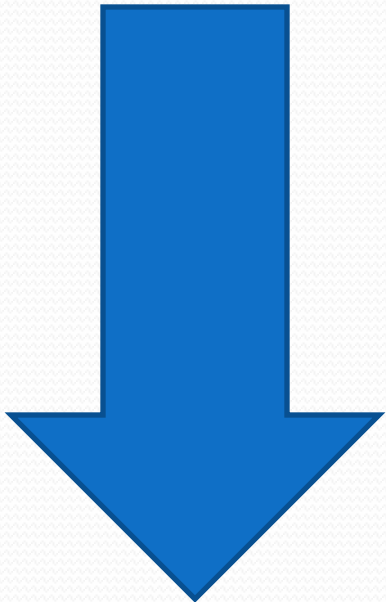


Chapter 6: Middle English

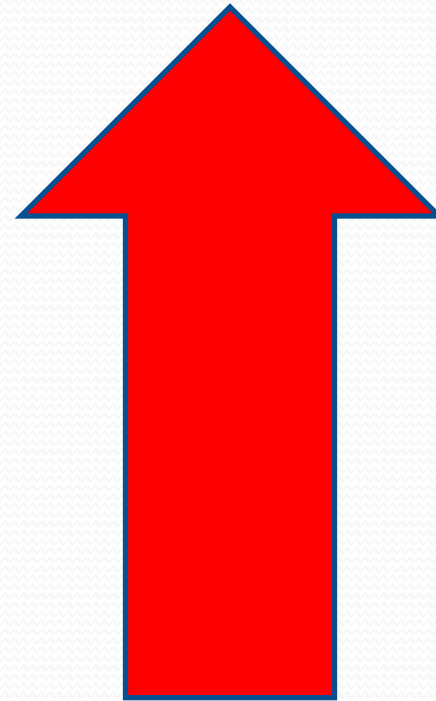
Part 3: Phonemic, Morphemic, and Grammatical Change

ne season/ and waneth & dyscreaseth another season/ And that comyn englysshe that is spoken in one shyre varyeth from a nother. In so moche that in my dayes happened that certayn marchautes were in a ship in tanyse for to haue sayled ouer the see into zelande/ and for lacke of wynde they tarped atte forlond, and wente to lande for to refreshe them. And one of theym named sheffelde a mercer cam in to an holwe and ayed for mete, and specyally he aydd after eggys. And the goode wyf answerde, that she coude speke no frenshe. And the marchaüt was angry, for he also coude speke no frenshe, but wolde haue hadde eggys/ and she vnderstode hym not/ And thenne at laste a nother sayd that he wolde haue eyren/ then the good wyf sayd that she vnderstod hym wel/ Loo what sholde a man in thysse dayes now wyte, eggys or eyren/ certaynly it is harde to playse euery man/ by

In summary, OE → MED

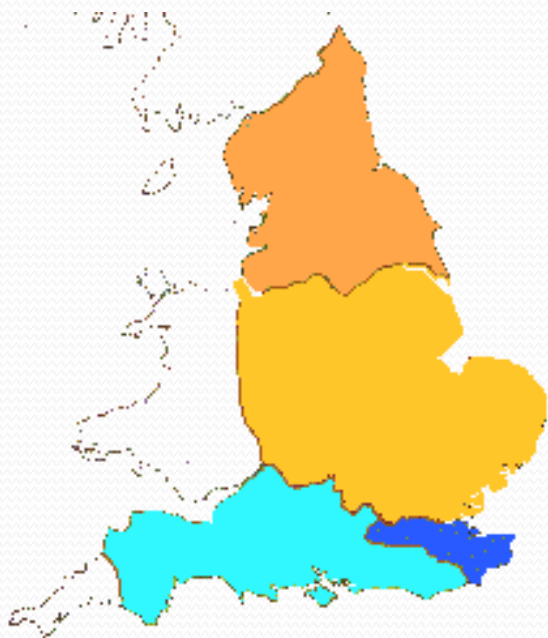


Lexis gets **COMPLICATED**

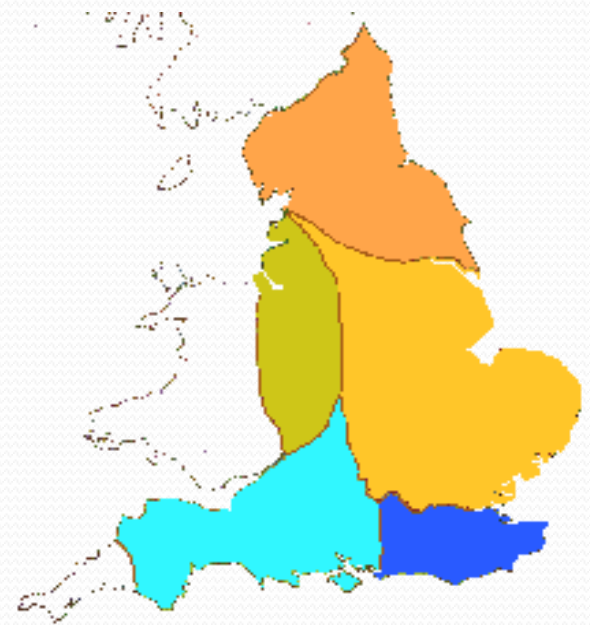


**Phonology, Morphology,
Syntax SIMPLIFY and LEVEL**

Changes in dialect areas & influence



The dialects of	
Old English	Middle English
Northumbrian	Northern
Mercian	East Midland
	West Midland
Kentish	Kentish
West Saxon	Southwestern



Major Changes to Orthography

- P. 116 ff.
- Emphasis of letter ‘ȝ’ (yogh) to represent the palatalized g—will be pronounced as ‘y’ usually (the “ye” in “ye olde” or “y-coming”)
- Thorn (Þ) and eth (ð) start to be spelled ‘th’; æ starts to disappear
- Use of letter ‘v’ initially (because of borrowed words from Latin and French); orthographic distinction between ‘u’ and ‘v’
- Some distinction between ‘i’ and ‘j’ in orthography; pretty much no distinction between ‘i’ and ‘y’ as vowels
- Introductions of the spellings ‘qu’ for the [kw] sound and ‘w’ for ‘uu’ spellings (a distinct graphemic character)
- Scribes no longer use the macron to mark long vowels but *sometimes* they write the vowel twice to indicate its length: *gōd* > *good*; *gēs* > *geese*

10 Major changes to consonants, p. 122 ff.

1. Loss of [h] before [l]: *hlāf* > *lōf*, 'loaf'
2. [ɣ] to [w] after [l] or [r]: *swelgan* > *swelian*, 'swell'; *sorg* > *sorwe*, 'sorrow'
3. Loss of [w] between consonants and back vowels (sometimes retained silently in spelling): *swā* > *so*, *twā* > *two*
4. Loss of final [č] in unstressed syllables, particularly for adjectives and adverbs: *anlic* > *onli*, 'only'
5. Loss of medial [v], in most cases before [d], and sometimes with syncope of unstressed vowel: *hæfde* > *had*; *hlafdig* > *lady*; *heafod* > *head* (with syncope)

6. Prefix *ge-* depalatalizes to *i-* or *y-*: *gecleped* > *ycleped* ('named'); *gewis* > *iwis* ('indeed'); sometimes spelled *ȝwis* with a yogh
7. In Southern dialects (mostly south of London), initial [f] and [s] became voiced: *sop* > *zoth* ('true'); *fela* > *vele* ('many'); *fyxen* > *vixen* ('female fox')
8. Final inflectional nasal was lost if following word began with a consonant (spelling confusion results): *mīn oncle* > *my nuncle* ('my uncle'); *a nadder* > *an adder*
9. [v], [z], and [ð] become recognized initial sounds from borrowed words: *vertu*, *zeale*, *that* (pron. [ðæt])
10. By 1450, consonant length is no longer phonemic: *settan* [settan] > *setten* [setən]. Silent consonants are beginning to appear in orthography: *write*, *wrong* (but the [k] is still pronounced in *knight* and *know*)

6 Changes to Unstressed Vowels , p. 123 ff.

1. In general, most unstressed vowels **level** to the pronunciation [ə]: *oxa* > *oxe*, *nacod* > *naked*, *sunu* > *sone*
2. Exception to levelling: unaccented [I] in roots was unchanged: *englisc* > *english*; *bisig* > *bisie* ‘busy’
3. Final inflectional –e in trisyllabic words was lost early: *ælmesse* > *almesse* > *almes* ‘alms’
4. Unaccented prefixes such as ge-, a-, an-, be-, on-, ym- reduce to y- (pronounced [ī] and spelled y- or i-)
5. Syncope (loss) of [ə] medially in trisyllabic words: *munecas* > *monkes*; *stedefæst* > *stedfast*; *nēagebūr* > *neighbor*
6. Insertion of epenthetic –e before r, l, h, w: *glædre* > *gladere* ‘gladder’; *æfre* > *ever*; *burh* > *borough*; *folgian* > *folowen*

Old English Vowels that DON'T Change

- High and middle tense (long) vowels [ī, ē, ū, ō] don't change: *wīn* > *win*; *gēs* > *gees*; *hūs* > *hous* 'house'; *wōd* > *wood* 'crazy'
- Short vowels in stressed syllables that had no other changes didn't change, but this is a fairly rare occurrence: *willa* > *wille*; *bedd* > *bed*; *cuppe* > *cuppe* 'cup'; *god* > *God*; *cætte* > *catte* 'cat'

3 Changes from OE to ME Stressed Vowels

1. OE high front vowels [i] and [I] became unstable, differing by dialects. They unrounded in the North and East Midlands, lowered and unrounded in Kent and around London, and remained high and rounded until late in the West Midlands and Southwest
 - OE *mȳs* (*mice*) > *mus* (W & SW), *mes* (K), *mis* (EM & N)
 - OE *cynn* (*kinfolk*) > *kun* (W & SW), *ken* (K), *kin* (EM & N)
2. Short æ > a: æ < a 'one'; *æpel* > *apple*; *cætte* > *cat* (*you see this mostly in spelling*)

3. Long low vowels move up:

- $\bar{a} > o$: *hām* > *hom*; *gāt* > *goot* ‘goat’; *bān* > *bon* ‘bone’
- $\bar{æ} > \bar{e}$ or ϵ : : *dǣd* > *deed*; *tǣcan* > *teche* ‘teach’
 - ME \bar{e} results from the umlaut of Germanic $\bar{æ}$; words with this history almost always have the modern English spelling ‘ee’: *deed*, *sleep*, *feed*.
 - ME ϵ : results from the unlaut of Germanic \bar{a} ; words with this history almost always have the modern English spelling ‘ea’: *teach*, *deal*, *read*.

3 Types of Diphthong Changes, p. 124 ff.

1. All the OE diphthongs undergo smoothing and monophthongize (reduce to the first sound in the diphthong) and then undergo regular sound changes: *lēaf* > *leaf* 'leaf'; *sceal* > *shal*; *sēon* > *seen*; *seofon* > *seven*. **No modern** English diphthongs descend from OE diphthongs.
2. New ME diphthongs are created **before** palatal sounds:
 - [j]: *dæg* > *dai* 'day'; *grǣg* > *gray*; *weg* > *way*; *eahta* > *eight*
 - [ɣ]: *lagu* > *law*; *āgan* > *owen* 'own'; *boga* > *bow*
 - [w]: *clawu* > *claw*; *feawe* > *few*; *cnēowan* > *knewe* 'knew'
 - Before [x]: *aht* > *aught* 'ought'; *dāh* > *dough*; *bohte* > *bought*; *sōhte* > *sought*
3. Two diphthongs borrowed from French, [ɔI] and [Ui]: *joie* > *joy*; *poison* > *poysen* 'poison'

5 Major Changes in Vowel Length, p. 126 ff.

1. Length before ND: in two-syllable words, the vowel usually lengthens if it is before a nasal or liquid PLUS a voiced consonant from the same place of articulation (bilabial, etc.). Began in the 9th and 10th centuries
 - *climban* > *climb*
 - *womb* > *woomb* 'womb'
 - *bindan* > *binde* 'bind'
 - *bunden* > *bounde* 'bound'
 - *milde* > *mild*
 - *felde* > *feld* 'field'
 - *alde* > *old*
 - *golde* > *gold*
- Exception: Vowels didn't lengthen before three-consonant clusters: *cildru* > *childer* 'children'; *hundred* > *hundred*; *englisc* > *english*
- Exception: Vowels didn't lengthen in words that were generally unstressed: *and*, *under*, *wolde*

2. Open root syllable lengthening. When the root syllable ends in a vowel we call it 'open'. Short vowels in OE open root syllables generally lengthen in ME; scribes often add an unhistorical final –e in ME to show length (the so-called 'scribal e' or modern 'silent e'). This change **never** happens in inflectional syllables, in trisyllables, or in words that generally are not stressed (*have, aren*)
- *Nama > name; beran > bere 'bear'; hopa > hope; wicu > weke 'week'; lufu > love.*
3. Trisyllabic shortening. In trisyllables (and a few disyllables) long vowels shorten: *hȳdde > hid; cēpte > kepte; blōstma > blosme 'blossom'; sūperne > southern; hālidæg > holiday*

4. Long vowels in unstressed syllables shorten and eventually **level** to [ə]: *wīsdōm* > *wisdom*; *ābīdan* > *abide*

5. Monosyllabic shortening: In monosyllabic words ending in a consonant cluster or geminated consonant pair, *sometimes* the vowel shortened, probably by analogy or by the influence of leveling on inflectional endings: *feoll* > *fell*; *fȳlþ* > *filth*

4 Major Grammatical Changes in Middle English, p. 128 ff.

1. The **decay of inflectional endings** due to phonemic levelling to [ə]: many fewer endings in ME than in OE
2. The loss of forms due to the loss of phonemic individuality (if everything is ə, what's the difference?)
3. Increased reliance on **word order** to convey grammatical information since inflectional endings were disappearing
4. As a result of changes 1, 2, & 3, the **loss of grammatical gender** in English by the 13th century, supplanted by natural gender; this simplified the entrance of new words into the language considerably

The Decay of Inflectional Endings

- Most **nouns** reduced to **three distinct forms**:
 - Nominative singular
 - Nominative and accusative plural
 - One form for all other cases & numbers (called the ‘oblique form’); usually it’s pronounced [ə] and spelled –e
- Plurals generally collapsed into two allomorphs, either –s/-es or –en. The –s forms come from the OE **strong noun** declensions and dominate in all dialects except Kentish; the Southeast of England only goes over to –s/-es in the 15th century by influence of Chancery Standard. Only a few –**en/-ren** plurals survive: *children, brethren, oxen*.
 - A few irregular plurals survive: *geese, mice, deer, sheep, fish*, but there’s no rhyme or reason to which ones do or don’t.

Adjective Changes, p. 130

- Phonological leveling to [-ə] and the pressure of analogy reduce **all** inflectional endings **except** comparative and superlative to **-e**. Chaucer retained final **-e** for metrical purposes, but it's clear that he was being old-fashioned; the pressure of Chancery Standard is especially seen here.
- Since adjectives had lost their distinctiveness, it wasn't necessary to have individual forms for masculine, feminine, neuter, strong, weak, etc; the forms ***disindividuated***, if you want a fancy term.

Pronoun Changes, p. 131

- Because of the loss of inflectional endings, it became less necessary to have individuated pronoun forms
- As word order becomes more fixed, there was **less need for five cases** of pronouns; it was possible to say “this pronoun comes after a preposition, so it must be in object case” without a specialized spelling for it.
- Chancery Standard apparently drove the adoption of the Scandinavian pronoun forms for 3rd person singular and plurals in the Southeast, where the older Old English forms still held out; this was still changing in Chaucer’s time.
- See the chart in Algeo p. 131 for the forms of the personal pronouns.
- Demonstrative pronoun forms are reduced to *the*, *that*, *this*, *these*, and *those*.

Clarification of Pronouns

- *They* instead of *hi* for nominative plural comes from Northern forms—adopted widely late in 14th century
- *Them* for object and *their* for genitive (instead of *hem/hir*) also come from Northern forms—adopted widely late 14th to early 15th century
- *She* instead of *heo* for 3rd person feminine nominative comes from East Midlands—adopted widely in early 15th century

Verb Changes

- See Algeo 134-135
- 1. The usual phonological changes **reduced and leveled the endings on nearly all forms of verbs**; 2nd & 3rd person singular and past participles were most likely to retain an individuated inflectional ending.
- 2. By analogy, **all new verbs** borrowed into English came in as **weak verbs** with three principal parts. No new strong verbs were created in the Middle English period.
- 3. About 20% of OE strong verbs were lost, replaced, or acquired weak conjugation forms; some scholars suspect that Chancery Standard was responsible for changes #2 & 3.
- 4. Middle English acquires a few **impersonal** verbs: *meseemeth* ('It seems to me'); *methinketh* 'I think'.