of the 14th century their number become quite large. The period of 1250 – 1350 is a period of Religious and secular literature of the English language. The general adoption of English by all classes, which had taken place by the latter half of the 14th century, gave rise to a body of literature that represents the high point in English literary achievement in the Middle Ages.

The 15th century is sometimes known as the Imitative Period because so much of the poetry then written was written in emulation of Chaucer. It is also spoken of as a Transition Period, because it covers a large part of the interval between the age of Chaucer and the age of Shakespeare. That period has been unjustly neglected. Stephen Hawes is not negligible, though admittedly overshadowed by some of his great predecessors, and at the end of the century there appeared the prose of Thomas Malory and William Caxton. In the north the Scottish Chaucerians, particularly Robert Henryson, William Dunbar, Gawin Douglas and David Lindsay, produced significant work. These authors carry on the tradition of English as a literary medium into the Renaissance. Thus, Middle English literature follows and throws interesting light on the fortunes of the English language [20; 24; 28; 54].

The runic writing system is a set of related alphabets using letters known as runes to write various Germanic languages before the adoption of the Latin alphabet and for specialized purposes thereafter. The Scandinavian variants are also known as futhark.

The literature of the Old English period was presented by two main tenors epic and religious. Among the most important works of this period was the poem Beowulf, which has achieved national epic status in England. The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle otherwise proves significant to the study of the era, preserving a chronology of early English history, while the poem Cædmon’s Hymn from the 7th century survives as the oldest extant work of literature in English.

The effects of the Norman Conquest added new features to the regional and social differentiation of the language. New words, coming from French, could not be adopted simultaneously by all the speakers of English; they were first used in some varieties of the language.

The dialectal position of Middle English is basically a continuation of that of Old English. The most important extra linguistic fact for the development of the Middle English dialects is that the capital of the country was moved from Winchester (in the Old English period) to London by William the Conqueror in his attempt to diminish the political influence of native English.

Geoffrey Chaucer’s literary standing had greatly added to the prestige associated with written language in the London dialect.

The introduction of the printing by William Caxton was one of the most significant factors of the Standard English diffusion. This resulted in the spread of a single norm over most of the country, so much that during the 15th century it becomes increasingly difficult to determine on internal linguistic grounds the dialects in which a literal work is written.

**CHAPTER 2. CHANGING CONDITIONS IN THE PERIOD OF STANDARDISATION OF THE LANGUAGE**

**2.1 The origins of Standard English**

The variety which we now call Standard English is a result of combination of influences, the most important of which do not emerge until the Middle English period. There is no connection between West Saxon, the written standard of old English, and the modern Standard.

The political heart of the country moved from Winchester to London after the Conquest, and majority of the linguistic trends increasingly relate to the development of the capital as a social, political and commercial centre. A written standard language began to emerge during the 15th century and, following the detailed study of the dialectal characteristics of the period it is now possible to isolate several factors which contributed to its identity.

A literally standardized language appeared in the last part of the 14th century, based on dialects of the Central Midland countries, especially Northunptonshire, Hutingtonshire, and Bedfordshire. This is chiefly found in the large number of John Wycliffe’s manuscripts which have survived including sermons, tracts, plays, poems, and the different versions of the Wycliffe Bible, as well as several secular works. The Lollards spread this variety widely, even into South-West England, thus increasing its status as standard. In the long term it was unable to compete with quantity of material emanating from the capital; but its central Midland origins are nonetheless noteworthy (for the map of Middle English counties, see Appendix 1, p. 67) [27; 28; 53].

**2.1.1 The Rise of Standard English**

Out of the variety of local dialects there emerged toward the end of the 14th century a written language that in the course of the 15th century won general recognition and has since become the recognized standard in both speech and writing. The part of England that contributed most to the formation of this standard was the

East Midland district, and it was the East Midland type of English that became its basis, particularly the dialect of the metropolis, London. Several causes contributed to the attainment of this result.

In the first place, as a Midland dialect the English of this region occupied a middle position between the extreme divergences of the north and south. It was less conservative than the Southern dialect, less radical than the Northern. In its sounds and inflections it represents a kind of compromise, sharing some of the characteristics of both its neighbors [20].

In the second place, the East Midland district was the largest and most populous of the major dialect areas. The land was more valuable than the hilly country to the north and west, and in an agricultural age this advantage was reflected in both the number and the prosperity of the inhabitants. If we leave Lincolnshire, Norfolk and Suffolk out of account we are to all appearances leaving out of account not much less than a quarter of the whole nation. No doubt all inferences drawn from medieval statistics are exceedingly precarious; but, unless a good many figures have conspired to deceive us, Lincolnshire, Norfolk and Suffolk were at the time of the Conquest and for three centuries afterwards vastly richer and more populous than any tract of equal area in the West. Only the southern counties possessed natural advantages at all comparable, and they were much smaller. The prominence of Middlesex, Oxford, Norfolk, and the East Midlands generally in political affairs all through the later Middle Ages is but another evidence of the importance of the district and of the extent to which its influence was likely to be felt [20; 27; 53].

A third factor, more difficult to evaluate, was the presence of the universities, Oxford and Cambridge, in this region. In the 14th century the monasteries were playing a less important role in the dissemination of learning than they had once played, while the two universities had developed into important intellectual centers. So far as Cambridge is concerned any influence that it had would be exerted in support of the East Midland dialect. That of Oxford is less certain because Oxfordshire is on the border between Midland and Southern and its dialect shows certain characteristic Southern features. Moreover, we can no longer attribute to Wycliffe an important part in the establishment of a written standard. Though he spent much of his life at Oxford, he seems not to have conformed fully to the Oxford dialect. Supposedly, the dialect of Oxford had no apparent influence on the form of London English, which was ultimately adopted as standard. Such support as the East Midland type of English received from the universities must have been largely confined to that furnished by Cambridge.

Much the same uncertainty attaches to the influence of Chaucer. It was once thought that Chaucer's importance was paramount among the influences bringing about the adoption of a written standard. And, indeed, it is unbelievable that the language of the greatest English poet before Shakespeare was not spread by the popularity of his works and, through the use of that language, by subsequent poets who looked upon him as their master and model. But it is nevertheless unlikely that the English used in official records and in letters and papers by men of affairs was greatly influenced by the language of his poetry. Yet it is the language found in such documents rather than the language of Chaucer that is at the basis of Standard English. Chaucer’s dialect is not in all respects the same as the language of these documents, presumably identical with the ordinary speech of the city. It is slightly more conservative and shows a greater number of Southern characteristics. Chaucer was a court poet, and his usage may reflect the speech of the court and to a certain extent literary tradition. His influence must be thought of as lending support in a general way to the dialect of the region to which he belonged rather than as determining.

A later and much larger group of diverse manuscripts include the work of Chaucer and Langland. These texts in their different ways represent London English of around 1400, but the amount of variation of their displays suggests that they cannot be called standard, in any strict sense. Not even Chaucer’s writing traditionally thought to be a precursor of modern Standard English, exercised a specific influence on the form this standard took – nor it is likely that poetic usage would ever influence general usage in any real way. It can be hardly doubted though that Chaucer’s literary standing would have greatly added to the prestige associated with written language in the London dialect.

The final factor in the emergence of the southern literary standard was the development of printing. This resulted in the spread of a single norm over most of the country, so much that during the 15th century it becomes increasingly difficult to determine on internal linguistic grounds the dialects, in which a literal work is written- apart from the northern dialects, such as Scots, which retained their written identity longer [20; 27; 28; 53].

**2.1.2 The importance of London English**

By far the most influential factor in the rise of Standard English was the importance of London as the capital of England. Indeed, it is altogether likely that the language of the city would have become the prevailing dialect without the help of any of the factors previously discussed. In doing so it would have been following the course of other national tongues – French as the dialect of Paris, Spanish as that of Castile, and others. London was, and still is, the political and commercial center of England. It was the seat of the court, of the highest judicial tribunals, the focus of the social and intellectual activities of the country. In the practicalities of commerce the London economy was especially important as an engine of communication and exchange which enabled ideas and information to be distributed and business to be done across an increasingly extensive, complex and varied field. Patterns of migration at this time cannot be fully reconstructed, but clearly London drew in a constant stream those whose affairs took them beyond the limits of their provincial homes. They brought to it traits of their local speech, there to mingle with the London idiom and to survive or die as the silent forces of amalgamation and standardization determined. They took back with them the forms and usages of the great city by which their own speech had been modified. The influence was reciprocal. London English took as well as gave. It began as a Southern and ended as a Midland dialect. By the 15th century there had come to prevail in the East Midlands a fairly uniform dialect, and the language of London agrees in all important respects with it. It is undoubtedly that the importance of the eastern counties, pointed out above, is largely responsible for this change. Even such Northern characteristics as are found in the standard speech seem to have entered by way of these counties. The history of Standard English is almost a history of London English.

In the latter part of the 15th century the London standard had been accepted, at least in writing, in most parts of the country. Its prestige may possibly be reflected in the fact that Mak the sheep-stealer in the Towneley Plays attempts to impose upon the Yorkshire shepherds by masquerading as a person of some importance and affects a “Southern tooth.” Considerable diversity still existed in the spoken dialects, as will be apparent from what is said in the next paragraph. But in literary works after 1450 it becomes almost impossible, except in distinctly northern texts, to determine with any precision the region in which a given work was written. And in correspondence and local records there is a widespread tendency to conform in matters of language to the London standard. This influence emanating from London can be seen in the variety of English used in documents of the national bureaucracy as written by the clerks of Chancery. By the middle of the century a fairly consistent variety of written English in both spelling and grammar had developed, and as the language of official use it was likely to have influence in similar situations elsewhere. With the introduction of printing in 1476 a new influence of great importance in the dissemination of London English came into play. From the beginning London has been the center of book publishing in England.

**2.1.3 The importance of Chancery Line**

The most important area for the development of writing standards is that of London and its immediate environs. The London dialect is portrayed in broad terms as one which turned from being an essentially Southern dialect to one which became an East Midland one. However, it is possible to be much more specific about various standards within the London area itself. These may be associated with different types of work so that in the Chancery scribes developed their own standard which was by no means constant since it changed with time, whereas other standards developed in association with particular scribes who wrote literary and other works. The copying of manuscripts often produced mixed dialects or Mischsprachen as one scribe superimposed his own conventions on those of the manuscript he was copying, but this is something which is more particularly associated with literary and didactic texts since these are the texts which are copied most frequently. They are also the texts read most frequently today. It might be said that each local standard draws its conventions from a pool which consists of traditional, national and local features, with the local and traditional features being more important at first and the national gaining in importance as the 15th century progresses. In London itself it is perhaps surprising that so much standardization is found, for although one might expect such standardization in religious houses with their traditions, London is characterized by secular copying. As far as it is probable to tell, secular scribes worked individually on a piece-work basis, though they might occasionally have teamed up to form a loose co-operative. However, many individual scribes may, like Hoccleve, have worked for a major organization such as the Chancery during the day and done private copying at other times. Hence even in secular private copying the process of standardization would gradually manifest itself.

The Chancery hand developed in Italian chancelleries in the 13th century and spread to France in the early 14th century. Later in that century it spread to London, and the standardization of the handwriting went hand in hand with the standardization of the spelling.

The Chancery clerks fairly consistently preferred the spellings which have since become standard. The documents in this anthology show the clerks trying to eliminate the kind of orthographic eccentricity found in the Privy Seal minutes, the petitions passed on to them for entering in the rolls, and most of the documents printed by Chambers and Daunt. At the very least, we can say that they were trying to limit choices among spellings and that by the 1440’s and 1450’s they had achieved a comparative regularization.

Among examples of this regularization process they note that such is the preferred Chancery form which had ousted sich, sych, seche and swiche. Which replaced wich. The auxiliary verbs appear more regularly in their modern forms: can, could, shall, should and would. Furthermore it is difficult to detect spellings used by the Chancery scribes that can be described as phonetic. In other words a standardized spelling was developing which was divorced from the immediate phonetic environment so that sound and spelling were becoming two separate, if parallel, systems (for more details see Appendix 2, p. 68) [24; 27; 28].

**2.2 The Middle English Spelling and Sounds**

What is immediately noticeable is the extraordinary diversity of Middle English spelling – far greater than that found in Old English.

This situation results from a combination of historical, linguistic, and social factors. The sociolinguistic impact of the French invasion, the continuation of the processes of sound change which began in Anglo- Saxon times, and the considerable growth and movement in population during the medieval period, especially in the south-east of the country, all helped to influence the shape of the writing system. The change is quite dramatic. There is a marked contrast between the diverse and idiosyncratic forms used at the beginning of the period and the highly regularized system of spelling which begins to appear in the 15th century, in the work of the Chancery scribes and William Caxton [28].

**2.2.1 Changes in Spelling due to the introduction of French scribal tradition**

The striking change in the written language of England during the 12th century was, to a considerable extent, a matter of mere spelling. After the Norman Conquest children ceased to be regularly taught to read and write English, and were taught to read and write French instead. When, therefore, the mass of the new generation tried to write English, they had no orthographical traditions to guide them, and had to spell the words phonetically according to French rules. They used ch instead of the old c, when it was pronounced as in cirice ‘church’. The sound of the Old English sc in sceamu ‘shame’, which did not exist at that time in French, was rendered by ss,ssh,sch, or sh. The French qu took the place of hw. The f between vowels [v] was replaced by u or v (these being still, as long afterwards, treated as forms of one and the same letter, used indifferently for vowel and consonant). The Old English symbol æ was dropped, its place being taken by a or e. The sound of the Old English y, in the dialects where it survived, was expressed by u; and that of the Old English long u was written ou, as in French.

Of course these changes did not take place all at once. It is not to be supposed that no one ever read an Old English Manuscript and there was, for a long time, some mixture of the traditional spelling with the new one. Some few English sounds admitted of no tolerable representation in the French alphabet; and for the expression of these the native characters were retained in use. The letters, þ, ð and were used, though often blunderingly, even by scribes who, in other respects, were thoroughly French in their spelling; though often the sounds were awkwardly rendered by t, th, ht, or d, and u. And in the 12th century, though the continental variety of the Roman alphabet was generally used for writing English, it was found convenient to retain the native form of the letter g for those two of its sounds that the French g lacked, namely, those of gh and y (as in year). A new letter was thus added to the alphabet, and, though it came to be written exactly like the contemporary form of z, it preserved its name ‘yok’ until the 14th century. It may be remarked in passing that the ambiguity of pronunciation of this letter has misled modern writers into calling the author of the Brut Layamon instead of Laghamon; the incorrect form, however, has become too well known to be displaced. In addition to the two original values of the ‘yok’, it very early obtained a third use, being employed (without indicating any change of pronunciation) instead of the Old English h in certain positions, as in kni[x]t, ibro[x]t, rou[x], for which the older spelling was cniht, gebroht, ruh.



The letter was retained; but, although it was still called ‘thorn’ in the 14th century, it seems in Geoffrey Chaucer’s time to have been regarded as a mere compendium for th, which generally took its place except initially. It may be noted that Thomas Usk, in the acrostic sentence of his Testament of Love (1387) spells in ‘thine’ with the four letters THIN. The adoption of a number of French words like ioie ‘joy’, in which i was pronounced like the modern English j, introduced the consonantal use of this letter into English orthography.

The Old English initial combination hl survived (written lh) in some dialects down to the 14th century; but hr was very early reduced to r. For the Old English hw, Middle English writers substituted wh, though the h was, at first, often omitted in this combination, as in other positions, by scribes of French education. The northern spelling qua, quilk for Wha, whilk ‘who’, ‘which’ arose from a dialectal pronunciation of qu as wh, which still survives locally in a few words.

From the 12th century onwards, the letter y, when used as a vowel, was treated as a mere alternative form of i.

The Ormulum is written in a peculiar phonetic spelling devised by the author himself. This is based, to a considerable extent, on native tradition, though the handwriting is of the continental type. There are, however, some of the new features. Orm uses ch and sh as we do now, and retains the Old English form of for the two sounds which the French letter had not. A device peculiar to himself is the appropriation of different shapes of the letter g to the two sounds in god ‘good’ and egge ‘edge’.



But the most noteworthy characteristic of his orthography is the method of indicating the quantity of the vowels. The shortness of a vowel, in a syllable ending with a consonant, is shown by doubling the following consonant, as in Crisstenndom. When the short vowel ended a syllable in the middle of a word, Orm indicated a long vowel by one, two, or even three acute accents over the letter. This elaborate and cumbrous system found no imitators, but, as preserved in the author’s autograph Manuscript, it is one of the most important aids that we possess for ascertaining the English pronunciation of the time [2; 11; 20; 28; 54].

**2.2.2 Middle English pronunciation**

Several sounds altered during the early Middle English period. Some took on a different value; some disappeared altogether. In particular, there was a restructuring of the Old English vowel system. The original diphthongs became pure vowels, and new diphthongs emerged. Some of the new units arose when certain consonants at the end of a syllable came to be pronounced in a vowel-like manner an example is wei ‘way’, from Old Engliss weg. French loan words also introduced new diphthongs, in the form of [oi] and [ui] – unusual sounds for English, and the ancestors of modern [ɔi] in joy, point, etc.

Several of the pure vowels also changed their values. For example, in most parts of the country (except the north), Old English [a:] came to be articulated higher at the back of the mouth, as is shown by such spelling changes as ban becoming bon ‘bone’ or swa becoming so. Northern speech followed its own course in several other areas too; for example, several of the new diphthongs were far more evident in the south, being replaced by pure vowels in the north (light vs licht).

An interesting change happened to [h]. This sound appeared before a consonant at the beginning of many Old English words, such as hring ‘ring’ and hnecca ‘neck’. It was lost early on in the Middle English period – the first sign of the process of ‘aitch-dropping’ which is still with us today. The loss of h before a vowel began some time later, producing variations in usage which continued into the 16th century. Middle English manuscripts show many examples of an h absent where it should be present (adde for had, eld for held) or present where it should be absent (ham for am, his for is). The influence of spelling (and doubtless the prescriptive tradition in schools) led to the h-forms being later restored in many words in Received Pronunciation (though not in such Romance loans like honour), and thus to the present-day situation where the use of [h] in socially diagnostic [20; 28].

In a few cases, new contrastive units emerged. The [v] sound became much more important, because of its use in French loan words, and began to distinguish pairs of words, as it does today f (feel vs veal). Although both [f] and [v] sounds are found in Old English, the language did not use them to differentiate words. Similarly, French influence caused [s] and [z] to become contrastive (zeal vs seal). And the ng sound [ ŋ] at the end of a word also began to distinguish meanings at this time thing vs thin. In Old English, this sound had always been followed by a [g] – cyning ‘king’, for example, was kyniŋg. However, the [g] died away at the end of the Old English period, leaving [ŋ] as the sole distinguishing unit.

The study of Middle English phonology is made increasingly difficult (and fascinating) by the intricate dialect situation. On the one hand, a letter might be given different pronunciations depending on the dialect area in which it appears; an example is the letter y, which for a while represented an unrounded sound quality in the south and a rounded sound quality in the north. On the other hand, a sound might be given different spellings depending on the dialect area in which it appears; an example here is Old English [х], spelled in the middle of words as gh in the south, and as ch in the north (night vs nicht). Finally, we should note the continuing need for analytical caution because spelling was not standardized. Problems of authorial idiosyncrasy and copyist error abound, contributing to both the complex character of the period and the moral fibre of its students [28; 31; 38; 43].

**2.3 Changes in Grammar in Middle and Early New English**

The changes in English grammar may be described as a general reduction of inflections. Endings of the noun and adjective marking distinctions of number and case and often of gender were so altered in pronunciation as to lose their distinctive form and hence their usefulness. To some extent the same thing is true of the verb. This leveling of inflectional endings was due partly to phonetic changes, partly to the operation of analogy. The phonetic changes were simple but far-reaching. The earliest seems to have been the change of final m to n wherever it occurred, i.e., in the dative plural of nouns and adjectives and in the dative singular (masculine and neuter) of adjectives when inflected according to the strong declension. Thus, mūðum >mūðun, gōdum>gōdun. This n, along with the n of the other inflectional endings, was then dropped (\*muðu, \*gōdu). At the same time, the vowels a, o, u, e in inflectional endings were obscured to a sound, the so-called “indeterminate vowel”, which came to be written e (less often i,y, u, depending on place and date). As a result, a number of originally distinct endings such as a, u, e, an, um were reduced generally to a uniform e, and such grammatical distinctions as they formerly expressed were no longer conveyed. Traces of these changes have been found in Old English manuscripts as early as the 10th century. By the end of the 12th century they seem to have been generally carried out. The leveling is somewhat obscured in the written language by the tendency of scribes to preserve the traditional spelling, and in some places the final n was retained even in the spoken language, especially as a sign of the plural. The effect of these changes on the inflection of the noun and the adjective, and the further simplification that was brought about by the operation of analogy, may be readily shown [10; 20; 22; 46].

**2.3.1 Middle English Noun**

A glance at the few examples of common noun declensions in Old English will show how seriously the inflectional endings were disturbed. For example, in the London English of Chaucer in the strong masculine declension the forms muð, mūðe, mūðe, mūð in the singular, and mūða, mūða and mūðum, mūðas in the plural were reduced to three: mūð, mūðes, and mūðe. In such words the e, which was organic in the dative singular and the genitive and dative plural (i.e., stood for an ending in the Old English paradigm), was extended by analogy to the nominative and accusative singular, so that forms like stōne, mūðe appear, and the only distinctive termination is the s of the possessive singular and of the nominative and accusative plural. Because these two cases of the plural were those most frequently used, the s came to be thought of as the sign of the plural and was extended to all plural forms. We get thus an inflection of the noun identical with that which we have today. Other declensions suffered even more, so that in many words like giefu, sunu, the distinctions of case and even of number were completely obliterated.

In early Middle English only two methods of indicating the plural remained fairly distinctive: the s or es from the strong masculine declension and the en (as in oxen) from the weak. And for a time, at least in southern England, it would have been difficult to predict that the -s would become the almost universal sign of the plural that it has become. Until the 13th century the en plural enjoyed great favor in the south, being often added to nouns which had not belonged to the weak declension in Old English. But in the rest of England the s plural (and genitive singular) of the old first declension (masculine) was apparently felt to be so distinctive that it spread rapidly. Its extension took place most quickly in the north. Even in Old English many nouns originally of other declensions had gone over to this declension in the Northumbrian dialect. By 1200 s was the standard plural ending in the north and north Midland areas; other forms were exceptional. Fifty years later it had conquered the rest of the Midlands, and in the course of the 14th century it had definitely been accepted all over England as the normal sign of the plural in English nouns. Its spread may have been helped by the early extension of s throughout the plural in Anglo-Norman, but in general it may be considered as an example of the survival of the fittest in language.

One of the consequences of the decay of inflections described above was the elimination of that troublesome feature of language, grammatical gender. The gender of Old English nouns was not often determined by meaning. Sometimes it was in direct contradiction with the meaning. Thus woman (OE wīf-mann) was masculine, because the second element in the compound was masculine; wife and child, like German Weib and Kind, were neuter. Moreover, the gender of nouns in Old English was not so generally indicated by the declension as it is in a language like Latin. Instead it was revealed chiefly by the concord of the strong adjective and the demonstratives. These by their distinctive endings generally showed, at least in the singular, whether a noun was masculine, feminine, or neuter. When the inflections of these gender distinguishing words were reduced to a single ending for the adjective, and the fixed forms of the, this, that, these, and those for the demonstratives, the support for grammatical gender was removed. The weakening of inflections and the confusion and loss of the old gender proceeded in a remarkably parallel course. In the north, where inflections weakened earliest, grammatical gender disappeared first. In the south it lingered longer because there the decay of inflections was slower.

The present method of determining gender was no sudden invention of Middle English times. The recognition of sex that lies at the root of natural gender is shown in Old English by the noticeable tendency to use the personal pronouns in accordance with natural gender, even when such use involves a clear conflict with the grammatical gender of the antecedent. For example, the pronoun it in Etað þisne hlaf (masculine), hit is mīm līchama (Ælfric’s Homilies) is exactly in accordance with modern usage when we say, Eat this bread, it is my body. Such a use of the personal pronouns is clearly indicative of the feeling for natural gender even while grammatical gender was in full force. With the disappearance of grammatical gender sex became the only factor in determining the gender of English nouns [20; 28; 54].

**2.3.2 Middle English and Early New English Adjective and Pronoun**

In the adjective the leveling of forms had even greater consequences. Partly as a result of the sound-changes already described, partly through the extensive working of analogy, the form of the nominative singular was early extended to all cases of the singular, and that of the nominative plural to all cases of the plural, both in the strong and the weak declensions. The result was that in the weak declension there was no longer any distinction between the singular and the plural: both ended in e as in blinda> blinde and blindan>blinde. This was also true of those adjectives under the strong declension whose singular ended in e .By about 1250 the strong declension had distinctive forms for the singular and plural only in certain monosyllabic adjectives which ended in a consonant in Old English (sing. glad, pl. glade). Under the circumstances the only ending which remained to the adjective was often without distinctive grammatical meaning and its use was not governed by any strong sense of adjectival inflection. Although it is clear that the e ending of the weak and plural forms were available for use in poetry in both the East and West Midlands until the end of the 14th century, it is impossible to know the most usual status of the form in the spoken language. Certainly adjectival inflections other than e, such as Geoffrey Chaucer’s oure aller cok, were archaic survivals by the close of the Middle English period.

The decay of inflections that brought about such a simplification of the noun and the adjective as has just been described made it necessary to depend less upon formal indications of gender, case, and (in adjectives) number, and to rely more upon juxtaposition, word order, and the use of prepositions to make clear the relation of words in a sentence. This is apparent from the corresponding decay of pronominal inflections, where the simplification of forms was due in only a slight measure to the weakening of final syllables that played so large a part in the reduction of endings in the noun and the adjective. The loss was greatest in the demonstratives. Of the numerous forms of sē, sēo, þæt. only the and that survived through Middle English and are used today. A plural tho ‘those’ survived to Elizabethan times. All the other forms indicative of different gender, number, and case disappeared in most dialects early in the Middle English period. The same may be said of the demonstrative þēs, þēos, þis ‘this’. Everywhere but in the south the neuter form þis came to be used early in Middle English for all genders and cases of the singular, while the forms of the nominative plural were similarly extended to all cases of the plural, appearing in Modern English as those and these.

In the personal pronoun the losses were not so great. Most of the distinctions that existed in Old English were retained. However the forms of the dative and accusative cases were early combined, generally under that of the dative (him, her, [t]hem). In the neuter the form of the accusative [h]it became the general objective case, partly because it was like the nominative, and partly because the dative him would have been subject to confusion with the corresponding case of the masculine. One other general simplification is to be noted: the loss of the dual number. A language can get along without a distinction in pronouns for two persons and more than two: the forms wit, and their oblique cases did not survive beyond the 13th century, and English lost the dual number.

It will be observed that the pronoun she had the form hēo in Old English. The modern form could have developed from the Old English hēo, but it is believed by some that it is due in part at least to the influence of the demonstrative sēo. A similar reinforcing influence of the demonstrative is perhaps to be seen in the forms of the third person plural, they, their, them, but here the source of the modern developments was undoubtedly Scandinavian. The normal development of the Old English pronouns would have been hi (he), here, hem, and these are very common. In the districts, however, where Scandinavian influence was strong, the nominative hi began early to be replaced by the Scandinavian form þei (ON þeir), and somewhat later a similar replacement occurred in the other cases, their and them. The new forms were adopted more slowly farther south, and the usual inflection in Chaucer is thei, here, hem. But by the end of the Middle English period the forms they their, them may be regarded as the normal English plurals [8; 20; 38].

**2.3.3 Middle English and Early New English Verb**

Apart from some leveling of inflections and the weakening of endings in accordance with the general tendency, the principal changes in the verb during the Middle English period were the serious losses suffered by the strong conjugation. This conjugation, although including some of the most important verbs in the language, was relatively small as compared with the large and steadily growing body of weak verbs. While an occasional verb developed a strong past tense or past participle by analogy with similar strong verbs, new verbs formed from nouns and adjectives or borrowed from other languages were regularly conjugated as weak. Thus the minority position of the strong conjugation was becoming constantly more appreciable. After the Norman Conquest the loss of native words further depleted the ranks of the strong verbs. Those that survived were exposed to the influence of the majority, and many have changed over in the course of time to the weak inflection.

Nearly a third of the strong verbs in Old English seem to have died out early in the Middle English period. In any case about ninety of them have left no traces in written records after 1150. Some of them may have been current for a time in the spoken language, but except where an occasional verb survives in a modern dialect they are not recorded. Some were rare in Old English and others were in competition with weak verbs of similar derivation and meaning which superseded them. In addition to verbs that are not found at all after the Old English period there are about a dozen more that appear only in Layamon (c. 1200) or in certain 12th -century texts based directly on the homilies of Ælfric and other Old English works. In other words, more than a hundred of the Old English strong verbs were lost at the beginning of the Middle English period.

But this was not all. The loss has continued in subsequent periods. Some thirty more became obsolete in the course of Middle English, and an equal number, which were still in use in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, finally died out except in the dialects, often after they had passed over to the weak conjugation or had developed weak forms alongside the strong. Today more than half of the Old English strong verbs have disappeared completely from the standard language.

The principle of analogy – the tendency of language to follow certain patterns and adapt a less common form to a more familiar one –is well exemplified in the further history of the strong verbs. The weak conjugation offered a fairly consistent pattern for the past tense and the past participle, whereas there was much variety in the different classes of the strong verb. We say sing—sang—sung, but drive—drove—driven, fall—fell—fallen, etc. At a time when English was the language chiefly of the lower classes and largely removed from the restraining influences of education and a literary standard, it was natural that many speakers should apply the pattern of weak verbs to some which were historically strong. The tendency was not unknown even in Old English. Thus rædan ‘to advise’ and sceddan ‘to injure’ had already become weak in Old English, while other verbs show occasional weak forms. In the 13th century the trend becomes clear in change. By the 14th century the movement was at its height. No less than thirty-two verbs in addition to those already mentioned now show weak forms. After this there are fewer changes. The impulse seems to have been checked, possibly by the steady rise of English in the social scale and later by the stabilizing effect of printing. At all events the 15th century shows only about a dozen new weak formations and in the whole modern period there are only about as many more.

In none of the many verbs which have thus become weak was the change from the strong conjugation a sudden one. Strong forms continued to be used while the weak ones were growing up, and in many cases they continued in use long after the weak inflection had become well established. Thus oke as the past tense of ache was still written throughout the 15th century although the weak form ached had been current for a hundred years. In the same way we find stope beside stepped, rewe beside rowed, clew beside clawed. In a good many cases the strong forms remained in the language well into modern times. Climb, which was conjugated as a weak verb as early as the thirteenth century, still has an alternative past tense clomb not only in Chaucer and Spenser but in Dryden, and the strong past tense crope was more common than crept down to William Shakespeare’s day. Low for laughed, shove for shaved, yold for yielded, etc., were still used in the 16th century although these verbs were already passing over to the weak conjugation two centuries before. While the weak forms commonly won out, this was not always the case. Many strong verbs also had weak forms blowed for blew, knowed for knew, teared for tore that did not survive in the standard speech, while in other cases both forms have continued in use such as cleft –clove, crowed –crew, heave –hove, sheared –shore, shrived –shrove.

For some reason the past participle of strong verbs seems to have been more tenacious than the past tense. In a number of verbs weak participles are later in appearing and the strong form often continued in use after the verb had definitely become weak. In the verb beat the principle beaten has remained the standard form, while in a number of other verbs the strong participle (cloven, graven, hewn, laden, molten, mown, (mis)shapen, shaven, sodden, swollen) are still used, especially as adjectives.

When we subtract the verbs that have been lost completely and the eighty-one that have become weak, there remain just sixty-eight of the Old English strong verbs in the language today. To this number may be added thirteen verbs that are conjugated in both ways or have kept one strong form. These figures indicate how extensive the loss of strong verbs in the language has been. Beside this loss the number of new strong formations has been negligible. Since the irregularity of such verbs constitutes a difficulty in language, the loss in this case must be considered a gain.

The surviving strong verbs have seldom come down to the present day in the form that would represent the normal development of their principal parts in Old English. In all periods of the language they have been subjected to various forms of leveling and analogical influence from one class to another. For example, the verb to slay had in Old English the forms slēan –slōg –slōgon—slægen. These would normally have become slea (pronounced slee) –slough –slain, and the present tense slea actually existed down to the 17th century. The modern slay is reformed from the past participle. The past tense slew is due to the analogy of preterites like blew, grew. In Old English the past tense commonly had a different form in the singular and the plural, and in two large classes of verbs the vowel of the plural was also like that of the past participle bindan –band –bundon –bunden. Consequently, although normally the singular form survived in Modern English, in many cases the vowel of the plural or of the past participle has taken its place. Thus cling, sting, spin, etc., should have had a past tense clang, stang, span (like sing), but these forms have been replaced by clung, stung, spun from the plural and the past participle. The past tense of slide should have been slode, but the plural and the past participle had i and we now say slide –slid –slid. Sometimes a verb has changed from one class to another. Break belonged originally to the fifth class of strong verbs, and had it remained there, would have had a past participle breken. But in Old English it was confused with verbs of the fourth class, which had o in the past participle, whence our form broken. This form has now spread to the past tense. We should be saying brack or brake, and the latter is still used in the Bible, but except in biblical language the current form is now broke. Speak has had a similar development. Almost every strong verb in the language has an interesting prehistory, but the present purpose will be sufficiently served by these few examples of the sort of fluctuation and change that was going on all through the Middle English period and which has not yet ended.

As a result of the leveling of inflections, syntactic and semantic relationships that had been signaled by the endings on words now became ambiguous. Whereas in Old English the grammatical functions of two consecutive nouns were clear from their endings in, say, the nominative and dative cases, in Middle English their functions might be uncertain. The most direct way to avoid this kind of ambiguity is through limiting the possible patterns of word order. The process of development from the highly synthetic stage of Old English to the highly analytic stages of Late Middle English and Modern English can be seen in the Peterborough Chronicle. Written in installments between 1070 and 1154, this text of the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle spans the period from Old English to Early Middle English. Within the continuations of the text it is possible to trace first a significant loss of inflections and afterwards a corresponding rigidity of word order, making clear the direction of cause and effect. This process of development and the reality of Middle English as a separate stage of the language grammatically (as well as phonologically and lexically) can be seen in the patterns of subject and verb. In addition to the Modern English order SV, Old English had VS and, in subordinate clauses, S...V (with the finite verb in final position). All of these patterns are still possible even in the last years of the Peterborough Chronicle. Thus, the word order looked much like that of Old English at a time when the inflectional system looked much like that of Modern English. As Bruce Mitchell writes, “the language of the Peterborough Chronicle 1122-1154 is Middle, not Modern English. It is transitional [1; 4; 20; 46].

It is important to emphasize that these changes which affected the grammatical structure of English after the Norman Conquest were not the result of contact with the French language. Certain idioms and syntactic usages that appear in Middle English are clearly the result of such contact. But the decay of inflections and the confusion of forms that constitute the truly significant development in Middle English grammar are the result of the Norman Conquest only insofar as that event brought about conditions favorable to such changes. By removing the authority that a standard variety of English would have, the Norman Conquest made it easier for grammatical changes to go forward unchecked. Beyond this it is not considered a factor in syntactic changes [4; 20; 38; 43; 46; 54].

**2.4 The complexity of Middle English Vocabulary**

The vocabulary of the Peterborough Chronicle is not typical of the Middle English period as a whole. Despite the fact that it was written almost a century after the Conquest, there is little sign of the French vocabulary which was to be the distinctive characteristic of the era. The Chronicle vocabulary is still typical of what would have appeared in literary West Saxon – predominantly Germanic, with an admixture of Latin and Scandinavian. Several of its words have since dropped from the language –for example, þines ‘cruelties’, or namen ‘took’ were not longer used. And of the words which are still found today, several have altered meanings: wonder could mean ‘atrocities’ as well as ‘marvels’ and flesh had the general sense of meat. Such “false friends” are always a problem in reading a Middle English text because of their misleading similarity to the modern words [28].

**2.4.1 French factor in the development of Middle English Vocabulary**

While the loss of inflections and the consequent simplification of English grammar were thus only indirectly due to the use of French in England, French influence is much more direct and observable upon the vocabulary. Where two languages exist side by side for a long time and the relations between the people speaking them are as intimate as they were in England, a considerable transference of words from one language to the other is inevitable. As is generally the case, the interchange was to some extent mutual. A good many English words found their way into the French spoken in England. Their number was not so large as that of the French words introduced into English. English, representing a culture that was regarded as inferior, had more to gain from French, and there were other factors involved. The number of French words that poured into English was unbelievably great. There is nothing comparable to it in the previous or subsequent history of the language [20; 24; 54].

**2.4.1.1 French influence on the English Vocabulary**

French influence became increasingly evident in English manuscripts of the 13th century. It has been estimated that some 10,000 French words came into English at that time – many previously borrowed from more distant sources (such as alkali from Arabic). These words were largely to do with the mechanisms of law and administration, but they also included words from such fields as medicine, art, and fashion. Many of the new words were quite ordinary, everyday terms. Over 70 per cent were nouns. A large number were abstract terms, constructed using such new French affixes as con-, trans-, pre-, -ance, -tion, and -ment. About three-quarters of all these French loans are still in the language today.

As new words arrived, there were many cases where they duplicated words that had already existed in English from Anglo-Saxon times. In such cases, there were two outcomes. Either one word would supplant the other; or both would co-exist, but develop slightly different meanings. The first outcome was very common, in most cases the French word replacing an Old English equivalent; for example, leod gave way to people, wlitig to beautiful, and stow to place. Hundreds of Old English words were lost in this way. But at the same time, Old English and French words often both survived with different senses or connotations, such as doom (OE) and judgment (F ), hearty (OE) and cordial (F), and house (OE) and mansion (F). Sometimes pairs of words were used, one glossing the other: for routhe and for pitie is a Chaucerian for example, and legal terminology often developed coordinations of this kind. Bilingual word lists were compiled as early as the mid-13th century to aid intelligibility between English and French [20; 28].

Although this influx of French words was brought about by the victory of the Conqueror and by the political and social consequences of that victory, it was neither sudden nor immediately apparent. Rather it began slowly and continued with varying tempo for a long time. Indeed it can hardly be said to have ever stopped. The large number of French words borrowed during the Middle Ages has made it easy to go on borrowing, and the close cultural relations between France and England in all subsequent periods have furnished a constant opportunity for the transfer of words. But there was a time in the centuries following the Conquest when this movement had its start and a stream of French words poured into English with a momentum that continued until toward the end of the Middle English period.

In this movement two stages can be observed, an earlier and a later, with the year 1250 as the approximate dividing line. The borrowings of the first stage differ from those of the second in being much less numerous, in being more likely to show peculiarities of Anglo-Norman phonology, and, especially, in the circumstances that brought about their introduction. When we study the French words appearing in English before 1250, roughly 900 in number, we find that many of them were such as the lower classes would become familiar with through contact with a French-speaking nobility –baron, noble, dame, servant, messenger, feast, minstrel, juggler, largess. Others, such as story, rime, lay, douzepers (the twelve peers of the Charlemagne romances), obviously owed their introduction into English to literary channels. The largest single group among the words that came in early was associated with the church, where the necessity for the prompt transference of doctrine and belief from the clergy to the people is sufficient to account for the frequent transfer of words. In the period after 1250 the conditions under which French words had been making their way into English were supplemented by a new and powerful factor: those who had been accustomed to speak French were turning increasingly to the use of English. Whether to supply deficiencies in the English vocabulary or in their own imperfect command of that vocabulary, or perhaps merely yielding to a natural impulse to use a word long familiar to them and to those they addressed, the upper classes carried over into English an astonishing number of common French words. In changing from French to English they transferred much of their governmental and administrative vocabulary, their ecclesiastical, legal, and military terms, and the familiar words of fashion, food, and social life, the vocabulary of art, learning, and medicine. In general we may say that in the earlier Middle English period the French words introduced into English were such as people speaking one language often learn from those speaking another; in the century and a half following 1250, when all classes were speaking or learning to speak English, they were also such words as people who had been accustomed to speak French would carry over with them into the language of their adoption. Only in this way can we understand the nature and extent of the French importations in this period [1; 20; 28; 54].

**2.4.1.2 Core semantic spheres of loanwords from French**

We should expect that English would owe many of its words dealing with government and administration to the language of those who for more than 200 years made public affairs their chief concern. The words government, govern, administer might appropriately introduce a list of such words. It would include such fundamental terms as crown, state, empire, realm, reign, royal, prerogative, authority, sovereign, majesty, scepter, record, repeal, adjourn, tax, subsidy, revenue, tally, exchequer. The word office and the titles of many offices are likewise French. Except for the words king and queen, lord, lady, and earl, most designations of rank are French: noble, nobility, peer, prince, princess, duke, duchess, count, countess, marquis, baron, squire, page, as well as such words as courtier, retinue, and titles of respect like sir, madam, mistress.

The church was scarcely second to the government as an object of Norman interest and ambition. The higher clergy, occupying positions of wealth and power, were, as we have seen, practically all Normans. Ecclesiastical preferment opened the way to a career that often led to the highest political offices at court. In monasteries and religious houses French was for a long time the usual language. Accordingly in English it is possible to find such French words as religion, theology, sermon, homily, sacramen, prayer, orison, lesson, passion, psalmody; such indications of rank or class as clergy, clerk, prelate, cardinal, legate, dean, chaplain, parson, pastor, vicar, sexton, abbess, novice, friar, hermit; the names of objects associated with the service or with the religious life, such as crucifix, crosier, miter, surplice, censer, incense, lectern, image, chancel, chantry, chapter, abbey, convent, priory, hermitage, cloister, sanctuary; words expressing such fundamental religious or theological concepts as creator, savior, trinity, virgin, saint, miracle, mystery, faith, heresy, schism, reverence, devotion, salvation, immortality, and the more general virtues of piety, sanctity, charity mercy pity, obedience, as well as the word virtue itself. Also a number of adjectives, like solemn, divine, reverend, devout, and verbs, such as preach, pray, chant, repent, confess, adore, sacrifice, convert, anoint, ordain should be included.

French was so long the language of the law courts in England that the greater part of the English legal vocabulary comes from the language of the conquerors. The fact that we speak of justice and equity instead of gerihte, judgment rather than dom ‘doom’, crime in place of synn, gylt, undæd, etc., shows how completely the terminology of French law was adopted. Even where the Old English word survives it has lost its technical sense. In the same way we say bar, assize, eyre, plea, suit, plaintiff, defendant, juror, panel, felon, evidence, proof, bail, ransom, mainpernor, judgment, verdict, sentence, decree, award, fine, forfeit, punishment, prison, gaol, pillory.

The large part that war played in English affairs in the Middle Ages, the fact that the control of the army and navy was in the hands of those who spoke French, and the circumstance that much of English fighting was done in France all resulted in the introduction into English of a number of French military terms. The art of war has undergone such changes since the days of Hastings and Lewes and Agincourt that many words once common are now obsolete or only in historical use. Their places have been taken by later borrowings, often likewise from French, many of them being words acquired by the French in the course of their wars in Italy during the sixteenth century. Nevertheless, medieval French words are used when it comes to the army and the navy, to peace, enemy, arms, battle, combat, skirmish, siege, defense, ambush, stratagem, retreat, guard, spy, and the names of officers such as captain, lieutenant, sergeant are preserved. It is possible to recognize as once having had greater significance words like dart, lance, banner, mail, buckler, hauberk, archer, chieftain, portcullis, barbican, and moat. Sometimes a word has been retained while its original military significance is forgotten.

That the upper classes should have set the standard in fashion and dress is so obvious an assumption that the number of French words belonging to this class occasions no surprise. The words fashion and dress are themselves French, as are apparel, habit, gown, robe, garment, attire, cape, cloak, coat, frock, collar, veil, train, chemise, petticoat. So too are lace, embroidery, pleat, gusset, buckle, button, tassel, plume, and the names of such articles as kerchief, mitten, garter, galoshes, and boots. Verbs like embellish and adorn often occur in contexts which suggest the word luxury, and this in turn carries with it satin, taffeta, fur, sable, beaver, ermine. The colors blue, brown, vermilion, scarlet, saffron, russet, and tawny are French borrowings of this period. Jewel, ornament, brooch, chaplet, ivory, and enamel point to the luxuries of the wealthy and it is significant that the names of all the more familiar precious stones are French: turquoise, amethyst, topaz, garnet, ruby, emerald, sapphire, pearl, diamond, not to mention crystal, coral, and beryl.

The French-speaking classes, it would seem, must also be credited with a considerable adornment of the English table. Not only are the words dinner and supper French, but also the words feast, repast, collation, and mess (now military). So, too, are appetite, taste, victuals, viand, and sustenance. One could have found on the medieval menu, had there been one, among the fish, mackerel, sole, perch, bream, sturgeon, salmon, sardine, oyster, porpoise; among meats, venison, beef, veal, mutton, pork, bacon, sausage, tripe, with a choice of loin, chine, haunch, or brawn, and with gravy included; among fowl, poultry, pullet, pigeon, and various game birds mentioned below. One could have pottage, gruel, toast, biscuit, cream, sugar, olives, salad, lettuce, endive, and for dessert almonds, and many fruits, including raisin, fig, date, grape, orange, lemon, pomegranate, cherry1 peach, or a confection, pasty, tart, jelly, treacle. Among seasoning and condiments we find spice, clove, thyme, herb, mustard, vinegar, marjoram, cinnamon, nutmeg. The verbs roast, boil, parboil, stew, fry, broach, blanch, grate, and mince describe various culinary processes, and goblet, saucer, cruet, plate, platter suggest French refinements in the serving of meals. It is melancholy to think what the English dinner table would have been like had there been no Norman Conquest.

A variety of new words suggests the innovations made by the French in domestic economy and social life. Arras, curtain, couch, chair, cushion, screen, lamp, lantern, sconce, chandelier, blanket, and basin indicate articles of comfort or convenience, while dais, parlor, wardrobe, closet, pantry, scullery, and garner (storehouse) imply improvements in domestic arrangements. Recreation, solace, jollity, leisure, dance, carol, revel, minstrel, juggler, fool, ribald, lute, tabor, melody, music, chess, checkers, dalliance, and conversation reveal various aspects of entertainment in a baronial hall, while numerous words associated with hunting and riding are a reflection of the principal outdoor pastime of the nobility: ambler, courser, hackney palfrey, stallion for various types of horse, together with rein, curb, mallard, partridge, pheasant, quail, plover, heron, squirrel; forest, park, covert, warren. One might extend the list to include other activities, with terms like joust, tournament, pavilion, but those given are sufficient to show how much the English vocabulary owes to French in matters of domestic and social life.

The cultural and intellectual interests of the ruling class are reflected in words pertaining to the arts, architecture, literature, learning, and science, especially medicine. Such words as art, painting, sculpture, music, beauty, color, figure, image, tone are typical of the first class, while architecture and building have given us cathedral, palace, tower, pinnacle, turret, porch, bay, choir, cloister, baptistry, column, pillar, base, and many similar words. Literature is represented by the word itself and by poet, rime, prose, romance, lay, story, chronicle, tragedy, prologue, preface, title, paper, and pen, and learning by treatise, compilation, study, logic, geometry, grammar, noun, clause, gender, together with verbs like copy, expound, and compile. Among the sciences, medicine has brought in the largest number of early French words still in common use, among them the word medicine itself, physician, surgeon, apothecary, malady, debility, distemper, pain, ague, pals, poison. It is clear that the arts and sciences, being largely cultivated or patronized by the higher classes, owe an important part of their vocabulary to French.

There can be little doubt that a large proportion of the words borrowed from French were thoroughly popular in character, that is, words current in the everyday French spoken in England. At the same time the importance of literature is not to be underestimated as a means of transfer. So much of Middle English literature was based directly on French originals that it would have been rather exceptional if English writers had consistently resisted the temptation to carry French words over into their adaptations. Layamon resisted, but most others did not, and when in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries French words were being taken by the hundreds into the popular speech, the way was made easier for the entrance of literary words as well. Although literature was one of the channels by which French words entered English all through the Middle English period, in the 15th century it became the principal source. Words like adolescence, affability, appellation, cohort, combustion, destitution ingenious, pacification, representation, sumptuous betray their learned or bookish origin, and in the works of Caxton at the end of the century new words like aggravation, diversify furtive, prolongation, and ravishment abound. The number of such words entering the language at this time is probably no greater than in the preceding century, but they are more prominent because the adoption of popular words was now greatly curtailed by the practical disappearance of French as a spoken language in England (for the details, see Appendix 3, p. 69) [20; 24; 28; 54].

**2.4.2 Latin borrowings in the Middle and Early New English**

French is the most dominant influence on the growth of Middle English vocabulary, but it is by no means the only one. During the 14th and 15th centuries several thousand words came into the language directly from Latin (though it is often difficult to exclude an arrival route via French). Most of these words were professional or technical terms, belonging to such fields as religion, medicine, law, and literature. They also included many words which were borrowed by a writer in a deliberate attempt to produce a ‘high’ style.

The influence of the Norman Conquest is generally known as the Latin Influence of the Third Period in recognition of the ultimate source of the new French words. But it is right to include also under this designation the large number of words borrowed directly from Latin in Middle English. These differed from the French borrowings in being less popular and in gaining admission generally through the written language. Of course, it must not be forgotten that Latin was a spoken language among ecclesiastics and men of learning, and a certain number of Latin words could well have passed directly into spoken English. Their number, however, is small in comparison with those that we can observe entering by way of literature. In a single work like Trevisa’s translation of the De Proprietatibus Rerum of Bartholomew Anglicus we meet with several hundred words taken over from the Latin original. Since they are not found before this in English, we can hardly doubt that we have here a typical instance of the way such words first came to be used. The 14th and 15th centuries were especially prolific in Latin borrowings. An anonymous writer of the first half of the 15th century complains that it is not easy to translate from Latin into English, for “there ys many wordes in Latyn that we have no propre Englysh accordynge therto.” Wycliffe and his associates are credited with more than a thousand Latin words not previously found in English. Since many of them occur in the so-called Wycliffe translation of the Bible and have been retained in subsequent translations, they have passed into common use. The innovations of other writers were not always so fortunate. Many of them, like the inkhorn terms of the Renaissance, were but passing experiments. Nevertheless the permanent additions from Latin to the English vocabulary in this period are much larger than has generally been realized.

It is unnecessary to attempt a formal classification of these borrowings. Some idea of their range and character may be gained from a selected but miscellaneous list of examples: abject, adjacent, allegory, conspiracy, contempt, custody, distract, frustrate, genius, gesture, history, homicide, immune, incarnate, include, incredible, incubus, incumbent, index, individual, infancy, inferior, infinite, innate, intellect, interrupt, juniper, lapidary legal, limbo, lucrative, lunatic, magnify, malefactor, mechanical, minor, missal, moderate, necessary, nervous, notary, ornate, picture, polite, popular, prevent, private, project, promote, prosecute, prosody, pulpit, quiet, rational, reject, remit, reprehend, rosary, script, scripture, scrutiny, suppress, temperate, temporal, testify, testimony, tincture, tract, tributary, ulcer, zenith, zephyr. Here we have terms relating to law, medicine, theology, science, and literature, words often justified in the beginning by technical or professional use and later acquiring a wider application. Among them may be noticed several with endings like -able, -ible, -ent, -al, -ous, -ive, and others, which thus became familiar in English and, reinforced often by French, now form common elements in English derivatives. All the words in the above list are accepted by the Oxford English Dictionary as direct borrowings from Latin. But in many cases Latin words were being borrowed by French at the same time, and the adoption of a word in English may often have been due to the impact of both languages.

The simultaneous borrowing of French and Latin words led to a highly distinctive feature of Modern English vocabulary sets of three items all expressing the same fundamental notion but differing slightly in meaning or style, such as kingly, royal, regal and rise, mount, ascend. The Old English word is usually the more popular one, with the French word more literary, and the Latin word more learned [20; 24; 28].

**2.4.3 Other sources of the borrowings in the Middle English language**

The effects of the Scandinavian invasions also made themselves felt during this period. Although the chief period of borrowing must have been much earlier, relatively few Scandinavian loans appear in Old English, and most do not come to be used in manuscripts until well into the 13th century, and then mainly in northern areas where Danish settlement was heaviest.

Several other languages also supplied a sprinkling of new words at this time, though not all survived. Contact with the Low Countries brought poll ‘head’, doten ‘bе foolish’, bouse ‘drink deeply’, and skipper ‘ship's master’, resulting from commercial and maritime links with the Dutch. Other loans included cork (Spanish), marmalade (Portuguese), sable (Russian), lough (Irish), and many words from Arabic, especially to do with the sciences such as saffron, admiral, mattress, algebra, alkali, zenith. In most cases, the words arrived after they had travelled through other countries (and languages), often entering English via French. A good example is the vocabulary of chess (chess, rook, check, mate), which came directly from French, but which is ultimately Persian.

The effect of all this borrowing on the balance of words in the English lexicon was dramatic. In early Middle English, over 90 per cent of words were of native English origin. By the end of the Middle English period this proportion had fallen to around seventy-five per cent [20; 28].

The new English language did not sound the same as the old one: for as well as undergoing changes in vocabulary, the complex system of inflected endings which Old English had was gradually lost or simplified in the dialects of spoken Middle English. This change was gradually reflected in its increasingly diverse written forms too. The loss of case endings was part of a general trend from inflections to fixed word order that also occurred in other Germanic languages, so cannot be attributed simply to the influence of French-speaking sections of the population. English remained, after all, the language of the vast majority.

The growth of a standard from the London area can be seen by the mid 14th century. Although London was very much a dialectal hybrid, patterns of standardization gradually appear.

The most significant factor must have been the emergence of London as political and commercial centre of the country. In particular the administrative office of London Chancery is now thought to have been critical, especially after 1430. Vast amount of manuscripts copying took place within the London area, and standards of practice emerged among the Chancery Scribes. These practices then influenced many individual scribes who worked privately, and eventually all kinds of material, including literary texts, were affected. When Caxton set up his press in Westminster and chose local London speech as his norm, the lasting influence of his Chancery Line was assumed.

These observations add up to the claim that the main influence of the standard language was the central Midland area, several of whose linguistic features eventually influenced the shape of Chancery Standard.

Caxton's introduction of printing into England was a crucial turning point in the development of the English language. Besides setting a standard, it eventually turned English into an international language.

**CONCLUSION**

In this research we endeavored to consider a long period of the English language history from its early stages to the period of standardization inclusive. Having analyzed this complex epoch we have come to the following conclusions.

The records of the Old English writing embraced a variety of matter, they were dated in different centuries, represent various local dialects, belong to diverse genres and were written in different scripts .The earliest form of writing in Old English period was known as runes and was presented as a special semantic code reflecting the beliefs, social hierarchy and the general world view of the people at that particular time. The literature of the Old English period is generally grouped in two main divisions, heroic and Christian. To the former are assigned those poems of which the subjects are drawn from English tradition and history or from the customs and conditions of English life; to the latter those which deal with Biblical matter, ecclesiastical traditions and religious subjects of definitely Christian origin.

The linguistic situation in the Middle English was complex. The Norman Conquest had a greater effect on the English language and on its vocabulary in particular than any other in the course of its history. Middle English dialects were partly matter of pronunciation, spelling, vocabulary and grammar. The regional Middle English dialects developed from respective Old English dialects and were preserved in the succeeding centuries, though in the Late Middle English the linguistic situation had changed.

A later and much larger group of diverse manuscripts include the work of Chaucer and Langland. These texts in their different ways represent London English of around 1400, but the amount of variation of their displays suggests that they cannot be called standard, in any strict sense. Not even Chaucer’s writing traditionally thought to be a precursor of modern Standard English, exercised a specific influence on the form this standard took – nor it is likely that poetic usage would ever influence general usage in any real way. It can be hardly doubted though that Chaucer’s literary standing had greatly added to the prestige associated with written language in the London dialect.

The influence of the first printers in spreading the written form of English was significant. The language they used was the London literary English established since the Age of Chaucer and slightly developed in accordance with the linguistic change that had taken place during the intervening hundred years.

With cheap printed books becoming available to a greater number of people the London form of speech was carried to other regions and was imitated in the written works produced all over England.

The changes of the Middle English period affected the language on its different levels including vocabulary, grammar, phonetic and spelling. As a result at the beginning of the period English is a language that must be learned as a foreign tongue, at the end it is Modern English.

The origins of the Standard English are an amalgamation of different historical, political, social, economical and geographical factors that took place within the span of nearly five centuries from Old English to the end of the Middle English period.

Thus, the English language changed from being a speech of a few tribes to becoming the major language on Earth and in that process it changed radically.

There is never to be total uniformity on the issue in question but the forerunner of Standard English undoubtedly existed by the end of the 15th century.

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APPENDIX 1

Semantic spheres of the loanwords from the French language

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Administration | Authority, bailiff, baron, chamberlain, chancellor, constable, coroner, council, court, crown, duke, empire, exchequer, government, liberty, majesty, manor, mayor, messenger, minister, noble, palace, parliament, peasant, prince, realm, reign, revenue, royal, servant, sir, sovereign, squire, statute, tax, traitor, treason, treasurer, treaty, tyrant, vassal, warden. |
| Law | Accuse, adultery, advocate, arrest, arson, assault, assize, attorney, bail, bar, blame, chattels, convict, crime, decree, depose, estate, evidence, executor, felon, fine, fraud, heir, indictment, inquest, jail, judge, jury, justice, larceny, legacy, libel, pardon, perjury, plaintiff, plea, prison, punishment, sue, summons, trespass, verdict, warrant |
| Religion | Abbey, anoint, baptism, cardinal, cathedral, chant, chaplain, charity, clergy, communion, confess, convent, creator, crucifix, divine, faith, friar, heresy, homily, immortality, incense, mercy, miracle, novice, ordain, parson, penance, prayer, prelate, priory, religion, repent sacrament, sacrilege, saint, salvation, saviour, schism, sermon, solemn, temptation, theology, trinity, vicar, virgin, virtue |
| Military | Ambush, archer, army, barbican, battle, besiege, Captain, combat, defend, enemy, garrison, guard, hauberk, lance, lieutenant, moat, navy, peace, portcullis, retreat, sergeant, siege, soldier, spy, vanquish |
| Food and drink | Appetite, bacon, beef, biscuit, clove, confertion, cream, cruet, date, dinner, feast, fig, fruit, fry, grape, gravy, gruel, herb, jelly, lemon, lettuce, mackerel, mince, mustard, mutton, olive, orange, oyster, pigeon, plate, pork, poultry, raisin, repast, roast, salad, salmon, sardine, saucer, sausage, sole, spice, stew, sturgeon, sugar, supper, tart, taste, toast treacle, tripe, veal, venison, vinegar |
| Fashion | Apparel, attire, boots, brooch, buckle, button, cape, chemise, cloak, collar, diamond, dress, embroidery, emerald, ermine, fashion, frock, fur, garment, garter, gown, jewel, lace, mitten, ornament, pearl, petticoat, pleat, robe, satin, taffeta, tassel, train, veil, wardrobe |
| Leisure and Arts | Art, beauty, carol, chess, colour, conversation, courser, dalliance, dance, falcon, fool, harness, image, jollity, joust juggler, kennel, lay, leisure, literature, lute, melody, minstrel, music, noun, painting, palfrey, paper, parchment park, partridge, pavilion, pen, pheasant, poet, preface, prose, recreation, rein, retrieve, revel, rhyme, romance, sculpture, spaniel, stable, stallion, story, tabor, terrier, title, tournament, tragedy, trot, vellum, volume |
| Science and Learning | Alkali, anatomy, arsenic, calendar, clause, copy, gender, geometry, gout grammar, jaundice, leper, logic, medicine, metal, noun, ointment, pain, physician, plague, pleurisy, poison, pulse, sphere, square, stomach, study, sulphur, surgeon, treatise |
| The home | Basin, blanket, bucket ceiling, cellar, chair, chamber, chandelier, chimney, closet couch, counterpane, curtain, cushion, garret, joist kennel, lamp, lantern, latch, lattice, pantry, parlour, pillar, porch, quilt, scullery, towel, tower, turret |
| General Nouns | Action, adventure, affection, age, air, city, coast, comfort, country, courage, courtesy, cruelty, debt, deceit dozen, envy, error, face, fault, flower, forest, grief, honour, hour, joy, labour, manner, marriage, mischief, mountain, noise, number, ocean, opinion, order, pair, people, person, piece, point, poverty, power, quality, rage, reason, river, scandal, season, sign, sound, spirit substance, task, tavern, unity, vision |
| General Adjectives | active, amorous, blue, brown, calm, certain, clear, common, cruel, curious, eager, easy, final, foreign, gay, gentle, honest, horrible, large, mean, natural, nice, original, perfect, poor, precious, probable, real, rude, safe, scarce, scarlet second, simple, single, solid, special, strange, sudden, sure, usual |
| General Verbs | advise, allow, arrange, carry, change, close, continue, cry, deceive, delay, enjoy, enter, form, grant, inform, join, marry, move, obey, pass, pay, please, prefer, prove, push, quit, receive, refuse, remember, reply, satisfy, save, serve, suppose, travel, trip, wait, waste |
| Turns of phrase | by heart, come to a head, do homage, do justice to, have mercy on, hold one's peace, make complaint, on the point of, take leave, take pity on |