From Old English to Standard English

Third Edition

A Course Book in Language Variation Across Time

Dennis Freeborn
FROM OLD ENGLISH TO STANDARD ENGLISH

A COURSE BOOK IN LANGUAGE VARIATION ACROSS TIME

Dennis Freeborn
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Preface

Language change

The English language, like all living languages, is in a continuous state of variation across time. The language of one generation of speakers will differ slightly from another, and at any one time there are 'advanced' and 'conservative' forms, whether they belong to regional, educational or class dialects. Change takes place at every level of language. New words are needed in the vocabulary to refer to new things or concepts, while other words are dropped when they no longer have any use in society. The meaning of words changes - *buxom* once meant obedient, *spill* meant *kill*, and *knave* meant *boy*. A word-for-word translation of some Old English will probably not read like grammatical contemporary English, because word order and grammatical structure have also changed. Pronunciation in particular is always being modified and varies widely from one regional or social group to another. Since the spelling of words in writing has been standardised, changes in pronunciation are not marked in the spelling, the orthography of the language.

Standard English

One variety of English today has a unique and special status - Standard English. Its prestige is such that, for many people, it is synonymous with the English language. This book sets out to show what the origins of present-day Standard English were in the past. It is concerned principally with the forms of the language itself, and makes reference to the historical, social and political background in the establishment of Standard English in outline only.

Levels of study

It is helpful to consider three levels of study which may be followed according to students' needs, or to the amount of time available for study. At the first, *observational* level, features of the language can be simply noted and listed as interesting or different; at the second, *descriptive* level, such features are identified more specifically, using appropriate descriptive terms from a model of language; at the third, *explanatory* level, they are placed in their relation to general processes of language change, and in their social, political and historical context.
The 'texts'

The core of the book is a series of 151 texts which exemplify the changes in the language from Old English to the establishment of Standard English. The texts have been selected for a number of reasons. The Old English texts are almost all from the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, and so provide something of the historical context of the language a thousand years ago. Some texts have aspects of language itself as their subject. As we have no authentic records of the spoken language before the invention of sound recording, letters and diaries of the past are included, because they are likely to provide some evidence of informal uses of English in the past. Some literary texts have been chosen, but the series does not constitute a history of English literature.

Activities

The activities are designed to encourage students to find out for themselves – to consider possible reasons for what they observe, and so to study data at first hand and to consider hypotheses, rather than to accept the answers to problems of interpretation that others have given. The process of analysing the texts demonstrates how our knowledge of earlier English has been arrived at. The surviving corpus of Old and Middle English texts is all the evidence we have about the language as it was then. There are no grammar books, descriptions or pronunciations, spelling books or dictionaries of English before the sixteenth century. The tasks in the activities are no more than suggestions, and teachers can omit, modify and add to them as they think useful.

Facsimiles

The facsimiles are an essential part of the book, not just decorative additions to the 'texts', for they are the primary sources of our knowledge of the language, and give students at least some idea of the development of spelling and writing conventions. Literary texts are generally printed with modern spelling and punctuation, and although editions of Old and Middle English retain the older spelling, they usually add present-day punctuation.

Commentaries

Analytic commentaries are provided for some of the texts in the book. Each commentary is a 'case study' based on the text itself, which provides some of the evidence for change in the language.

The Text Commentary Book and Word Book

Two supplementary books in typescript published by the author are available for teachers and advanced students. The Text Commentary Book contains detailed explanatory analyses of the linguistic features of many of the texts. The Word Book provides a complete word list, in alphabetical order, for each Old and Middle English text. The lists for the Old English texts give the base form of inflected words and a translation, so that you can refer to an Old English dictionary or grammar more easily. Those for the Middle English texts include the derivation of each word. The Word Book also contains selected lists of words in present-day English which are derived from Old English, Old French, Old Norse or Celtic.
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Symbols

OE Old English
ME Middle English
EME Early Modern English
MnE Modern English
OF Old French
ON Old Norse
WW Word-for-word translation
m masculine (gender)
f feminine
n neuter
nom nominative (case)
acc accusative
geno genitive
dat dative
sg singular (number)
pl plural
n noun
vb verb
adj adjective
cj conjunction
neg negative
NP noun phrase
VP verb phrase
PrepP prepositional phrase
S subject (in clause structure)
P predicate
C complement
O object
A adverbial
< > e.g., <e>, refers to written letters of the alphabet
// e.g., /e/, refers to the spoken sound, using the symbols of the International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA)

1. The English language is brought to Britain

1.1 How the English language came to Britain

English in the 1990s is an international language. It is spoken as a mother tongue by nearly 400 million people, in the British Isles, Canada, the United States of America, Australia and New Zealand. It is a second language for many others in, for example, India and Pakistan and some African states, where it is used as an official language in government and education. Many different regional and social varieties of English have developed and will continue to do so, but there is one variety which is not related to any one geographical region, but is used in writing, and generally also in educated speech.

Educated English naturally tends to be given the additional prestige of government agencies, the professions, the political parties, the press, the law court and the pulpit – any institution which must attempt to address itself to a public beyond the smallest dialectal community. It is codified in dictionaries, grammars, and guides to usage, and it is taught in the school system at all levels. It is almost exclusively the language of printed matter. Because educated English is thus accorded implicit social and political sanction, it comes to be referred to as STANDARD ENGLISH...

*(A Comprehensive Grammar of the English Language, R. Quirk et al., Longman, 1985, p.18)*

This book tells in outline how present-day Standard English developed from the English of the past.

Four hundred years ago, in the 1590s, English was spoken almost exclusively by the English in England, and by some speakers in Wales, Ireland and Scotland, and this had been so for hundreds of years, since the language was first brought to Britain in the fifth century.

To give you a first impression of the changes in the language since it was brought to Britain, here are two short texts in Old English (OE), with their word-for-word (WW) translations, which were written down in the ninth century. The first is the beginning of a description of the island of Britain, while the second tells how the Britons were conquered by the Romans in AD 47. The texts are printed with their original punctuation. The sign «&» was used in manuscript writing for *ana*, like «&» today.
The account in Text 1 from the *Peterborough Chronicle* was copied in the twelfth century from an earlier copy first written down in the ninth century. The WW translation is followed by a paraphrase in Modern English (MnE). Abbreviated words in the manuscript have been filled out, but the punctuation is the original.

(i) Compare the WW translation of Text 1, the chronicle for AD 443, with the text of the Old English.
   (a) List some OE words that are still used in MnE (some will be different in spelling).
   (b) List some OE words that have not survived into MnE.
   (c) List any letters of the alphabet that are not used in MnE.
   (d) Comment on the punctuation.

(ii) Read the MnE version and consider some of the reasons why the WW translation does not read like present-day English.

(iii) Repeat the assignment for Texts 2 and 3.

**TEXT 1 – Chronicle for AD 443**

**WW**

443. Here sent Britons over sea to Rome, & their troops asked against pics, but they had none there, because they fought against Attila hun's king, & then sent them to angles & Angle-people's princes the same asked.

**CE**

443. Here send Britons over sea to Rome, & their troops asked against pics, but they had no there because they fought against Attila hun's king, & then sent them to angles & Angle-people's princes the same asked.

**WW**

47. Here Claudius roman's king went with army in Britain, & island over-ran & all pics. & Welsh made-subject-to roman's empire.

**CE**

47. Her Claudius roman's coming went here by Brytene. 7 island gecode. 7 ealle pyhtas. 7 wælæ underpeodde roman rice.

**WW**

xlvi. Her Claudius roman's coming went here by Brytene. 7 island gecode. 7 ealle pyhtas. 7 wælæ underpeodde roman rice.

**CE**

xlvi. Her Claudius roman's coming went here by Brytene. 7 island gecode. 7 ealle pyhtas. 7 wælæ underpeodde roman rice.

The following account (Texts 1–3) in OE from the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* tells us why the language was first brought to Britain in the fifth century.

The *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* has survived in several manuscripts, and most of the extracts and facsimiles of the original writing which follow in this chapter are taken from the copy known as the *Peterborough Chronicle* (see Section 3.3). Sometimes other manuscript versions are quoted, in particular the *Parker Chronicle*, because the differences between them provide some interesting evidence for changes in the language.

If you compare the facsimiles with the printed reproduction of the texts, you will find some marked differences in letter shapes, and some OE letters which are no longer used. The OE alphabet and modern conventions for printing are described in Section 2.2.4, but in the meantime you could work out for yourself what the differences are.

From Old English to Standard English
449. In this year Marcius (Eastern Roman Emperor) and Valentinus (Western Roman Emperor) came to power and reigned seven years. In their days Vortigern invited the Angles here and they then came hither to Britain in three ships, at a place called Ebbsfleet (in Kent). King Vortigern gave them land in the south-east of this country, on condition that they fought against the Picts. They fought the Picts and were victorious wherever they fought. Then they sent to Angeln, and ordered the Angles to send more help, and reported the cowardice of the Britons and the fertility of the land. So the Angles at once sent a larger force to help the others. These men came from three Germanic nations – the Old Saxons, the Angles and the Jutes. From the Jutes came the people of Kent and the Isle of Wight (that is, the people who now live in the Isle of Wight, and the race among the West Saxons who are still called Jutes). From the Old Saxons came the men of Essex, Sussex and Wessex. From Angeln (which has stood waste ever since, between the Jutes and Saxons) came the men of East Anglia, Middle Anglia, Mercia and the whole of Northumbria. Their leaders were two brothers, Hengest and Horsa.
1.2 Roman Britain

In the middle of the fifth century, Britain had been a province of the Roman Empire for over 400 years, and was governed from Rome. The official language of government was Latin. It would have been spoken not only by the Roman civil officials, military officers and settlers, but also by those Britons who served under the Romans, or those who needed to deal with them. The term *Romano-British* is used to describe those 'romanised' Britons and their way of life.

The native language was British, one of a family of Celtic languages. Its modern descendants are Welsh, and Breton in Brittany (Britons migrated across the Channel in the sixth century to escape the Anglo-Saxon invasions). There were also speakers of Cornish up to the eighteenth century. Irish and Scottish Gaelic come from a closely related Celtic dialect. None of these languages resembles English, which comes from the family of West Germanic languages.

The Saxons had been raiding the east coast of Roman Britain for plunder since the early third century, and a military commander had been appointed to organise the defence of the coastline. He was called, in Latin, *Cornes ilor Ormon*, the 'Count of the Saxon Shore'. But Roman power and authority declined throughout the fourth century, and we know that a large-scale Saxon raid took place in AD 390.

By AD 443, the Roman legions had been withdrawn from Britain to defend Rome itself, so when the Romano-British leader Vortigern invited the Angles Hengest and Horsa to help to defend the country, they found Briton undefended, open not only for raiding and plunder, but also for invasion and settlement.

This was not a peaceful process. Bede describes what happened in his *History of the English Church and People*, which was written in Latin in the eighth century (see Section 2.2.3).

It was not long before such hordes of these alien peoples crowded into the island that the natives who had invited them began to live in terror. They began by demanding a greater supply of provisions; then, seeking to provoke a quarrel, threatened that unless larger supplies were forthcoming, they would terminate the treaty and ravage the whole island... These heathen conquerors devastated the surrounding cities and countryside, extended the confiscation from the eastern to the western shores without opposition, and established a stranglehold over nearly all the doomed island. A few wretched survivors captured in the hills were butchered wholesale, and others, desperate with hunger, came out and surrendered to the enemy for food, although they were doomed to lifelong slavery even if they escaped instant massacre. Some fled overseas in their misery; others, clinging to their homeland, eked out a wretched and fearful existence among the mountains, forests and crags, ever on the alert for danger.

(Translation from the Latin by Leo Sherley-Price, Penguin, 1955)

There is no surviving evidence of the British or Celtic language as it was used in the fifth century, and practically no Old Celtic words are to be found in MnE, except a few like *ass*, *bannock* and *crug* (see the Celtic-derived word list in the accompanying *Word Book*), and a larger number of Celtic place names of rivers, forests and hills. The reason for this must lie in the lack of integration between the British and the Anglo-Saxon invaders. As Bede records, the Britons were in time either driven westwards into Wales and Cornwall or they remained a subject people of serfs. The dominant language would therefore have been English.

The complete conquest of 'Englaland' - the land of the Angles - in fact took another two centuries. There are tales of a Romano-British king called Arthur who led successful resistance in the 470s, winning several battles that were recorded in Welsh heroic legends. He must have been a Romano-British noble, and was probably a commander of cavalry. Twelve victories against the Saxons are recorded, and much of the country remained under British rule for some time. But Arthur's name does not appear in the Anglo-Saxon *Chronicle*, and his historical existence is still disputed, although the chronicle does tell of other battles that took place, as in the following example.
TEXT 4 – Chronicle for AD 519

519. Here cered & cynnic took west saxons' kingdom. & the same year they fought against brtons, where one now names cered's ford. & afterwards ruled west saxons' princes from that day.

Activity 1.2

(i) Use the WW translation to write an acceptable version of Text 4 in MnE.
(ii) Compare the Peterborough Chronicle text for AD 519 (Text 4) with the following version from the Parker Chronicle. What differences are there?

519. Here cered & cynnic west saxens rice of fogen. 7 py ilcan geare hi gefulton wið bryttas. theor man nu nemmad ceredces ford. 7 siddan rixdodon west saxena cynebean of pam daze.

Similar entries about fighting against the Britons were recorded throughout the sixth century and into the seventh and eighth centuries, by which time they would have been driven as a fighting force from England. They are often referred to by the name Wealas, or Wallas, meaning foreigners. This is the origin of the modern words Wales, Welsh and Cornwall (Cornwalla).

The singular noun wealh is also used to mean slave or serf. which is an indication of the status of the Britons under Anglo-Saxon rule. For example, the entry for AD 755 in the Parker Chronicle tells of Cynewulf, King of Wessex:

7 se Cynewulf of mielcum gefoehtum fealt wið bretwalum.
& thyn Cynewulf ofen great battles fought against brto-welsh.

It mentions in passing how a Welsh hostage became caught up in a local fight against Cyneheard, a prince of Wessex:

hic smale frohtende waran of his alle legon butan anum bryttscum guile.
7 he swipe gewunded was.
they continuously fighting were until they all lay (dead) except one british hostage.
& he badly wounded was.

Here are two typical short entries in the Peterborough Chronicle, followed by the Parker Chronicle text. The annal for AD 614 is evidence of continued British resistance.

TEXT 5 – Chronicle for AD 611

dc.xi. Her kynegils feng to rice. on west seaxum. 7 heold. xxxi. wintra.

611. Here kynegils took to kingdom. among west saxons. & held 31 winters.

MnE
611. In this year Cynegils succeeded to the West Saxon kingdom and reigned for 31 years.

TEXT 6 – Chronicle for AD 614

dc.xii. Her kynegils 7 ecwichelm ge fulton on beandune. 7 ofsilogan .ii. Pusend wala. 7 lkv.

614. Here kynegils & ecwichelm fought at beandune. & slew 2 thousand welsh. & 65.

MnE
614. In this year Cynegils and Ecwichelm fought at Beandune and slew two thousand and sixty-five Welsh.

Parker Chronicle annals

dc.xi. Her kynegils feng to rice on wessexum. 7 heold. xxxi. wintra.
dc.xii. Her kynegils 7 ecwichelm gefulton on beandune. 7 ofsilogan .ii. Pusend wala. 7 lkv.
1.3 Studying variety in language across time

As speakers of present-day English, we recognise many different dialects and dialectal accents, but usually we identify differences by labelling them with a geographical region – Scottish, Welsh, Northern, West Country, Liverpool, Cockney, Geordie – or by making some kind of personal judgement, like 'he's talking posh' or 'she speaks good English', 'they've got a dreadful/beautiful accent' or 'that's bad grammar'. Students of language are interested in finding out what people's attitudes to language use are, but they also try to be objective in studying all varieties of the language, not only Standard English. They identify different levels which can be separately examined: meaning (semantics) is conveyed through words (vocabulary or texts) in a particular order in sentences (grammar).

In speech, each of us has an individual pronunciation, which belongs to a particular accent of English. The study of pronunciation is called phonology. In writing, we are not allowed any variation in spelling (orthography), which has not changed since the mid-eighteenth century (with the exception of a few words, for example, mistak), and can be checked in any dictionary. But our handwriting (graphology) and pronunciation cannot be regulated like this: we write English in an individual way and speak it with a personal variety of an accent. Different accents are liked or disliked by different people: some accents have prestige, while others are stigmatised. The accent with the most prestige in England is called Received Pronunciation (RP) by linguists. Its popular name is 'BBC English'. Some refer to it as 'standard' pronunciation. Your attitude towards it will depend on a variety of reasons personal to you.

The English language consists of the sum of all its dialects, of which the most prestigious is Standard English – it has such prestige that many people think of it as 'correct English', and regard other dialects as substandard. Linguists prefer to classify Standard English as one dialect among many, and refer to the others as non-standard dialects. Each regional dialect has its own range of descriptions.

This description seems to suggest that dialects and accents are clearly identifiable as separate varieties with marked boundaries. This is in fact not true. They merge and blend with each other, but we have to pretend that they are separate in order to make sense of the obvious differences between dialects that are geographically far apart. We can clearly hear small differences between speakers of our own dialectal accent, even within the same town, but lump together speakers of unfamiliar dialects. To Southerners, all Northerners talk alike, and vice versa.

To study the dialects of a language, we therefore focus our attention on the following:

- Meaning (semantics): the semantic level.
- Vocabulary (lexis): the lexical level – loss of old words, gain of new words.
- Word structure: the morphological level – prefixes and suffixes, internal changes in words.
- Grammar (syntax): the syntactic level – word order in sentences and phrases.

The object of this book is to provide an outline of how the English language, and Standard English in particular, has developed into its present form. The texts that illustrate this development make up a series of 'case studies' which can be studied in greater or lesser detail. Some record historical events in the language of the time at which they happened.

1.4 How has the English language changed?

It is interesting to observe successive changes in the language in versions of the same text. The most useful source is the Bible, because translations have been made in every period from Old English to the present day.

1.5 How can we learn about OE and later changes in the language?

The evidence for changes in the language lies in the surviving manuscripts of Older English going back to the eighth century, and in printed books since the end of the fifteenth century. A lot of older English texts have been reprinted in modern editions, and so can be readily studied. All our knowledge of pronunciation, however, has to be worked out from written evidence. So we can never reproduce for certain the actual pronunciation of English before the invention of sound recording in the late nineteenth century, but we try to make a reasonable guess by building up different kinds of evidence.
1.6 Changes of meaning – the semantic level

Some people believe that words have 'real meanings' and object to evidence of change in current usage. For instance, aggravate and disinterested have taken on the meanings of annoy and uninterested, in addition to those of make worse and impartial. It is argued that the new meanings are wrong, and an appeal is made to the derivation or etymology of a word – that is, what its original meaning was in the language it came from. Here is an example from the 'Letters to the Editor' column of a newspaper. The first writer is arguing that Latin should be taught in schools; the second letter is one of the replies that were printed later.

First letter
It is demonstrably more easy to explain the function of a word when you know what it means. The very word 'education' provides me with a wonderful example. In Latin e from ex meaning 'out and dicare 'to lead' – literally, therefore, to lead out. To lead out of ignorance into the light of knowledge.
(The Independent, 14 Nov 1987, writer – Daniel Massey)

Second letter
Knowing the derivation of the word education is of as much help to us in deciding how children should be educated as knowing the derivation of, say, 'hysteria' would be in choosing a treatment for that condition.
May I suggest that your etymologically minded correspondents look up 'treacle' in a good dictionary? They will then know what to do if ever bitten by a snake.
(The Independent, 25 Nov 1987, writer – Carol Clark)

Activity 1.4

(i) Discuss the argument and the response. It would help if you were to check the recorded meanings of educate in a Latin dictionary, and education in an English dictionary.
(ii) Look up the original meanings of hysteria and treacle in a dictionary containing details of the derivation and successive meanings of words.

To understand that words do change their meaning is to understand that words like aggravate and disinterested can have two meanings. Many words have changed so much that their original meaning seems quite remote; it is interesting to use a good dictionary to trace the sequence of meanings and to see how one leads to another.

For example, the earliest written record of the word buxom in the Oxford English Dictionary (OED) is dated 1175 and is spelt buosome. It is recorded in a modern dictionary of Anglo-Saxon as bæcesum, meaning flexible, obedient, and its first syllable bæ-case-came from the OE word bægan, meaning to bow down or bend – that is, bæcesum/buosome means 'bowed', 'pliable'. Its present-day meaning is defined in the Concise Oxford Dictionary as 'plump and comely'. How did this come about and what then is its 'true meaning'?

Its meaning changed in the following stages (details from the OED):

1 easily bowed or bent
   i morally
      a obedient
         Beo buxsum toward gode (1175) – Be obedient to God
         This meaning survives into the nineteenth century:
         To be buxom and obedient to the laws and customs of the republic ...
         (1843, George Borrow)
      b submissive, humble, meek
         Ðat lauedi til hir lauerd lute
         Wit buxum reverence and due
         The lady bowed to her lord
         With humble and fearful reverence
         (c.1300, Cursor Mundi)
   c amiable, courteous, kindly
      Meek and buxum looke thou be
      And with her dwell
      (c.1460, Mystery Play, The Annunciation, Angel to Joseph)
      d ready, willing
      And many a begger for benes buxum was to swynke
      And many a beggar was willing to toll for (a meal of) beans
      (1377, Langland, Piers Plowman)
   2 physically
      flexible, pliant, resisting
      Then gan he scourge the buxome are so sore
      That to his force to yielden it was faine
      (1596, Spenser, The Faerie Queene)

2 blithe, jolly, well-favoured

3 bright, lively, gay
   A Souldier firme and sound of heart, and of buxome valour
   (1599, Shakespeare, Henry V)

4 full of health, vigour and good temper: well-favoured, plump and comely, 'jolly', comfortable-looking (in person): (chiefly of women)
   She was a buxom dame about thirty
   (1823, Scott, Peveril of the Peak)

These meanings overlapped for centuries in the course of the development of the present-day meaning of the word, which is confined to references to women as 'comfortable-looking in person'. It cannot be said that the 'real meaning' today is 'obedient'.

Activity 1.5

The words in the following list have all changed their meaning in time.

(i) Choose some words from the list and look up their original meanings in the word lists in the Word Book or in a dictionary that provides the etymology of words.
(ii) Use the dictionary to trace the successive changes of meaning.
2. Old English

We call the language of the Anglo-Saxon period and up to about 1100 to 1150, after the Norman Conquest, Old English (OE). Our knowledge of OE is based on a number of manuscripts that have survived from OE times, from which the grammar and vocabulary have been reconstructed by scholars, working from the sixteenth century onward (for a sixteenth century example see Section 2.2.5), but especially in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. They have provided us with the dictionaries and grammars of OE, and the editions of OE texts, to which we can refer.

2.1 Dialects and political boundaries

The English were not a politically unified nation until late OE times, and as they originally came from different parts of western Europe (see Text 2 and Map 1), they spoke different dialects of West Germanic. They settled in different parts of Britain, but they were able to communicate with each other. Dialects are varieties of a language that differ in pronunciation, vocabulary or grammar, but are not different enough to prevent understanding.

The country as it existed during the seventh and eighth centuries is sometimes referred to as the heptarchy – that is, the country of seven kingdoms: Northumbria, Mercia, East Anglia, Essex, Kent, Sussex and Wessex (see Map 2).

Wars were frequent in the country during Anglo-Saxon times, in which one or other of the kingdoms might dominate the others. For instance, the following example tells of a battle between Wessex and Mercia in 628.
TEXT 8 - Chronicle for AD 628

628. Here cynegils & cuichelm fought with penda at cirencester. & settled then.

628. In this year Cynegilis (King of Wessex) and Cwichelm fought against Penda (King of Mercia) at Cirencester, and then they agreed terms.

The fact that there were seven kingdoms does not mean, however, that there were seven different dialects. The evidence from OE manuscripts suggests that there were in fact three or four: Northumbrian and Mercian, which together are called Anglian, from the West Germanic dialect of the Angles; Kentish and West Saxon, developing from the dialects of the Jutes and Saxons (see Map 3).

Map 3. The dialects of Old English

All living languages are in a continuous state of change and development, and OE was no exception between the fifth and twelfth centuries. So any mention of the forms of OE words, or features of pronunciation, illustrates one dialect of the language at one stage of its development in a generalised way. It is usual to use the late West Saxon dialect of the tenth and eleventh centuries to describe OE, because West Saxon was by then used as a standard form for the written language, and most surviving manuscripts are written in West Saxon.

2.2 Written OE

2.2.1 Runes

The writing system for the earliest English was based on the use of signs called runes, which were devised for carving in wood or stone. Few examples have survived in Britain, the most famous of which can be found on an 18-foot cross now in the church at Ruthwell, Dumfriesshire. On the Ruthwell Cross are some rune inscriptions in the Northumbrian dialect which are part of a famous OE poem called The Dream of the Rood (rood comes from the OE word rōd meaning cross), in which the 'cross' relates the events of the Crucifixion. The Ruthwell Cross probably dates from the eighth century.
Activity 2.1

(i) Use a dictionary or the OE word list in the Word Book to look up the original meaning of the words rune, write and read.

(ii) Use the chart of rune symbols to transcribe the following extract from the Ruthwell Cross. It appears at the top of the SW face of the Cross.

(A transcription and translation of the runes, with a short commentary, can be found in the Text Commentary Book.)

2.2.2 Early writing

Written English as we know it had to wait for the establishment of the Church and the building of monasteries, at which time the monks wrote manuscripts in Latin, the language of the Church. This did not begin to happen until the seventh century. In that century, much of the north of England was converted to Christianity by monks from Ireland, while Augustine had been sent by the Pope to preach Christianity to the English, which began in the south, in Kent. Here are the Peterborough Chronicle records of the event.

TEXT 9 – Chronicle for AD 595

d.xcv. Hoc tempore monasterium sancti benedicti a longobardis destructum est. Her gregorius papae sende to breyhte augustinium mid wel manegum munucum. Pe godes word engla fode godspelledon.
(The first sentence is in Latin)

595. At this time monastery of saint benedict by longobards destroyed was. Here gregory pope sent to britain Augustine with very many monks, who god's word to english nation preached.

595. At this time the monastery of St Benedict was destroyed by the Lombards. In this year Pope Gregory sent Augustine to Britain with very many monks, who preached God's word to the English nation.

TEXT 10 – Chronicle for AD 601

dct. Her sende gregorius papa augustine arcebiscope pallium on breyhte, 7 wel maneg godeund earowas him to fullume, 7 paulinus bishop gehwirledo edwine nordhymbra eining to fullume.

601. Here sent gregory pope augustine archbishop pallium in britain, 7 very-many religious teachers him for help, 7 paulinus bishop converted edwin northumbria king to baptism.

601. In this year Pope Gregory sent the pallium to archbishop Augustine in Britain, and very many religious teachers to help him; and bishop Paulinus converted Edwin King of Northumbria and baptised him.

Parker Chronicle annals

d.xcv. Her Gregorius papa sende to breyhte Augustinium, mid wel manegum munucum. Pe godes word engla fode godspelledon.

dct. Her sende gregorius papa augustino, arce biscepe pallium in bretene, 7 welmanenge godeund earowas him to fullome. 7 paulinus bishop gehwirledo edwine northymbra cuning to fullume.
The monks adapted the Roman alphabet from Latin to write English, which means that the spelling of OE gives us a good idea of its pronunciation. We know the sounds of Latin represented by the Roman alphabet, because there has been a continuous tradition of speaking Latin to the present day. This also provides the evidence for the different OE dialects, because different spellings for the same words would indicate differences of pronunciation or word form.

2.2.3 Evidence of dialectal variation

Here are two versions of the earliest known poem in English. It is found in the OE translation of Bede's *History of the English Church and People*, which was written in Latin and finished in AD 731. Bede's history was translated into English in the late ninth century as part of a great revival of learning under King Alfred. The poem, a hymn to God the Creator, is all that survives of the work of the poet Caedmon, who lived in the seventh century. (For a brief discussion of OE verse, see Section 2.4.)

TEXT 11 - Caedmon's hymn

West Saxon dialect

Nu we scanum herun heofonricces
Weard Metaodes mihte and his medgodend
were Wulfhord beesed; swa he wundra gehwes
ece Dryhten, or ondostalde.
He ærest gesceop eordan bearnum
heofon to hrofe, halig Scyppend;
ða middangeard, moncynges Weard,
ece Dryhten, æfter teode
firum foldan, Freo ælmhtig.

Northumbrian dialect

Nu scylun herun hefmonnes
Uard Metaudes meast end his medgodan
were wuldfurfar; sce he wundra gilhues
ece Dryhtin, or astefald.
He ærist sceop ælda bearnum
beben til hrofe, halig Sceppen;
tha middangeard, moncynges Uard,
ece Dryhtin, æfter teode
firum foldan, Freo ælmhtig.

Now we must praise heaven-kingsdom's Guardian
Creator's might and his mind-thought
work Glory-fathers' as he of-wonders each
everlasting Lord, beginning established.
He first shaped of-earth for-children
heaven as roof, holy Creator,
then middle-earth, mankind's Guardian,
everlasting Lord, after determined
for-men earth, Ruler almighty.

Activity 2.2

(i) Use the WW translation of the West Saxon poem to write a version in MnE.
(ii) List the dialectal variations.

2.2.4 The OE alphabet

Facsimiles of original OE writing are hard to decipher at first because some of the letters look different from the shapes familiar to us. In printing and writing OE today, present-day shapes of Roman letters are used, with three additional non-Roman letters which were devised for writing OE. These were necessary because some sounds in OE did not have an equivalent in Latin, and so no Roman letter was available. They were:

- a vowel pronounced /æ/ and called *ash* - derived from Latin. It is today popularly known as 'short a', as in MnE *cat*.
- a consonant pronounced /θ/ or /ð/; the letter is called *thorn* from its rime name - now replaced by *<th>*.
- a consonant also pronounced /ð/ or /ð/; the letter is called *eth* - derived from Irish writing and now replaced by *<th>*. (These two letters tended to be interchangeable, and did not separately represent the voiced or voiceless *<th>* consonant.)

These letters are usually retained in printing and writing OE today. Another non-Roman letter used in writing was:

- pronounced /u/ and called *wyna* from its rime name. This letter is usually not used in printing OE today but is replaced by *<w>*. Letter *<w>* was not part of the OE alphabet. The consonant /u/ was represented in the earliest OE writing by *<ue>* or *<uw>* ('double-u') and was then replaced by *<w>*.

The roman letter *<w>* was written *<w>* (called *yogh*) and pronounced /gl/, /f/ or /j/, depending on the sounds that preceded or followed it (see Commentary 1 of the Text Commentary Book, Section 1.2.7, ii, iii). Modern reprints of OE usually use letter *<w>* not *<w>*.

<e> and <e> were less commonly used; <e> and <e> were not yet in use.

The OE alphabet therefore consisted of:

**Vowel letters:** a e i o u y

**Consonant letters:** b c d f g (written <g>) h (k) l m n p (q) r s t ð w (written <w>) x (z)

Here is a list of the letters of the OE alphabet with a brief indication of pronunciation. Some letters in OE represented more than one sound, but pronunciation and spelling were much closer in OE than in MnE. You will notice that the spelling of the same sound in MnE is often different from that in OE. OE vowel letters represented both long and short OE vowels (see Commentary 1 of the Text Commentary Book, Sections 1.2.3 and 1.2.4). Long vowels are conventionally marked by a macron, for example, ā, in modern printed texts, although in this book long vowels are only marked when the information is necessary.

This list will need some explanation from a teacher or tutor, but there is a more detailed introduction to the pronunciation and spelling of OE in Commentary 1 of the Text Commentary Book.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Letter</th>
<th>OE word and MnE translation</th>
<th>OE sound (IPA symbol)</th>
<th>MnE word with same sound (RP)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>&lt;e&gt;</td>
<td>bringan bring</td>
<td>/æ/</td>
<td>bring, machine</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&lt;e&gt;</td>
<td>niðan ride</td>
<td>/e:/</td>
<td>niðan, ride</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&lt;e&gt;</td>
<td>hyll hill</td>
<td>/ə:/</td>
<td>German schotten</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&lt;e&gt;</td>
<td>bylf hwe</td>
<td>/i:/</td>
<td>German grän</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&lt;e&gt;</td>
<td>elm elm</td>
<td>/e:/</td>
<td>elm, German egen</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&lt;e&gt;</td>
<td>æsc æsch</td>
<td>/æ:/</td>
<td>æsch, French eire</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&lt;e&gt;</td>
<td>săcc sæck</td>
<td>/æ:/</td>
<td>American English sæck</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&lt;e&gt;</td>
<td>gæt goat</td>
<td>/æ:/</td>
<td>gæt, German wghnen</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&lt;e&gt;</td>
<td>gro sæge</td>
<td>/æ:/</td>
<td>gro, sæge</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&lt;e&gt;</td>
<td>ful full</td>
<td>/æ:/</td>
<td>ful, full</td>
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<td>&lt;e&gt;</td>
<td>eart eart</td>
<td>/æ:/</td>
<td>eart, eart</td>
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<td>&lt;e&gt;</td>
<td>eort earth</td>
<td>/æ:/</td>
<td>eort, earth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&lt;e&gt;</td>
<td>þrest þrest</td>
<td>/æ:/</td>
<td>þrest, þrest</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(i) Use the WW translation of the West Saxon poem to write a version in MnE.
(ii) List the dialectal variations.
2.2.5 A Testimonia of Antiquitie

A small book called A Testimonia of Antiquitie was printed in London in 1567. Its purpose was to provide evidence, in a contemporary religious controversy, about the Church sacraments. It reproduced, with a translation, a sermon 'in the Saxon tongue' by Ælfric, who was Archbishop of Canterbury in AD 995. He was a famous English preacher and grammarian.

The book is of interest to students of language because the translation provides an example of sixteenth century Early Modern English (EME) both in style and spelling and printing, while the Old English sermon is reproduced in a type face that copies OE manuscript letter forms. Just as <o> and <e> were two shapes of the same letter, so there were two forms for ð, ð and d, not to be confused with <d>, which were used into the eighteenth century. These letter shapes derive from manuscript writing.

Here is the beginning of Ælfric's sermon in A Testimonia of Antiquitie, with its sixteenth century translation, and the list of The Saxon Caracters or letters, that be mosie strange', which are printed at the end of the book. The WW translation of the OE in the facsimile is also given.

The epistle beginneth thus in the Saxon tonge.
Ælfric abb. grete Sigeferth
greondlice: We thonner Æhr 
Dw redeht beo me pesc open 
Myte on Englonc zeppiten 
open copen ancop ic 
ham mi eop teah. teopann 
Sehe muntcheze razh Æh 
hte alep. þæs mecere 
pel moten mjenzen. 
and mun 
zeppiten psegerze Æyrn.

That is, Elfricke abbot doth send frendlye fulfation to 
Sigeferth. It is told me that I 
teach otherwyfe in my Englonc 
wrightyes, the doth thy anker 
teach, which is at home wyth 
the. For he fayth plyenly that 
it is a lawfull thing for a priesst 
to mare, and my wrytynges 
doeth speke agaynst thyg. &c-

d.th. th.f. g.i. r. f. t. w.
<o> b. s. p. f. g. i. p. t. w.
y. z. and. that.
<o> y. t. f.
<o> \( \frac{\text{OE}}{\text{EME}} \) Th. Th. E.H. M.
<o> \( \frac{\text{OE}}{\text{EME}} \) Th. E.D. p. E.H. M.
<o> S. W. And.
<o> S. p. f.

Ælfric abb. grete Sigeferth 
friendllye to me is said that 
thou saldest about me that I other 
taught in English wri- 
tings, than your anchorette (= religious hermit) at 
home with you teaches, because 
he clearly says that it 
is permitted, that mass priests 
well may wyve, and my 
wrightyes against speke this.

other ... other = otherwise ... than = differently from

\[ \text{WW} \]
2.3 Danish and Norwegian Vikings

The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle records an event in AD 787 which proved to be an ominous portent of things to come.

TEXT 12 – Chronicle for AD 787

Peterborough Chronicle

Her nam brehttric cinning
offfan dohter eadburh. | on his dagum comon
ægerst jii. scipu nordmana on hryca londe. | pa se ge-
repe hæl to rad. | he wolde drifan to des eniges tune
by he nyste hwat hi waron. | hine man ofsho pa. | Dat
waron pa erestan scipu demera manna. | he angel cy-
nes land gesohman.

(Peterborough Chronicle)

787. Here took brehttric king
offa's daughter eadbeth. & in his days came
first 3 ships of-northmen from hortha londe. & then the reeve
there to rode. & he wished drive to the king's manor
because he knew not what they were. & him one slew there. That
were the first ships danish men's that Angle-people's
land sought.

Parker Chronicle

Hn han brehttric cinning
offfan dohter eadburh. | on his dagum comon
ægerst jii. scipu nordmana on hryca londe. | pa se ge-
repe hæl to rad. | he wolde drifan to des eniges tune
by he nyste hwat hi waron. | hine man ofsho pa. | Dat
waron pa erestan scipu demera manna. | he angel cy-
nes land gesohman.

By the end of the eighth century the Angles, Saxons and Jutes had finally occupied and settled almost the whole of England. The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle continued to record battles for supremacy between the kings of the seven Anglo-Saxon kingdoms, as in the following example in the annal dated AD 827.

827. In this year there was an eclipse of the moon on Christmas morning. And the same year Egbert conquered Mercia, and that was south of the Humble, and he was the eighth king to be 'Ruler of Britain': the first to rule so great a kingdom was Ælle, king of Sussex; the second was Cæwin, king of Wessex: the third was Æthelbért, king of Kent; the fourth was Raedwald, king of East Anglia; the fifth was Edwin, king of Northumbria; the sixth was Oswald who reigned after him; the seventh was Osywy, Oswald's brother; the eighth was Egbert, king of Wessex.

(Translated by G. N. Grummenway, Everyman Classics, 1972)

But by AD 827, the three ships which the king's reeve had ridden to meet in AD 787 had already been followed by greater numbers of Norsemen, who began to make annual attacks for plunder on the coasts and up the rivers of England and northern France. The Peterborough Chronicle annal for AD 793 records the first Norwegian Viking attack on the monastery of Lindisfarne, and Jarrow on the NE coast.

TEXT 13 – Chronicle for AD 793

decxiii. 7 tiel after jan pas i-
cun caerres on xi. ides januarii earmlice heðenna manna
hergung adligode godes cyrycan. In lindisfarone ce
Purh reafam. 7 manslyh.

793. & little after that the
same year on 6 ides january miserably of-heathen men
raid destroyed god's church. on lindisfarne isle
by robbery. & murder.

793. and a little after that in the same year on 8th January God's church on the island of Lindisfare was miserably plundered and destroyed by the heathen, with great slaughter.

Another chronicle annal
decxiii.iiii. Ðees ylear caerres earmlice heðenna hergung adligodan godes cyrycan in lindisfarone ce. Purh reafam 7 manslyh.
Norsemen from Norway were soon to raid the NW coast of England, the north of Ireland, the western islands and coast of Scotland, and the Isle of Man.

Danes began to attack the east coast of England in AD 835. By the middle of the ninth century, large Danish armies regularly ravaged the land and began to occupy and settle permanently in parts of the country. The most famous of the Saxon English kings, Alfred, King of Wessex, after years of continuous war, negotiated treaties with the Danes. By the time of Alfred's death in AD 899, at the end of the ninth century, only Wessex remained independent. The rest of England, north and east of the old Roman road called Watling Street (from London to Chester), was shared between the English and the Danes, and became known as the Danelaw. Here is a typical entry in the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle describing the ravages of the Danish armies during King Alfred's reign.

TEXT 14 – Chronicle for AD 878

decclxxxviii. Heri hiene bestel se here on midne winter offer tueftan nith to eppanhamme. 7 geridum wesseaxma land 7 gesetton. 7 mycel Pæs folces offer sæ adrefaidon. 7 Pæs olbes Pone mestan dael hi geridon butan Pæm cyng hylfelede t. 7 he lite woredelice after wudum for. 7 on morfestenum.

7 Pæs on eaxstrom wrothe alfreed cyning lyte woredelice geweore æt ærelinga eige. 7 of Pæm gewecore was wunnende wæt Pone here. 7 sumer setena se del þe Pær nebst was. Pa on ðere seofoldan wacum ofer eaxstrom he gerid to eogbrithes stane be eaxston sealwyd. 7 him common Pær ongeam suumorsate calle. 7 willsate. 7 hamtun scir se del þe hire behemonne se wæs. 7 his gefege wæran. 7 he for ymb ane nith of Pæm wacum to ægel. 7 Pæs ymb ane nith to ðæn dune. 7 Pær gefealt wæt calne here 7 hiene gefylmde. 7 him after rad oð Pæt gewecore. 7 Pær set. xiiii. nith. 7 Pa saeld se here him gulas. and mycel ðæs. Pæt hi of his ræumlodon. 7 him eac gehton Pea heora cyng fulwileæ ondon wolde.

(Peterborough Chronicle)

878. Here itselft star away the host in mid winter after twelftun night to chippyham. & overran west saxons' land & occupied, & much of the folk over sea drowe. & of the other the most part they subdued except the king alfred (t. & he) with small band with difficulty through woods went. & in moor-fastnesses.

& after at easter build alfred king with little company fortress at athelne. & from that fortress was fighting against the host* & of somerset the part that there nearest was. then in the seventh week after easter he rode to otheisteone by east of weltwood. & to him came there back of somerset-men all. & wiltshire. & hampshire the part that of it on this side of sea was. & of him glad they were. & he went after one night from those camps to liey. & later after one night to edington. & there fought against all the host & it put to flight. & it after rode up to the fortress. & there sat 14 nights. & then gave the host him hostages. and great oaths that they from his kingdom wished. & him also promised that their king baptism receive would.

*The OE word here (host) was always used for the Viking armies.

2.4 The Battle of Brunanburh – OE poetry

The lines of OE poetry divide into two half-lines, each with two main stresses. Stress in OE was usually on the first syllable of a word (see Commentary 1 of the Text Commentary Book, Section 1.11). Words seldom contained more than three syllables, so there was a strong natural 'falling' rhythm in ordinary speech which was exploited in poetry. There was no rhyme or regular metre, so the sound of verse was a 'heightened' form of ordinary speech, but the two parts of each line were linked by alliteration of two or three words in each line. These words were stressed lexical words - nouns, adjectives, verbs or adverbs - not function words like pronouns or prepositions. The following example is from the poem The Phoenix.
TEXT 15 – The Phoenix

have I heard that is far hence
east-lands in noblest of-lands
to-men famous.

I have heard that far from here
in eastern lands is the noblest of lands
famous among men. That region of earth
is not accessible to many earthly rulers throughout the world
but through the might of the Creator
it is far off from evil-doers.

In OE manuscripts, poetry was set out like prose, not in separate lines in the way we are
used to. Lines and half-lines were often clearly marked with a dot like our full-stop, as in the
manuscript poem of the Battle of Brunanburh. The following three short extracts from the
poem, taken from the Parker Chronicle, show how poetry was written down.

TEXT 16 – The Battle of Brunanburh, Chronicle for AD 937

937. Here aedelstan king, of-ears lord, of-men
ring-giver. & his brother also, edmund prince. life long honour
won in battle. of-swords with-edges. by brunanburh.

not happened slaughter more. in this
island. ever yet. of-folk fell. before this. of-sword
with-edges. as to us say books. ancient scholars. since from east hither.

937. Here aedelstan king led troops
to brunanburh.
A period of 25 years of peace after AD 955 was once again broken when more attacks by Norsemen began in the 980s. Some came from Normandy across the Channel, where Norsemen (the Normans) had also settled, as well as from Denmark and Norway. In 1017, the Danish king, Cnut, became 'King of All England'; the line of Danish kings was not ended until 1042, when the English Edward the Confessor became king.

2.5 Effects on the English language

The settlement of the Norsemen and the occupation of the Danelaw had important effects on the English language.

Old Norse (ON) is the name now given to the language spoken by the Norsemen – Danish and Norwegian Vikings. It was cognate with OE; that is, they both came from the same earlier Germanic language. It seems likely that the two languages were similar enough in vocabulary for OE speakers to understand common ON words, and vice versa, so that the English and Norsemen could communicate. An Icelandic saga says of the eleventh century, 'there was at that time the same tongue in England as in Norway and Denmark'. But speakers simplified their own language when talking to the other, and OE dialects spoken in the Danelaw time became modified in ways which were different from the Wessex and Kentish dialects. Present-day northern and East Anglian dialects show ON features, particularly in vocabulary.

Many OE words therefore have a similar cognate ON word, and often we cannot be sure whether a MnE reflex has come from OE, ON or from both. In the OE word list in the Word Book, the ON cognate of an OE word is given where it is known. If the word is marked fr. ON, it means that the OE word has derived from ON, which is proof of the close contact between the two languages.

Activity 2.7

(i) Use the OE word list to look up those ON words that are cognate with OE words spelt with <ce> (see Commentary of the Text Commentary Book, Sections 2.6, 3). Does it seem likely that an OE speaker would have recognised the ON words?

(ii) Look up in the Word Book or a dictionary the MnE words beginning with <sk> which derive from ON. Does it seem likely that the pronunciation of ON <sk> had changed to /ʃ/ like OE <sc>?

(iii) OE skyrta and ON skyrta both have reflexes in MnE. What has happened to the meaning of the two words?

(iv) Make a selection of other OE words from the Word Book or a dictionary that have ON cognates. Write down the ON cognate word and compare it with the OE. Does the evidence support the claim that OE and ON speakers could communicate with one another?

So one important result of Danish and Norwegian settlement in the Danelaw was its effect on the English language. English and Norse speakers lived in communities that were close enough for contact to take place, and sometimes within the same settlement, or family after inter-marriage. A large number of proper names of Scandinavian origin can be found in late OE and early ME documents. In time, the communities merged and Norse was no longer spoken, but the English dialects spoken in different parts of the Danelaw had been modified –

TEXT 17 - Inscription, St Gregory's Minster, Kirkdale, North Yorkshire

Transcription

ORM GAMALSON BOHTE SCS (= SANCTUS) GREGORIVS MINSTER DONNE HIT WES ÆLTOBROCAN ÆL TOFALAN 7 HE HIT LET MACAN NEWAN FROM GRUNDE XPE (= CHRISTI) 7 SCS GREGORIVS IN EADWEG DAGUM CNG (= CYNING) 7 IN TOSTI DAGUM EORL 7 HAWARD ME WROTHE 7 BRAND PRS 7 PREOSTAS

Translation

ORM GAMALSON BOUGHT ST GREGORY'S MINSTER WHEN IT WAS ALL BROKEN & FALLEN DOWN & HE CAUSED IT TO BE MADE ANEW FROM THE GROUND TO CHRIST AND ST GREGORY IN KING EDWARD'S DAYS & IN EARL TOSTIS DAYS & HAWARTH & BRAND PRIESTS MADE ME

Tosti or Tostig, was Earl of Northumberland and brother to Harald Godwinson, who became King of England in 1066, on King Edward's death (see also Texts 18 and 19 in Section 2.8). Orm and Gamal are Norse names, but the language is OE.

2.5.1 OE and Scandinavian surnames

The name Orm Gamalson looks familiar to us as the usual way of referring to people by their forename and surname, as in David Williamson. This name no longer literally means David, son of William, and there is nothing strange today about the name Marion Johnson, which is unlikely to mean Marion, son of John. But Orm Gamalson (Orm Gamalson) did meanOrm, son of Gamal, and this way of creating personal names, by adding -son as a patronymic suffix (name derived from the father), was in fact a Scandinavian custom, which was in time adopted throughout the country.

The Anglo-Saxon patronymic suffix was -uEg, as in Ælfred Ælfricwulfing, Alfred, son of Aelfwulf, and was used to name families or peoples as descendants from a common ancestor.

2.5.2 OE and Scandinavian place names

These names were also incorporated into place names, as in Walsingham, Billingborough and Kidlington, although the -uEg suffix tended to be used in a more general way as well, so must not always be taken literally to mean son of the family. Some place names consist of the patronymic alone, for example, Woiking, Tosting, Malting.

The suffixes that indicate place names in OE included -hyrst (copse, wood), -ham (dwelling, fold), -uc (village), -ton (settlement) and -ste (place), as in present-day Wadhurst, Newnham, Norwich, Berwick, Hestington and Mapledstead.

The detailed study of place names provides much of the historical evidence for the settlement of Danes and Norwegians in England.
Activity 2.8

Use an atlas and atlas gazetteer of England to identify towns and villages with place names ending in the following Scandinavian suffixes:

(a) -by (town, farm)
(b) -thorpe (village)
(c) -thwaite (piece of land)
(d) -oft (piece of land)

If you find a sufficient number, and mark them on a blank map, you should find good evidence of the extent of the Danegeld.

2.6 Latin vocabulary in OE

A great deal of 'Latinate' vocabulary was adopted into English from the sixteenth century onwards, during the Renaissance or Revival of Learning, when both Latin and Greek were generally considered to be languages superior to English. These words are often long and learned, and contrast with shorter Anglo-Saxon words in their use in formal speech and writing. But OE also contained words of Latin origin, some of which are still common words in MNE, and are in no way learned or obscure.

2.6.1 Latin words adopted before the settlement in England

Some words of Latin origin had already been adopted in the language brought over with the Angles and Saxons. This was because OE was a Germanic language, and the Germanic people were in continuous contact with the Romans. There are no written records from this period, so the evidence for the early adoption of Latin words lies in an analysis of known sound changes.

In the following assignment, only words that have survived into MNE have been listed. Many OE words derived from Latin have not survived, for example, clype from Latin "culcus" (leather bottle), mense from "mensa" (table) and sigel from "sigillum" (brooch).

Activity 2.9

(i) Use the word list of Latin-derived words in the Word Book or a dictionary to find out the OE and original Latin forms of the following words.
(ii) Divide the words into sets according to their meanings (for example, domestic, household articles, etc.) Consider what these sets of adopted words might suggest about the relationship between the Germanic tribes and the Romans.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Latin</th>
<th>OE</th>
<th>Latin</th>
<th>OE</th>
<th>Latin</th>
<th>OE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>albus</td>
<td>white</td>
<td>alvis</td>
<td>ash</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>aures</td>
<td>ears</td>
<td>altos</td>
<td>high</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>aqua</td>
<td>water</td>
<td>argus</td>
<td>eagle</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>arbor</td>
<td>tree</td>
<td>aula</td>
<td>hall</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>avis</td>
<td>bird</td>
<td>aurum</td>
<td>gold</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>avis</td>
<td>bird</td>
<td>aqua</td>
<td>water</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>aurum</td>
<td>gold</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

2.7 OE grammar

We have to speak in sentences to convey meanings. Words are grouped into phrases, and phrases into clauses, and in written English one or more clauses make up a sentence. There are two principal ways in which words are related to form phrases and clauses to give meanings. One is using an agreed word order. The other is changing the form of words, either by adding inflections (prefixes or suffixes) or altering part of a word.

In OE, the order of words in a clause was more variable than that of MNE, and there were many more inflections on nouns, adjectives and verbs.
2.7.1 Word order

Today, the order of the elements in a declarative clause (one making a statement) is SP(C/O)(A); that is, the subject comes first, followed by the predicate (or verb), then the complements or objects, and last the adverbials, if any. This pattern was already common in OE, as the following examples illustrate. (Examples in this and the following section are from the OE versions of the Garden of Eden (Adam and Eve) and the Flood (Noah) stories in the book of Genesis from the Old Testament.)

S   P   A
seo neddre cwæþ to haman wif
the serpent said to the woman

S   P   O
hi gebyðdon his stæmne
they heard his voice

S   P   O & S P
seo neddre beapani me and ic eowt
the serpent deceived me and I ate

But there were also different orders of words. For example, after a linking adverb the verb came before the subject:

A   P   S   A   A
pæ cwæþ seon neddre of to haman wif
then said the serpent after to the woman

A   P   S   C   S   P
hæ gesæh past wif past pæst trowa was god to stæmne
then saw the woman that the tree was good to eat

or the verb might sometimes come last in a subordinate clause:

S   P   A   C   S   C   P
hi onceceonwæt pæt hi nacode wæron
they knew that they naked were

OE word order in asking questions and forming the negative also differed from MnE:

A   P   S   C   S   N   P
hæu forhæð God eow past ge ne ræten?
Why forbade God you that you not eat?
(= Why did God forbid you to eat?)

Other examples can be found in the OE texts in Chapters 1 and 2 by reading the WW translations.

2.7.2 Number, case and gender – inflections on nouns and adjectives

Number

There are only a few inflections in MnE today which mark the grammatical functions of nouns. We show the number of a noun, that is, whether it is singular (sg) or plural (pl), by adding /s/ or /t/ in speech, and /s/ or /æs/ in writing, as in:

- cat / cats
dog / dogs
church / churches

There are a few irregular plurals that have survived from OE, like men, geese and mice, which show plural number by a change of vowel, and oxen.

Case

In MnE today, only the personal pronouns (except you and it) are inflected to show whether they are the subject or object in a clause.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>MnE</th>
<th>OE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>S</td>
<td>P</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I</td>
<td>saw</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>you (sg)</td>
<td>saw</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>he</td>
<td>saw</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>she</td>
<td>saw</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>we</td>
<td>saw</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>you (pl)</td>
<td>saw</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>they</td>
<td>saw</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OE</td>
<td>S</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>hit</td>
<td>ic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>hi</td>
<td>Pu</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>me</td>
<td>he</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>hine</td>
<td>heo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>eow</td>
<td>we</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>us</td>
<td>ge</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>hi</td>
<td>hi</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Adjectives are not inflected to agree with nouns in MnE, nor is the definite article (the), but they were in OE. The feature of the grammar that marks these functions is called case.

| subject          | nominative case (nom) |
| direct object    | accusative case (acc) |
| indirect object  | dative case (dat) |

In a prepositional phrase (PrepP) in OE, the noun was in either the accusative or dative case, according to the preposition.

The only other MnE inflection on nouns is the /s/ or /æs/ in writing to show possession – called the possessive or genitive case (gen). This is the only grammatical case in MnE that survives from OE in nouns. In OE, the genitive noun usually preceded the noun head of the phrase, as illustrated in the following examples.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>OE</th>
<th>Old English</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ðy</td>
<td>(he) (mynte)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(hwaet)</td>
<td>(hi) (wæron)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(hine)</td>
<td>(man) (owsloth) (Pa)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Pa)</td>
<td>(wæron) (Pa eostan scipu demanca munn)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Pa)</td>
<td>(angil cylnes land) (geselthon)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Text 14

Her hiene bestæl se here on midne winter ofer twelftan niht to sippahamme

7 Ø gerdum west seaxna land

7 Ø geselthon

7 mycel Pæs forces ofer sæ atrafædon

7 Pæs æthres Pæne maestan dael hi gerdum butan Pæm cyngæ ælfrede

7 he little wæoræ ðelicæ æfter wudum for ð on morfæstænum
Proper nouns were also inflected: *ælfred cyang* (Text 14) is subject and so nominative case; in the PrepP *hwian hwæt cyng-e ælfred-e*, except *king Alfræd* (Text 14), all three words in the noun phrase (NP) are in the dative case, following *hwian*.

2.7.3 Verbs

In MnE, there are different ways of forming the past tense and past participle of verbs.

**MnE regular verbs – OE weak verbs**

The majority of verbs are regular, and we add *-ed*/*-d* or *-de* in speech and *-ed* (usually) in writing to the verb to form both the past tense and past participle.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>MnE</th>
<th>OE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>kiss – kissed – kissed</td>
<td>cyssan – cytce – cyssed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>fill – filled – filled</td>
<td>fyllan – fyldye – fyllde</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>knit – knitted – knitted</td>
<td>cryttan – crytte – crytted</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

MnE regular verbs derive from a set of OE verbs whose past tense was marked with *-e* or *-de* in a dental suffix, which are now called **weak verbs**.

**MnE irregular verbs – OE strong verbs**

There is another set of common verbs in MnE whose past tense and past participle are marked by a change of vowel, while the participle has either an *-ed* suffix (not *-ed*) or none. These are called **irregular verbs**. Here are a few examples, to which you could add many more.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>MnE</th>
<th>OE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ride – rode – ridden</td>
<td>ridan – rad – ridden</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>choose – chose – chosen</td>
<td>ecosan – cases – cohen</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>drink – drank – drank</td>
<td>druncan – drance – druncen</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>come – came – come</td>
<td>cuman – com – comen</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>speak – spoke – spoken</td>
<td>sprecan – spriec – sprecen</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>see – saw – seen</td>
<td>soon – seah – sewen</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>fall – fell – fallen</td>
<td>feallan – feoll – feallen</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The irregular verbs in MnE derive from a much larger set of verbs in OE, marked by changes of vowel, which linguists have called **strong verbs**.

(This is an outline only – the verb systems in both OE and MnE are more varied than shown here.)

**Inflections for person and tense**

OE verbs were also marked by different suffixes to agree with their subject – either 1st, 2nd or 3rd person, and singular or plural number. In MnE, the only present tense inflection is *-s*, to agree with the 3rd person singular subject:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>MnE</th>
<th>OE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em>I</em>you/we/they drive</td>
<td><em>he/shet drive-s</em></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In OE, this verb would have a variety of suffixes:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>MnE</th>
<th>OE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em>-e</em> drif-e</td>
<td><em>-e</em> heofan drif-e</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>-st</em> drif-st</td>
<td><em>-e</em> heo/sa drif-e</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In MnE, there are no additional suffixes to mark agreement in the past tense:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>MnE</th>
<th>OE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em>I</em>he/shet/we/you/they drove</td>
<td><em>he/shet/wet/you/they drive</em></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In OE, the past tense had some suffixes to mark agreement:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>MnE</th>
<th>OE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em>-e</em> drif-e</td>
<td><em>-e</em> heofan/drif-e</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(These examples illustrate only some of the forms of inflection in OE verbs.)
2.7.4 Evidence of changes in word endings in OE

One of the important differences between OE and MnE is that MnE has lost most of the inflections of OE. We can observe the beginnings of this loss of word suffixes from evidence in the manuscripts. If you compare the spellings of the same words in the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle texts in Chapters 1 and 2, you will sometimes find differences in the vowel letters that mark case in nouns and tense in verbs. Here are some examples, where the text words are followed by the form with the 'correct' OE suffix (there are other differences in spelling in other words, but these are not discussed here).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Peterborough Chronicle</th>
<th>Parker Chronicle</th>
<th>Regular OE form</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Text 1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>nefdan</td>
<td>nefdan</td>
<td>nefdan = ne herfdan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>feorddan</td>
<td>lyrdon</td>
<td>feorddan or lyrdon</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>cyminge</td>
<td>cyminge</td>
<td>cyminge</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>bcadan</td>
<td>bcadan</td>
<td>bcadan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Text 2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>cuman</td>
<td>cuman</td>
<td>cuman</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>feohtan</td>
<td>feohtan</td>
<td>feohtan (infinitive)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>sendan</td>
<td>sendan</td>
<td>sendan (infinitive)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Text 3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>broor</td>
<td>broor</td>
<td>broor (unstressed syllable, not a case ending)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Text 4</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>onfengon</td>
<td>onfengun</td>
<td>onfengon</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>nemnep</td>
<td>nemnep</td>
<td>nemnep</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>rxadon</td>
<td>rxadon</td>
<td>rxadon</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Text 8</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>gefuhtun</td>
<td>gefuhtun</td>
<td>gefuhtun</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>gepingodon</td>
<td>gepingodon</td>
<td>gepingodon</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Such spelling irregularities became frequent, so we can assume that the vowel sound of these suffixes was no longer, for example, a clear /ə/ or /u/, but was 'reduced' to the vowel /a/. This is the commonest vowel in present-day English, the one we use in most unstressed syllables, but we have never used a separate letter of the alphabet for it. The scribes of OE therefore began to use vowel letters in these unstressed syllables at random. Eventually, letter <a> came to be generally used, as discussed in Chapter 3 (see also Commentary 1 of the Text Commentary Book, Section 1.1).

So although in late OE times the West Saxon dialect had become a standard for writing, and therefore did not reflect differences of pronunciation, scribes sometimes 'mis-spelt' because changes in pronunciation were not matched by changes in the spelling. This is, however, important evidence for us about the changes that were taking place in OE.

2.8 The Norman Conquest

In 1066, Duke William of Normandy defeated King Harold at Hastings and became King William I of England. This event had the most profound effects on the country and on the language (see Chapter 3), and when we read English texts from the twelfth century onwards, we notice changes at every level of language – spelling and vocabulary, word form and grammar.

To end this chapter, here are two further extracts from the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle. On very short and the other much longer, describing the events of 1066. If you are able to study the longer Text 19 from the Peterborough Chronicle, you will understand a little of how historians have to interpret original sources when writing history. The annal is written in the simple narrative style of the chronicle, with each event prefaced by and. Reference to individuals as he or him is sometimes rather confusing. Here is an outline of the events told in the chronicle.

King Edward the Confessor died on 28 December 1065, and was buried on 6 January 1066. He was succeeded by King Harold, but Duke William of Normandy also claimed the English throne, and prepared a force to attack southern England. But before this, King Harold, with Earl Edwin and Morcar, had to fend off attacks on the north of England by the Norwegian Harald Hardrada. Harold defeated the Norwegian at Stamford Bridge near York. Tostig, the Earl of Northumberland, was King Harold's brother, but he had defected to the Norwegian Harald. King Harold made a forced march southwards immediately after the battle at Stamford Bridge, but his army was defeated by William at the Battle of Hastings. Duke William was crowned William I soon after.
In this year one consecrated the minster at westminster on children’s mass day, and the king Edward died on twelf mass eve, and he one burned on twelf mass day, in the new consecrated church at westminster. Harold earl succeeded to england’s kingdom, as the king it to him granted, and as men him thereto chose, and was blessed (e consecrated) as king on twelf mass day, and the same year that he king was, he went out with ship-force against William, and meanwhile came tostig earl into humber with 60 ships. Ed-ward earl came (with) gun-army, and drove him out, and the shipmen him forsook, and he went to scotland with 12 vessels, and him met harold the norwegian king with 300 ships, and tostig him to submitted, and they both went into humber until they came to york, and them against fought morcar earl, and edward earl, and the norwegian king all victory gained, and one told harold king how it was there done & happened, and he came with great army of english men, and met him at stamford bridge, and him slew, and the earl tostig, and all the host manfully overcame, and meanwhile came william earl up at hastings on st michael’s mass day, and harold came from-north and him against fought before his army came all, and there he fell, and his two brothers Guth & leofwine, and William this land conquered, and came to westminster, and eldered archbishop him to king consecrated, and men paid him tribute, and hostages gave, and then their lands bought-back.

Cont...
2.9 The pronunciation of OE

A more detailed description of the pronunciation of OE is provided in Commentary 1 of the Text Commentary Book. Changes of pronunciation that take place over a long period of time have important effects on word structure and grammar, and so cannot properly be separated from these aspects of language if you want to understand some of the reasons for language change.

2.10 The inflections of OE

A description of the inflections of nouns, adjectives and verbs is set out in Commentary 2 of the Text Commentary Book, but for fuller details you should consult a grammar book of OE (see the Bibliography).

3. From Old English to Middle English

3.1 The evidence for linguistic change

The ways in which we have identified and described features of the language in the OE texts of Chapters 1 and 2 are those that we can systematically apply to any text of English. To remind you once more, we look at any one or more of the following 'levels' of language and observe:

- changes in spelling conventions, letter forms and the alphabet used – these are only a guide in OE and ME texts to the pronunciation of the language;
- changes in pronunciation, inferred from the written words;
- changes in word structure, suffixes (inflections) and prefixes;
- changes in the grammar and word order;
- changes in the vocabulary – new words appear, old ones are no longer used.

We call the language from about 1150 to 1450 Middle English (ME), because from our point of view in time it comes between the periods of Old and Modern English. The evidence for change and development in ME, before the first printing press was set up by William Caxton in 1476, lies in written manuscripts, just as for OE. Every copy of a book, letter, will or charter had to be written out by hand, but only a few of the existing manuscripts in ME are originals, in the hand of their author. Many copies of popular books, like Chaucer’s The Canterbury Tales, for example, have survived, although Chaucer’s original manuscripts have been lost. On the other hand, other works are known through a single surviving copy only.

As a result of the social and political upheaval caused by the Norman Conquest (see Section 3.2), the West Saxon standard system of spelling and punctuation was in time no longer used. Writers used spellings that tended to match the pronunciation of their spoken dialect, and scribes sometimes changed the spelling of words they were copying to match their own dialectal pronunciation. After several copies, therefore, the writing might contain a mixture of different dialectal forms. But for students of language today, the loss of the OE standard system of writing means that there is plenty of evidence for the different dialects of ME.

Today, we are used to reading printed books and papers in Standard English which all use a spelling and punctuation system that has been almost unchanged for over 200 years. We are taught to use Standard English and standard spelling when we learn to write. MinE spelling is neutral to pronunciation, and written texts can be read in any regional accent. Misspelled words and non-standard forms look ‘wrong’.

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3.2 The Norman Conquest and the English language

In Chapters 1 and 2, we looked at OE in the West Saxon dialect, which had become the standard form for writing by the first half of the eleventh century in all dialectal areas. A standard orthography (spelling system) means that changes in pronunciation tend not to be recorded. On the other hand, any inconsistencies in spelling that do occur are clues to changes that were taking place in pronunciation and word form (see Section 2.7.4 of this book and Commentary 1 of the Text Commentary Book, Section 1.1).

The policy of writing in the Anglo-Saxon period is the most comprehensive of all dialects. It contains several unfamiliar features of spelling and punctuation which would be marked wrong if you used them. There is also the problem of interpreting the meaning of *sonet* for certain — probably *souset*. At a glance, it doesn’t look like ‘good English’.

The policy of modernizing the spelling and punctuation of old texts from the eleventh century onwards leaves us unaware of the gradual development of modern spelling and punctuation. We read Chaucer’s original 1390s spelling, but not Shakespeare’s of the 1590s. The examples of historical English texts in this book are reproduced with their original spelling, because this is part of the development of written English.

All printed versions of old texts must compromise in reproducing the originals — only facsimiles are completely authentic, but it needs experience to be able to decipher handwriting on the past.

**TEXT 20 – Anonymous short metrical chronicle**

**SW Midlands dialect**

- *SuSp* he regnede a gode gome
- Harold Godwynes sone
- He was culped Harefoot
- For he was renner goud
- Bote he ne regnede here
- Bot. ix. mondes of a yere
- William bastard of Normandy
- Hym cant Pat was a villany
- Harold lies at Waltham & William bastard Pat his land won
- He regnede here
- On & twelve yere
- SuSp he deide at he home
- At Normandyne at Cane

(A letter to an anonymous Short Metrical Chronicle, E. Zettl (ed.), EETS 196)
Activity 3.2
Rewrite Robert of Gloucester's chronicle in MnE.

3.3 The earliest surviving ME text

The manuscript of the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle which was written in the abbey at Peterborough is of special interest for two reasons, one historical and the other linguistic. Firstly, it is the only copy of the chronicle that describes events up to the middle of the twelfth century, nearly 100 years after the Norman Conquest. Secondly, it gives us the first direct evidence of the changes in the language that had taken place by the 1150s.

We know that a disastrous fire at Peterborough destroyed most of the monastery's library in 1116, including its copy of the chronicle. Later, another chronicle was borrowed and copied. This rewritten copy has survived and is the only known as the Peterborough Chronicle. The entries for the years up to 1121 are all in the same hand, and copied in the 'classical' West Saxon OE orthography. But there are two 'continuations' of the annals, probably written down by two scribes, one recording events from 1122 to 1131, and the other from 1132 to 1154, where the chronicle ends.

The importance of the continuations is that the language is not the classical West Saxon OE of the older chronicle to 1121, but is markedly different. It is good evidence of current English usage of that area in the first half of the twelfth century. The monks of Peterborough were probably local men, so spoke the East Midlands dialect of English. Peterborough was within the Danelaw, so some influence of ON might be expected too. The tradition of writing in classical OE spelling was by now lost, and as the continuations of the annals were probably written from dictation, the scribes would tend to spell English as they heard and spoke it. Scribes were also now trained in the writing of French as well as Latin, and some conventions of writing French would influence their spelling of words.

Activity 3.3
Text 22 is part of the annal for 1140 in the second continuation of the Peterborough Chronicle.

(i) Read through the text to see whether you can understand the gist of it without referring to the translation.
(ii) Use the literal translation to write a version in MnE.
(iii) List any differences between the language of the text and that of the chronicle annals in Texts 1–19 which you immediately notice.
(iv) Comment on the words of French derivation in the text: muevre, castel, prison.

1140. In this year wished the king Stephen take Robert earl of Gloucester the king's son Henry's, but he ne was able for he became it aware, there after in the lent darken the sun & the day, about noon day's, when men eat, that one lighted candles to eat by ... were men very amazed ... thereafter waxed violently much war between the king & Randolph earl of chester not because he ne gave him all that he could demand from him, as he did all others, but ever the more he gave to them, the worse they were to him, the earl held lincoln against the king & took from him all that he ought to have, & the king fared thither & besought him & his brother William de Romans in the castle, & the earl stole out & went after Robert earl of gloucester, & brought him thither with great army, & fought violently on Candle mass day against their lord, & captured him for his men him betrayed & fled, & led him to Bristol & put in prison & in letters, then was all England disturbed more than before was, & all evil was in land ...

(For a detailed commentary on the language of Text 22, and the evidence of marked change in the language, see Commentary 4 of the Text Commentary Book.)
Activity 3.4

Is there any significance in the meanings of the earliest French words in the chronicle and those in the foregoing list?

An analysis of a short text like this shows how much information a close examination can yield. The scribe of the chronicle does not appear to be familiar with the former OE West Saxon spelling, and he tends to write according to the pronunciation of the words. It provides clear evidence of changes which are only hinted at in late OE texts.

The most important change is the beginning of the loss of most of the inflections of OE, mainly by their reduction in sound. This leads to a greater reliance on word order, and the more frequent use of prepositions to show the meanings that formerly might have been signalled by inflections. Consequently, the chronic text reads much more like MnE to us than the OE texts, even though there is still some way to go.

The next extract is followed by a version in West Saxon OE, so that you can see the extent of the changes in the language.

TEXT 23 - Chronicle for 1137, c.1154

I ne can ne I ne mai tellen alle þe wunder ne alle þe pines ði diðen wrecceumen on þis land. ði ðastede þe Pa xix. wintra wilhe Stephene was king þe œre it was wuerse ði wuerse.

Pa was corn deare, þe flec þe can þe buere, for nan ne was þo Pa land. Wrecceumen sturven of hunger.

war sae me tilede. þe erthe ne bar nan corn. for þe Pa land was al fordon. mid suiflic dædes. þi saeden openlice ðat lastede þi ðat hillechen. Sute þe mare Panne we cungen saen. we Poloden .xix. wintra for ure sinnes.

(From facsimile edition of the Peterborough Chronicle, Dorothy Whitelock (ed.), Copenhagen: Rosenkilde & Bugger, 1954)

Version in the former OE standard written form

tæ ne can ne tæ ne megn tellan cælæ þa wunder ne cælæ þa þe pynes þe hie dydon wrecceum mannum on þissum lande. þæ lastæde þe Pa xix. wintra þe hwele þe þe Stephene cyning was þæs hræ hit was wyrsæ þæ wyrsæ.

þæ wæs corn deore. þæs flec þe can þe buere. for nan ne was on þæm lande. wrecce menn sturven of hunger.

swa hwær swa man tilede. seor cæþe ne hær nan corn. for þæm land was eal fordon. mid swilæcum dældæm. þæ hæor openlice þæt lastædæ þæs hælæm. swilæ þæ mare Panne we cungen secgæn. we Poloden .xix. wintra for ure synæn.

Activity 3.5

(i) Write a version of Text 23 in MnE.

(ii) Use the OE version or the word list in the accompanying Word Book to make a study of the changes that you can observe in the language. Look particularly at the following words or phrases:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>OE</th>
<th>Chronicle</th>
<th>OE</th>
<th>Chronicle</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>NPs and PrepPs</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ic</td>
<td>Ic ne megn tellan</td>
<td>Ic</td>
<td>Ic ne megn tellan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>hit</td>
<td>hie dydon</td>
<td>hit</td>
<td>hie dydon</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>we</td>
<td>we</td>
<td>we</td>
<td>we</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>hi/hi</td>
<td>Stephene was</td>
<td>hi</td>
<td>Stephene was</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>man</td>
<td>hit was</td>
<td>me</td>
<td>hit was</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>nan</td>
<td>corn was</td>
<td>nan</td>
<td>corn was</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>nan corn</td>
<td>nan ne was</td>
<td>nan corn</td>
<td>nan ne was</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>cælæ þa wunder</td>
<td>þæt lastædæ</td>
<td>alle þe</td>
<td>man sturven</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>cælæ þa þe pynes</td>
<td>þæt lastædæ</td>
<td>alle þe</td>
<td>man sturven</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>on þæm lande</td>
<td>þæt lastædæ</td>
<td>o þe land</td>
<td>man tilede</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>seor cæþe</td>
<td>þæt lastædæ</td>
<td>seor cæþe</td>
<td>þæt lastædæ</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>ne hær</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>nan corn</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>man</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>sturven</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>tilede</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>eþe ne bar</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>land</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>was</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>fordon</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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### Activity 3.6

(i) Read Orm's text aloud, pronouncing every final -<e> with the vowel /æ/, unless it comes before a word beginning with another vowel or <e>, when it is not pronounced.

(ii) How many syllables are there between each 'full-stop'?

(iii) What do the 'full-stops' mark?

#### 3.4.1 Commentary on Text 24

There are fifteen syllables to every line, without exception, so the text is in verse and the metre is absolutely regular. Single unstressed and stressed syllables (or off-beats and beats) alternate, always with an initial and final unstressed syllable:

```
x / x / x / x / x / x / x / x / x / x
```

Piss boc iss nemmed Ormulum. Forpit pat Orm itt wrothe, and the steps in the text mark the end of each half-line and line.

### Activity 3.7

(i) Write out a version of Orm's text in MnE.

(ii) Check the sources of the vocabulary (see the word list in the Word Book).

---

**3.4 The book called *Ormulum***

Another early text dating from the late twelfth century is an important source of information about the state of the language. It was written by a monk called Orm (a Danish name, as we have seen in Section 2.5.1). Text 24 consists of an extract from the opening of the book, where Orm explains why he has written it.

**TEXT 24 – *Ormulum*, late twelfth century (i)**

This book is called Ormulum. Because Orm it wrought (= *made*).

I have turned into English. The gospel's holy lore. After that little while that me. My Lord has lent (= *granted*).

And whoever shall this book. Again another time write. Him ask I that he it copy right. In the same way that this book him teaches. Entirely after the way that it is. According to this first example. With all such rhyme as here is set (down). With all the many words, And (I ask) that he look well that he. A latter writes twice. Everywhere in this book. Is written in that way. (Let him) Look well that he it wrote so. For he must not else ( = *otherwise*). In English write correctly the word. That (should) know he well for sure.

---

**3.4.2 A note on Orm’s spelling**

There are two important things to remember about Orm’s spelling: firstly, it is consistent; secondly, it is an attempt to reform the system and relate each sound to a symbol. For example, he introduced three symbols for <e>, to differentiate between the three sounds that it had come to represent (see Commentary 1 of the Text Commentary Book, Section 2.7 iiii). In the texts, you will notice his use of <wh> for OE <hw>, for example, *what-*, *whos* for *hwos swa*, *hwes* (MnE *whoso*, *whose*), and <sh> for <se>, for example, *shall*, *Englissh* for *seal*, *Englis*, both of which are familiar in MnE.
3.4.3 Orm's writing as evidence of language change in early ME

Orm's 20000 odd lines of verse are important evidence for some of the changes that had taken place in the language by the late twelfth century in his part of the country, just over 100 years after the Norman Conquest. His lines are, however, monotonous to read, since they are absolutely regular in metre. Students of literature do not place Orm high on their list, but for students of language his writing is very valuable.

Because Orm probably lived in northern Lincolnshire (now South Humberside), he wrote in an East Midlands dialect of English, like the Peterborough Chronicle continuations. His object was to teach the Christian faith in English, and the verses were to be read aloud. So he devised his own system of spelling, to help a reader to pronounce the words properly. What is especially noticeable is the number of double consonant letters.

(The relationship of Orm's spelling to the pronunciation of his East Midlands dialect is explained in Commentary 5 of the Text Commentary Book.)

3.5 The origins of present-day Standard English in ME

Standard English today is the form of the language normally used in writing. It is also the spoken form for some people. It is not a regional variety of English. It may be spoken in a regional accent, or in the accent known as Received Pronunciation (RP), which developed during the nineteenth century and is not a regional accent. You cannot tell where someone speaking Standard English in RP today comes from.

All present-day dialects of English, including Standard English, can be traced back to the dialects of the ME period (c.1150–1450) in their pronunciation, vocabulary and grammar. There was no standard form of the language then, and the spelling, pronunciation, vocabulary and grammar varied from one part of the country to another. Differences of spelling, vocabulary and grammar in the manuscripts are first-hand evidence of differences of usage and pronunciation, and of the changes that took place over the ME period.

We shall now look at some of the evidence for change and development in the dialects of ME, remembering that this helps us to explain many of the differences between the dialects of MnE today.

3.6 Evidence of changes in pronunciation

If you examine any ME text, you can compare the form of a word with its original form in OE, ON or OF, and see whether the evidence of the spelling suggests that it has changed in pronunciation. When this is done systematically, knowledge of the probable dialectal area in which a text was written can be deduced.

Demonstrating this in accurate detail is the work of ME scholars, and beyond the scope of an introductory textbook, but we can learn a little by taking two contrasting short texts, one in a Southern dialect and the other in a Northern dialect, and seeing what we can find out about changes in the language since the OE period.

3.6.1 The Fox and the Wolf

Here is the opening of a poem called The Fox and the Wolf, which is a southern text dating from the early thirteenth century.
TEXT 26 – The Fox and the Wolf, early thirteenth century

Southern dialect

A vox gon out of pe wode go
Afingret so þat him wes we
He nese naver in none wise
Afingret erour half so swipe.
He ne heold noþer wey ne strete
For him wes loþ men to mete.
Him were leuere meten one hen
Per half an ounderd wimmern.
He strok swipe auðral
So þat he ofse; ane wal.
Wpitine þe walle wes on hous.
The vox wes þider swipe wous.
For he þolute his hounger aqenche
Oþer mid mete oþer mid drunche.

A fox went out of the wood (gon ... go = went)
Hungred so that to him was woe
He ne-was never in no way
Hungred before half so greatly.
He ne held neither way nor street.
For to-him (it) was loathsome men to meet.
To-him (it) were more-pleasing meet one hen
Than half a hundred women.
He went quickly all-the-way
Until he saw a wall.
Within the wall was a house.
The fox was thither very eager (to go)
For he intended his hunger quench.
Either with food or with drink.

Activity 3.9

(i) Use the WW translation to write a version in MnE.
(ii) Use the word list in the Word Book to compare the forms of the ME words and their OE sources, and discuss the possible reason for the following:
(a) The use of the letters <e>, <w>, and <u> in the words vox, wox, neure, leure, auðral, and wous.
(b) The use of letter <e> for the main vowel in neure, wes, res, erro, strete and pen.
(c) The spelling <eo> for the vowel in out, ounderd, hans, wous and hounger.
(d) The spellings <qu> and <ce> in aqenche.
(e) The spelling <eo> for the long vowels of go, wo, nede, so, noþer, loþ, one and strøk.
(f) The spelling and possible pronunciations of drunche (it is a rhyming word with aqenche).
(g) The spelling of the vowels of half, auðral, wallwalle and leure.

Activity 3.10

Examine the following extract from Cursor Mundi for evidence of change, or lack of change, in the language of the text.
(i) Use the word list in the Word Book to compare the ME words with their OE sources, group them into sets of similar features and try to explain any differences.
(ii) Examine the pairs of rhyming words for any further proof of change.
(iii) Rewrite the text in MnE.

TEXT 27 – Cursor Mundi, c.1300

Northern dialect

Adam had pasid nine hundret yere
Nai selcet poþ he wex unfer
Forwroght wit his hak and spad
Of himself he wex aþ sad.
He lened him þan upon his hak
Wit Seth his sun Puspat he spak
Sun, he said, Fou must now ga
To Puradis Pat I com fra
Til Cherubin Pat þe yate ward.
Yai sir, wist I wynderward

Adam had passed nine hundred years
No wonder though he waxed infirm
Exhausted with this hoe and spade
Of himself he waxed all weary.
He leaned him then upon his hoe
With Seth his son this-way he spoke
Son, he said, thou must now go
To Paradise that I came from
To Cherubim that the gate guards.
Yes sir, knew I whitherwards...
3.6.3 Other features of The Fox and the Wolf and Cursor Mundi

So far, we have discussed some of the evidence of changes in pronunciation which can be deduced from the patterns of spelling in the manuscripts. One important development, the reduction of many unstressed suffixes to -e, pronounced /ə/, was not simply a sound change. The loss of inflections leads to, and is a part of, a change in the grammar. Other features of ME grammar can be seen in these two texts.

Grammatical changes

The following three examples of a construction that is found in OE, but which is no longer seen in MnE, occur in The Fox and the Wolf. A literal translation is also given:

him wes wo to-him was woe
him wes hop to-him was hateful
him wereleure to-him were more pleasing

There is no subject to the verb. In MnE, we have to supply one, the 'dummy subject' it, as in it was hateful/pleasing to him. The ME him is the old dative case, so in MnE we have to add the construction to give the same meaning. This is called an impersonal construction.

As in OE and most MnE dialects today, the double or multiple negative was used:

He nes neure in none wise...
He nes neure in none weri ne strete...

This text also shows the development of the definite article des from the OE numeral an, which at first meant one only. Examples of both uses occur, with variant spellings:

Him wereleure meien one hen...
half an ouondred wimmen...
he of fer ans wal...
Wifipine Pe walle wes on hous...

Vocabulary

All the vocabulary of The Fox and the Wolf is derived from OE. However, there are changes of meaning in apparently familiar words which sometimes cause difficulty in reading if we are unaware of the change. For example, mete in both OE and ME means food in general. This meaning survives in the MnE collocation meat and drink.

The vocabulary of the northern text from Cursor Mundi contains a number of words derived from ON and OF, fra, gate, tak, til and pop from ON because it was written in the area pastid and sir from OF probably because it is a later text than The Fox and the Wolf and so there had been more time for French words to be assimilated into the language and to be used in writing.

One important example of 'borrowing' from ON does not occur in Text 27, but can be seen in the following lines from the same poem.
3.8 A note on ME spelling

When listing OE or ME words, only one representative spelling is usually given, but for many words there were many spellings, according to the time and the dialectal area in which the manuscript was copied. Examples can easily be found by looking in the OED. For example, the OED lists these spellings for shield, from OE to MnE:

- scild – scylde – scild
- sed – ssedl – scheid – shed
- scheild – sceild – scheeld – cheeld – schuld
- scheilde – schulde – schylde – shilde
- scheiede – sheeld
- schielde – sheeld – shield

The sun scorches all his wings
And also it makes his eyes bright.
His feathers fall because of the heat
And he down then to the water.
Falls in the well bottom
Where he becomes hail and sound
And comes out all new...

4. Middle English I – Southern and Kentish dialects

4.1 The dialectal areas of ME

In OE, the evidence of the writings suggests that there were four main dialectal areas: West Saxon, Kentish, Mercian and Northumbrian. In ME, they remained roughly the same, except that the Mercian Midlands of England showed enough differences between the eastern and western parts for there to be two distinct dialects. So the five principal dialects of ME were: Southern, Kentish (the SE of England), East Midlands, West Midlands and Northern (see Map 4). The dialects of Northern English spoken in southern Scotland were known as Inglis until about 1500, when writers began to call it Scots, present-day Scots.
In the ME period, there was no single dialect or variety of the language whose spelling, vocabulary, and grammar were used for writing throughout the country—indeed, in other words, there was no Standard English. After the Norman Conquest, the language of the Norman ruling class was Northern French, which took French court as English in the twelfth century was Parisian French, which carried more prestige than Anglo-Norman and other varieties—remember Chaucer's troncal comment in the 1390s on the Pierre's French, learned in a nunnery in East London:

And Frensh she spak ful faire and feistly
After the scolle of Stratford-at-the-Bowe ...

The language of instruction in English schools was French until the second half of the fourteenth century. John of Trivisa wrote in 1385:

For Johan Cornwal, a master of dramen, chayangede þe leere in grammerscule and construction of Freynsch into English, so put now, in all the grammerscoles of Engeland chiildren leaue Frensch, and curre in and kame in English ...

After 1362, English was used in the law courts and Parliament was opened in English, instead of French.

By the end of the fourteenth century, the educated language of London was beginning to become the standard form of writing throughout the country, although the establishment of a recognised Standard English was not completed for several centuries. In ME, there were only dialects, and writers or copyists used the terms of some other region, Chaucer implied the lack of a standard and the diversity of forms of English at the end of his poem Troilus and Criseide, written about 1385:

Go, lilet bok, go, lilet myn tragedye ...
And for ther is so grei diversite
In Englishe and in wratynge of oure tonge.
So prey I God that non mynswrite the,
Ne the myssmyre for defaute of tonge.

as did John of Trivisa, also in the same year: 'Per buo also of so many people langages and tongues' (see Text 29).

The following sections give various other examples of the diversity of tongues, taken from writings from different parts of the country in the ME period. They show some of the variations of spelling and form in the same words. Notice how there is inconsistency within a dialectal area, and even within the same manuscript sometimes. It is difficult to know whether some of the differences are simply variations in the spelling, or in the form and pronunciation of a word. As always, spelling tended to remain the same even though the pronunciation of a word had altered.

(WW translations follow each text. References are to text and line numbers in Early Middle English Verse & Prose, Bennett and Smithers, 1968.)

4.1.1 1st person singular pronoun (MnE I)

Also Ic n o boke rede (EMidI)
As Iit m n book read

For Ice annaende off heffness and (Orm, EMidI)
For I am sent from heven's land

Weste Hic hit mgtte ben forhothen (EMidI)
Knew I it might be hidden (= If I knew ...)

Gode Poonk nou hit is pus
Pat Ic am to Criste vend. (S)
God think now it is thus
That I am to Christ gone

"Dare," he sade, "Ich warth ded
But Ic haue of þe help and red.
Lete child, fuit wel I se
Pat Pau wilt to depe te." (EMidI)
"Dare," he sade, "I were ded (= shal die)
Unlesse I have of thee help and advice,"
"Dear child, full weel I see
That thou wilt to death draw." (= thou wilt die)
Cortes for þi luft ham HI spilte. (N)
Certainly for thy love am I spilte. (= raned)

4.1.2 3rd person singular feminine pronoun (MnE she)

First group

For Pan heom Puhne pat heo hadde
Pe houle overcome ... (SE late twelfth century)
Therefore to-þem (it) seemed that she had
The owl overcome ...

Hu was Pe gladar urp Pe risc. (SE late twelfth century)
She was the gladder for the branch

And in ech manere to alle goodnesse heo droug. (SW thirteenth century)
And in every way to all goodness she drew

He song so lude an so scharpe ... (SE late twelfth century)
She sang so loud and so sharp ...

He wente him to Pen inne
Per hoe wondenede me. (EMidI)
He went (him) to the inn
Where she dwelled (in)

God wilde hue were myn! (WMidI)
God grant she were mine!

... ha mee don wi God God al Pet ha euer wule. (WMidI)
... she may do with God all that she ever wishes

Nu ne dorste he namore sigge, ure Lauedi; la ec use spac
to po ternanz Pet semede of po wynce ... (Kentish thirteenth century)
Now ne dared she no more say, our Lady; but she spoke
to the servants that served (of) the wine ...

Second group

Po he seghe hit was noweth she ... (EMidI thirteenth century)
When he saw it ne was not she ...

Letzende scehe saide to Blauchehflour ... (EMidI thirteenth century)
Laughing she said to Blauchehflour ...

She is my quene, Ic hire chalenge ... (SE early fourteenth century)
She is my queen, I her claim

And te Lundenissee folc hire wolde teecen and sec flec (Petebroh彻h Chroncule, EMidI twelfth century)
And the Londonish folk her wished (to) take and she fed...
Do pat hit com to Pe time
Pat hoo shulden arise me ... (S)
When that it came to the time
That they should rise in ...

And bispeken hou buy mesten best don Pe lepe dere dede
And plaided how they might best do the wicked deed

... for na licke ne beop bu (WMidl)
... for no more-like ne-aren they

And Pylke Pat beP maidens clene
Pai mai hem wassehe of Pe rene. (EMidl)
And the same that be maidens pure
They may them(selves) wash in the stream.

For many god wyman haf Pai don seamen (N)
For (to) many good women have they done shame

A red Pei taken hem hitwene (EMidl)
A plan they made them between

So hem charged Pat wrap pai were (EMidl)
So them burdened that angry they were

And slæm heoom alle clane ... (WMidl)
And slæm them all completely ...

Hii seende to Sir Maci Pat he Pur castel 30lde
To hem and to Pe barome (SW)
They sent to Sir Maci that he the castle (should) yield
To them and to the barons

God wælde o sum wese schawin ham to men (WMidl)
God washed in some way (to) show them to men

Pe popen war don under his tung
Put ræ o Pam thre wandles yong (N)
The seeds were put under his tongue
There rose from them three young shoots

4.1.3 3rd person plural pronouns (MnE they, them)

Hi holde plesing supe strone ... (SE)
They held debate very strongly ...

An alle ho Pe druep homne ... (SE)
And they all thee drive hence ...

Pat Pj dwere-song heo ne forlere. (SE)
That they deceitful-song they (should) shun.

(All three forms hi, ho and heo in one manuscript)

And he answeren and scealle (Kentish)
And they answered and said

Alle he art off one mode (EMidl)
All they are of one mind

Nuste Ic under Criste what heo blicumen woren (WMidl)
Ne-knew I under Christ where they come were
(= I didn't know where they had gone on earth)

4.2 How to describe dialect differences

Dialects are varieties of a single language which are 'mutually comprehensible': that is, speakers of different dialects can talk to and understand each other. An unfamiliar dialect may be difficult to understand at first because of its pronunciation or the use of unknown dialect words, but with familiarity, these difficulties disappear. This is not the case with a foreign language.

Dialects have most of their vocabulary and grammar in common; therefore, we can make a fairly short list of features to look for when describing the differences between dialects. Today, dialects are usually compared with Standard English. The story of the emergence of a standard language – a prestige dialect – which derived from the educated dialect of the London area, begins in the fifteenth century, and is described in later chapters. In medieval times, as we have seen, there was no national standard form of English, only local standards.

The texts that have been described in some detail so far suggest that the main linguistic features that mark ME dialectal differences are:

Spelling: The alphabetical symbols used and their relation to the contrasting sounds of the dialectal accent. We have to be careful not to assume that there is a one-to-one relation
4.3 An example of a fourteenth century SW dialect

The following text, written in the 1380s by John of Trevisa, describes one man’s view of the linguistic situation at that time. The complete work is a translation, with Trevisa’s own additions, of a history called Polychronicon, written in Latin earlier in the century. John of Trevisa was vicar of Berkeley near Gloucester when he translated Polychronicon.

This work is a reminder to us of the historical origins of English and its dialects. Trevisa’s attitude is not unlike that of some people today in his talk of the apyeing or deterioration of the language, but the reasons he gives are different. He blames it on the fashion for speaking French. He is writing in the SW dialect of ME, although his use of the dialect is said to be ‘impure’. (manyen is a reference to the Black Death of the 1340s.)

TEXT 29 – John of Trevisa on the English language in 1385 (i)

As hyt ys y-knowe houg meny muner people buþ in Pit ylonl Per buþ also of so meny people longages and tonges. Noþele ys walschm and scottes Pat buþ nagi ymelled wip ðer nacons holdeþ wel nyþ here fursie longage and speche ...

Also englischin peyn yd hebbe fraþ pe byggynynge ðer muner speche souþeron noþeron and myddel speche in Pe myddel of Pe land, as by come of ðer muner people of Germana, noþele by comynyxston and mellyng furst wip danes and afterward wip normans in menye Pe contray longage ys apayed and some veþl strange wyllyng cheriyng harryng and garyng, grusbityng.

This apyeing of ðe buþ tonge ys bycause of twye Pinges – on ys for clhyldern in scote aeges ðe versus and menere of ðe oþer nacons buþ compelled for to leue here oone longage and for to construe here lessons and here Pinges a freynshe, and habeb buþ ðe ðe normans come furst into engelond.

Also gentil men children buþ ytaingt for to speke freynshe fram tympe Pat a buþ yrokedd in here crafel and conneþ speke and playeþ wip a child bys brouch. And oplyndish men weyl ylyke hamsyl to gentil men and fondëþ wip gett bryses for to speke freynshe for to be more yoold of ...

Pys manere was moche y-usd tofore ðe furse moreyn and ys wip the somdel y-changed ... now, Pys cyre of oure Lord a Pouston ðe hundred four shoure and fyve, in al the grummerscotes of Englonl childen lueþ Frengish, and construeþ and lerneþ an Enlyshe ...

Also gentil men habeb now moche yleft for to teche here childer freynshe. Hyn semeþ a gret wondur houg englyshe, Pat ys ðe buþ-tonge of englyshmen and here oone longage and tonge ys so dyvers of souþ in Pit ylonl, and ðe longage of noðeryd ys comlyng of anoter lond and buþ on marer souþ among al men Pat spekeþ hys aryþ in engelond.

(Fourteenth Century Verse & Prose, Kenneth Sisam (ed.), OUP, 1921 – manuscript written c.1400. A version from another manuscript is given in Text 61, which illustrates the kinds of variation to be found in a different copy of a text.)

4.4 Grammar

Many of the contrasts between older and present-day English are matters of style rather than significant grammatical differences. We can read Trevisa’s text without much difficulty, but it does not transcribe word for word into colloquial MNE. For example, the phrases meny munur people and þre munur speche today require the preposition of, hence three varieties of speech.

In OE, the words for people and speche would have been in the genitive case, and the ME form has a similar construction (see Section 2.7.3).

The phrase a child hys brouche, a child’s toy, is a new construction for the possessive, which survived for some time but has now been lost. It does not derive from OE.

Infinitives that complement a main verb are marked by for to, as in compelled for to leue ...

and for to construe and fondëþ wip gett bryses for to speke freynshe for to be more yoold of.

This construction is still used in some MNE dialects, but is now non-standard. Notice also that the last quotation is an example of a ‘preposition at the end of a sentence’, centuries before prescriptive grammarians ruled that the construction was ungrammatical.
4.5 A SE, or Kentish, dialect

The single manuscript of a book called *Avenbite of Inwyte*, 'the remorse of conscience', is of great interest to students of language for two reasons. Firstly, its author and exact date are both written on the manuscript:

> Pis boe is Dan Michielis of Northgate, ywrite an English of his oeye (= own) hand, Pet hatte (= is called) Avenbite of Inwyte; and is of the boe-house of Suynt Aystines of Canterbury.

> Pis boe is unheld (= fulfilled, completed) me pe eue of Pe holy apistles Symon an ludas (= October 27) of one brother of the cloystre of Suynt Austen of Canterbury, in the yeare of eure Lhordes beringe (= birth) 1340.

That is, Michael of Northgate, a monk of St Augustine’s, Canterbury, finished the book, a translation from a French original, on October 27, 1340.

The second reason is that the book is spelled consistently, and so provides good evidence for the dialect of Kent at that time, as illustrated in the following extract.

**Kentish dialect**

Now I wish that you know
How it is went
That this book is written
With English of Kent.
This book is made for lewd men
Them for to protect from all manner sin

Now I want you to know
How it has come about
That this book has been written
In the English of Kent.
This book is made for common folk
To protect them from all kinds of sin

4.5.1 Commentary on Text 31

**Grammar**

The common basic structures of MnE were present in OE, so it is not surprising that the grammar of ME causes us few problems in conveying meaning. However, as we read older English, we come across phrases and combinations of words that are definitely 'old-fashioned', and which we would not use today. Sometimes the order of words is no longer acceptable; sometimes words appear to be missing, or to be superfluous when compared with English today; sometimes particular combinations of words are no longer used. In addition, as Michael of Northgate was translating from French, it is possible that some constructions are not genuine ME, so we can observe differences, but not draw any firm conclusions from them. The following examples illustrate these points:

> uman Pe he was child

MnE requires from when or from the time that, and the addition of a determiner in the NP, e.g., a child.
The adverb *often* in ME either precedes the verb, *he often gave*, or follows the object, *he gave his coat often*.

The direct object, *him or it*, now follows the verb in ME: *his mother beat him often* and *he gave it to the poor*.

A ME clause must contain a subject, here the 'dummy subject' *it* would be used, hence *it be fell that*.

that had suffering

This is perhaps not ungrammatical in ME, but it is a phrase that would sound strange.

The OE negative *ne* preceded the verb, as in *ne wes, was not*. The emphatic *nay, nay* came to be used to reinforce the negative (it did not make it positive). In ME, the multiple negative form with *ne* before and *nay* or another negative word like *never* after the verb was commonly used. In time, the older *ne* was dropped, particularly in Standard English when it developed later, although the use of the multiple negative is still very common in most spoken dialects of English today.

for to pasi Pet yer *in order* to last the year

The phrase *for to in a structure like i want for to go* is found in all ME texts, but is no longer Standard English, although it is still used in some dialects (see Section 4.4).

Word structure

A short text may not contain a sufficient variety of word forms to enable us to come to any conclusions about the range of inflections. For example, there are no plural nouns in this text, so we cannot observe whether the *-es* or *-en* plurals were used. But the NP *pet gemer* shows the use of the older neuter OE pronoun *pet* for ME *the*, while the PrepP to *be gemer* has a dative case inflection *-e* on the noun but the common form *Pe* for the determiner. The NP *our Lhorda* also has the inflection *-e* on the noun to mark the dative case after *to*, to *our Lord*.

There are no adjectives apart from possessive pronouns like *his* and *ours*, so there is no evidence here of the survival of inflections on adjectives.

There is only one example of a present tense verb, *telp*, with the 3rd person singular inflection *-e*P. The past participle *yngered* retains the prefix *-e*, from the OE *ge-*.

The newer pronouns *she, them, and their* are not used. Even those limited observations suggest that Kentish was a conservative dialect; that is, when compared to other dialects it has retained more features of the OE system of inflections, even though greatly reduced. These features are very similar to those of South Western texts, and can be compared with John of Trevisa's. This fact is not surprising when we consider the geographical position of Kent, relatively cut off and distant from the Midlands and the North of England, but accessible to the rest of the South.

Pronunciation and spelling

The vowel *<e>* is much in evidence in Kentish texts, partly from the pronunciation of the vowel in words derived from OE words with *e*H, like *pet* (*pert*), *wes* (*wes*), *heedes* (*hefdom*), *Per* (*pet*), *dode* (*dode*) and *bed* (*bed*), and partly from the shift of OE *eH* to *e* (see Commentary 3 of the Text Commentary Book, Section 3.5.4), like *kerel, svere* from OE *cyret, sceire*.

The following spellings:

Kentish: uram uror perure bevul un zuo mezyse

Midland: from therefore befell full so misese

suggest that the consonants pronounced *fH* and *fH* in other dialects were 'voiced' at the beginning of a word or root syllable in Kentish, and pronounced *fH* and *fH*. This initial voicing of fricative consonants is still a feature of SW dialects in Devon, Somerset, Dorset, Wiltshire and Hampshire, although no longer in Kent (see A Structural Atlas of the English Dialects, P. M. Anderson, 1987, pp. 141-3). This is probably also the case for the consonant *fH*, both in Kentish and ME, but it has not been recorded in spelling, because the letters *<df>* or *<th>* are used for both the voiced and voiceless forms of the consonant, as in *thin* and *then*.

Activity 4.4

(i) Write a version of Text 32 in ME.

(ii) Using the word list in the Word Book or a dictionary, write a commentary on the evidence for changes in pronunciation, word form and grammar from OE, and of any special characteristics of the Kentish dialect in the fourteenth century.

TEXT 32 – Ayenbyte of Inwyrt, 1340 (ii)

Kentish dialect

Afterward Pet wes a pore man, use me day, Pet hede ane cou, and yence zyge of his preeste me his prechinge Pet God seide me his spele Pet God wold yele an hurndredtai al Pet me yeus uor him. Pet gude man, mid pe rode of his wyue, yeaf his cou to his preeste, Pet wes riche, Pe prest his nom bliefliche, and hisse zem Pe of Pe Pet he hede. Do his kom to cuen, Pe gude mannes cou com hom to his house ane his wyne, and leede mid hale alle Pe prestes ken, al to an hundred. Pe gude man ys Pet, Pet, do yeve Pe Pet wes Pe word of Pe Godspelle Pet he hede yzolde; and him hi wren yzolde bevore his bissoppe aye Pane prest, Pe urborne swisewel Pet meret is gudem chupure, uor hi deP wex Pe tunliche guodes.

Afterward there was a poor man, as one says, that had a cow; and heard say from his priest in his preaching that God said in his gospel that God would yield a hundredfold all that one gave for him. The good man, with the advice of his wife, gave his cow to his priest, that was rich. The priest her took forlornly, and sent to the others that he had. When it came to evening, the good man's cow came home to his house as she was accustomed, and led with her all the priest's kine, all to a hundred. When the good man saw that, he thought that that was the word of the Gospel that to-him* had restored them; and to-him they were adjudged before his bishop against the priest. These examples show well that mercy is good trading, for it does increase the temporal goods.

* The obscure English is the result of a mis-translation of the French original.

(The French original of the text can be found in Fourteenth Century Verse & Prose, Kenneth Sisam (ed.), 1921, p. 213)
5. Middle English II – Northern dialects

The Northern dialects of ME came from the Northumbrian dialects of OE. The present-day dialects of Scotland and the North of England are still markedly distinct from Standard English and other dialects in features of the grammar and vocabulary, and from RP and Southern accents in pronunciation.

John of Trevisa’s comments in the fourteenth century on the Northumbrian dialect at York (see Text 30) as ‘sharp slayting and frotyng and unshape’ can no doubt also be heard today (although in different words that convey the same meaning) in the South, say, where people are unfamiliar with accents like Geordie, Glaswegian or rural North Yorkshire. Equally, Northern speakers may make similar disparaging remarks about Southern speech. Our reaction to other dialects and accents is, of course, dependent upon our familiarity with them. One person’s ‘thick accent’ is another’s familiar speech, and beauty is in the ear of the listener rather than in any objective standard.

But as we cannot reproduce the actual sound of the dialects of the past, we cannot follow up this aspect of language study. The only evidence we have of the language at that time is in the form of manuscripts, so we have to speculate about pronunciation in the abstract, recognising some of the main changes but not properly hearing them. Most of our attention therefore has to be on vocabulary and grammar.

5.1 A fourteenth century Scots English dialect

The Brus is a verse chronicle of the life and heroic deeds of Robert Bruce (1274–1329), written by John Barbour in about 1375 – The Actes and Life of the Most Victorous Conqueror, Robert Bruce King of Scotland. Barbour was Archdeacon of Aberdeen and had studied and taught at Oxford and Paris. The following extract comes from Book I.

TEXT 33 – John Barbour on freedom, Bruce, c.1375 (I)

Northern (Scots) dialect

A fredome is a noble thing
Fredome may be haiff liking
Fredome all solace to man giffis
He levys at es yat frely lovys
A nobles hart may haiff nane es
Na ellys nocht yat may him ples

cont...
Gyff fredome failt[e], for fre liking
Is sharnyt our all oyer thing.
Na he yat ay has levyt fre
May nacht know well the propytre
Ye angyr na ye wreeceyt dome
Yat is cowptyl to foule thyrildome
Bot gyff he had assayt it.


Once you have deciphered some unusual spellings, you will find that this Northern Scots dialect is much closer to MnE than Southern dialects of England. That is, the loss of the inflections of OE is almost complete, and has gone as far as it will go. We can rewrite the text in present-day standard spelling, and it reads more or less like MnE.

Ah freedom is a noble thing
Freedom makes man to have liking (= free choice)
Freedom all solace to man gives
He lives at ease that freely lives
A noble heart may no ease
Nor else nought that may him please
If freedom fails, for free liking
Is yeamed over all other thing.
Nor he that aye has lived free
May not know well the property
The anger nor the wretched doom
That is coupled to foul thraldom
But if (= unless) he had assayed it.

5.1.1 Commentary on Text 33

The text is too short to illustrate more than a few features of this dialect, but it is at an 'advanced' stage in its loss of the inflectional system of OE.

Vocabulary

The derivation of the vocabulary can be found in the word list in the Word-Book for this text. In a Northern dialect, we would expect to find words derived from ON, but the text contains only two, agyr and ay, as against seven from OF. Barbour was a scholar writing a literary romance, so it is not surprising that he used words like propytre and solace.

Spelling and pronunciation

The metre of the verse is regular: an eight-syllable line rhyming in couplets. If you compare some of Chaucer’s contemporary verses, you will notice that many of Chaucer’s words and in a final <e>, some of which have to be pronounced to fit the metre of the verse, and some not. Perhaps this is what Chaucer was referring to when he hoped that no one would ‘mysmest’ his verse (see Section 4.1). For example, the final <e> is pronounced in these lines from The Book of the Duchess as indicated:

For fature /wold-e/ mat suff/ys-e
/To noon /e/ternely ke/naiture
Nat /lo-g-e /yn-e/e/ to en/dure
Wuthout-e /slep and the m /sorw-e.

But as already indicated it is not always pronounced, and it is always elided when it precedes a word beginning with a vowel, so that none of the final <e> spellings are pronounced in the following lines:

/Purely for de/faut(e) of /slep
That (by my /trou/h(e) I /nak(e) no /kup ...
5.2 Another Northern dialect – York

The York 'mystery plays' consist of a cycle of 50 short episodes which tell the story of the world according to medieval Christian tradition, from the Fall of the Angels and the Creation to the Last Judgement. Each trade guild of the city was responsible for the costs and production of a play, which was performed in procession on a pageant-wagon in the streets of York. Some of the plays were obviously assigned to a guild whose occupation was reflected in the story. For example, the bakers played The Last Supper, the shipwrights The Building of the Ark, the fishers and mariners The Flood, and the vintners The Marriage at Cana.

The cycle was produced each year at the feast of Corpus Christi, from the late fourteenth century into the early sixteenth century. Twelve 'stations' were set up in the streets and each pageant-wagon moved in procession from one station to another to perform its play. The procession of wagons began at 4.30 am and the last play was probably finished after midnight. Banners were set up to mark the positions of the stations and a proclamation was made.

TEXT 35 – The York proclamation for the Corpus Christi plays, 1415

Oiez &c. We command of Pe kynges behalwe & Pe mair & Pe shireh of Pis Cite & Pat no man go armed in Pis cite & with swerdes, ne with carill axles, ne none othir defences in disturbance of Pe kynges pees & Pe play, or hyndering of Pe procession of Corpore Christii; & Pat Pat leue Pare hermas in Pare ises, saufand knightes and squywers of worship Pat awe hau swerdes borne after Pome, of payne of forfature of Pare wapen & imprisonment of Pare bodys. And Pat men Pat bryyeng furth pacentes, Pat Pat play at the places Pat is assigned Perfore, and nowere elles, of the payne of forfature to be ryesed Pat is ordyneyd Perfore, Pat is to say xi s ... And Pat all manner of crafmen Pat bryyeng furth their pageantez in order & course be good players, well arrayed & openly spekyng, vpon payn of lesing of c s., to be paid to the chambres without any pardon. And that every player that shall play be redy in his pageant at convenant tyme, that is to say at the mydhowre betwex tijth & vi of the cloke in the mornynge, & then all oter pageantez fast folowyng likon after oter as Per course is, without tarioing ...


Activity 5.2

(i) Write a version of the proclamation in MnE.
(ii) Discuss the language and style of the proclamation:
   (a) The different functions of the word Pat.
   (b) Verb inflections.
   (c) Noun inflections.
   (d) Forms of personal pronoun.
   (e) The sources of the vocabulary – OE, ON or OF (see the word list in the Word Book or use a dictionary).
   (f) Spelling.

The only copy of The York Plays to survive was written about 1470, and this was originally the property of the corporation of the city. It was probably compiled from the various prompt copies belonging to each guild that performed a play, and so the language may therefore be that of the earlier part of the fifteenth century.

The dialect is Northern, but the scribes introduced a lot of modifications from the East Midlands dialect, the evidence for which is in the variations of spelling of the same words. The use of some East Midlands forms is evidence of the beginning of a standardised system of spelling.
The plays are written in a variety of verse stanza patterns, with both rhyme and alliteration, so that they cannot be read as natural everyday speech, in spite of the liveliness of the dialogue. The following extract is from the potters 'Pentecost Play', which retells the story of the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, or Whitsunide, after the Ascension of Christ. It fills out the story in the Acts of the Apostles, Chapter 2. The play does not attempt to portray the actual coming of the Spirit as it is told in the Bible.

While the day of Pentecost was running its course they were all together in one place, when suddenly there came from the sky a noise like that of a strong driving wind, which filled the whole house where they were sitting. And there appeared to them tongues like flames of fire, dispersed among them and resting on each one. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to talk in other tongues, as the Spirit gave them the power of utterance.

(The New English Bible, 1961)

The following four stanzas of the play span the coming of the Spirit, which is represented by the singing of the ancient hymn Veni Creator Spiritus (Come Creator Spirit). Two 'doctors' speak contemptuously of the claim of the apostles that Jesus was alive again. After the hymn, Mary and Peter celebrate the coming of the Holy Spirit.

**TEXT 36 - The York potters 'Pentecost Play', c.1470**

Harke maistur for maumonds peyne
Howe pat pes mombardis madds nowe
Per maistur pat oure men haue slayne
Hase garde Pame on his triffolis trouwe

I doctor

De lurdayne saus he leffis agayn
Pat mather may pe neure arowe
For as Pei herde his prechynge pleyne
He was away Pat wise nee nowe

II doctor

They wiste nonht whenne he wente
Perfore fully Pei failie
And saus pam schull he sente
Grete helpe thurgh his consaille

I doctor

He myghte nowelte sende clothe nor clothe
He was neure but a wreeche alway
But summe oure men and make a schowe
So schall we beste yone foolis flaye

II doctor

Nay myr Pei will Pei dye for doute
I rede we make nought mekill dray
But warly wayte when Pei come oute
And marre Pame Panne if Pei we may

I doctor

Now certes I assente per tille
Yit wolde I othi Pei wise
3one carles Pei schall we kill
But Pei liffe als vs liste

II doctor

Anglus tunc cantare veni creator spiritus
Angel then to sing Come Creator Spirit
Honoure and blisse be ever nowe
With worschipe in his worlde alwaye
To my souerayme soone liu (Jesus)
Oure lorde allone Pat laste schall ay
Nowe may we triste his talis ar trewe

Mara

With worschipe in his worlde alwaye
To my souerayme soone liu (Jesus)
Oure lorde allone Pat laste schall ay
Nowe may we triste his talis ar trewe

Cont ...
5.3 Northern and Midlands dialects compared

John de Thoresby became Archbishop of York in 1352. He found many of his parish priests ignorant and negligent of their duties, and as one remedy for this he wrote a 'Catechism' in Latin, setting out the basic doctrines of the faith. It was translated into English by a monk of St Mary's Abbey in York in 1357. This version is called The Lay Folks' Catechism. An extended version was written a little later by John Wyclif. He had been born in the North Riding of Yorkshire, but because he had lived and worked for a long time in Oxford and Leicesstershire, his writings were in a variety of the Midlands dialect. By comparing the two versions of Archbishop Thoresby's 'Catechism', we can therefore clearly see some of the differences between the dialects of the North and the Midlands.
5.4 Chaucer and the Northern dialect

Chaucer's *The Reeve's Tale* features two undergraduate characters, 'yonge poure scolers':

*John highte that eon and Aleyne highte that oother*
*Of eon towne were they born that highte Strether*
*Fer in the north, I kan nought telle where.*

Chaucer makes their northern origins clear by marking their speech with some of the features that his readers would recognise. He wrote in the educated London dialect (see Chapter 7), which differed from the Northern dialect in its grammar and pronunciation. Here is an extract from the tale. The northern words are printed in bold type. Aleyne and John have come to a mill and greet Symkyn, the miller. They intend to supervise the grinding of their corn, as millers were notorious for cheating their customers.

**TEXT 38 – John Wyclif's version of The Lay Folks' Catechism, c.1360**

Aleyne answere: John, wiltow swa? Thanne wil I byneth by my crowne And so how that the mele falles down Into the trogh. That sal be my disport. For, John, in faith I may been of yorere sort, I is as ille a millere as ar ye.

**Activity 5.5**

Refer to the list of northern features in Activity 5.1 and identify them in Text 39. Some are marked for pronunciation and some for different meanings. There are also some dialectal differences of meaning, as listed in the following table.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Text 39</th>
<th>Source</th>
<th>MnE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ar</td>
<td>OE Northern arun</td>
<td>are</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>falles</td>
<td>OE feallan</td>
<td>falls</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>feres</td>
<td>OE faran</td>
<td>fares</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>fra</td>
<td>ON fra</td>
<td>fra</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>gas</td>
<td>OE gan</td>
<td>goes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>heem</td>
<td>OE ham</td>
<td>home</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>hopan</td>
<td>OE hoplan</td>
<td>hope = believe</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>behoian</td>
<td>OE behoian</td>
<td>him behoves = he must</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ill</td>
<td>ON illr</td>
<td>ill = bad</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>is</td>
<td>OE is</td>
<td>is</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>na</td>
<td>OE nun</td>
<td>no</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>sal</td>
<td>OE sexal</td>
<td>shall</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>swa</td>
<td>OE swa</td>
<td>so</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>swayn</td>
<td>ON sveinn</td>
<td>swan = servant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>til</td>
<td>ON til</td>
<td>till = to</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>waggos</td>
<td>OE wagan</td>
<td>wags</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>werkes</td>
<td>OE wyranc</td>
<td>works = aches</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>wanges</td>
<td>OE wang</td>
<td>wangs = back teeth</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This is only part of the dialogue between the miller and the two 'clerkes'. Other words that give away their dialect are:

| alswa | OE alswa | also |
| bannes | OE ban | bones |
| hathe | ON hathe | both |
| fonne | OE gan | fon = fool |
| galgane | ON galien | go/gone |
| il-hail | OE lang ON heil | ill health = bad luck |
| lang | OE lan | long |
| man | OE man | none |
| ra | OE ra | me (deer) |
| sang | OE sang | song |
| saule | OE sawol | soul |
| waat | OE wat fr. witan | wist = knows |
| wha | OE hwa | who |
6. Middle English III – West Midlands dialects

In the Anglo-Saxon invasion and settlement of Britain, the Angles occupied the Midlands, the North of England and what is now southern Scotland. The general term Anglian is used to describe their dialect of OE, but its northern and southern variants were different enough for two dialects to be recognised: Northumbrian (north of the river Humber) and Mercian (south of the Humber).

During the ME period, the Mercian (Midlands) dialect developed in different ways. The East Midlands was part of the Danelaw (see Section 2.3), but the West Midlands was not, so the language of the East Midlands changed partly under the influence of the Danish Old Norse speakers who settled there. As a result, OE Mercian became two ME dialects: East Midlands and West Midlands.

Within what we call a dialect, there are always other variations, so that the more closely we examine the speech or writing of a dialectal area, the more differences we observe, until we arrive at the concept of an individual person’s own variety of language, an idiolect.

The two texts that have been chosen to illustrate the West Midlands dialect are sufficiently similar to be called ‘same dialect’, however, they show differences which have led scholars to place one in the north and the other in the south of the West Midlands.

### 6.1 A NW Midlands dialect

Sir Gawain and the Green Knight is a romance in alliterative verse which tells a story of the legendary court of King Arthur. The one surviving manuscript was probably written towards the end of the fourteenth century, and scholars are agreed that the dialect is that of Cheshire or south Lancashire. The author’s name is not known.

#### 6.1.1 A note on the use of the letter <e> in the poem

We think of MnE spelling as being irregular and inconsistent in the relationship of letters to sounds. This, however, began long before modern times, and the manuscript of Sir Gawain and the Green Knight provides a good example of the use of a single letter to represent several different sounds.

The letter <e> was used in this poem to represent several sounds because it had developed from two sources: firstly, from the OE letter <ē> (see Section 2.2.4) and, secondly, as a form of letter <æ>. It was therefore used for all the following sounds (the words are from Texts 40 and 41).

```
jl – for example, yse-llyde, cwe-līdc, yederly, prompli, solden, yielded; ȝenes, yeor; ȝet, yet. We use <y> in MnE.

lk – similar to the sound in German ich, ieh, and usually followed by /f/ in <f>: for example, knyft, knicht; hy3f, height; lýf, light; ȝy3f, light. We use <gh> in MnE, although the sound has now been lost in these words.

ls – similar to Scots loch; lōc; or German lachs; lōc; after /f/, /v/ or /h/: for example, pürf, though; rāf, reached; ȝy3f, laughed; hōf, hough; ȝf, fof; ȝaf, laugh. Again, <gh> is used in MnE, and the sound has either changed to /f/ or has been lost.

lw – a developing sound change from OE lyf; for example, pāf, though (also, elsewhere: argl, arrow; sāf, sav; brown; browz, browz). Letter <w> is also used in the poem for this sound, as in blowe and have.

ls – <f> and <w> were both used for letter <s> – letters <ss> and <sw> had been used in OE for the sound /ts/, which changed to /s/ and later to /f/. This French convention was used in the poem for the sound /f/; for example, heedles, headless; resource, reasons; hast, has.

lz – <e> represented the voiced sound /z/ in <ez> noun and verb suffixes: for example, discoveres, lokkes, renketes, hōfes, cacheches, stęppes, strydes, haldeles, etc. However, letter <s> is also used in the text, as in houses, howes; bones, schonkes, shanks, etc.

The poem is written in 101 stanzas which have a varying number of unhyphenated alliterative lines followed by five short rhymed lines. Like all OE and ME verse, it was written to be read aloud to an audience. Although it was contemporary with Chaucer’s writing, you will find it more difficult to read than a comparable passage of Chaucer’s, partly because some of the vocabulary is from a stock of words reserved for use in poetry, and partly because many words of the West Midlands dialect came down into MnE spoken dialects, but not into written Standard English.
```

### Activity 6.1

The story so far: during the New Year celebrations at King Arthur’s court, a Green Knight rides in, carrying a battle-axe, and challenges any knight to strike him a blow with the axe, provided that he can give a return blow a year and a day later. Gawain takes up the challenge.

(i) Read the stanza (Text 40) and see what you can understand without looking up the words.

(ii) Translate the stanza using the word list in the Word Book, and note the number of words that have not survived into MnE and their source.

Before you read the commentary which follows:

(iii) Describe the patterns of alliteration and rhyme.

(iv) Describe some of the dialectal features and differences from MnE under the headings set out in Section 4.2.

#### TEXT 40 – Sir Gawain and the Green Knight, late fourteenth century (i)

```
The grene knyft vpon grounde graylyth hym dresses
A litel lut with pe hede, pe lere he discoveres
His longe louelich lokkes he layd ouer his croun
Let the nakid nec to pe note schewe.
Gawyn grappet to his aks & gederes hit on hy3f
Pe layd for on pe fole he before sette
Let hit doon lýf lyth on pe naked
Dat pe scharp of pe schalk schyndered pe bones
& schrank purf pe schyrore grewe & scade hit in twaynne,
Dat pe bit of pe brow stel bot on pe grounde.
```

cont ...
6.1.2 Alliteration and rhyme

The poem is evidence that the oral traditions of OE alliterative verse were unbroken (see Section 2.4). Each line divides into two, with a short break, or censa, in the middle. There are usually four stresses in a line, two in the first half and two in the second, three of which alliterate together, but this could vary; for example:

/Gaun /gripped to his /ax /
Pe kuy /for on pe /fold
/Let hit doun /lystly
Pe Pe /sech of Pe /schalk
& /schrick Purg /pe /schyre grece
Pe Pe /hit of Pe /browen stel

& /gedere hit on /hyst
He before /sette
/lyst on Pe /naked
Schyndered Pe /bones
& /scade hit in /hwynne
/hot on Pe /grounde.

Each stanza ends with a group of rhyming lines. The first short line was called the 'bob', which rhymed with two alternate lines of the following four, called the 'wheel' – ababa:

He brayde his bluk aboute
Pat vgly bodi Pat bleddde
Moni on of hym had doute
Bi Pat his resoung were redd.

6.1.3 Grammar

Pronoun forms

One stanza of the poem will obviously not include all the pronouns. Text 40 gives us:

3rd person sg: he/hym/hys/hit
3rd person pl: her (= their)
rel. pronoun: hit

From Text 41, we can add:

1st person sg: I/me
2nd person sg: Pou/Pe
3rd person sg: his (= its)
pl: Pay

That is, from two stanzas; we have:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Singular</th>
<th>Plural</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1st person subject</td>
<td>me</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>object</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>genitive</td>
<td>Pe</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2nd person subject</td>
<td>Pou</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>object</td>
<td>Masculine</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>genitive</td>
<td>Feminine</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3rd person subject</td>
<td>he</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>object</td>
<td>Neuter</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>genitive</td>
<td>Pay</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Activity 6.2

Complete the chart above by identifying the remaining pronouns from the following lines of the poem (all the pronouns are in bold type).

Scho (= she) made hym so greet chere
Pat wat3 so fayre of face ...

Ho (= she) comon the coryn & at the kny3 totes (= peeps).
Sir Gawyn her weicum worpy on fyrst
And ho hym 3elde (= replies?) 135yn ful 3erne (= eager) of hir words3.
Sette hir sofry by his syde & swynely (= very much) ho 3a3 (= langt) ...

He sayde, se ar welcam to welle (= asea) as yow lyk3y.
Pat here is (= that which is here), al is yowre aven to have at yowre wylle & welde ...

Where is now your souquydrye (= pride) & your conquistes?

Where schuld I waile (= find) Pe, quod Gauan, where is py place? ... 

Bot se schal be in yowre bed, burne (= knight), at yyn ese ...

I schal yf hym of my gyf yps gisernec (= battle-axe) ryche (= splendid) ...

To wone (= remain) any quyte in pis won (= place), hit wat3 not myn ernde (= errand) ...

And we ar in pis valay verlyf oure one (= on our own);
Here ar no renkes (= men) vs to rykke, rele as vus like5 (= [lit. pleases us].

A comlker kny3 neuer Kryst made hem fust (= fit) (= seemed to them). 

And sypen (= afterwards) on a stif stange (= pole) stoutly hem hunges ...

As fortune wolde fulsun (= help) hem (= them) ...

How ledes (= knights) for her frle luy5 (= their true love) hor luy3 (= lives) han aumert (= have risked) ...
Noun inflections

Plural nouns in the text are:
lokke\(3\) bones fete schonkes renkke\(3\) resoun\(3\)

With the exception of fete, which still retains its OE vowel change to make plural, these nouns are marked by the -\(es\) or -\(es\) suffix. This derives from the former OE strong masculine -\(a\)\(s\) plural (see Commentary 2 of the Text Commentary Book, Section 2.1), and is now the regular Me\(n\)E plural suffix.

It is probable that a final -\(e\) no longer marks a suffix such as the former dative case inflection of OE (see Section 2.7.3).

Verb inflections

Refer to Commentary 2 of the Text Commentary Book, Sections 2.4.4 and 2.4.5, or to an OE grammar book to see the range of inflections on OE weak and strong verbs. We know that a principal feature of ME is the progressive change and eventual loss of many OE inflections, and also that one marker of ME dialects is the variety of verb inflections. Text 40 provides some information about verb inflections in the NW Midlands dialect, as listed below. Where it does not, other words from the poem are listed in brackets.

**Present tense**

1st person sg: I (bere, craue, telle, ask)
2nd person sg: thou (rede3, hattes, hopes, deles)
3rd person sg: he/ho/hit (dresses, gederes)
plural: we/ye/ye (discovered, bosse3, cachese3, steppe3, styde3, halde3) (fallen; helden = turn; solden)

**Past tense**

1st person sg: I (lakke\(3\); se\(3\) = saw; chewed = gat)
2nd person sg: thou (gef = gave; fayled; kyssedes = kissed)
3rd person sg: he/ho/hit (blykke\(d\), falted, foyned, gpped, roleet, schyndered, bledde, brayde/broyd, hit, tayd, last, lyf, ract, scade, sette)
plural: we/ye/ye (stoden (maden)

**Infinitive**

schewe (tuk, giff, praye)

**Imperative**

(giff = giv; kyss; lepe; lach = seixe)

**Present participle**

(syke\(y\)ande = nighing; wre\(g\)ande = denouncing)

**Past participle**

(fayled, payed, blyned, siuyn)

Several of these inflections are familiar to us in Mn\(E\), and it is clear that in this dialect the loss of OE inflections has gone further than in others.

Infections in ME

The loss of most of the OE inflections is called levelling, and the reduction in the variety of the remaining inflections is called regularisation. Both developments took place more quickly in the North of England, as well as in those Midlands dialects that were closer to the North than others. The effect of the Viking settlement in the Danelaw was not only an influx of Scandinavian words, but also the kinds of simplification that are known to take place when people speaking similar languages communicate together, or when a pidgin language begins to be spoken.

Because Northern and North Midlands dialects were more advanced in their loss of grammatical inflections, they tend to resemble Mn\(E\) more closely in their grammar. The barrier to the easy reading of \textit{Sir Gawain and Pe Greene Knyght} is due to its vocabulary, with its large number of ON, OF and dialect words that have not survived in Standard English, and not its grammar.

Text 41 is the next stanza of the poem and tells what happened when Gawain took up the Green Knight's challenge to strike a blow with the axe. Rewrite it in Mn\(E\) and make some analysis of its language.

**TEXT 41 - Sir Gawain and Pe Greene Knyght (ii)**

For pe hede in his honde he halde3 vp euen
Toward pe derrest on pe dece he dress3 pe face
& hit lyfse vp pe yde3 & 1okd ful brode
& mele3 pus much with his muthe, as pe may now here:
Loke, Gawau, pou be graye pe to go as pou hett3
& lyte as jelly til pou me, lude, fynde.
As pou hett he in Pe hal, herende Pe kny3tes.
To pe grene chapel Pou cho, I charge pe, to fete
Such a dunt as pou hat3 dalt — dissered Pou hett3 —
To pe 3eder 3olden in Pe hal eser3 mon.
Pe kny3t of pe grene chapel men kno me mony:
For pe me for to fynde if Pou fraye3, fayle3 pou neuer.
Perefore com, 3eber recreant be calde Pe boute.
With a runish rout Pe ray3 he torne3,
Halled out at Pe hal dor, his hed in his hande,
Put Pe pry3 of Pe flynte fange fro folc boute.
To quat kyth he becom knawe non Pere,
Neuer more pou pay wiste fram quen pe wat3 wonnen.

What Penne?
Pe kyng & Gawau Pere
At Put grene pay laxe & greme
Set brest wat3 hit ful bare
A meruayl among Pe menne.

6.2 A SW Midlands dialect

\textit{Piers Plowman} is one of the most famous poems in ME. It must have been a very popular work because over 50 manuscripts have survived. The poem is an allegory of the Christian life, and of the corruption of the contemporary Church and society, written in the form of a series of dreams or visions:

Ace on a May mornynge on Maluerne hulles (= hils)
Me bifful for to slepe ...
And mercye/loisliche me mete (= dreamted), as y may telle.
(C-text Prologue, lines 6–7, 9)

Piers Plowman, a humble poor labourer, stands for the ideal life of honest work and obedience to the Church.

The author was William Langland, but almost nothing is known about him except what can be inferred from the poem; however, we must remember that the 'dreamer' of the visions is a character in the story, and may not always be identified with the author. For example, his name, is Will, as indicated in the following extracts:
TEXT 42 – Piers Plowman, c.1370 (i)

In a somer sesoun when softe was Pe sonne
Y shope me into shrudes as y a shlep were
In abite as an hereme vnholie of werkyn.
Wente forth in Pe world wondres to here
And say many selles and selkouthe bynge.
As on a May mornynge on Maloure halles
Me biful for to stope, for werynas of-walked
And in a launde as y lay, lened y and slepte
And merueytousliche me mette, as y may telle.
Al Pe weith of the world and Pe wo bothe
Wynkyng, as hit were, witterliche y sugh hit;
Of treuthe and trichere, tresoun and gyte,
Al y say slepyng, as y shal telle.
Estward y beheld aftar Pe sonne
And say a tour – as y twowde, Treuthe was there-ynne.
Westward y waytede in a while affir
And soth a depe dol – Deth, as y leve,
Woned in tho wones, and wikked spiritus.
A fair feld ful of folk fond y Per bywene
Of alle manere men, Pe men and Pe pope,
Worchynge and wondryng as Pís world ascuth ...

(C-text, Derek Pearsull ed., Edward Arnold, 1978)

Activity 6.5

Describe some of the linguistic features of this ME dialect from the evidence provided in Text 42 under the following headings:

(i) Spelling conventions.
(ii) Evidence of pronunciation changes from OE.
(iii) Pronoun forms.
(iv) Noun and verb inflections.
(v) Grammatical structures and word order.
(vi) Sources of vocabulary.

The printed text is edited; that is, it is based on one of the C-text manuscripts but uses other manuscript readings or makes changes where the manuscript does not make good sense. Abbreviations are also filled out and modern punctuation added. We are therefore not reading exactly what is in a manuscript.

Remember also that the manuscripts used by the editor are copies, not the original. Consequently, any observations we make about either Langland’s dialect or the SW Midlands dialect in general would need to be verified from other evidence. Refer to Section 4.2 on how to describe dialect differences, and use the data in the Word Book which groups the words of Text 42 (a) according to their pronunciation in OE and (b) by word class and source. (A more detailed description of the language of Text 42 can be found in Commentary 10 of the Text Commentary Book.)

Activity 6.4

Rewrite Text 42 in ME. This is from the Prologue of Piers Plowman, in which the writer dreams of a ‘fair field full of folk’, the world of contemporary society.
6.2.1 Commentary on Text 42

Vocabulary

There are relatively few words of French origin, and even fewer from ON. The south and west of England had not been settled by Danes and Norwegians, so the scarcity of ON words is understandable. The proportion of French words in one short text cannot, of course, be used to come to any useful conclusions. We need a lot more evidence to be able to comment, but the text does perhaps demonstrate the solid core of OE vocabulary which is the basis of our language.

Wrath and Patience

Of the ME manuscripts that have come down to us, a large proportion are in the form of sermons or homilies which set out the ideals of the Church and the Christian life. A typical example is contained in "The Parson's Tale" in Chaucer's The Canterbury Tales, in which the first prominent theme is sin and repentance for sin, or penitence:

Seint Ambrose seith that penitence is the plenyng of man for the gilty that he hath done and namoore to done any thyng for which hym oghte to pleyne.

The second theme is the Seven Deadly Sins, those sins which were thought to be the most offensive and serious:

Now is it behovely thine to telle whiche ben deddy synnes, that is to seyn chieflaynes of synnes . . . . Now ben they cleped chieflaynes for as muche as they ben chief and syryng of alle othir synnes.

The Seven Deadly Sins were pride, envy, wrath, sloth, covetousness, gluttony and lust. Chaucer's Parson defines wrath (anger, or ire) as:

This synne of ire, after the discreetynge of seint Augustyn, is wikked wil to ben angeng by word or by ded.

In Piers Plowman, the dreamer vividly personifies each of the Seven Deadly Sins as men or women seeking repentance. In Text 43, Wrath appears.

TEXT 43 – Piers Plowman, c.1370 (ii)

Now awake! Wraþe wip two white eijen.
And newelyng wip þe rose and his nekke hangyng.
I am Wraþe quod he, I was som tyme a frere.
And the couseynes gardenfer for to graffen impes.
On lymtorus and listres lynynes I ymped.
Til þei berre lewe of lowe speche lordes to plese.
And siþen þei blommed a brood in bower to here shirifes.
And now is fallen þerof a fruyt – Pat folk han wel leueere.
Shewen hire shirifes to hem þan shrywe hem to hir persons.
And now person þun parte waþ þer hem.
Thise possessiones preche and depreve freres.
And freres fyn⁺h þem in deuate as folk hereþ witenes.
That whan þei preche þe pepel in many places aboute.
I Wraþe waþke wip hem and wisse hem of my bokes.
þus þei spoken of spirituale, Pat eþþer despissþ oþþer.
Til þei be boþe beggers and by my spirituale lifben.
Or ellis al riche and ryden aboue; I Wraþe reste neuer.
That I ne mosse folwe þis folk, for schwe is my grace.

(B-text, G. Kane and E.T. Donaldson (eds), Athlone Press, 1975, Vol.1, Passus V, pp. 135–50)
Here is a facsimile of an extract from one of the C-text manuscripts, part of which is transcribed. In the first line, a question is put to Patience by Activa Vita (Active Life). They are allegorical characters in the poem. Piers Plowman is seeking how to live a good life, and the next Passus (section) goes on to describe the life of Dowel – that is, how to do well. The text is from Passus XV, beginning at line 274.

TEXT 45 – Piers Plowman, c.1370 (iv)

What is ypur patiencie quod Activa Vita.
Mekenesse and mylde speche and men of on wil
Ye whiche wil be loue lede to oure lordes place
And pat is charite chaumpion chief of alle vertues

Pekere pouete and patience plese more god aymighty
Then rynfull yche ryche and resonable yche to speke

Ze ques est ille qui quod Patience, 'quik laudabimus eum (= let us praise him'.
Thohe men rede of ryche rite to the worldes ende
I waste neoure remir Pat riche was, pat when he rekene sholde
Then when he drow to Pe deth, that he ne dradd hym sarre
Then any pore pacient, and pat preue ye resoun.

(C-text, Derek Pearsall (ed.), Edward Arnold, 1978)

Transcription

What is ypur patiencie quod Activa Vita.
Mekenesse and mylde speche and men of on wil
Ye whiche wil be loue lede to oure lordes place
And pat is charite chaumpion chief of alle vertues

Pekere pouete and patience plese more god aymighty
Then rynfull yche ryche and resonable yche to speke

Ze ques est ille qui quod Patience, 'quik laudabimus eum (= let us praise him'.
Thohe men rede of ryche rite to the worldes ende
I waste neoure remir Pat riche was, pat when he rekene sholde
Then when he drow to Pe deth, that he ne dradd hym sarre
Then any pore pacient, and pat preue ye resoun.

Activity 6.8

(i) Write out some lines from the manuscript of Text 45 that are not transcribed here.
(ii) Compare the transcription with the edited version printed as Text 46. Comment on the differences and the choices that the editor made in producing this text.
(iii) Does the text need modern punctuation?

Activity 6.9

Examine one or more of the texts in this chapter for evidence that they are written in the West Midlands dialects. Typical markers of ME West Midlands dialects include:

(i) OE long vowel /æ/ has shifted and is now spelt <o>.
(ii) OE vowel /y/ remains but is spelt <u>, as in hull for MnE hill.
(iii) Suffix <ed> sometimes 'devoiced' and spelt <e>.
(iv) Pronouns:
   3rd person feminine her or heo.
   3rd person plural possessive hares.
(v) Verbs:
   3rd person plural present tense suffix <e>.
   Present participle suffix <ende>.
7. Middle English IV – East Midlands and London dialects

7.1 The origins of present-day Standard English

One of the reasons for learning about the development of the English language is to understand the relationship between the dialects and Standard English in present-day English. In the conglomeration of different dialects that we call 'Middle English', there is no one recognised standard form. If we were to study the political, social and economic history of England in relation to the language, we would observe that the conditions for a standard language were beginning to emerge by the late fifteenth century. From the sixteenth century onwards, there is evidence that people were actively discussing the need for a standard in spelling, pronunciation and grammar. This naturally raised the question of which dialect or variety of the language to use for the standard.

One definition of a standard language, in modern sociological terms, is:

The Standard is the speech variety of a language community which is legitimised as the obligatory norm for social intercourse on the strength of the interests of dominant forces in that society.

(Social linguists, Norbert Dimar, 1976)

that is, the choice is made by people imitating those with prestige or power in their society, while the latter tend to prescribe their variety of the language as the 'correct' one to use. A standard language is not superior in itself as a language for communication – all dialects are regular and 'rule-governed' – but in its adoption and development it is the language of those with social and political influence, although advocates of a standard will often claim an intrinsic superiority for it.

In 1589, the poet George Puttenham published a book called The Arte of English Poesie. In it, he gave advice to poets on their choice of language:

It must be that of educated, not common people, neither shall he follow the speach of a craftsman man, or other of the inferiour sort, though he be habituate or bred in the best towne and citie in this Realme. But he shall follow generally the better brought vp sort, ... cuuill and graciously behaved and bred.

The recommended dialect was therefore Southern, not Northern or Western:

...the usuall speach of the Court, and that of London and the shires lying about London within 1s. myles, and not much above.

(A longer extract from Puttenham's book is given in Text 81.)

This defines the literary language already in use in the sixteenth century, and clearly describes it as the prestigious language of the educated classes of London and the South-East. London was the centre of government, trade and commerce, and so the language of the 'dominant forces' in society would carry prestige, and others would seek to copy it. This is a simplified explanation of a complex state of affairs, but it helps to explain why the educated London dialect formed the basis of the standard language as it developed. If the centre of government and commerce had been York, no doubt the Northern dialect would have formed the basis for Standard English today.

The London dialect in the late fourteenth century derived from a mixture of ME dialects, but was strongly influenced by the East Midlands dialect in particular. London naturally attracted large numbers of men and women and their families from other areas of the country to find work, bringing their own dialectal speech with them. Historians have identified a considerable migration of people from the East Midlands to London from the late thirteenth century to the mid-fourteenth century, some of whom must have become the 'dominant social class' whose language carried prestige and was imitated by others. But because people from other parts of the country also migrated to London, there are also features of Southern and Kentish in the London dialect.

So present-day Standard English derives in its origins from the East Midlands dialect of ME, and this explains why it is comparatively easy to read Chaucer's English of the late fourteenth century, as well as other East Midlands texts. It will not be necessary therefore to examine the texts in this chapter in the detail given to those already described. You can apply the same principles of analysis to them, if you wish.

7.2 A SE Midlands dialect

The Travels of Sir John Mandeville was one of the most popular books written in the fourteenth century, with over 300 manuscripts having survived, but its title is misleading. The original book was written in French in the 1350s by a doctor of Liege called Jehan de Bourgogne. He probably never travelled outside France and based the stories on other men's travel writings, filling them out from his own imagination. It is believed that he adopted the name Sir John Mandeville and wrote a preface claiming to be an Englishman born in St Albans, although the facts are not known for sure. The text in English is a translation from the French by an unknown English writer using a SE Midlands dialect. It cannot be a translation by the French author, because it is sometimes an inaccurate rendering.

Another version was written in verse form. The verse was originally in a NE Midlands dialect, but the only surviving manuscript is in a 'modernised version' of the fifteenth century. It gives us some idea of the standard literary language that had evolved at that time, and the style that writers were beginning to use. Unfortunately, part of the manuscript that corresponds to Text 47 is missing, but enough remains for comparison.

**TEXT 47 – The Travels of Sir John Mandeville (I)**

SE Midlands dialect

Now schall I seye you sawnygly (= in what follows) of contrees and yles

Pat ben beyonde the contrees (pat I haue spoken of). Wherfore I seye you,

in passyng be the lond of Cathayre toward the high Yeide, and toward Bacharye,

men passen be a kingdom (pat men clepen Cadilike, Pat is a full fair contre.

And pere groweth a maner of fruit, as Pough it weren growed; and whan

pat ben rype, men kiten hem aot, and men fynden withinne a lyttell best,

in flesh, in bon, and blodes as Pough it were a lyttell lomb, without wolfe.

And men eeten bothe the frut and the best: and Pat is a grete servyelle.

Of Pat frute I haue eeten, allPough it were wonderfull: but Pat I knowe wel.

Pat god is meruyllous in his werkes.
TEXT 48 – The Boke of Mawndeveile

... That bereth applis grete piente
And who Pat cleuchet an appul atwyn (= apart, in two)
A litel beest he fyndith thereyn.
To a litel lombe liche it ys
Of blonde and bone and eke of fleisch
And welle shapen ate folle (= at full, in every detail)
In al thinge saufe (= save, except that) it hath noo wolle
And men and women here meest and leest (= most and least, greatest and lowest)
Eten of Pat frute so with Pat beest.


Activity 7.1

Rewrite Texts 47 and 48 in MnE and comment on their linguistic features.

TEXT 49 – The Travels of Sir John Mandeville (ii)

Transcription

Nata de ter
ra egyst
Egypt is a strong contre
& manye perilous hauenys
ben therin for there lith
in eche haue be tyme grete
ryches (= rocks) in the entre of the
haune / Toward the est
is the rede se (= Red Sea) that rennyth
right to the cete of cos
antyn (= Constantin) the Noble / The
contre of egyp is in
lente the v vineis but not
but iij in brede for deserts
that aryn ther / Betwyn
egip & the lond that is
callyd Nundyne (= Numidia) arn
tii journes in desertis
The folk that wonde
in that contra arn cris
tene (= Christian) men but thy aryn
blake of color for the ouer
gret hete that is there

5 day's journeys = c.100 miles, 3 day's journeys = c.60 miles

(Bodley version of Mandeville's Travels, EETS OS 253, 1963 p. 33; facsimile from Bodleian MS E Musaco 116 f. 15th)

Activity 7.2

Transcribe some of the first column of the facsimile.
7.3 The London dialect – Chaucer

7.3.1 Chaucer's prose writing

Geoffrey Chaucer was born in the 1340s and died in 1400. He was acknowledged in his own day as the greatest contemporary writer, not only in poetry but also in the arts of rhetoric and philosophy. The following tribute to Chaucer after his death is from a poem by Thomas Hoccleve:

Alas my worthy master honorble
Thys landes verrey tresour and rycheesse
Deth by thy deth hast harme irreparable
Vnto vs don; hir vengeable dureesse
Despydyl hyst this land of the sweonesse
Of retoriks, for vnto Tullius
Was here man so lyk amonges vs.
Also, who was hir in philosophie
To Aristotle in our tonge but thau?
The seyges of Virgile in poezie
Thow filwedist eek, men wot wel know ...

Chaucer wrote in the London dialect of the ME of his time; that is, the literary form of the language based on the speech of the educated class. The dialect of the mass of ordinary people living in London must have been as different from Chaucer's, both in form and pronunciation, as present-day Cockney is from educated RP and Standard English.

The Canterburie Tales is Chaucer's best-known work, but some of the tales are much more widely read than others. Most of them are in verse, and it is unlikely that the two tales in prose will ever be as popular as the one of the squire's wife, since their content and style are now out of fashion. The first prose tale is supposed to be told by Chaucer himself, after his comic satire on narrative romances. The Tale of Sir Thopas, has been interrupted by the Host:

Namour of this for goddes dignyte ...

Chaucer agrees to tell the Tale of Melibeus:

I wol yow telle a flet thynge in prose
That oughte lyke yow as I suppose
Or elles certes ye be to daungerous
It is a mora tale vertuous ...

The tale is a translation from a French prose work which is itself based on a Latin original. Here are the opening paragraphs.

TEXT 50 – Chaucer's 'The Tale of Melibeus'

A yong man whilom called Melibeus myghty and reche bigat vp on his wif, he called was Prudence a doghter, which he called was Sophie I vpon a day bifele he for his desport is went into the feeldes hym to pleye I hys wif & eek his doghter, hith he left swifly with his hous, of which the dores weren faste ysheete I thre of his olde foes, hun it espreded, & setten ladders to the walls of his hous, by vnderys ouer his entred, & betten his wif, & wounded his doghter with fyue mortal wounds in fyue sadery places I this is to seyn, in hir feet, in hir handes, in hir eyez, in hir nose, & in hir mouth, & lefthen hir for deed & wenten away I Whan Melibeus retournew was in to his hous, & segh al this meschief, he lyk a mad man remynge his clothes, gan to wepe and crey I Prudence his wyf, as fer forth as she dorste, bitoughte hym of hys wepyng for to stynye but nat for thy he gan to crey & wepe euere lenger the moore.

(Transcribed from a facsmile of the Hengwrt manuscript of The Canterbury Tales.)
Chaucer's verse

Here is the transcription of the opening of the prologue to the beginning of 'The Friar's Tale' about a summoner in Chaucer's The Canterbury Tales. It is accompanied by another version of the text from another manuscript.

TEXT 52 - Chaucer's 'The Friar's Tale'

Transcription

This worthy lymyjouris noble freere
he made alway a louungye cheere
upon the somnour, but for honeste
No vileyns worde, 3t to him spak he
But arte laste he sayde unto pe wyf
Dame quod he, god yue sche wel good lyf
Ye he heere touched / al so mote I thee
In scole materie / griete difficultee
Ye han seyd muche thinyn / right wel l seye
But dame / here as we ryden by the wyfe
Us noedt? nought but for to spoyke of gam
And lete aucctories / on goddes name
To prechynge and to secreles of clergye
But if it like to Pys company
I wil 3ow of a somnour tel a game

Alternative version

This worthy lymyjour / this noble freere
He made alwey / a manere louungye cheere
Vp on the Somnour / but for honeste
No vileyns word / as yet to hym spak he
But arte laste / he seyde vn to the wyf
Dame quod he god yue sche wel good lyf
Ye he heere touched / al so mote I thee
In scole materie / griete difficultee
Ye han seyd muche thinyn / right wel l seye
But dame / here as we ryden by the wyfe
Vs nedeth nat / to spoken / but of game
And lete aucctories / on goddes name
To prechynge / and to secreles of clergye
But if it like / to this company
I wol 3ow / of a Somnour tel a game

(English Literary Manuscripts, H. Kellihier and S. Brown, The British Library, 1986)

List the rhyming words in the opening lines of Chaucer's prologue to The Canterbury Tales.

Either:
(i) Select some of the pairs that show evidence of change and describe the differences.
Or (for a more systematic description):
(ii) Group the pairs into sets according to the rhyming vowel and see if you can discover any patterns of change in pronunciation or stress.

(The list of rhyming words, with their etymologies and Me relexes, and a full descriptive commentary, is given in Commentary 11 of the Text Commentary Book.)

The London dialect - Thomas Usk

From the late fourteenth century onwards, we begin to find many more examples of everyday language surviving in letters and public documents than we do for earlier English. Literary language draws on the ordinary language of its time, but in a special way, and we cannot be sure that the literature of a period tells us how people actually spoke.

In Chaucer's day, London was, from time to time, the scene of violence and demonstration in the streets, and the following text describes one such series of incidents in the 1380s. Thomas Usk was involved with what turned out to be the wrong side in the political factions of his day, for he was unsuccessful in the appeal from which Texts 53 and 54 are taken, and was later executed.

The appeal is 'an example of the London English of a fairly well-educated man'. The original spelling is retained, but the punctuation is modern.
TEXT 53 – Thomas Usk’s appeal, 1384 (i)

I Thomas Usk ... knowleched thes wordes & wrote hem with myn owne honde ... 

... Also, that day that Sir Nichol Brembre was chose mar, a non after mete kom John Northampton to John Mores bowes, & thider kom Richard Norbury & William Essex, & ther it was accorded that the mar, John Northampton, shold be sende after the persones that thilk tymc wer in the comon conseil of crafys, & after the wandyns of crafys, so that they shold be kome to the goldsmithes halfe on the morwe after, & ther the mar shold speke with hem, to lode & ordene how thilk eleccion of Sir Nichol Brembre myght be lented; & aud it be for drede of our lord the kyng, I wot weuen man shold haue be in others top. And than sente he Richard Norbury, Robert Rysby, & me, Thomas Usk, to the Neyte, to the duk of lancastre, to enforme hym in thys wyse: 'Sir, to day, ther we wolden haue go to the eleccion of the mar in goddes peas & the kynges, ther kom yn an orrible companye of crines, no man nod whiche, & ther, with oute any vysage butte strength, chosen Sir Nichol Brembre mar, a yen our maner of eleccion to fow thys uesed; when fore we preye yow yf we myght haue the kynges wrat go to a Newe eleccion.' And the duk seide: 'Nay, certes, wrat shul ye no haue, ausse yow amonges yow selue.' & her of I appepe John Northampton, John More, Richard Norbury, & William Essex.

(A Book of London English 1384–1425, R. W. Chambers and Marjorie Daunt (eds), OUP, 1931, pp. 28–9)

Activity 7.6

(i) Use the word list in the Word Book to write a version of Text 53 in MnE.
(ii) List some of the lexical and grammatical features of Usk’s language that mark its differences from MnE.

Activity 7.7

Repeat Activity 7.6 for Text 54.

TEXT 54 – Thomas Usk’s appeal, 1384 (ii)

Also, atte Goldsmithes halfe, when at the pople was assembled, the mar, John Northampton, reheered as euell as he knewe of the eleccion on the day to forn, & seyde that truly: 'Sirs, thus be ye shape for to be ouer ronne, & that,' quod he, 'I nee night soeffe; lat vs rather al be ded atones than soeffe such a vyleyne; & than the comunes, upon these wordes, wer stered, & seiden truly they wolde go to a nother eleccion, & noght soeffe thys wrong, to be ded al ther for atones in on tynde; & thun be the mar, John Northampton, was euer euery boden gon horn, & kome fast a yem strong in to Chepe with al her crafys, & I wen ther wer a bout a xxx crafys, & in Chepe they slouthen have sembled to go to a newe eleccion, & truly, had noght the aldermen kome to trete, & made that John Northampton had the pople gon horn, they wolde have go to a Newe eleccion, & in that hete have slayn hym that wolde have lented it, yf they had myght; & ther of I appepe John Northampton.
8. Early Modern English I – the fifteenth century

8.1 The beginnings of EMnE

You should have found the fourteenth century texts in Chapter 7 relatively easy to read without the help of a glossary – it is usually possible to make out the sense of late ME writings in the East Midlands and London dialects because they are the organs of Standard English today. The following fifteenth century was a period of transition to present-day English, and we talk of the Early Modern English (EMnE) period, from about 1450, in the development of the language. The date is, of course, arbitrary, as the normal development of a language is gradual and continuous.

8.2 Early fifteenth century East Midlands dialect

Margery Kempe (c.1373–c.1439) was a married woman from King’s Lynn, Norfolk, who gave up her married life as a result of her mystical experiences to devote herself to religion. She made many pilgrimages during her lifetime and, in the 1420s, dictated a book describing her visions, temptations and journeys.

As the book was written down from Margery Kempe’s own dictation, it is probably reliable evidence of ordinary speech in the early fifteenth century. The dialect is East Midlands, but we cannot tell how accurate the scribe’s reproduction of Margery’s speech was, or that of the only surviving manuscript, which was copied in the mid-fifteenth century.

Here she describes her early marriage. Throughout the book she refers to herself as ‘this creature’.

TEXT 55 – The Boke of Margery Kempe, c.1420 (i)

East Midlands dialect

When his creature was xx tjer of age or sumdele mor sche was marryd to a worschepful burgeys of Lyn and was wyth chylyde wyth in schort tyme as kynde wolde. And aftyr Pat sche had conceyved sche was labowrd wyth grete acessysys til he chyld was born & Pat what for labowr sche had in chyldyng & for sekenesse gayning befor sche dyspered of lytr lyf, wenyng sche myght not leavyn.
8.3 Later fifteenth century East Midlands dialect

The Pastons were a prosperous family who lived in Norfolk. A large collection of their letters written between the 1420s and 1500s has survived. The letters cover three generations of the family, and so are a valuable source of evidence for historians as well as students of language. Much of the period was troubled by the political upheavals of the Wars of the Roses, which is reflected in the Pastons' letters.

Two letters are printed here. Text 59 is to the first generation William Paston from his wife Agnes. This letter was dictated to a secretary but Agnes Paston signed it. It was probably written on 20 April, 1440. Text 60 is a Valentine letter from Margery Bews to the third generation John Paston, and was written in 1477. They were married later that year.

TEXT 59 – Paston letter, 1440

Dede hounboud I recomend me to yow & blysseyd be God I sende yow gode tydyngyss of pe comying & pe bryggyyn hoorn of pe gentlywoman Pat ye wetyn of fro Redham Pis same ryghte me accordyng to poynynen Pat ye made Per for yowre self & as for pe furste apweryntuence betwen John Paston & pe seyde gentillywoman she made hym gentylly chere n gyntyl wyse & seyde he was verray yowre son & so I hope Per shal nede no gret trete be wyse hym & he parson of Storcon tooke yowre son & I hope I hope Per shal not do gret trete be wyse hym & I pe parson of Storcon tole me yf ywede hym here a goone hery moder wolde ye ther to a godeley furre Pe gounye nedeth for to be had & of coloure it wolde be a goyledy bloy & elles a bryghte sanguynce I pity yow yowre son for me I pity gypys of golde & I yowre stweoys do weel & the Holy Trinete have yow in gouvynance wyten at Paston in hast Pe Wednesday next after Deus qui errantibus for deute of a good secreture &

Yowres

Agnes Paston

(Paston Letters and Papers of the Fifteenth Century, Norman Davies, ed., OUP, 1971)

TEXT 60 – Paston letter, 1477

Vn to my ryght welbeloved voluntyn John Paston squyer be Pis bill
delyvered &c

Ryght reacrent and worschypfull and my ryght welbeloved voluntyn I
recommande vn to yowe full herely desyreng to here of yowre welefare wherxe I
bescheye almyghty god long for to preserve vn to wys pleasure & yowre hertys desyre & yf it please yowre son to here of my welefare I am not in good hecule of body ner of herte nor schall be tyll I here from yowe

For Per wothys no creature what peyn Pat I endure

And for to be deede I dure it not dyscure

And my hody my moder hath laurberd Pe ater to my fadure full delgently but schen no more gete Pen ge knowe of far Pe wegh god knowwth I am full worry but yf that se loffe me as I tryste veryly that se do 3e will not leffe me Perfor. if for Pat 3e hode not halfe Pe lyvelode Pat 3e hafe, for do to Pe grettys labure Pat any woman on

lyve myght I wolde not forsake yowe

and yf 3e commande me to keppe me true thereuer I go

wyse I will do all my ryght yowe to love and never no mo

and yf my frendys say Pat I do amys Pe schal not me let so for to do

my herte me bydyds ever more to love yowe truly ever all ethely thing

and yf Pei be never so wrung I tryst it schall be betur in tymy comynge

no more to yowe at this tymethe holy trinitie hafe yowe in kypynge & I besche

yowe Pat this bill be not seyn of non ethely creatures safe only your selfe &c and thys lettur was sende at Topcroft wyth full heu yhte herte &

be your own MB
8.4 Late fifteenth century London English

William Caxton is known as the first English printer. The setting up of his printing press in London in 1476 was the beginning of a revolution in the production of books, which no longer had to be separately copied by hand. Copying did not, of course, die out immediately—the professional scriveners were able to maintain a living for some time. Caxton was more than just a printer of other people’s writing. He also translated into English and edited many of the books that he printed, and he provided a considerable number of prefaces and commentaries.

8.4.1 Caxton’s revision of Polychronicon

In 1482, William Caxton printed a revised text of Trevisa’s 1385 translation of Higden’s Polychronicon (see Texts 29 and 30). This provides an excellent example of some of the changes that had taken place in the language within a hundred years. Caxton evidently found Trevisa’s English old-fashioned and out of date, as he said in an epilogue:

... I William Caxton a semplice persone have endeavoured me to write fyrest overall the sayd book of Polychronicon and somewhat have changed the rude and old English, that is to wete certaine wordes in these dayes be neither vsyd ne understonden.

Caxton’s fifteenth century modernised version of John of Trevisa’s description of the languages of Britain is printed here alongside the fourteenth century text. This Trevisa text, which is taken from another manuscript and is slightly expanded, shows some interesting differences from Texts 29 and 30. It illustrates the lack of standardisation in ME and the way in which differences in the dialects of ME were reflected in writing. Some features of Caxton’s punctuation, like his use of the virgule <>, are reproduced, but modern punctuation has been added.

TEXT 61 – John Trevisa, 1385

As it is i-knowe how many manere peple bee in Pyes ilond Pere bee bee also so many dyers longages and tonges; nopeles walshmen and soctes Pat bee nouȝt i-meddel wiþ other nacionis holden wel nyh hir firste longage and speche ...

Also englishe men Pey Pei haddre from Pe byggynynge Pe maner speche norPeme sowPeme and middel speche in Pe myddel of Pe ilond, as Pey come of Pe manere peple of Germania, nopeles by commynxion and melynyge

TEXT 62 – Caxton’s version, 1482

As it is known how many maner peple ben in this Ilond ther ben also many langages and tonges. Nethelles walshmen and soctes that ben not meddel with other nacionis kepe neyagh yet thayr firste langage and speche /

also englysshe-men though they had fro the bygynynge thayr maner speches Southern norther and myddel speche in the middel of the londe as they come of thayr maner of people of Germania. Nethelles by commynxion and medlynyng

firste wip danes and afterward wip normanes in many Pe contrye langage is apayed and som veep straung waferynge chiterynge harrynge and garrynge gribistynge.

This apayrynge of Pe burȝe tonge is because of twye Pinges; on is for children in scole aginst Pe vsage and manere of alle oþere nacionis bee compelled to leue hire owne langage and for to constreyn hir lesions and here Pynges a freysche, and so Pej hauȝei Pe normanes com in to engelond.

Also gentilmen men children bee i-taught to speke freysche from Pe tyme Pat Pey bee i-rolded in here cradel and kunne speke and playe wiþ a childis broche; and vпоlondishe men wil likene hym self to gentilmen and fondi wiþ greet bosnesse for to speke freysche for to be i-tolle of ...

This manner was moche used to for the firste deth and is siȝe remedel i-chawinged. For John Cornwalle, a mastere of grammer, chaunged Pe lore in gramer scole, and construction of freysche into englyssche; and Richar Pernachere lemed Pe manere tychynge of hym and of òtere men of Pershyn; so Pat now, Pe jere of oure Lorde a Powsand Pe hundred and foure score and fyue, in alle Pe gramer scoles of engelond children leuȝe freysche and constreyn and lernei an englyssche ...

Also gentil men haue now moche i-lefte for to teche hir children freysche. Hit semel a grete wonder hous englyssche, Pat is Pe burȝe tonge of englishe men and hir owne langage and tonge, ys so dyverse of sowne in Pis ilon ilond, and Pe langage of normandie is comynge of oþer londe and holp ouer manere sowne among alle men Pat spekei hit aȝtaz in engelond.

... also of Pe forsaide saxon tonge Pat is i-delet a Pe and is abide sarcebse wiþ oþere vpołondelishe mens is grete wonder; for men of Pe est wiþ men of Pe west, as it were vnder Pe same parti of usegne, acoðei more in sownynge of speche Pe men of Pe norP wel wiþ men of Pe souȝe.

Also gentilmen children ben lemed and taught from thei yonge to speke freysche. And uplonys and men wil counterete and likene hym self to gentilmen and are besti to speke freysche for to be more setei by.

This manner was moche used to for the grete deth. But syn it is somedele chaunged For John Cornuayl a maister of grammer chaunged the tychynge in gramer scole and construction of Freysche in to englyssche, and other Scolemaistres use the same way now in the yere of oure lorde M.III.C.LX.V. the lye yere of kyng Rychar the secund and leve all freysche in scoles and use al construction in englyssch.

And also gentilmen moche lefte to teche thei children to speke freysche Hit semel a grete wonder that Englissmen have so grete dyverse in thayr owne langage in sowne and in spekyng of it / whiche is al in one ylond. And the langage of Normandy is comen out of another lond / and hath one maner soure among al men that spekeith it in englond ...

Also of the farsayl tong whiche is departed in thire is grete wonder / For men of the este with the men of the west acorde better in sownynge of thayr speche than men of the northe with men of the south /
Perfore it is Pat mercier, Pat beed men of myndel engeland, as it were partners of ye endes, vnderstande bettre the se side langages, norþerne and southerne, Pat norþerne and southerne vnderstande ñester clyper other.

Al se langage of the norþumbres and speciallich at yerk is so scharp slitting and froute and vnschappe Pat we southerne men may Pat langage vnschappe vnderstande. I Rowe Pat Pat is bycause Pat Pey beed ñye to strauge men and aliens Pat speke ñylegliche.

Therfor it is that men of mercier that ben of myndel england as it were partyners with the endes understande better the side langages northern & sothern than northern & southern understande ñester other.

Alle the langages of the norþumbres & specially at yerk is so scharp slitting frotyng and vnschappe that we sothermen may uneth understande that langage I suppose the cause be that they be unyngh to the alyns that speke strungely.

wroten in suche wyse that it was more lyke to duche than englysshe: I could not reduce ne brynge it to be understonden / And certaynly our langage now vseyd varryth ferre from that whiche was vseyd and spoken whan I was borne / For we englysshe men / ben borne vnder the domynacyon of the mone, whiche is neuer stedfast / but ever wauercynge / weyngynge one season / and waneth & dysycrench other season / And that comyn englysshe that is spoken in one sluye varryth from a mother. In so moche that in my dasies happoned that certayn machaumes were in a shappe in tamysse (= the river Thames), for to hawe sayled ouer the see into zelande (= Holland) / and for lacke of wynde, that taryd atte forland (= Foreland), and wente to lande to to refreshe them: And one of thynm named sheffolde (= Sheffield), a mercer, cum mto an hows and exed for mete (= food); and specially he exed Aft egges: And the good wyf answere, that she coude speke no freindle. And the marchant was angry, for he alse coude speke no freindle, but wolde hauke haidde egges / and she understode hym not / And thenthe at laste a mother sayd that he wolde haue eyen / then the good wyf sayd that she understode hym wel / Loo, what shold a man in those dasies now wroten, egges or eyen? certaynly it is hard to plese every man / by cause of dyuersite & chaunge of langage... but in my judgumente / the comyn termes that be dayily vseyd, ben lyghter (= easier) to be understonde than the olde and auneynt englysshe /

If you were to examine Caxton's language in detail, you would find that he did not devise a consistent and regular spelling system, and that many of his decisions about spelling and grammatical form were already old-fashioned for the language of the 1480s.

Here is a very short example of Caxton's printing. It is an advertisement, dating from about 1478, of Caxton's edition of the Sarum Ordinal (an ordinal is a book of church services; Sarum is the older name for Salisbury).

TEXT 64 – Caxton's advertisement, 1478

If it pleseth myn spynship or tempore to lyhe any pyses of two and thre commenocracies of salisbury use enypyned after the forme of this presët lettre whiche ben wel and truly correct, late hym come to westminster nestor in to the almonerstie at the reed pale and he shal haue them good chepe. 

Suplicio et cedula

If it pleseth any man spynship or tempore to lyhe any pyses of two and thre commenocracies of salisbury use enypyned after the forme of this presët lettre whiche ben wel and truly correct, late hym come to westminster nestor in to the almonerstie at the reed pale and he shal haue them good chepe.

Suplicio et cedula
### Activity 8.5

(i) Examine Caxton's texts (Texts 63 and 64) for evidence of his inconsistency of choice in spelling and word form.

(ii) Rewrite Text 63 in MnE.

(iii) Describe those features of Caxton's English by which we would describe it as 'archaic' in comparison with MnE.

(iv) Comment on Caxton's style.

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### 8.5 The medieval tales of King Arthur

In 1485, Caxton published a 'noble and joyous book entytled Le Morte Darthur'. He describes it in these words:

> ... a book of the noble hystories of the sayd Kyng Arthur and of certeyn of his kynges after a copie unto mo delvereved. Whych copie Syr Thomas Malory dydde take oute of certeyn books of frentise and reducde it into Englyssh.

We know that Sir Thomas Malory made his translations and adaptations from French while he was in prison. He wrote the following at the end of one of the books making up the collection:

> And I prye you all that redyth this tyle to pray for hym that this wroth, that God sende hym good delvereunce soone and hastily. Amen

Malory died in prison in 1471.

Caxton's printed book was the only known source of Malory's version of the legends of King Arthur until 1934, when a manuscript was found in the Fellows' Library of Winchester College. It is not Malory's own hand, but more authentic than Caxton's book, which has many alterations, emendations and omissions.

Here is the opening of the fourth story, 'The War with the Five Kings', in the first of the books, *The Tale of King Arthur*.

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### TEXT 65 – Sir Thomas Malory, c. 1460–70

*O aftir thes questys of Syr Gawayne Syr Tor and kyng Pelynonor Than hit bellyth that Merly on felle in dotege of the damesell that kyng Pelynonor brouhte to courte and she was one of the damesels of the Lady of the lake that hyght Nenyre But Merlioun wolde nat lette her have no reste but all waies he wolde be wyth her And ever she made Merlioun goode chere tyelle sche had lerned of hym all maner of thyng that sche desired and he was assysted upon hit that he myght nat be from hit So on a tyme he tolde to kyng Arthure that he schold not endure longe but for all his crafts he schold be putte into the ethre quyk and so he tolde the kyng myny thyngis that schold be falle but alwyss he warned the kyng to kepe well his swer de and the scawerde *scholde be stolyn by a woman frome hym that he moste trusted Also he tolde kyng Arthure that he schold mysshe hym. And yett had ye levere than all youre landis have me agayne A sayde the kyng syn ye knowe of youre evil adventure purgey for hit and putt hit a way by youre cruftis that mysshe adventure Nay seyde Merlioun hit wolle not be.

* scholde omitted: for he told hym how the scwerde and the scawerde

(Facsimile from BM Add MS 59678 f. 45, and also in *English Literary Manuscripts*, Hilton Kelliherr and Sally Brown, *The British Library*, 1986)

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### Activity 8.6

The first six lines of the facsimile were written by the principal scribe, while the rest was written by a second scribe. The handwriting is clearly different. Does the second scribe's spelling differ from that of the first?

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### 8.6 Late fifteenth century London dialect

A collection of letters and memoranda of the Cely family, written in the 1470s and 1480s, gives us authentic handwriting evidence of London English a century after Thomas Usk's, and contemporary with the later Paston letters.

The Celys were wool merchants, or staplers. They bought woollen fleeces in England and sold them on the Continent in Calais and Bruges. The letters and accounts provide historians with direct evidence of the workings of a medieval English firm. They also give language students plenty of examples of late medieval commercial English, as well as evidence of the speech and writing habits of middle-class Londoners of the period.
The collection contains letters by 40 different people, but most are from two generations of the Cely family, father and sons. Like the Paston letters, they show that there was as yet no standardised written English. The spelling is not good evidence for the pronunciation of spoken English, partly because we do not know the sounds given to particular letters, but also because the spelling of the different writers is so irregular. Individual writers show many inconsistencies of spelling.

The following three texts consist of facsimiles and transcriptions, followed by versions in MNE spelling and punctuation.

TEXT 66 – George Cely in Calais to Richard Cely in London, 12 March 1478

Transcription
Ryght reverent and whorschypful Heady affyry all dew recoun
dayson plenteyng I reconsirnd me vn to yow in the melost lowly
est whishe that I con or may fowr dyr mor plesythe yit yow to
vndyr stond that I come vn to calle the thonsaday affyry my dey
tyng from yow in sauffe y thanke god and y whas wheeleven vn
to my friends foyr tyll my brodery cor to calle the whas none
hodyr tyding ther but I whas dede // etc // plesythe yit yow to vndyr
stond ther ys now none mchants at caly nor whas but fowr whys
moynythe / and as fowr any hodyr tydying I con none wryt vn to
yow as yety tyll y her mor and be the next wrytting PI I
sent ye shall vndyr the sale of yowr fyllis w mor be the
garise of god whish who have yowr and all yowrs in hys kypng
amen wryt at calle the xij th day of meche a kirvij

p your son
G cely

TEXT 67 – Richard Cely (the father) in London to Agnes, Richard and George
Cely in Essex, 12 August 1479

Transcription
I gret you well. I let you wot of suche tryng as I here
Thomas Blewom hath a letter from caleys the weche
ys of a hault done on saterday the 6th of augst the dyde tyyn
be the dwke of burgay & the frenche kyng the
weche batel be gone on sater day at iij of the
dwke at after non and laste tyll rigty & meche
bloode schele of botich persys and the dwke of
burgay hath the fylde and the worschep the dwke of
burgay hath gete meche edenes of frenche
kyngeys and hathe slawe y in thowt frenche men
wryte on thorsday non in heste

p re cely

pyour son
G cely

Version with modernised spelling/punctuation
I greet you well. I let you wot of such tiding as I hear.
Thomas Bleom hath a letter from Calais, the which
ys of a battle done on Saturday last past beside Tourn
by the Duke of Burgundy and the French king, the
which battle began on Saturday at 4 of the
clock at afternoon, and lasted till night, and much
blood shed of both parties, and the Duke of
Burgundy hath the field, and the worship. The Duke
of Burgundy hath got much ordinance of (the) French
king's and hath stáus 5 or 6 thousand Frenchmen.
Writ on Thursday now in haste.

per Richaid Cely

The following text is not a letter, but a jotted down note of political events and rumours in the troubled times preceding the deposition of Edward V and the accession of the Duke of Gloucester as Richard III. The first five stanzas are written as facts; the rest, beginning with 'If...', are rumours. The poetings were written on the back of an old memorandum and are not always grammatically clear.

p your son
G cely
Lord Hastings, the Lord Chamberlain, had been executed in June 1483. The Chancellor was Thomas Rotherham, Archbishop of York. 'my lorde pynsse' was the Duke of York, Edward V's brother. The Earl of Northumberland and John Howard were supporters of the Duke of Gloucester. 'movasewr sent jonys' (Monsieur St John) is a pseudonym, to disguise the name, for Sir John Weston, from whom George Cely presumably got the rumours.

TEXT 68 – Note of events and memoranda, George Cely, June 1483

Transcription
Ther ys gret rombor in the rene / the scoutys has done grett
yn ynglynd / schamberlyne ys desesed in trobll the chavnse
ler ys dyssprowett and not content / the bishop of ely ys dede
yf the kyng god suffe his lyffe whe derett / the dewke of glo
sett whe in any parell / geffe my lorde pynsse whe god
defend whe trobellett / yf my lord of norchombyrland
whe deede or gretty trobellett / yf my lorde haward whe
slaye
De movnsewr sent jonys

Version with modernised spelling/punctuation
There is great rombor (= disturbance, upheaval) in the realm. The Scots has done great
in England. (The Lord) Chamberlain is deceased in trouble. The
Chancellor is disproved (= proved false) and not content. The Bishop of Ely is dead.
If the King, God save his life, were deceased. (If) the Duke of
Gloucester were in any peril. If my Lord Prince were, God
defend, were troubled (= molested). If my Lord of Northumberland
were ded or greatly troubled. If my Lord Howard were
slain.

From monsieur Saint John

9. Early Modern English II – the sixteenth century

9.1 The Lisle letters

In Chapter 8, we saw how the private letters of the Pastons and the Celys written in the
fifteenth century give us some idea of everyday speech at that time. Another large collection,
the Lisle letters, from the early sixteenth century, provides us with examples of the language 50
years on.

Writers at that time were not using a nationally standardised form of spelling, but this does
not mean that their spelling was haphazard, or that they 'wrote as they spoke'. There were
inconsistencies, especially in the use of a redundant final <e> on many words, but they had
clearly learned a system of spelling. Variations occurred because there were no dictionaries or
spelling books to refer to until later in the sixteenth century.

These letters were written to and by Lord Lisle, his family, friends and staff, when he was
Governor of Calais for King Henry VIII, from 1533 to 1540. The French town was at that time
an English possession. The letters provide examples of a wide range of correspondence, both
formal and informal, and are therefore first-hand evidence of the state of the language then.

Here is an example of a letter by a 14-year-old boy, George Bassett, the son
by her first marriage, and as part of his education he was 'put to service' in the household of Sir
Francis Bryan. The letter is 'purely formal: the boy has nothing to say and he says it in the
approved Tudor manner' (Muriel St Clare Byrne, editor of The Lisle Letters).

Activity 8.7

(i) Write versions of the letters in an acceptable MnE style.
(ii) Examine the facsimiles and write out the letter forms of the alphabet used in the letters.
(iii) List the principal lexical and grammatical features of the Cely's London English that mark
its difference from MnE.

Activity 9.1

Describe 'the approved Tudor manner' of writing a formal letter, which the following letter
illustrates.
George Bassett's formal 'duty letter' to his parents does not tell us much about him, except that he can write very competently in beautiful handwriting. He uses the strike or virgule (/) as a mark of punctuation, and the occasional full-stop, then called a prick. There are some conventional abbreviations, similar to those you will have noticed in the Cely and Puson letters. One that was commonly used both in handwriting and printing was the titile (=) over the vowel preceding one of the nasal consonants ⟨n⟩ or ⟨m⟩, especially if the consonant was double. Another was sometimes writing post-vocalic ⟨e⟩ as a superscript. Additional writing and spelling conventions can be observed in later texts.

The next letter is from Sir William Kingston, who was a member of the King's Privy Council and Constable of the Tower at the time. It is an interesting example of an educated man's style of writing which, at first glance, would be unacceptable today in its presentation because there is no punctuation. It mentions the names of several birds used in hawking, or falconry.

... my lord to allvertys ye of newes here be none 31 for now they be about the pease (= peace) in the marches of Scotland & with goddes grace all shall be well & as yit the kynges grace thithe hard now word from my lord of Wyncheste & so the kyng hawkes evry day with goshawks (= goshawks) & other hawkes that ys to say laynres (= lancers) sparrowhawks (= sparrowhawks) and merlins (= merlins) both affore none & after yf the wether serve I pray you my lord yf ther be hony gerfalck (= germale) or yerkyn (= jarkyn) to help me to both yf it may be & for lack of bothe to have wun & to send me worde of the charges ther of & then your lordshyp done mee for me & my wyfe both right hartely recoumunde hus unto my god lady & we thunke my lady for my token for it can to me in the church of the blak freres (= friars) & my wyf wase desposed to have oferd it to saynt hoy (= St Eligius) (th)at hyr horse shul not halte & he never went up right synce (= since) I betesee the your lordshyp to have me in your remembrance to master porter & my lady & to master marshall & my lady ...
Activity 9.2

(i) Rewrite the letter using today’s spelling and punctuation. Is it fully grammatical?

(ii) What did the following phrases mean in 1533: to advertsetye you of newes, if the wether serve?

(iii) Examine the spelling of the words in the letter and discuss any that seem unusual to you. Is the spelling significantly irregular or inconsistent? How many words have more than one spelling?

On 17 January 1536, Sir Thomas Audley wrote to Lord Lisle, Governor of Calais, for a post (called a ‘Spear’) in the Retinue on behalf of Robert Whethill. Whethill’s father Richard had been Mayor of Calais and still lived there. He was constantly at loggerheads with Lord Lisle, who had to reply very diplomatically to Audley’s letter.

Here is Lord Lisle’s response, written on the back of Audley’s letter. It would have been copied and tidied up before being sent, and is an interesting example of the first draft of a letter.

TEXT 71 – Draft of Lord Lisle’s reply to a letter, 1536

Ryght honorably sir, my most humlyest wysse I contend me vnto you & have resewyvd yo’ jentyl lett’ in the favor of R whethill corynyng the next spens ryme within myn office her hit shall plese yo’ good lordlyhpe that ther is not the trustyst s’vatis myn hose mother in ynglant that shall gladyer do yo’ cymamand & pleasur then I wold w owght desemyllaison as eu’ devryng my lyfle shall aper toward you & yo’s thys whethill & his father orderyd me upnyly at lantern gate w word & covetons that I neu’ sofferyd so mwyche of no dege sens I whas xvj yer old notwothyng I wall at yo’ cymamandment forget all

(The Lisle Letters, Vol. 3 No. 633a, Murriel St Clare Byrne (ed.))

Activity 9.3

(i) Rewrite the draft with modern spelling and punctuation, filling out the abbreviated words.

(ii) Comment on the grammar of most humlyest, iht and xvj yer old.

9.2 Formal prose in the 1530s

An example of formal written language contemporary with the Lisle letters is Sir Thomas Elyot’s The boke named The Gouernour, printed in London in 1531. Its dedication was:

vynto the moste noble & victorious prince
kynge Henry the eght kyng of Eng-lande and Fraunce / defender of the true fythyte / and Iorde of Irelande.
Elyot refers to 'the insufficiency of our owne langage' when defining the words publice and commune 'whiche be borrowed of the latyn tonge'. Elyot's commune is MNE commune and is used in the sense of the word communuer as against noble. We now know that both words had been taken from OF during the ME period, but their source was Latin publicer and communes, and Elyot, like other scholarly writers of the period, Engished many Latin and Greek words in order to express his meaning.

Sir Thomas Elyot sets out a programme of education for young noblemen in which learning Latin begins before the age of seven.

**TEXT 73 - Sir Thomas Elyot's The Gouernour, 1531 (ii)**

The orde of leymynge that a noble man shulde be trayned in before he come to thauge of seuen yeres. Cap.v.

But there can be nothynge more convenient than by little and little to traynye and exercitye them in speychynge of latyn ye: insuffrnyng them to knowe first the names in latynne of all thynge that cometh in syghte and to name all the partes of theys bodies.

It is clear that in Elyot's day, just as today, strong feelings could be aroused over accent and pronunciation. In the following text, he is recommending the kind of nurse and serving woman that a young nobleman under seven should have.

**TEXT 74 - Sir Thomas Elyot's The Gouernour, 1531 (iii)**

but I shalbe expedient that a nostable manners some in his infansy have with hym continually onely such as may acuynone hym by little and little to speake pure and elegant latin. Semblably these enouryfes to other women aboute hym, if it be possible to do the same: or at the leaste way that they speken none englyishe but that whiche is cleane polite perfectly, and articularly pronounced omitting none lettre, or sillable, as solish be women often times doe of a wantone, whereby divers noble men and gentlemens chylde (as I do at this daye knowe) have attainted corrupte and soule pronunciation.

These texts from *The Gouernour* are not only of interest with regard to their subject matter and style, but also to observe those features of grammar and lexis which clearly mark Elyot's language as still archaic in terms of MNE, although it is much closer to our Standard English than the earlier texts we have studied.

**Activity 9.4**

(i) Explain the few alternative spellings in the texts: hitfi, latun-latyn/layn, onely/onely, pronounced/pronounce, sight/seele, shal/shall, significations/signification, ther/there, things/thyngs/thynge, which/whiche.

(ii) Compare Elyot's system of punctuation with present-day conventions.

(iii) Use a dictionary to identify some of the words that were borrowed from French, Latin or Greek during the sixteenth century.

(iv) What was the meaning of the following words in the 1530s: vulgare, astates, equite, diuers, beoketh, abused, dyesyn, sensualite?

(v) Do any verb inflections differ from those in Standard English today?

(vi) How do the grammatical features of the following phrases or word sequences differ from Standard English today: body layynge; all thing of the whiche, them whiche, they which; them that, that that; do suppose; whiche be borrowed?

9.3 A different view on new words

Sir Thomas Elyot expressed a scholar's view on the superiority of the resources of Latin and Greek, from which hundreds of words were 'Englished'. These words were disparagingly referred to as 'inKimorl terms' — words coming from the scholar's horn of ink and therefore pedantic — and there was a lot of controversy over this. For example, George Puttenham called the introduction of Latin and Greek words 'corruption' of language, the result of the 'peckush affections of clerks and scholars', because it introduced polysyllabic words into English.

**TEXT 75 - George Puttenham's The Arte of English Poesie, 1589**

but now I must retrench and confess that our Normane English which hath grown since Williams the Conquerour doth admit of the many polisyllables even to fixe and feuen in one word, which at this daye we in our most ordinarie language: and which corruption hath bene occasioned chiefly by the peckish affection not of the Normans them selues, but of clerks and scholars or secretaries long since, who not content with the usual Normane or Saxon word, would convery the very Latine and Greke word into vulgar French, as to say innumerable for innombrable, reuocable, irreuocable, irradiation, depopulatiō & such like, which are not natural Normans nor yet French, but altered Latines, and without any imitation at all: which therefore were long time despised for inkehorne terms, and now be reputed the best & most delicat of any other.

*auncient feete* means the verse rhythms of the classical Latin and Greek poets. *A foot* is a unit of rhythm.

*peckish* is here used as an adjective of dislike: 'expressing rather the speaker's feeling than any quality of the object referred to' (OED).
But there were those who did not accept Sir Thomas Elyot's view on 'the insufficiencie of our own language', and who disliked any borrowing from other languages, not just the creation of 'unknow terms'. Richard Verstegan described them in 1605.

**TEXT 76 - Richard Verstegan's A Restitution of Decayed Intelligence, 1605**

Since the tyme of Chaucer, more Latin & French, hath bin mingled with our toung, then left out of it, but of late wee have faigne to such borrowing of woords from, Latine, French, and other toungs, that it had bin beyond all stay and limit, which albeit some of vs do lyke wel and think our toung thereby much bettred, yet do strangers therefore carry the farre leffe opinion thereof, some saying that it is of it self no language at all, but the scum of many languages, others that it is most barren, and that wee are dayly faigne to borrow woords for it (as though it yet lacked making) out of other languages to patche it vp withall, and that yf wee were put to repay our borrowed speech back again, to the languages that may lay claim on it; wee should bee left little better then dumb, or scarcely able to speak any thing that should bee fencible.

**TEXT 77 - John Hart's An Orthographie, 1569 (i)**

Which is upon the consideration of the generall voices of the speach, and the use of their generall marks for them, which wee call letters. But in the moderne & present maner of writing (aswell of certaine other languages as of our English) there is such confusion and disorder, as it may be accounted rather a kinde of cypihing, or such a darke kinde of writing, as the best and readiest wit that euer hath bene, could, or that is so sharde, can or may, by the only gift of reason, attaine to the ready and perfitte reading thereof, without a long and tedious labour, for that it is unfit and wrong shapen for the proportion of the voice. Whereas the new maner hereafter (though it seeme at the first very strange, hard and unprofitable) by the reading only thereof, will prove it felte fit, easy and delectable, and that for whatsoeuer English may be wript in that order.

**Activity 9.5**

Discuss what an ideal alphabetic system of spelling should be like and give some examples of what Hart calls 'confusion and disorder' in our present system, which is largely unchanged since Hart's time in its essentials. For example:

(i) How many letters are there in the Roman alphabet used today?
(ii) How many contrasent sounds (phonemes) are there in English today?
(iii) What are some of the ways in which the mismatch between phonemes (Hart's voices) and letters (Hart's marks) has been dealt with in our spelling system?
(iv) Which of them had developed in ME before the sixteenth century?
Hart’s argument begins with the five differing simple sounds or voyces’—that is, the five vowels /a e i o u/. They should each represent one sound, but they have been and are abused in divers sounds’. He illustrates their proper pronunciation with this sentence:

The prating Hosteler hath dressed, curried, and rubbed our horses well, and adds:

... none of the five vowels is mis sounded, but kept in their proper and auncient sounds.

As you read the sentence, remember two things. Firstly, the present-day RP and Southern pronunciation of curried and rubbed, with the short vowel /ə/, did not exist then. The vowel was /u/. Secondly, the /p/ in horses was pronounced.

Hart pointed out two spelling conventions which are still part of the modern English system, but which he did not use in his reformed spelling. The first was the use of a final /g/ to mark a preceding long vowel, as in MnE butt/but/ and steele/steele/. The second was the use of double consonants to mark a preceding short vowel, as in MnE nattyn/nation/ and rubbing/rubbing/. He preferred to use a dot under the letter to mark a long vowel:

I leave also all double consonants: haung a mark for the long voyelle, there is therby sufficient knowledge given that every unmarked voyelle is that...

The interest of Hart’s book for us is not so much in the reformed alphabet that he invented, but the authentic evidence it indirectly provides about changes in the pronunciation of English. Here is a facsimile of the opening of the first two pages of the second part of the book, which is printed in Hart’s new spelling, followed by a transcription into MnE spelling.

**TEXT 78 – John Hart’s An Orthographie, 1569 (ii)**

An exceris or dat buit s i sed: buuer i in is declared, how the deffircond soundes ar ned
bes distingued so as the mouth shoul
not omitted in the prouct, for dat
w dmil must alway
dem Cap vex.

In this title above-written, I consid-
er of the <i> in exerise, & of the <a>, in instruments: the like of the <e>, in tille, which the common man,
and many learned, do sound in
the diphongs <ao>, and <eu>: yet I
would not think it meet to write them, in those
like words, where the sound of the voyelle only,
may be as well allowed in our speech, as that
of the diphong used of the rude; and so far I allow
observation for derivations. – Whereby you may
perceive, that our single sounding and use of let-
ters, may in process of time, bring our whole natton
to one certain, perfect and general speaking. –
Wherein she must be ruled by the learned from
time to time. – And I can not blame any man
to think this manner of new writing strange, for
I do confess it is strange to my self, though before

I have ended the writing, and you the reading of
this book. I doubt not but you and I shall think
our labours best well bestowed. – And not with-standing that I have devised this new manner of
writing for our English, I mean not that Latin
should be written in these letters, no more then
the Greek or Hebrew, neither would I write any
man of any strange natton in these letters, but
when as I would write English. – And I would
gladly counterfeit his speech with my tongue, so would
I his writing with my hand. – Yet who could
let me use my pen the best I could, thereby
attain to the perfect pronunciation, of any
strange speech: but writing English, we may
(as is said) use for every strange word, the same
marks or letters of the voices which we do find in
speech, without any other regard to show by
writing whence the word is borrowed, then we do in
speaking. – For such curiosity in superfluous let-
ters, for derivation or for difference, and so forth, is
the disordering and confounding, of any writing;
contrary to the law of the perfection there-
of, and against all reason: whereby, it should be
obedient unto the pronunciation, as to her lady
and mistress: and so, add or diminish as she shall in success of time command. –
Activity 9.6

Identify the sound changes that Hart describes in this extract from his book.

In Text 79, John Hart refers to some of his objections to the current spelling system:
- **Superfluous letters** — some of the letters of the Roman alphabet are redundant and could be dropped.
- **Derivation** — he rejects the argument that the original spelling of words borrowed from other languages should be retained because it shows their derivation. He advocates the use of English spelling conventions once a word is assimilated.
- **Difference** — he also rejects the use of different spellings for words that are pronounced alike. If there is no confusion when we speak them, then there can be none when we write them.

Activity 9.7

Give some examples of each of these three ‘abuses’ of spelling in present-day English.

9.5 Changes in English pronunciation – the Great Vowel Shift

Between the time of Chaucer in the late fourteenth century and Shakespeare in the late sixteenth century, all the long vowels in English spoken in the Midlands and South of England shifted their pronunciation. We don’t know why it happened, and no similar shift is known to have taken place at other times. It has therefore been called the **Great Vowel Shift**. John Hart’s reference to the <i>ae</i> vowel in *exercise* — that it was being pronounced as a diphthong by some speakers — is contemporary evidence of the shift taking place.

The shift was not complete in 1569, and there was variation between regional and social dialect speakers, but in time all the long vowels were either raised or became diphthongs. In spite of Hart and other reformers up to the present day, our spelling system has never been altered to fit the changed pronunciations. Consequently, the sound of the short vowels, represented by the letters <a>ae</a> <e>ee</e> <i>ie</i> <o>oo</o> <u>uu</u>, has remained more or less the same, while the sounds of the long vowels no longer match the letters.

Here is a simplified list of the changes (there are a lot of irregularities and variations which make this topic very complex to study in detail):

**Short vowels**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ME vowel</th>
<th>Letter</th>
<th>MnE word</th>
<th>MnE pronunciation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>/i:/</td>
<td>&lt;ae&gt;</td>
<td>thin</td>
<td>/θ/</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>/e:/</td>
<td>&lt;ee&gt;</td>
<td>pen</td>
<td>/θ/</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>/æ:/</td>
<td>&lt;ae&gt;</td>
<td>add</td>
<td>/θ/</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>/ɑ:/</td>
<td>&lt;aa&gt;</td>
<td>common</td>
<td>/θ/</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>/ʌ:/</td>
<td>&lt;u&gt;</td>
<td>but</td>
<td>/θ/ or /θ/</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Long vowels before and after the Great Vowel Shift

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ME vowel</th>
<th>Letter</th>
<th>MnE word</th>
<th>MnE pronunciation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>/i:/</td>
<td>&lt;ae&gt;</td>
<td>thin</td>
<td>/θ/</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>/e:/</td>
<td>&lt;ee&gt;</td>
<td>we, geese</td>
<td>/θ/</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>/æ:/</td>
<td>&lt;ae&gt;</td>
<td>speak</td>
<td>/θ/</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>/ɑ:/</td>
<td>&lt;aa&gt;</td>
<td>lady</td>
<td>/θ/ or /θ/</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>/ɑ:/</td>
<td>&lt;o&gt;</td>
<td>oak</td>
<td>/θ/ or /θ/</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>/u:/</td>
<td>&lt;u&gt;</td>
<td>do, goose</td>
<td>/θ/</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>/ʌ:/</td>
<td>&lt;o&gt;</td>
<td>cow, house</td>
<td>/θ/ or /θ/</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notice that there were two pairs of contrasting long front and back vowels, /e/ and /æ/, /o/ and /ʌ/. This can be seen in the facsimile of the letters in an ‘amended of orthography’ by another spelling reformer, William Bullokar, in 1580. These vowels were represented in traditional spelling (but not consistently) by the digraphs <ee> <ae> <oo> and <oo> respectively. Bullokar provides a separate letter for each of the four sounds.
9.6 Punctuation in sixteenth century texts

The facsimiles of written and printed texts that you have already read will have shown some obvious differences from present-day conventions in punctuation. A useful summary of conventions in the 1560s is provided by John Hart.

TEXT 79 – John Hart’s An Orthographie (iii)

At last, to be ready to enter into my native manner of writing, I will but the bone of distruction or pointing, which (well shewen) may be the matter, much the reader to the notions, as well to the eye as to the eare. For it theweth how to read when of sentence contynueth, and when it entith: how to understand what is written, and is not made thus to the sentence: what name translator or new writer of a voice, both add more than the Author did at first write: and also what sentence is nothing: and what is numbering: their number is tenen, whose figured follo. The first marked thus: the Croches call comma, by which the Latines and other vulgaris have blased a strike thus/ore thus, which is the space at the home, fiste and shuene between two letters, and so accounting a full sentence, as a complete bone: these two piches may well signifie a great part thereof; as of the body, may be taken from the ancle to the lomb, and from the knee to the bulke or buttock tope: and knowing thereby that there is more to come, whereas the other strike of comma, both in manner denotes the small parts (between the topes) of the hands and face.

And the last of these there is a pricketh thus, to signifie the end of a full and sentence, as the head and face are the extreme endes of a body, which pich the Croches and Latines with many other nations doe bie:

Hart goes on to speak of the parenthesis (), the interrogative (?) and the admirativel !

9.7 The development of the standard language

In Chapters 4 to 7, we saw that there was no ME standard language, but a number of interrelated dialects of the language. English today consists of interrelated dialects, spread throughout the world, but in England people now tend to regard the Standard English dialect as 'the English language', and look on the other regional and social dialects as substandard or inferior. Hence they talk of 'good English' or 'correct English', and devalue the status of the regional dialects.

This point of view is not new: we have seen evidence of concern over the differences between the dialects at least as far back as the fourteenth century, in John of Trevisa's discussion of the language (see Texts 29 and 30). Both Chaucer in the 1380s and Caxton in the 1480s refer to the 'diversity' of the English language.
A written standard was the first to develop. Educated men and women wrote in the standard but continued to speak in the dialect of their region. John Aubrey, writing in the mid-seventeenth century, says of Sir Walter Raleigh (1552–1618):

Old Sir Thomas Malory, one of the Justices of the King’s bench tempore Caroli I et II, knew Sir Walter, and I have heard him say, that notwithstanding his so great Mastery in Style and his conversation with the learnedest and politest persons, yet he spake broad Devonshire to his dying day.

Aubrey implies that this was unusual, and that gentlemen in his time did not speak in regional dialects at court. There is also the hint that the dialect does not somehow fit with learning and polite behaviour.

Standard vocabulary and grammar eventually spread to spoken English as well as written. We have already noted in Chapter 8 how, by the end of the fifteenth century, there is less and less evidence in printed books and in manuscripts of the range of dialects of English. Regional and social varieties still flourished, but the evidence for them is much more difficult to find. There are no written records of colloquial speech as authentic as sound recording makes possible for present-day English. The language of informal letters or the dialogue of characters in prose drama is probably the nearest we can get to everyday speech of the time.

9.7.1 ‘The best and most perfite English’

John Hart in An Orthographie insisted that writing should represent speech: ‘we must be ruled by our speech’. But he also recognised the problem that the diversity of dialects posed in using his new alphabet to write English as it sounded – whose dialect do you choose?

Activity 9.9

Read the following paragraph from Hart’s book and discuss his solution to the problem of choice of dialect.

TEXT 80 – John Hart’s An Orthographie (iv)

...notwithstandinge he should have a strong opinion of me, that should thinke by the praufices, I ment any thinge shoule be print in London in the maner of Northen or Western spyches: but if any maere minded at Medocellian Roman Line, or Woman in Camembale, to write or print his name ther, who coule not beholde nyma by his Orthographie: to terme his neighbours according to their mother spych, pe, though he went to London, to thameater it were, he could be no more attenede to see his writing fo, than if he were present to heare him speake: and there is no doubt, but that the English spych, which the learned not in the ruled Latin, together with those which are acquainted with the vulgaris Italian, French, and Spanish too dicke, is that spych which every reseasonable English man, told the nearest he can, frame his tongue therunto but such as have not conferencie by the limite base, no experience of reading, no in reading no certaintie what every letter shoule be founden, can never come to the knowledge and dicke, of that best and most perfite English which by Conscience I will the nearest to folowe, learning many a

9.7.2 ‘The vsuall speach of the Court’

George Puttenham’s advice to writers about choosing the best variety of English was briefly quoted in Section 7.1. Here is a longer extract which illustrates Puttenham’s awareness of the range of available regional and social varieties before Standard English was a fully accepted and defined variety.

TEXT 81 – George Puttenham’s The Arte of English Poesie, 1589

...But after a speach is fully fashioned to the common understanding, & accepted by consent of a whole countrey & nation, it is called a language, & receaueth none allowed alteration, but by extraordinary occasions by little & little, as it were insensibly bringing in of many corruptions that crepe along with the time. This part in our maker or Poet must be heedfully looked unto, that it be natural, pure, and the most vsuall of all his countrey: and for the same purpose rather that which is spo-ken in the kings Court, or in the good towns and Cities within the land, then in the Marches and frontiers, or in port towns, where strangers haunt for traffike fake, or yet in Universities where Schollers vs many peculith affection of words out of the primavine languages, or finally, in any vplandish village or corner of a Realme, where is no reft of but of poore rusticall or vici-

Text 80 is clear evidence of the advocacy of educated London speech as ‘the best and most perfite’, spoken by ‘euerly reasonable English man’.
Exercise 9.10

(i) Describe the assumptions about language that are evident in the text. Comment particularly on the following:
(a) His use of the word corruptions to describe changes in a language.
(b) The reference to a language that is natural, pure and the most usual.
(c) His contrasting of good townes and Cities with other places.
(d) His references to the inferior sort of men and women.
(e) The attitude implied in any speech used beyond the river of Trent.

(ii) Are Puttenham's attitudes still current today?

Puttenham was expressing a point of view that is probably common in all societies. There is evidence earlier in the sixteenth century in the books on spelling and grammar, which Puttenham mentions, that diversity in the language worried writers and scholars. The implications of this point of view are, however, more serious, because it is not limited simply to specifying a choice of language for writers:

- Varieties of the language are marked by social class and education. Social classes speak differently and can be recognised by their speech. Written and spoken English have prestige varieties.
- Once a written standard language becomes the norm for speech in the educated class, the division between that class and regional dialect speakers is complete.

Such differences of language are a part of every society. Standardisation of language is a necessary development in a society, but brings with it social consequences. This development of a standard is, therefore, the background to our continuing study of the development of EMnE in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.

9.8 Evidence for some sixteenth century varieties of English

9.8.1 National dialects

The dialogue of characters in plays cannot be taken as completely authentic evidence of the spoken language, but may indicate the more obvious dialectal features of speech. In Shakespeare's The Life of Henry the Fifth, there are comic episodes involving four captains - Gower, Fluellen, Mackerorice and Jamy. Their names give them away as an Englishman, a Welshman, an Irishman and a Scotsman.

Exercise 9.11

Describe the dialectic features of the characters' speech which is indicated by the spelling, vocabulary and syntax of the dialogue in Text 82.
9.8.2 Using thou/thee and ye/you

In OE, there were both singular and plural forms of the 2nd person pronoun, *pu/þu* and *gelcrow/oneway*. This was at first a simple contrast of number – *pu* was used to address one person and *ye* more than one – or of case – *pu/ge* as subject, *petus* as object and *pu/denow* as possessive. However, it developed into a means of marking the relationship between the speaker and the listener which the language has now lost, and so it is difficult for us to respond to the social connotations of *thou/thee* and *ye/you* in ME and EModE writing.

The pronoun *ye/you* came to be spoken to a single person to mark a relationship that was either formal or one of superiority of rank, and *thou/thee* became more informal and intimate. A master or mistress used *thou* to a servant, but the servant replied with ye. It remained conventional to address God as *thou*, as in the Church of England's *Book of Common Prayer*, from the 1540s. The 1611 translation of the Bible preserved the contrasting use of *thou* and *you* as singular and plural, which remained familiar to readers and churchgoers until the 1660s (when the *New English Bible* began to be used), long after *thou* had ceased to be used in speech.

(Note that the distinction between *ye* as subject and *you* as object became confused during the sixteenth century, so that they were virtually interchangeable. You can find plenty of examples in Shakespeare.)

The choice between using *thou* or *you* was part of a quite complex way of charting the course of a relationship, and if we are not aware of this, then we miss something important in, for example, Shakespeare's plays, as the extract from *The Tragedy of King Lear* (see Text 84) shows. Section 10.3.2 shows how the Quaker George Fox used *thou* in a way that appeared to insult others.

This social meaning of *thou* and *ye* has been established well before the sixteenth century. Here is an example from the 1390s in Chaucer's 'The Knight's Tale'. Arcite, in prison, addresses the gods Mars and Juno at first with *thow* as individuals and then with *ye* as a pair. Immediately, he goes on to address his absent love Emelye, whom he has seen but not yet met, with *ye*. He is the suppliant and she is far above him in his estimation, so *thow* would not be appropriate, as it would mark an established intimacy.

*Alias thou* Jelle Mars, alias Iuno,
*Thus hath yeure* se eure lynge at forc ... lines 1561–2

*Ye sleen me with yeure* eyen, Emelye,
*Ye been the cause wherfore I dye* ... lines 1569–70

Elsewhere in *The Canterbury Tales*, the Host addresses the Cook with *thow*:

*Now tel on, gentil Roger, by thy name*  
*But yet I praye thee be nat wroth for game* ... lines 4345–6

but uses *ye* to the Monk, his social superior:

*Now tel the ye, sire monk, if that ye konne* ... line 3114

In English today, we have only one 2nd person pronoun, *you/thee*, which is used to address both one and more than one person, and carries no connotations of power or intimacy. The former singular forms *thou/thee* are archaic.

9.8.3 Regional dialects

By the end of the sixteenth century, the educated language of London was clearly established as the standard for writing in England, so that there is little evidence of the regional dialects apart from occasional references. Here is another extract from Richard Verstegan's *A Restitution of Decayed Intelligence* (see Text 76) which gives us just a little information about regional dialects. He is discussing 'allegation and varente' in related languages like Danish, Norwegian and Swedish, and is saying that they do not borrow from any extraneous language (the word *extraneous* here meant 'outside the boundaries', that is, foreign).

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**TEXT 83 – Richard Verstegan's A Restitution of Decayed Intelligence, 1605**

This is a thing that safely may happen in so spictious a young as this, it beeing spoken in so many different countries and regions, when we see that in some seueral partes of England it icle, both the names of things and pronuntiations of woords are somwhat diuerse, and that among the countrey people that neuer borrow any woords out of the Latin or French, and of this different pronuntiation one example in stede of many shal suffice, as this: for pronouncing according as one would say at London, I would eate more cheesse if I had it, the northern man saith, He shall eat more cheesse and the weste man saith: Chube eat more cheesse an chab it. Lo hear thee three different pronuntiations in our owne countrey in one thing, and heereof many the lyke examples mighte be alleaged.

---

**Activity 9.12**

Identify and describe the differences between the three dialectal sentences quoted in Text 83.

There is little evidence of contemporary regional dialect in Shakespeare's plays, but an example can be found in *The Tragedy of King Lear*. Edgar, the Duke of Gloucester's son, banished by King Lear, disguises himself as a madman – a Tom a Bedlam. The speech he assumes is often incoherent but not obviously dialectal, for example:

Awai, the folowe fiend folowes me, thorough the sharpe hathorne blowes the cold wind, goe to thy cold bed and warme thee.

but at one point, defending his blinded father, his speech becomes clearly dialectal for one short episode.

In the following extract, Glossier does not recognise Edgar as his son, and cannot see him. The Steward believes Edgar to be a beggar. The facsimile is taken from the folio of 1685.
TEXT 84 – Shakespeare’s The Tragedy of King Lear

Glou. Now good Sir, what are you?
Edg. A most poor man, made tame to fortunes blows
Who, by the Art of known, and feeling sorrows,
Am pregnant to good pity. Give me your hand,
I'll lead you to some biding.
Glou. Hearty thanks:
The bounty, and the benison of Heaven
To boot, and boot.

Enter Steward.

Stew. A proclaim’d prize: most happy.
That eye’s head of thine, was first fram’d flesh
To raife my fortunes. Thou old, unhappy traitor,
Brieit thy self remember: the Sword is out
That muft destroy thee.
Glou. Now let thy friendly hand
Put strength enough to’t.
Stew. Wherefore, bold Perzent,
Darft thou support a publish’d traitor? hence,
Left that th’infection of his fortune take
Like hold on thee. Let go his Arm.
Edg. Chill not let go Zir,
Without vurther caison.
Stew. Let go, Slave, or thou dy’st.
Edg. Good Gentleman go your gate, and let poor volk
pass: and chud ha’been zwagged out of my life, twould
ha’been zo long as ’twas, by a worthing. Nay, come not
near th’old man: keep out the vor’reye, or else see
whither your Custard, or my ballow be the harder; chill be plain
with you.
Stew. Out Dunghil.
Edg. Child pick your teeth Zir: come, no matter vor
your foyns.
Stew. Slave thou haft flain me: villain, take my purse;
If ever thou wilt thrive, bury my body,
And give the Letters which thou findst about me,
To Edward Earl of Glifier: Eee him out
Upon the English party. Oh untimely death, death.
Edg. I know thee wel. A serviable Villain,
As duteous to the vices of thy Milfris,
As badnifs would define.
Glou. What, is he dead?
Edg. Sit you down Father: reft you.

(A detailed description can be found in Commentary 14 of the Text Commentary Book.)

Activity 9.13

(i) Which of Richard Verstegan’s examples of dialect in Text 83 does Edgar’s speech resemble?

(ii) The scene of the play is set in Kent. The words ice try stand for hol try. Salt for shall and
gate for war are both northern forms. Is Shakespeare accurately reproducing a regional
dialect?

(iii) Describe the differences in Edgar’s language, when he is talking to Gloster and the
Steward, which mark it as a dialect.

(iv) Explain the changing use of the 2nd person pronouns thou/thee/ye/you and ye/you/your.

9.9 English at the end of the sixteenth century

Reading texts from the sixteenth century onwards, we find fewer and fewer features of
vocabulary and grammar that are archaic and unfamiliar, and it becomes more difficult to
specify exactly what differences there are between older and contemporary English. This is
especially so if the spelling of older texts is modernised. Facsimiles or exact reproductions
make the language look more unfamiliar than it really is. But it is worth trying to sum up the
principal differences between English in 1600 and Standard English today. Most of them have
already been described in relation to the printed texts.

9.9.1 Spelling and punctuation

OE and ME <p> was no longer in use, except in the conventional abbreviations for the and
that, <pc> and <pd>
<tp> and <tv> were still used for both vowel /u/ and consonant /v/, determined by their position
in the written or printed word. Similarly, long and short <s> continued to be written
according to their position in the word.
Letter <p> was not yet in general use for the consonant, only as a variant of letter <st>.
Letters <e> and <ee> were generally interchangeable for the vowel /i/.
The redundant final <ee> was still added to many words, long after the unstressed vowel
/æ/ had disappeared.
The comma <,> colon <,> and full stop (punkt) <.> were used, with question and
exclamation marks <?> <!>. The virgule or strike </> was no longer in general use by 1600.
The apostrophe <’> to mark the possessive had not yet appeared.

9.9.2 Pronunciation

The raising or diphthongisation of long vowels in the South and Midlands (the Great Vowel
Shift) had taken place, but was not yet complete. For some time, until after the sixteenth
century, there were no words with the long back vowel /a:/.
Words <a> were generally pronounced /æ/, <aa> words /æ/ and <oa>
words /o:/, but there was considerable irregularity and variation between dialects. Many words
spelt with <ee> and <oo> were pronounced with either a long or a short vowel in different
dialects. This diversity led to a growing demand for regularity and standardisation.
9.9.3 Vocabulary

The adoption of large numbers of Latin words into the written language had been made easy because of the previous adoption of hundreds of French words. At the same time, a number of new prefixes and suffixes were also adopted into the language and used with English words; for example:

circum- non- -able -anti- -ent
co- pre- -acy -ate
dis- re- -age -ess
e-en/em- sem- -al -ean
inter- sub- -ance -ace
-ancy/-ency -let

Words were also adopted from other languages, some through travel and exploration, others from foreign literature and culture. For example, the following list contains a very small selection of words adopted before 1600 from Latin, Greek, French, Italian, Spanish, Low German, Scandinavian, Scots Gaelic, Persian and Arabic. Many were adopted directly, via another language. Greek words were often adopted through their use in Latin, for instance.

![Activity 9.14](image)

Find the source of the following words from an etymological dictionary.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Alanac</th>
<th>Carnaval</th>
<th>Medium</th>
<th>Serviette</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Armada</td>
<td>Chorus</td>
<td>Milliner</td>
<td>Silt</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arsenic</td>
<td>Cipher</td>
<td>Pickle</td>
<td>Slogan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Batten</td>
<td>Galleon</td>
<td>Plaid</td>
<td>Taffeta</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bog</td>
<td>Genus</td>
<td>Redeem</td>
<td>Traffic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bonnet</td>
<td>Jasmine</td>
<td>Rhythm</td>
<td>Vacuum</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Buoy</td>
<td>Lemon</td>
<td>Scrag</td>
<td>Waggan</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

9.9.4 Grammar

In general terms, the grammar of sixteenth century English is the same as that of ME; only a few features mark it as an earlier form.

**Personal pronouns**

Both 2nd person pronouns were still in use, thou/they/thine and ye/she/you/thou (see Section 9.8.2), and the neuter pronoun hit/this.

The unstressed form a was written for he, as in Shakespeare's *The Life of Henry the Fifth*, when Mistress Quickly describes Falstaff's death:

> a made a finer end, and went away and it had become any Christone Childe: a parted ou'n just betweene Twelue and One ... and a babild of greene fields ... so a cryed out, God, God, God, three or fourt times ... so a bad me lay more Clothes on his feet ... 

**Relative pronouns**

That and which were most common. Which was used with a human subject – *Our Father which art in heaven ... – but who/whom began to be used in the late sixteenth century.

**Verbs**

In the verb phrase, the modal system was established, with the verbs will/would, shall/should, can/could, must/must, may/might/mought and must/must. The passive was fully in use.

**Perfect aspect** was expressed with have, and also with be when the verb was intransitive, as in *I am come*. Some complex verb phrases were recorded but they were still to develop in general use.

The 3rd person singular present tense was marked by both <eth> (the southern form) and <e> (the northern form); for example:

> Beate doeth vanish Age, as if new borne.<br>And gues the Cruch the Cradles infanite.<br>O tis the Sunne that maketh all things shine.<

but <e> eventually became standard. The King James Bible of 1611 kept the old-fashioned <eth> suffix, as the translation was based on the early sixteenth century translations of Tyndale and Coverdale. Poets continued to use both forms, because they provided different metrical and syllabic patterns. There is evidence in William Bulloker's *Boke at Large* that both the <eth> and <e> suffixes were acceptable:

> And, s, for, eth, may cahged be<br>to yeild som vers his grace truly.

**Interrogatives and negatives**

The inversion of subject and verb in the simple present and past for the interrogative was still common – *knowest thou?*, *came he?* – but the MnE form with *do* had also come into use – *doest thou know?*, *did he come?*

Similarly, the negative *not* was still used with inversion – *I know not* – but was now also used with *do* – *I do not know*.

It is at about this time that the multiple negation ceased to be standard usage, although it was and is normal usage in the dialects.

**There and it**

The filling of the subject slot in a clause with the 'dummy' *there* or *it* had been established well before the beginning of the century, as in the following extract from Chaucer:

> Whil vs ther was a doctour of phisik<br>In al this world na was thor noon hym lik ...<br>It is nat honeste, it may mogh auunce<br>For to deten with no sych phabol ... 

and this led to the loss of the OE and ME impersonal verb constructions without a subject, such as:

> Me thynketh it accordant to resoun ...

A yeman he hadde and seruantz namo<br>At that tyme for hym liste ryde so. 

which were replaced with *It seems to me ... and It pleased him to ride so*.

**Nouns**

The plural with <e> or <es> was the regular form, and most <en> forms like *eyren* (eggs) and *shoon* (shoes) had gone.
10. Early Modern English III – the seventeenth century

In Chapters 7 to 9, we followed the establishment of educated London English as a standard language. Although all varieties of seventeenth and twentieth century writing are clearly contrasted in style, the underlying grammatical differences between seventeenth century and present-day English are relatively small, so there are fewer developments in the grammar to record. As the spelling of words becomes more and more regular, the look of the printed page becomes more familiar, although we still find less conformity to a standard spelling and pronunciation in handwriting. The vocabulary is, of course, always losing and gaining words according to the needs of communication.

The remaining chapters of the book therefore consist of a series of texts that provide some typical examples of the uses of the language – ordinary uses, letters and diaries for example, and examples of literary prose, both colloquial and rhetorical, together with a section on some of the evidence for changes in pronunciation during the century.

10.1 More evidence for changes in pronunciation

All living languages are in a constant state of change in their vocabulary and grammar. A standard language, however, changes more slowly, because new forms tend to be resisted, and the very fact of it being standard means that it is regarded as fixed and unchangeable.

At the same time as the establishment of a standard in vocabulary and grammar, social standards of pronunciation are also set up, and the speech of those with prestige or authority is imitated by others. In this way, there is a polarisation of opinion in attitudes to language use, which is derived from differences of social class. In the seventeenth century, rural and artisan speech was referred to as \textit{barbarous}, meaning uneducated or unpolished as against \textit{polite} or \textit{civilised}. In England today, if a man or woman is said to have 'a good accent', we would understand what is meant, although we might find it hard to describe objectively. It is commonly asserted that such speech 'has no accent', but to say of someone that 'she speaks with an accent' is to imply a non-standard or regional way of speaking.

The evidence for pronunciation is not as easy to interpret as that for vocabulary, spelling and grammar, in spite of a series of books on spelling and pronunciation in the seventeenth century, because, unlike today, there was no International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA) to provide an agreed reference for the relationship of sounds to letters. We shall study some of this evidence in Section 10.9.

Other evidence comes from a study of the rhymes in poetry (see an earlier example from Chaucer in the late fourteenth century in Section 7.3.3); some of the rhymes in John Dryden’s verse, written at the end of the seventeenth century, are examined in Section 10.10.3.

10.1.1 Occasional spellings in handwritten sources

Another indirect source of knowledge about changing pronunciation is in the spelling of written manuscripts. Printers in the seventeenth century tended to regularise spelling name and more, even though there were still variations and no fixed standard of spelling had been established. In letters, however, even educated writers sometimes used ‘phonetic’ spellings, and these provide some clues to their pronunciation. The concept of a ‘spelling mistake’ had not yet been established.

In what follows, we consider a small selection of ‘occasional spellings’ which are evidence of differences in pronunciation. The range of differences in dialectal pronunciation would have been much greater then than now. People moved from all parts of the country into London and their varieties of dialectal accent were in competition with each other for acceptability. Sometimes it was the ‘vulgar’ speech that eventually became the social standard.

The following activity is designed to show the kind of evidence that scholars draw upon in building up their knowledge of changes in the language. The words do not come from any one particular dialect. The ME source, the spelling found in a written seventeenth century source and the MnE reflex are given for each word.

![Activity 10.1](image)

What changes in the pronunciation of the vowels do the spellings of each group show?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ME</th>
<th>Written form</th>
<th>MnE reflex</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>/æ/</td>
<td>ceme</td>
<td>came</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>came</td>
<td>cradle</td>
<td>cradle</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>take</td>
<td>take</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>/e/</td>
<td>symed</td>
<td>seemed</td>
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<tr>
<td>seemed</td>
<td>styeel</td>
<td>steeple</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>stepel</td>
<td>flet</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>discrete</td>
<td>discrete</td>
<td>discreet</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>retiree</td>
<td>retreat</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>/oi/</td>
<td>gine</td>
<td>join</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>jomen</td>
<td>poison</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>pursin/poison</td>
<td>pyson</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>repisson</td>
<td>rejoice</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>flied/flied</td>
<td>defoyled</td>
<td>defiled</td>
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<tr>
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<td>certun</td>
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<tr>
<td>cern</td>
<td>darch</td>
<td>darch</td>
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<td>divert</td>
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<td>diuert</td>
<td>learn</td>
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<tr>
<td>lern</td>
<td>marcy</td>
<td>mercy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>meri</td>
<td>person</td>
<td>person/parson</td>
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<tr>
<td>persoun</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Although consonants are more stable than vowels, there have been a number of changes for which there is evidence in written letters.
Activity 10.2
Describe any changes of pronunciation in the consonants indicated by the spelling in the following words.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ME</th>
<th>Written word</th>
<th>MnE reflex</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>daughter</td>
<td>dafter</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>bough</td>
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<td>bought</td>
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<td>fassoun</td>
<td>fessycchen</td>
<td>fashion</td>
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<td>instruction</td>
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<td>instruction</td>
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<td>issue</td>
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<td>suspiscous</td>
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<td>suit</td>
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<td>morsel</td>
<td>moste</td>
<td>morsel</td>
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<td>person</td>
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<tr>
<td>scarsliche</td>
<td>skasey</td>
<td>scarcely</td>
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<td>excepte</td>
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<td>often</td>
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<tr>
<td>wastcotte</td>
<td>wastcote</td>
<td>wastcote</td>
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<td>(16th C)</td>
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<tr>
<td>linnene</td>
<td>linnd</td>
<td>linen</td>
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<td>los</td>
<td>losse</td>
<td>loss</td>
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<tr>
<td>sysn</td>
<td>synst</td>
<td>since</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>vermine</td>
<td>varment</td>
<td>vermin</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Data from Studies in English Rhymes from Surrey to Pope, H. C. Wyld, 1923)

Activity 10.3
What is the stress pattern of the italicised words in the following lines from Shakespeare, and in present-day speech?

TEXT 85 – Shakespeare

1. ... I do conjure thee,  
   Who art the Table wherein all my thoughts 
   Are visibly Character’d.

2. Ay, and perjured, she persuers so:

3. Goe to thy Ladys grace and call hers thence,
   Or at the least, in hers, sepulcher thine.

4. Madam: if your heart be so obturate,
   Vouchsafe me yet your Picture for my loue,

5. Nephew, what means this passionate discourse?

6. She bears a Dukes Reuenues on her back,
   And in her heart she scorns our Pourtie:

7. Peregrines Protector, dangerous Peer ... 

8. Away: Though parting be a Great full corruce,
   It is applied to a deathfull wound.

9. Close vp his eyes, and draw the Curtaine close, 
   And let vs all to Meditation.

10. Is it for him you do enuie me so?

10.1.2 Evidence of change from musical settings

Sir Walter Raleigh's poem *What Is Our Life?* was set to music by Orlando Gibbons in 1612. The first two lines are:

What is our life? a play of passion,

Our mirth the music of division ...

The music sets *passion* to three syllables on separate notes, *pastriom, and division* to four, *divisiom*, so the pronunciation of the last two syllables of each word must have been */-l/, */-m/* and */-i/*, with secondary stress on the final syllable */-om*, as well as primary stress, as in today's pronunciation, */-om* and */-i/*s. This loss of secondary stress in many words marks one of the differences between sixteenth and seventeenth century pronunciation and today's.

10.1.3 Evidence of change from verse

Hundreds of lines of verse were written in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries by William Shakespeare. Ben Jonson and other dramatists used the iambic pentameter line, which in its regular form consisted of ten syllables of alternating unstressed and stressed syllables, as in Raleigh's poem and in these lines of Shakespeare:

What say / you, can / you lose / the Gen / thoum?

This night / you shall / behold / him at / our feast

This gives us the pattern of stressed syllables in words of two or more syllables, and shows whether the distribution of stress has since changed. For example, the word *proportion* in these lines:

I thought King Henry had resembled thee,  
In Courage, Courtship, and *Proportion;*

must have four syllables to complete the line:

In Cour- / age Court- / ship and / propor- / ti- on

and reinforces the musical evidence about the pronunciation of *passion* and *division.*

10.2 Sir Thomas Browne

10.2.1 Religio Medici

Sir Thomas Browne (1605–82), after studying medicine on the Continent, practised as a physician in Norwich for the rest of his life, but he is remembered today as a writer. His first book *Religio Medici* ('the faith of a doctor') had been written as 'a private Exercise directed to myself', but a pirated edition had been published 'in a most depraved Copy', so he decided to publish his own version.

The book explores the tension that existed then between religious faith and new scientific ideas. This conflict had been expressed earlier by John Donne in 1611 in *An Anatomy of the World*:

And new Philosophy calls all in doubt,  
The Element of fire is quite put out;  
The Sun is lost, and th'Earth, and no mans wit  
Can well direct him where to looke for it ...  
Tis all in pieces, all coherence gone;  
All just supply, and all Relation.

The following short extract from *Religio Medici* expresses Sir Thomas Browne's religious faith.

TEXT 86 – Sir Thomas Browne's Religio Medici, 1642

As for those wingy Mysteries in Divinity, and airy subtleties in Religion, which have unhing'd the brains of better heads, they never stretched the *Pta Mater (= a membrane in the brain) of mine. Methinks there be not impossibilities enough in Religion for an active faith; the deepest Mysteries ours contains have not only been
illustrated, but maintained, by Syllogism (= a logical argument consisting of two propositions and a conclusion) and the rule of Reason. I love to lose my self in a mystery, to pursue my Reason to an O altitudin! 'Tis my solitary recreation to pose my apprehension with these involved Ængima's and riddles of the Trinity, with Incarnations, and Resurrection. I can answer all the Objections of Satan and my rebellious reason with that odd resolution I learned of Tertullian, Certum est quia impossible est (= Latin for 'It is certain because it is impossible').

Students of literature value Browne's writings for their style rather than for their content, and style is of interest to students of language too, in showing how a writer exploits and expands the resources of the language of the time.

10.2.2 Vulgar Errors

Sir Thomas Browne's learning is illustrated in the volumes of Pseudodoxia Epidemica, or Enquiries into very many received tenets and commonly presumed truths, which are more popularly known as Vulgar Errors – vulgar in the sense of common. He examines a variety of beliefs that were commonly held in the light of authority (what had been written about the subject), rational thought and experience. The outcome is often, in a modern reader, quaint and amusing, but the book gives us valuable insights into the 'world view' of the early seventeenth century, which was still largely a late medieval view in spite of the beginnings of scientific experiment at that time.

The following extract shows the alternation of direct observation and appeal to antique authorities (now long since forgotten), which he applies to the problem 'what is Sperma-Ceti? a substance found in whales and used both in medicine and the manufacture of candles. Notice also his literal acceptance of the Old Testament account of Jonah and the whale. As a point of minor interest, he uses the phrases sixty foot and two pound, which today are arguably non-standard (for the OE origins of this construction see Section 2.7.3).

TEXT 87 – Sir Thomas Browne's Vulgar Errors (i)

What Sperma-Ceti is, men might justly doubt, since the learned Hufmannus in his work of Thirty years, saith plainly, Nescio quid sit (Latin for 'I do not know what it is'). And therefore need not wonder at the variety of opinions; while some conceived it to be flos maris (Latin for 'a flower of the sea'), and many, a bituminous substance floating upon the sea.

That it was not the spawn of the Whale, according to vulgar conceit, or nominal appellation (name given without reference to fact) Physiographers have always doubted, not easily conceiving the Seminal humour (= sperm, humour = body fluid) of Animals, should be inflammable; or of a floating nature.

That it proceedeth from a Whale, beside the relation of Clusius, and other learned observers, was indubitably determined, not many years since by a Sperma-Ceti Whale, cast upon our coast of Norfolk. Which, to lead on further inquiry, we cannot omit to inform. It contained no less than sixty foot in length, the head somewhat peculiar, with a large prominence over the mouth; teeth only in the lower Jaw, received into fleshly sockets in the upper. The Weight of the largest about two pound; No gristly substances in the mouth, commonly called Whale-hones; Only two short fins seated forwardly on the back; the eyes but small, the pizzle large, and prominent. A lesser Whale of this kind above twenty years ago, was cast upon the same shore.

The disposition of this Whale seems omitted by Geisser, Rondelenius, and the first Editions of Aldrovandius; but describeth the Latin impression of Pareus, in the Exegetes of Clusius, and the natural history of Nirenbergius; but more amply in icons and figures of Johnstania.

Out of the head of this Whale, having been dead divers days, and under putrefaction, flowed streams of oil and Sperma-Ceti; which was carefully taken, and preserved by the Coasters. But upon breaking up, the Magazin of Spermu-Ceti, was found in the head lying in folds and courses, in the bigness of goose eggs, encompassed with large flakie substances, as large as a mans head, in form of horny-combs, very white and full of oil ... And this many conceive to have been the fish which swallowed Jonas. Although for the largeness of the mouth, and frequency in those seas, it may possibly be the Lusans.

Some part of the Sperma-Ceti found on the shore was pure, and needed little depuration (= purifying); a great part mixed with fetid oil, needing good preparation, and frequent expression, to bring it to a flakey consistency. And not only the head, but other parts contained it. For the carcous parts being roasted, the oil dropped out, an astringious (= greasy, like lard) and thicker parts subsiding; the oil it self contained also much in it, and still after many years some is obtained from it ...

(A full analysis of the text is given in Commentary 15 in the Text Commentary Book.)

Activity 10.4

(i) Discuss how the vocabulary and grammatical structures that Browne uses in Text 87 tend to make the style of his writing formal and unlike ordinary speech.
(ii) Identify those parts of the text in which Browne appeals to either authority, reason or experience.

It was a 'vulgar error' of the times that a badger's legs were longer on one side than the other, and Browne discusses this also.

TEXT 88 – Sir Thomas Browne's Vulgar Errors (ii)

That a Brock or badger hath the legs on one side shorter then of the other, though an opinion perhaps not very ancient, is yet very general; received not only by Theorists and unexperienced believers, but assented unto by most who have the opportunity to behold and hunt them daily. And for my own part, upon indifferent enquiry, I cannot discover this difference, although the regardable side be defined, and the brevity by most impugned unto the left.

Again, it seems no ease affrunt unto reason, and generally repugnant unto the course of Nature: for if we survey the total set of Animals, we may in their legs, or Organs of progression, observe an equality of length, and parity of Numeration; that is, not any to have an odd leg, or the supporters and mowers of one side not exactly answered by the other. Perfect and viviparous quadrupeds, so standing in their position of proneness, that the opposite points of Neighbour-legs consitis in the same plane: and a line descending from their Nadel intersects at right angles the axis of the Earth ...

(There is a complete list of the vocabulary of Text 88, and a commentary on the activity, in Commentary 15 in the Text Commentary Book.)

Activity 10.5

Discuss the distribution of words of OE, French and Latin derivation in Text 87 or 88, and their effect upon the formality and style of the writing.
10.3 George Fox's Journal

George Fox (1624–91) was the son of a Leicestershire weaver. He experienced a religious conversion, an intense spiritual conviction of 'The Inner Light of Christ', and left home in 1643 to become a preacher and the founder of the Society of Friends, or Quakers. At this time, however, failure to conform to the doctrines and practice of the Church meant civil penalties and often persecution. He was imprisoned many times, and it was during his long stay in Worcester jail between 1673 and 1674 that he dictated an account of his experiences to his fellow prisoner Thomas Lamer, who was Fox's son-in-law.

Fox's journal is not only a moving account of his life but also, for students of language, an insight into everyday spoken language of the late seventeenth century, as it was taken down from Fox's spoken narrative.

Some extracts follow in which Fox speaks of some of his many clashes with individuals and institutions.

10.3.1 The origin of the name 'Quaker'

The name 'Quaker' was originally a term of abuse, but it has since been adopted by the Friends and its original connotations lost. Fox and his followers called themselves Children of the Light, Friends of Truth or simply Friends. George Fox explains in his journal how the name Quaker came about:

... this was Justice Bennett of Darby ye first called Us Quakers because wee bid ye Word of God & this was in ye year 1650.

Fox referred to this in a letter addressed to Justice Bennett and reproduced in his journal.

TEXT 89 – The Journal of George Fox, 1650

Collonell Bennett that called the servants of the Lord Quakers
C.F. paper to him: Collonell Bennett of Darbe 1650

... thou wast the first man in the nation that gave the people of god the name quaker
And called them quakers, when thou Examined George in thy house att Darby
(which they had never the name before) now A Justice to wrong name people; what
may the brutish people doe, if such A one A Justice of peace give names to men,
but thou art Lifted upp proud and haughty and soe turnest Against the Just
one given upp to misname the saints, and to make lies for others to believe.

Thus saith the LORD, The heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool; where is
the house that ye build unto me? and where is the place of my rest? For all those
things hath mine hand made, and all those things have been, saith the LORD: but this
man will I look, even to him that is poor and of a contrite spirit, and trembleth at
my word. (Isaiah 66: 1–2)

(The Journal of George Fox, Norman Penney (ed.), Cambridge UP, 1911)

The spelling and punctuation of the written journal are typical of the time in their lack of conformity to the developing printed standard, but if a transcription is made using present-day spelling and punctuation, it becomes easier to examine the features of vocabulary and grammar that mark the narrative style.

Transcription

... Thou wast the first man in the nation that gave the people of God the name 'Quaker',
and called them 'Quakers', when thou examinest George in thy house at Darby
(which they had never the name before). Now, a Justice to wrong name people! What
may the brutish people do, if such a one – a Justice of Peace – give names to men? But
thou art lifted up proud and haughty, and so turnest against the just. (Thou art) one
given up to misname the saints, and to make lies for others to believe ...

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There can be no doubt that this is a record of speech, with its expressions 'now a Justice to wrong name people', and the verb 'wrong name', but its only marked difference from ME is the use of 'thou' in addressing the Justice, which Fox insisted upon.

10.3.2 Saying thou to people

The use of thou/thine/thine became old-fashioned and out of date in polite society during the seventeenth century. For example, in Section 10.5, you will see that Dorothy Osborne always uses you when writing to her future husband, in the 1650s. The grammarian John Wallis in 1653 considered that the use of thou was 'usually contemptuous, or familiarly caressing' and that 'custom' required the plural you when addressing one person.

George Fox took a different view and published a pamphlet in 1660 called:

A Door-Bell for Teachers and Professors to Learn Singular and Plural; You to many and
Thou to One: Singular One, Thou; Plural Many, You

He believed that the use of thou to address one person was a mark of equality between people, whereas it had long been used to mark social superiority or inferiority.

TEXT 90 – George Fox's A Battle-Door for Teachers, 1660

For all you Doctors, Teachers, Schollars, and School-masters, that teach people in your Hebrew, Greek, Latin, and English Grammars, Plural and Singular; that is, Thou to one, and You to many, and when they learn it, they must not practice it: what good doth your teaching do them? for he is a Novice, and an Idiot, and a fool called by You, that practiseth it; Plural, You to many; and Singular, Thou to one.

Now People, What good doth all your giving money to these Schoolmasters, Teachers, and Doctors, to teach your children Singular and Plural, in their Accidence, and Grammars? ... If your child's practice which he hath learned at School, which you have paid for, is he called a Clown, and unmannerly, and ill bred ...

Activity 10.6

(i) Rewrite the following two extracts from Fox's journal using present-day spelling and punctuation. (Text 91 describes events at Patrioting in the East Riding of Yorkshire; Text 92 describes what happened when Fox was brought before a JP)

(ii) Why was the woman 'something strange' and why did the JP ask whether Fox was not 'Mased or fonde'?

(iii) Explain Fox's use of the word meate when referring to milk and cream.

(iv) Explain the use of letter <y> in the words ye and y'.

TEXT 91 – The Journal of George Fox, 1651 (i)

... And afterwards I passed away through ye Country & att night came to an Inn: & there was a rude Company of people & I askt ye woman if she had any Meate to bringe me some: & shee was something strange because I saide thee & thou to her: soo I askt her if shee had any milke but shee denyed it: & I askt her if shee had any creame & shee denyed it also though I did not greatly like such meate but onely to try her.

And there stood a chorne in her house: & a little boy put his hande Into ye chorne & pullet it doune: & threw all ye creame In ye floore before my eyes: & soe it manifested ye woman to bee a lyar: & soe I walke out of her house after ye Lord God had manifested her deceite & perverseness: & came to a stache of hay: & lay in ye hay stakke all night: bengie but 3 days before ye time caleed Christmas in snowe & raine.
10.3.3 The steeplehouse

The use of a particular word may cause offence when its connotations are not shared. For George Fox, the Church meant the people of God; he refused to use the word for the building in which religious worship took place. This, like much of Fox's preaching, his use of thee and thou, and his principled refusal to remove his hat before a magistrate, caused offence. Here is one of many references to this in his journal. In Fox's view, a professor is one who pretends to be religious but is not truly so.

10.3.4 George Fox persecuted

Fox's journal is full of accounts of violent attacks on Fox and his followers for their faith and preaching. The following extract is typical. Barlby is about 12 miles south of York and Tickhill is about six miles south of Doncaster.

10.4 John Milton

George Fox gave offence to the religious and civil authorities both during the Commonwealth under Oliver Cromwell in the 1650s and the Restoration of Charles II after 1660. John Milton (1608–74), on the other hand, devoted years of political activity to the Puritan cause in the 1640s and 1650s, writing books and pamphlets on behalf of, for example, religious liberty (against bishops), domestic liberty (for divorce) and civil liberty (against censorship).

One of his best-known pamphlets was Areopagitica (the Areopagus was the highest civil court of Ancient Athens). 'A Speech of Mr John Milton for the Liberty of Unlicen'd Printing, to the Parliament of England, Printed in the Year 1644', is a speech although in fact it was printed, and uses the rhetorical model of Greek and Latin oratory – as if it were written to be spoken. Its style is in complete contrast to the unrelentless narrative of George Fox.

be affir'd, Lords and Commons, there can no greater testimony apper, then when your prudent spirit acknowledges and obyes the voice of reason from what quarter forever it be heard speaking, and renders ye as willing to repeal any Act of your own setting forth, as any set forth by your Predecessors.

If ye be thus resolv'd, as it were injury to think ye were not, I know not what should withhold me from presenting ye with a fit instance wherein to shew both that love of truth which ye eminently profess, and that uprightness of yeur judgement which is not wont to be partial to your selves; by judging over again that order which ye have ordain'd to regulate printing, that no Book, pamphlet, or paper shall be henceforth printed, unless the fame be first approvd and licienc'd by both, or at least one of such as shall be thereto appointed. I deny not, but that it is of greatest concernment in the Church and Commonwealth, to have a vigilant eye how Bookes demeane themselves as well as men; and thereafter to confine, imprison, and do sharpell justice on them as malefactors. For Books are not absolutely dead things, but doe containe a potency of life in them to be as active as that foule was whose progeny they are; may they do preserve as in a veil the puritie of intellect and of that living intellect that bred them. I know they are as lively, and as vigorously produfive, as those fabulous Dragones teeth and being flown up and down, may chance to spring up armed men. And yet on the other hand unlesse warrinnesse be us'd, as good almost kill a Man as kill a good Book; who kills a Man kills a reasonable creature, God's Image; but hee who destroys a good Booke, kills reason and fole, kills the Image of God, as it were in the eye. Many a man lives a burden to the Earth; but a good Booke is the precious life-blood of a master spirit, imbalme'd and treasur'd up on purpose to a life beyond life.
Activity 10.9

Discuss the style and rhetoric of this extract. (A stylistic analysis can be found in Commentary 17 of the Text Commentary Book.)

10.5 Dorothy Osborne's letters

Dorothy Osborne (1627–95) met William Temple in 1648 (1628–99). They married in 1654, after much opposition from their families in the intervening years, during which they wrote many letters to each other. Most of Dorothy's letters to William from 1652 to 1654 have survived. They give a lively and personal picture of the life and manners of the times, and contain a moving portrait of her constancy at a time when other suitors were urged upon both of them by their families. It was not fashionable to marry for love, and marriages for men and women in landed wealthy families were more often than not arranged for them, as this paragraph written by William Temple's sister explains.

Your servant refers to Dorothy's servant, her companion and friend Jane Wright. William Temple is also a 'servant' of Dorothy's because he is in love with her, so he called Jane a 'fellow servant'. Jane delivered the letter to Temple on her way to Guernsey.

TEXT 97 – Dorothy Osborne's letter to William Temple, 17 March 1653

S'r,

Your fellow servant upon the news you sent her is going to Looke out her Captain. In Earnest now she is going to sea, but 'tis to Guernsey to her friends there. her going is soe sudden that I have not time to say much to you, but that I Longe to heare what you have done, & that I shall have my selfe as Longe as I live if I cause any disorder between your father and you, but if my name can doe you any service, I shall not scruple to trust you with that, since I make none to trust you with my heart. she will direct you how you may sende to me, and for god sake though this bee a short Letter let not yours bee tooe, vizt very late & I am able to hold open my Eyes noe longer, good night, if I were not sure to meet you againe by and by, I would not Leave you soe soone.

Your

Activity 10.10

Comment on the way that Dorothy makes a definite promise to marry William Temple if he wishes it.
The following text is the last page of a letter that provides evidence of the marriage market of the landed gentry in seventeenth-century society.

**TEXT 98 – Dorothy Osborne's letter to William Temple, 25 March 1653**

(Handwritten text)

The next letter is complete. Dorothy asked William to send her copies of the diary he was compiling; her reference to 'your first Chapter' is evidence to the fact. An ague was a malarial type of fever, with alternate fits of high temperature and shivering.

**TEXT 99 – Dorothy Osborne's letter to William Temple, 30 April 1653**

Sr

I am sorry my last letter frighted you soo, tward now part of my intension it should. but I am more sorry to see by your first Chapter that your humor is not always soe good as it could wish it, it was the only thing I ever desygnd wee might differ in and (therfore) I think it is denyd mee, whilst read the disscription on I could not believe but yt I had writ it my selfe, it was soe much my owne. I put you in Earnest much more then I doe my self, and yet I may deserve yours when I shall have told you, that besydes all that you speake of I have gotten an Ague that with two fits has made mee soe very weak that I doubted Extreamely yesterday whethere I should be able to set up to day to write to you. but you must not bee troubled at this, that's the way to kill mee indeed, besides it is impossible I should keep it long for heere is my Eldest Brother and my Cousen Mollie & two or three more of them that have great understanding in Agues and they doe so tutor & governe mee that I am neither to eate nor sleep without there leave and sure my Obedience descory's they should cure mee or else they are great Tyrans to very little purpose. You cannot imagne how Cruell they are to mee and yet will perswade mee tos for my good, I know they mean it soe and therfore say nothing but submittt and sigh to to think those not here that would bee kinder to mee but you were Cruell your self when you seem'd to apprehende I might Oblige you to make good your last offer*. Alasse if I could purchase the Empeire of the world at that rate I should think it much too deare ... for god sake write mee all that you heare or can think of that I may have something to Entertaine my selfe withall. I have a sicour head that will not let mee write longer.

I am

Your

* Dorothy and William were informally engaged to each other, and he had offered to release her from the engagement.

**Activity 10.12**

Identify any lexical and grammatical features of the letters which show the language to be of the seventeenth century.

Henry Osborne, Dorothy's brother, kept a diary, in which the following entry occurs in 1654:

Dec 25. Munday. Being Christmases day my sister was married.

William Temple's sister Martha (later Lady Giffard) wrote a Life of Sir William Temple; her account gives us a little more information about Dorothy Osborne's marriage with William Temple. (William Temple was in Ireland in early 1654.)
TEXT 100 – Martha Temple's Life of Sir William Temple

... He staid there six months, & m y time Mr. Osborne came to be at liberty by the loss of her Father, & Sir W T went immediately into England with the hopes of being soon happy in seeing the end of so long a persuasion, though against the consent of most of her friends, & dissatisfaction of some of his, it having occasioned his resumption of a very great fortune when his Fanny was most in want of it, as she had done of many considerable offers of great Estates & Families. But the misfortunes of this amours were not yet ended. The week before they were to be married she fell soe desperately ill there was little hopes* of her life and nothing, the Doctors said, but its proving the small pox could have saved her. He was happy when he saw y security, his kindness having greater eyes then that of her beauty though that Loss was too great to leave him wholly insensible. He saw her constantly while she was ill, & marred her soon after. They past y next year at the House of one of their friends in the Country, where at the end of it she was brought to bed of a son & the beginning of the next they made a vow to his Father and Fanny, y were then in Ireland.

*The plural form of the word was used as a singular.

By the 1680s, after Sir William Temple's retirement, they had only two children living, seven others having died in infancy. One of these two, also called Dorothy, died of small pox in 1684. The following letter from Dorothy to her father has survived, although the date is not known.

TEXT 101 – Dorothy Temple’s letter to her father, c.1680

Sir, I defter’d writing to you till I could tell you that I had receaved all my fine things, which I have just now done; but I thought never to have done gueing you thanks for them—they have made me soe very happy in my new closet, and every body that comes does admire them above all things, but yet not soe much as I think they deserve; and now, if Papa was here I should think myself a perfect pope, though I hope I should not be burnt as there was one at Neil gun's close the 5th of November, who was set in a great cheare, with a red nose halfe a yard long, with some hundreds of boys throwing saultes at it, monsieur gare and I agree mugby well, and he makes me believe I shall come to something at last: that is if he stays, which I don't doubt but he will, because all the faire lads will petition for him. we are got rid of the workmen now, and our house is redy to entertain you come when you please, and you will meet with no body more glad to see you then

Sr
your most obedient
and dutiful daughter.

D. Temple

(Letters from Dorothy Osborne to Sir William Temple, E. A. Parry (ed.), p. 278, Dent n.d.)

10.6 John Evelyn's diary

John Evelyn (1620–1706) travelled widely on the Continent and had a great variety of interests – he published books on engraving, tree-growing, gardening, navigation and commerce, and architecture, but is now best known for his diary, which covers most of his life.

During the Civil Wars of the 1640s, Evelyn was a royalist in sympathy. After the execution of King Charles I in 1649, a Commonwealth was set up, with Oliver Cromwell later named Lord Protector. One of the many ordinances or regulations imposed by the Puritan regime abolished the celebration of Christmas and other Church festivals. On Christmas Day 1657, John Evelyn went with his wife to the chapel of Exeter House in the Strand, London, where the Earl of Rutland lived. He recorded in his diary what happened.

TEXT 102 – John Evelyn's diary for 25 December 1657

I went with my Wife to London to celebrate Christmas Day. Mr. Gunning preaching in Exeter Chapel on 7: Michæl 2. Sermon Ended, as he was giving us the holy Sacrament, The Chapell was surrounded with Souliders: All the Communicants and Assembly surpriz'd & kept Prisoners by them, some in the house, others carried away. It fell to my share to be confined to a room in the house, where yet were permitted to Dine with the master of it, the Countesse of Dorset, Lady Hatton & some others of quality who invited me: In the afternoon came Collonel Whady, Goffe & others from Whittel to examine us one by one, & some they committed to the Marshal (= Marshal, 11th of a senior Army officer), some to Prison, some Commuted. When I came before them they took my name & abode, examined me, why contrary to an Ordinance made that none should any longer observe the superstitious time of the Nativity (so esteem'd by them) I durst offend, & particularly be at Common prayers, which they told me was but the Messe in English, & particularly pray for Charles Stuart, for which we had no Scripture: I told them we did not pray for Cha. Steward but for all Christian Kings, Princes & Governors: They replied, in so doing we praied for the K. of Spain too, who was their Enemy, & a Papist, with other frivolous & insulting questions, with much threatening, & finding no colour to detaine me longer, with much pity of my Ignorance, they dismiss'd me: These were men of high flight, and above Ordinances: & spake full of things of our B: Lords nativity: so I got home late the next day blessed be God: These wretched miscreants, held their muskets against us as we came up to receive the Sacred Elements, as if they would have shot us at the Altar, but yet suffering us to finish the Office of Communion, as perhaps not in their Instructions what they should do in case they found us in that Action:


The object of the raids on churches was political as well as religious, as the authorities were afraid of royalist plots against the government. A newspaper, The Publick Intelligencer, printed an account on 28 December 1657.

TEXT 103 – The Publick Intelligencer, 28 December 1657

This being the day commonly called Christmas, and divers of the old Clergymen being assembled with people of their own congregating in private to uphold a superstititious observation of the day, contrary to Ordinaries of Parliament abolishing the observation of that and other the like Festivals, and against an express Order of his Highness and his Privy-Council, made this last week; for this cause, as also in regard of the ill Consequences that may extend to the Publick by the Assemblies of ill-afflicted persons at this season of the year wherein disorderly people are wont to assume unto themselves too great a liberty, it was judged necessary to suppress the said meetings, and it was accordingly performed by some of the Soldiery employed to that end; who at Westminster apprehended one Mr. Thiss cross*, he being with divers people met together in private: In Fleet street they found another meeting of the same nature, where one Dr. Wilde was Preacher; And at Exeter-house in the Strand they found the grand Assembly, which some (for the magnitude of it) have been pleased to term the Church of England; it being (as they say) to be found no where else in so great and so compact a Body, of which Congregation one Mr. Gunnung was the principal Preacher, who together with Dr. Wilde, and divers other persons, were secured, to give an account of their doings; Some have since been released, the rest remain in custody at the White-Hart in the Strand, till it shall be known who they are.

*The paper's version of Thruscross. Timothy Thruscross was a Doctor of Divinity and a priest.
Activity 10.13

The following entry in Evelyn's diary describes a whale that was stranded in the Thames Estuary. It is an interesting contrast to Sir Thomas Browne's account in Text 87.

TEXT 104 – John Evelyn's diary for 2 and 3 June 1658

2 An extraordinary storme of haule & raine, cold season as winter, wind northerly neere 6 montnes. 3 A large Whale taken, twixt my Land butting on £ Thames & Greenwich, which drew an infinite Concours to see it, by water, horse, Coach on foote from Land, & all parts: It appeared first below Greenwich at low-water, for at high water, it would have destroyed all £ boats: but lying now in shallow water, incomparable wth boats, after a long Conflict it was killed with the harping yrons, & struck in £ head, out of which spouted blood and water, by two tunnels like Smokes from a chimney: & after an horrid groane it ran quite on shore & died. The length was 58 foote: 16 in height, black skin'd like Coach-leather, very small eyes, greate tale, small fins & but 2: a piked (= pointed) snout, & a mouth so wide & divers men might have stood upright in it: No teeth at all, but sucked the slime only as thro a grate made of y4 bone wth we call Whale bone: The throte so narrow, as would not have admitted the least of fishes: The extremes of the Cetaceous bones hang downwards, from £ upper jaw, & was hauy towards the E nds, & bottome within: all of it prodigious, but in nothing more wonderfull then that an Animal of so greate a bulk, should be nourished only by slime, thro those grates:

a) The bones making £ grate.
b) The Tongue, e. £ finn: d £ Eye:
c) one of £ bones making the grate (a) £ Tunnells thro which shutting £ mouth, the water is forced upward, at least 30 foote, like a black thick mist &c:

Activity 10.14

Compare John Evelyn's description of the whale with that of Sir Thomas Browne's, which was written less than 20 years earlier. Discuss the differences in content and style – the choises of vocabulary and grammatical structure.

10.6.1 The Royal Society and prose style

The Royal Society of London for the Improving of Natural Knowledge, usually called just The Royal Society, was founded in 1662 under the patronage of King Charles II, who had been restored to the throne in 1660. Evelyn was a founder member of the society, whose members met regularly to present and discuss scientific papers. The poet John Dryden was also a member, and two verses of a poem called Aneue Mirabilia – The Year of Wonders 1666 contain what he called 'Apostrophe to the Royal Society'. (An apostrophe is a term in rhetoric which means 'a figure in which a writer suddenly stops in his discourse, and turns to address some other person or thing'.)

This I fore-tel, from your auspicious care,
Who great in search of God and nature grow.
Who best your wise Creator's praise declare.
Since best to praise his works is best to know.
O truly Royal! who behold the Law,
And rule of beings in your Makers mind.
And thence, like Limbecks, rich Ideas draw,
To fit the level'd use of humane kind.

Evelyn's diary entry on the whale shows his interest in the detailed scientific observation of natural phenomena, expressed obliquely in Dryden's poem as 'the Law and Rule of beings in your Makers mind'.

Members of The Royal Society like John Evelyn and John Dryden were dedicated to new ways of scientific thinking and experiment, and the style of writing that they began to adopt in the 1660s also changed. The following statement, about the prose style being developed by members of the society in their scientific papers, was written by Thomas Sprat, Secretary of The Royal Society, in 1667.

TEXT 105 – Thomas Sprat's The History of The Royal Society, 1667

And, in few words, I dare say; that of all the Studies of men, nothing may be sooner obtain'd, than this vicious abundance of Phrase, this trick of Metaphors, this volubility of Tongue, which makes so great a noise in the World.

They have therefore been most rigorous in putting in execution, the only Remedy, that can be found for this extravagance: and that has been, a constant Resolution, to reject all the amplifications, digressions, and swellings of style: to return back to the primitive purity, and shortness, when men deliver'd so many things, almost in an equal number of words. They have exacted from all their members, a close, naked, natural way of speaking; positive expressions; clear senses; a native eafines: bringing all things as near the Mathematical plainness, as they can: and preferring the language of Artizans, Countrymen, and Merchants, before that, of Wits, or Scholars.
10.7 John Bunyan

John Bunyan (1628–88) was the son of a Bedfordshire brass-worker; he followed his father's trade after learning to read and write in the village school at Elstow. He served in the Parliamentary army during the Civil War in the 1640s, and joined a non-conformist church in Bedford in 1653 and preached there. His first writings were against George Fox and the Quakers. He too came into conflict with the authorities in 1660 for preaching without a licence, and spent 12 years in Bedford jail, during which time he wrote nine books. In 1672, he returned to the same church and was again imprisoned for a short time in 1676, when he finished the first part of The Pilgrim's Progress. The book was published in 1678, and a second part in 1684.

The Pilgrim's Progress is an allegory, in which personifications of abstract qualities are the characters. The story is in the form of a dream, in which the narrator tells of Christian's progress 'from this World to that which is to come'.

The following text, reproduced in facsimile, is from the first edition of the book published in 1678. Christian's religious doubts have caused him to lose hope and fall into despair. In the terms of the allegory, he and his companion Hopeful have been caught by Giant Despair and thrown into the dungeon of Doubting Castle.

Bunyan's use of the language brings us close to hearing the colloquial, everyday speech of the 1670s. It is 'the language of artisans, countrymen and merchants', not of 'wits and scholars', that Thomas Sprat commended.

The text shows us that spelling in printed books was by now standardised in a form that has hardly changed since. There are only a few unfamiliar conventions, like the use of long <<>, the capitalising of some nouns and adjectives, and the use of italics to highlight certain words.

TEXT 106 – John Bunyan's The Pilgrim's Progress

Now there was not far from the place where they lay, a Castle, called Doubting Castle, the owner whereof was Giant Despair, and it was in his grounds they now were sleeping; wherefore he getting up in the morning early, and walking up and down in his Fields, caught Christian and Hopeful asleep in his grounds. Then with a grim and surly voice he bid them awake, and asked them whence they were? and what they did in his grounds? They told him, they were Pilgrims, and that they had lost their way. Then said the Giant, You have this night trespassed on me, by trampling in, and lying on my grounds, and therefore you must go along with me. So they were forced to go, because he was stronger then they. They also had but little to say, for they knew themselves in a fault. The Giant therefore drove them before him, and put them into his Castle, into a very dark Dungeon, nasty and stinking to the spirit of these two men: Here then they lay, from Wednesday morning till Saturday night,
without one bit of bread, or drop of drink, or any light, or any to ask how they did. They were therefore here in evil case, and were far from friends and acquaintance. Now in this place, Christian had double sorrow, because 'twas through his unadvised haste that they were brought into this distress.

Well, on Saturday about midnight they began to pray, and continued in Prayer till almost break of day.

Now a little before it was day, good Christian, as one half amazed, brake out in this passionate Speech, *What a fool, quoth he, am I thus to lie in a sinking Dungeon, when I may as well walk at liberty?* I have a Key in my bosom, called Promise, that will, I am persuaded, open any Lock in Doubting Castle. Then said Hopeful, That's good News; good Brother pluck it out of thy bosom and try: Then Christian pulled it out of his bosom, and began to try at the Dungeon door, whose bolt (as he turned the Key) gave back, and the door flew open with ease, and Christian and Hopeful both came out. Then he went to the outward door that leads into the Castle yard, and with his Key opened the door also. After he went to the Iron Gate, for that must be opened too, but that Lock went damnable hard, yet the Key did open it; then they thrust open the Gate to make their escape with speed, but that Gate, as it opened, made such a creaking, that it waked Giant Despair, who hastily rising to pursue his Prisoners, felt his Limbs to fail, so that he could by no means go after them. Then they went on, and came to the Kings high way again, and so were safe, because they were out of his Jurisdiction.

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**Activity 10.15**

Discuss some of the evidence of informal and colloquial language in Bunyan's text.

Bunyan was not a scholar of the universities in Latin and Greek. His own use of the language was influenced by his reading of the King James Bible of 1611, but at the same time, as we have seen, it reflects popular everyday usage. We can therefore use The Pilgrim's Progress with reasonable confidence as evidence of ordinary language use in the 1670s.

Although there has been little change in the basic grammatical patterns of the language since the seventeenth century, there are many superficial features, part of the idiom and usage of that period, that date it. A list of selected quotations from The Pilgrim's Progress follows to illustrate this, but you could extend this activity yourself by examining any suitable seventeenth century text.
TEXT 107 – John Bunyan’s The Pilgrim’s Progress

1
   a his reason was, for that the Valley was altogether without Honour;
   b ... but he could not be silent long, because that his trouble increased.
   c So the other told him, that by that he was gone some distance from the Gate, he
   would come at the House of the Interpreter ...
   2
   a (we) shall miserably come to ruin: except (the which yet I see not) some way of
   escape can be found ...
   b ... all is not worth to be compared with a little of that that I am seeking to enjoy.
   c ... to be bestowed at the time appointed, on them that diligently seek it.
3 (3rd person singular present tense inflections)
   a ... by reason of a burden that lieth hard upon me:
   b The shame that attends Religion, lies also as a block in that way:
   c Why came you not in at the Gate which standeth at the beginning of the way?
   d How stands it between God and your Soul now?
4 (perfective aspect)
   a ... but the ground is good when they are once got in at the Gate.
   b I thought so: and it is happened unto thee as to other weak men.
   c So when he was come in, and set down, they gave him something to drink;
   d There was great talk presently after you were gone out ...
5 (interrogatives)
   a Then said Plausible. Don’t revile;
   b My Brother, I did put the question to thee, for that I doubted of the truth of our
   belief my self ...
   c Well then, did you not know about ten years ago, one Temporary?
   d Nay, methinks I care not what I meet with in the way ...
   e Why came you not in at the Gate which standeth at the beginning of the way?
6 (interrogatives)
   a But my good Companion, do you know the way ...?
   b ... dost thou see this narrow way?
   c Wherefore dost thou cry?
   d But now we are by ourselves, what do you think of such men?
   e ... how many, think you, must there be?
   f Know you not that it is written ...
   g Whence came you, and whither do you go?
7 (colloquialisms)
   a Oh, did he light upon you?
   b Know him! Yes, he dwelt in Graceless ...
   c I thought I should a been killed there ...
   d If this Meadow lieth along by our way side, lets go over into it.
   e But did you tell them of your own sorrow? Yes, over, and over, and over.
   f ... the remembrance of which will stick by me as long as I live.
   h Joseph was hard put to it by her ...
   i ... but it is ordinary for those ... to give him the slip, and return again to me.
   j He said it was a pitiful low sneaking business for a Man to mind Religion.
   k ... let us lie down here and take one Nap.
8
   a I beseech him for his counsel;
   b ... and he not what to do.
   c Who can tell how joyful this Man was, when he had gotten his Roll again!
   d The Shepherds had them to another place, in a bottom, where was a door in the
   side of an Hill.
   e He went on thus, even untill he came at a bottom ...
   f ... out of the mouth of which there came in an abundant manner Smoak, and Coals
   of fire, with hideous noises.
   g And did you presently fall under the power of this conviction?
   h But is there no hopes for such a Man as this?
   i They was then asked, if they knew the Prisoner at the Bar?

TEXT 108 – John Aubrey’s Brief Lives

10.8 John Aubrey

John Aubrey lived from 1626 to 1697. He was an antiquary, archeologist and biographer, but only one book of stories and folklore, Miscellanies, was published in his lifetime in 1696. He finished none of his many other books and deposited all his manuscripts in the Ashmolean Museum in Oxford in 1693, including a collection of 'lives' of sixteenth and seventeenth century notable men and women entitled Brief Lives.

The 426 'lives' range in length from two to 23,000 words, so any published version is an edited selection. Aubrey himself wrote:

I hope, hereafter it may be an Incitement to some Ingenious and publick-spirited young Man, to polish and compleat, what I have delivered rough hewn.

Some of the 'lives' are in no more than note form, but the longer ones are examples of writing that give the impression of spoken narrative – a record of his unselconscious gossip with his friends. Consequently, they provide an example of standard educated English of the seventeenth century in its informal and colloquial style.

TEXT 108 – John Aubrey’s Brief Lives

Mr. Gore. He is a fiddling peevish fellow.

Thomas Willis, M.D. was middle stature: darke brindle hare (like a red pig) stammered much.

William Sanderson dyed at Whitehall (I was there then): went out like a spent candle: died before Dr. Holder could come to him with the Sacrament.

William Outram was a tall spare lean pale consumptive man: wasted himself much, I presume, by frequent preaching.

Mrs. Abigail Sloper borne at Broad Chalk, near Salisbury. A.D. 1648. Pride; lechery; ungrateful to her father; married; name distracted; recovered.

Richard Stokes, M.D. His father was Fellow of Eaton College. He was bred there and at King's College. Scholar to Mr. W. Oughtred for Mathematices (Algebra). He made himself mad with it, but became sober again, but I fear like a crackt-glass.

Became a Roman-catholic: married unhappily at Liege, dog and cat. etc. Became a Sott. Dyed in Newgate. Prisoner for debt April 1681.

Thomas Fuller was of middle stature; strong set; curly hair; a very working head, in so much that, walking and meditating before dinner, he would cut up a penny loaf, not knowing that he did it. His natural memmone very great, to which he added the Art of Memnote: he would repeat to you forwards and backwards all the signs from Ludgate to Charing-cross.

The 'lives' were anecdotal, each one a collection of facts and stories that Aubrey had gathered about his subject — he was sometimes uncertain, it is true, but he was never untruthful. The following example is from Aubrey's *Life of Richard Corbet* (1582–1635), who was Bishop firstly of Oxford and then of Norwich. It is typical of the amusing stories that Aubrey remembered and recorded about his subjects.

**TEXT 109 — John Aubrey’s *Life of Richard Corbet***

... His conversation was extreme pleasant. Dr. Stubbins was one of his Cronies; he was a jolly fayt Dr. and a very good house-keeper; parson in Oxfordshire. As Dr. Corbet and he were riding in Lob Lane in wet weather (tis an extraordinary deep, dirty lane) the couche fell; and Dr. Corbet sayd that Dr. Stubbins was up to the elbowes in mud, he was up to the elbowes in Stubbins.

He was made Bishop of Oxford, and I have heard that he had an admirable, grave and venerable aspect.

One time, as he was Confirming, the country-people press in to see the Ceremonie, sayd he, *Bear off there, or I'll confirm yee with my Staffe*. Another time, being to lay his hand on the head of a man very bald, he turns to his chaplain, Lushington, and sayd, *Some Dust, Lushington* (to keepe his hand from slipping).

There was a man with a great venerable Beard; sayd the Bishop, *You, behind the Beard*.

His Chaplain, Dr. Lushington, was a very learned and ingeniose (= intelligent) man, and they loved one another. The Bishop sometimes would take the key of the wine-cellar, and he and his Chaplain would goe and look themselves in, and be merry. Then first he lays downe his Episcopal hat — *There lyes the Doctor*. Then he puts off his gowne — *There lyes the Bishop*. Then 'twas *Here's to thee, Corbet*, and *Here's to thee, Lushington* ...

The last words he sayd were, *Good night, Lushington*.

**10.9 Christopher Cooper's *The English Teacher*, 1687 (i)**

Examine the following lists in turn (Texts 110–115), taken from Cooper's *The English Teacher*. Discuss the evidence they show of:

(a) Cooper’s pronunciation in the 1680s and any change from ME as a result of either the shift of the long vowels or other causes.

(b) Later changes that have taken place in the pronunciation of any of the words.

(A description with the etymologies of an extended vocabulary can be found in Commentary 19 of the Text Commentary Book.)

**10.9.1 'Of the Vowel a’**

Cooper described the letter <a> as having three sounds: a short, a long and a slender. In the IPA today, they would be written /æ/, /a:/ or /æ:/, and /æ:/ respectively.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Short</th>
<th>Long</th>
<th>Slender</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bar</td>
<td>Barge</td>
<td>Bare</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>blæ</td>
<td>blæc</td>
<td>blænt</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>cap</td>
<td>carking</td>
<td>cap</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>car</td>
<td>carp</td>
<td>case</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>cat</td>
<td>cæst</td>
<td>case</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>dash</td>
<td>dart</td>
<td>date</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>flash</td>
<td>flæsht</td>
<td>flæsht</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>gash</td>
<td>gæst</td>
<td>gate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>grand</td>
<td>grant</td>
<td>grænt</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>land</td>
<td>lanc</td>
<td>lane</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mash</td>
<td>mask</td>
<td>mæsnt</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>pat</td>
<td>path</td>
<td>pæt</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>tar</td>
<td>tart</td>
<td>tærs</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Cooper distinguished as different the vowels in certain pairs of words which today are identical homophones in RP and other dialects. These words, however, have remained different in parts of the North and East Anglia, for example, pane with a pure vowel /pæn/ and paun with a diphthong /pəun/ (see Acents of English, I. Chapter 3 Section 3.1.5. J. C. Wells, CUP, 1982), although the contrast is not the same as that in Cooper's speech. He describes the difference in the following way (Cooper's 'u guttural' was the short vowel /ʌ/).

TEXT 111 – Christopher Cooper’s The English Teacher, 1687 (ii)

pronounced gently hath the sound of a pure, as in cane, but where o only is written u guttural is founded after it; as

Bain   Mail   Maid
bane    bale    made
main    lay'n   pain
mane    lane    pane
plain   spaid   tait
plane   spade   tale

10.9.2 ‘Of the Vowel e’

The purpose of the digraph <ee> was to distinguish the more open of the two long front vowels /iː/ from the closer vowel /eː/, usually spelt <ee> (see Section 9.5). Here is the evidence from Cooper's book this 'long e' was the vowel /eː/:

That sound which is taken for the long e is express by putting a after it; as men, mean.

10.9.3 ‘Of the Vowel o’

TEXT 112 – Christopher Cooper’s The English Teacher, 1687 (iii)

ao aw in these following is founded oo.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>A-board</th>
<th>con-courfe</th>
<th>court-ship</th>
<th>fourfe</th>
<th>whorn</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ac-cou-tred</td>
<td>could</td>
<td>forces</td>
<td>fourfe</td>
<td>whore</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>af-ford</td>
<td>courfe</td>
<td>forces</td>
<td>sworn</td>
<td>who-fe-o-wor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>be-bouns</td>
<td>courtes</td>
<td>move</td>
<td>tomb</td>
<td>womb</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>boar</td>
<td>court</td>
<td>mourn</td>
<td>two</td>
<td>worn</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>born</td>
<td>cour-ti-er</td>
<td>fourfe</td>
<td>un-couth</td>
<td>would</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>bourn</td>
<td>court-li-nefs</td>
<td>should</td>
<td>who</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In all others this found is written oo; as look, roof. But Board, forth, prove, flou, are better written boord, fourth, proov, floop.

10.9.4 ‘Improper diphthongs’

Cooper differentiated diphthongs in pronunciation from digraphs in writing. He did not, however, use the word diphthong but the phrase improper diphthong for pairs of letters that represented only one sound.

In the following extract, 'e short' meant /ε/; 'e long' /eː/; 'ee' /iː/; 'a' /æ/; and 'a' /aː/. Only a selection from Cooper's lists of words is printed here.

TEXT 113 – Christopher Cooper’s The English Teacher, 1687 (iv)

Of the improper Diphthongs ea, ou, eo, ie. In which one Vowel alone is pronounced; to which may be added n, as it is commonly taken.

Rule 1. Of ea.

Ea is put 1. For e short. 2. For e long. 3 For ee. 4. For a and a.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>(e) short (=/ε/)</th>
<th>(e) long (=/eː/)</th>
<th>(ee) (=/iː/)</th>
<th>(a) (=/æ/)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>bread</td>
<td>break</td>
<td>dear</td>
<td>learn</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>deart</td>
<td>clean</td>
<td>blear-ey'd</td>
<td>scream</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>earth</td>
<td>leaf</td>
<td>ear-wig</td>
<td>swear</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ready</td>
<td>sea</td>
<td>near</td>
<td>weary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>round</td>
<td>wear</td>
<td>hearth</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

10.9.5 ‘Barbarous speaking’

The pronunciation of rural and urban dialects has always been regarded as inferior by those who consider themselves to be in a superior social class. Cooper, as a teacher, shows this in his chapter ‘Of Barbarous Speaking’, in which he implies that a person's pronunciation will determine his spelling.

Activity 10.18

(i) Read the two pages ‘Of Barbarous Dialects’ in Text 114.
(ii) Are any of the ‘barbarous’ pronunciations to be heard today in (a) RP or (b) any of our regional dialects?
(iii) Does this provide any evidence that some features of RP, the socially prestigious accent of English today, have derived from regional accents?

TEXT 114 – Christopher Cooper’s The English Teacher, 1687 (v)

H, that would write more exactly, must avoid a Barbarous Pronunciation; and consider for facility, or thorow mistake, many words are not founded after the bext dialect: Such as

A.   E.   I.  

Ex-terr, axle-tree  Im-possible, im pos-
ised, end  fible, pos-
e'd, is et not  

cont...
10.9.6 'Words that have the same pronunciation'

Other lists in Cooper's book are useful in a study of changing pronunciation. For example, there are several pages of 'Words that have the same pronunciation, but different significance and manner of writing'. Most of them are pronounced alike today, although not necessarily with the same vowels as in the seventeenth century. For example, *seas* and *seise* are homophones today, *lse*; but would have been pronounced *se:z* or *se:z* in Cooper's time, the final raising to *ie* not yet having taken place.

Some of the words confirm changes since ME. For example, the pairing of *rest*/*wrest*, *right*/*wright* and *ring*/*wright* shows the loss of *<w>* from the OE and ME initial consonant group *<w>* to be complete. John Hart's An Orthographie written in the sixteenth century showed that *<w>* was still pronounced.

Here are a few of the pairs that have remained homophones:

- altar/alter
- chew/chuse
- in/inn
- asent/aspect
- dear/dear
- lesson/lesson
- bare/bear
- hurt/hure
- pair/pair

Others show that at least one word in each pair or group has changed since the 1680s, for example, the pronunciation of *are*; *one*, the *-ure* of *censure*, *gesture* and *tenure*, the *o* of *oil* and *lom*, and the *ea* of *flea*, *heard*, *least*, *rear*, *reason*, *shear* and *wear*.

TEXT 115 – Christopher Cooper’s *The English Teacher*, 1687 (v)

- are/ather/ere
- mile/moil (= hard labour)
- bile/boil
- censer/censor/censure
- cow/cour/cover
- compute/cummin
- cool/could
- coughing/coffin
- rare/rear
- card/card
- raisins/reasons
- do/do/low (= dough)
- fleach/lape
- fit/fit (= did fight)
- jester/gesture
- hard/hard/herd
- i/e/tois/eoi
- jerkin/jeerking
- kill/kiln
- least/lest

10.9.7 Words spelt with *<coi>*

The study of sound changes is complex. Here, we consider briefly one particular change, in which two sets of words with different vowels in ME and MnE fell together for a time.

From the evidence of the preceding list, *boil*, *oil*, *lom* and *moll* had the same pronunciation as *bile*, *isle*, *line* and *mile*. This can be checked in the poetry of the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, in which many similar pairs of words consistently rhyme together (see Section 10.10.3 on John Dryden). However, this did not mean that their pronunciation at that time was either *foul* or *foil*.

**<boil>**

The verb *boil*, like many other words spelt with the *<coi>* digraph, came from French and was pronounced *fouil* in ME, although it was usually spelt with *<coi>*. The diphthong was 'unrounded' during the seventeenth century and changed to */iel/*. 

- list, list
- list, lyst
- list, list
- list, list
- list, list
- list, list
- list, list
- list, list
- list, list
We saw evidence in John Hart’s *An Orthographie* of the shift of the long vowel /æ/ to the diphthong /aɪ/ which was almost the same in sound as /ai/ by the 1560s. As a result, words formerly with /æ/ and /ai/ fell together, and both were pronounced with the diphthong /aɪ/.

After about 1700, the first element of the diphthong shifted further to its present-day pronunciation /ai/ in words like *bite*. Why, then, do we pronounce *boil* (and similar words) today as /boʊəl/ and not /boɪəl/?

The reason is that, in ME, there was a second set of words spelt with <o> for example, *chose* and *noise*, with a diphthong pronounced /oɪə/, not /oʊə/. Evidence from the orthoepists suggests that /oɪə/ words were also pronounced /oʊə/ by some speakers. Eventually, helped by the spelling, all words spelt with <o> came to be pronounced /oɪə/, so that *bite*, by then pronounced /boɪəl/, ceased to rhyme with *boil*, pronounced /boʊəl/.

### 10.10 John Dryden

John Dryden (1631–1700), one of the great writers in the English literary tradition, was a poet, dramatist, and critic. He was largely responsible for the cherished superstition that prepositions must, in spite of the incurable English instinct for putting them late, ... be kept true to their name & placed before the word they govern’ (H. W. Fowler, 1926). Dryden ‘went through all his prefaces contriving away the final prepositions that he had been guilty of in his first editions’ (ibid). This is incidental, however, to his recognised eminence as a prose writer, and it has been said that Modern English prose begins with Dryden.

#### 10.10.1 Dryden as letter writer

This first example of his writing reveals the problems of being dependent on patronage at that time.

**TEXT 116 – John Dryden’s letter to Lawrence Hyde, Earl of Rochester, August 1683**

My Lord

I know not whether my Lord Sunderland has interceded with your Lordship, for half a year of my salary: But I have two other Advocates, my extreme wants, even almost to arresting, & my ill health, which cannot be repaid without immediate returning into the Country. A quarters allowance is but the Jesuites powder to my disease; the fitt will return a fortnight hence. If I durst I would plead a little merit, & some hazards of my life from the Common Enemies, my refusing advantages offer’d by them, & neglecting my benificial studies for the King’s service: But I only think I merit not to serve. I never applied my selfe to any Interest contrary to your Lordship’s; and, on some occasions, perhaps not known to you, have not been unwilling to serve the memory & reputation of My Lord your father. After this, My Lord, my conscience assures me I may write boldly, though I cannot speak to you. I have three Sons growing to mans estate, I breed them all up to learning beyond my fortune; but they are too hopeful to be neglected though I want. Be pleased to treate on me with an eye of compassion; some small employment would render my condition easy. The King is not unsatisfied of me; the Duke has often promised me his assistance; & your Lordship is the Conduct through which their favours passe. Either in the Customs, or the Appeals of the Excise, or some other way: menees cannot be wanting if you please to have the will. Tis enough for one Age to have neglected Mr Cowley, and serv’d Mr Butler; but neither of them had the happiness to live till your Lordship’s Ministry. In the mean time be pleased to give me a gracious and speedy answer to my present request of half a year’s pension for my necessities. I am going to write somewhat by his Majestyes command, & cannot stirr into the Country for my health and studies, till I secure my family from want. You have many petitions of this nature, & cannot satisfy all, but I hope from your goodness to be made an Exception to your general rules: because I am, with all sincerity,

Your Lordship’s most obedient
Humble Servant
John Dryden

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**Early Modern English III – the seventeenth century**

**Activity 10.19**

List any features of spelling, punctuation, vocabulary or grammar in Text 116 that are not now standard and comment on their number in proportion to the whole letter.

**10.10.2 Dryden on Chaucer**

Dryden admired Chaucer’s poetry, but some aspects of his assessment of Chaucer throw as clear a light on Dryden himself, and the way he and his contemporaries thought about language and writing, as it does on Chaucer. His summary of Chaucer’s achievement is well known:

‘Tis sufficient to say according to the Proverb, that here is God’s Plenty.

Dryden’s remarks on Chaucer’s language are relevant to our survey of the development of Standard English, and of the attitudes to acceptable usage. The earliest English for us is OE, in texts as far back as the ninth century. Dryden was concerned with the idea of the ‘purity’ of English and the notion that it had reached a state of perfection in his day – *From Chaucer the Purity of the English Tongue began ... Chaucer* (lived) in the Dawning of our Language. For Dryden, Chaucer’s diction ‘stands not on an equal Foot’ with ‘our present English’.

**TEXT 117 – John Dryden on Chaucer’s verse (i)**

The verse of *Chaucer*, I confess, is not harmonious to us ... They who liv’d with him, and some time after him, thought it Musical ... There is the rude Sweetness of a Scotch tune in it, which is natural and pleasing, though not perfect.

In the following text, Dryden criticises the editor of an earlier late sixteenth century printed edition of Chaucer.

**TEXT 118 – John Dryden on Chaucer’s verse (ii)**

... for he would make us believe the Fault is in our Ears, and that there were really Ten Syllables in a Verse where we find but Nine: But this Opinion is not worth confuting; 'tis so gross and obvious an Error, that Common Sense ... must convince the Reader, that Equality of Numbers in every Verse which we call *Heroick*, was either unknown, or not always practis’d in Chaucer’s Age. It were an ease Matter to produce some thousands of his Verses, which are lame for want of half a Foot, and sometimes a whole one, and which no Pronunciation can make otherwise ... Chaucer, I confess, is a rough Diamond, and must first be polish’d ere he shines.

Dryden’s ‘polishing’ of Chaucer was done by reversing some of the Canterbury tales, making his choice from those tales ‘as savour nothing of Immodesty’. In his preface to the fables, he quotes from Chaucer’s prologue, where the narrator thus excuses the ribaldry, which is very gross... Dryden then goes on to discuss Chaucer’s language.

**TEXT 119 – John Dryden on Chaucer’s verse (iii)**

You have here a *Specimen* of Chaucer’s Language, which is so obsolete, that his Sense is scarce to be understood; and you have likewise more than one Example of his unequal Numbers, which were mention’d before. Yet many of his verses consist of Ten Syllables, and the Words not much behind our present English.
The following texts consist of the same extract from Chaucer’s prologue to *The Canterbury Tales*, firstly as quoted by Dryden in 1700 from an early printed version as an example of Chaucer’s ‘obscure’ language and rough versification, and then in a modern edition based on the manuscripts.

**TEXT 120 – John Dryden’s version of Chaucer’s prologue to *The Canterbury Tales***

But first, I pray you, of your courtesy,
That ye ne arrete it nought my villany,
Though that I plainly speak in this matter
To tellen you her words, and else her chere:
Ne though I speak her words properly,
For this ye knowen as well as I,
Who shall tellen a tale after a man
He mote rehearse as nye, as ever He can:
Everch word of it been in his charge,
All speke he, never so rude, ne targe.
Or else he mote tellen his tale untrue,
Or faine things, or find words new:
He may not spare, altho he were his brother,
He mote as well say o words as another.

Thus spake himself full broad in holy Writ,
And well I wote no Villany is it.
Eke Plato saith, who so can him rede,
The words mote been Cousin to the dede.

**TEXT 121 – Modern Edition of Text 120***

But first I pray yow of your curtesy
That ye n'arrete it nought my vileynye
Though that I pleynely spake in this mateere
To telle yow hir wordes and hir chere:
Ne though I spake hir wordes propreye.
For this ye knowen al so wel as I
Whoso shal tell a tale after a man
He mote rehearse as ny as euere he kan
Euerch a word if it be in his charge
Al spake he neuer so rudeleche and large,
Or elles he mote telle his tale wentre
Or feyne thyng or fynde wordes newe.
He may not spare althogh he were his brother.
He mote as wel saye o word as another.
Crist spak hymself ful brode in hooyle wryt
And wel ye woot no vileynye is it.

Eek Plato seith, whoso that kan hym rede,
The wordes mote be esyyn to the dede.

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**Activity 10.20***

(i) Study the two versions of Chaucer’s prologue and comment on the differences between them.
(ii) Read Section 5.4, which briefly describes the pronunciation of Chaucer’s verse.
(iii) Discuss the possible reasons for Dryden’s criticism of Chaucer’s ‘unequal Numbers’; that is, his belief that many of Chaucer’s lines have fewer than the ten syllables that verses should have.
(iv) What was ‘obscure’ for Dryden in Chaucer’s vocabulary and grammar?

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**10.10.3 Dryden and rhymes***

When you read poetry from the sixteenth to the eighteenth centuries, you will often find pairs of words that should rhyme, but do not do so in present-day pronunciation. We have already looked at rhymes in our study of the language, as evidence of changes in the pronunciation and structure of words up to the end of the fourteenth century (see Section 7.3.3 on Chaucer’s rhymes). It is therefore interesting to examine a few examples from the end of the seventeenth century and to relate them to what we have learned about pronunciation from both our orthoepists, John Hart in the sixteenth century (see Chapter 9) and Christopher Cooper in the seventeenth century (see Section 10.9).

These rhymes from John Dryden’s translation of Virgil’s Latin *Aeneis* occur many other times in the translation, and thus are not single examples that might be explained as false or eye rhymes.

**TEXT 122 – John Dryden’s *Aeneis***

- Sea
- Year
- Wind

---

**174**

---

**175**
Then, as her Strength with Years increas'd, began
To pierce aloft in Air the soaring Swan;
And from the Clouds to fetch the heron and the Crane.

O more than Madmen! you your selves shall bear
The guilt of Blood and Sacrilegious War:
Loaded with Gold, he sent his Darling, far
From Noise and Tumults, and destructive War:
Commuted to the faithless Tyrant's Care.

She seem'd a Virgin of the Spartan Blood:
With such Array Harpalice bestrode
Her Thracian Courser, and oust'd the rapid Flood
His Father Hyrcanus of Noble Blood;
His Mother was a Ham'tress of the Wood:
... The Brambles drank his Blood;
And his torn Limbs are left, the Vulture's Food.
Resume your ancient Care; and if the God
Your Sirs, and you, resolve on Foreign Blood:
His knocking Knees are bent beneath the Load:
And shivering Cold congeals his vital Blood.
Maids, Matrons, Widows, mix their common Moans:
Orphans their Sires, and Sires lament their Sons
Acestes, fir'd with just Disdain, to see
The Palm usurp'd without a Victory;
Reproch'd Enelius thus ...
The Pastor pleas'd with his dire Victory,
Beholds the satiate Flames in Sheets ascend the Sky:
... the Coast was free
From Foreign or Domestick Enemy:
He heav'd it at a Lift: and pos'd on high,
Ran stag'ring on, against his Enemy.

Then, as her Strength with Years increas'd, began
To pierce aloft in Air the soaring Swan;
And from the Clouds to fetch the heron and the Crane.

O more than Madmen! you your selves shall bear
The guilt of Blood and Sacrilegious War:
Loaded with Gold, he sent his Darling, far
From Noise and Tumults, and destructive War:
Commuted to the faithless Tyrant's Care.

She seem'd a Virgin of the Spartan Blood:
With such Array Harpalice bestrode
Her Thracian Courser, and oust'd the rapid Flood
His Father Hyrcanus of Noble Blood;
His Mother was a Ham'tress of the Wood:
... The Brambles drank his Blood;
And his torn Limbs are left, the Vulture's Food.
Resume your ancient Care; and if the God
Your Sirs, and you, resolve on Foreign Blood:
His knocking Knees are bent beneath the Load:
And shivering Cold congeals his vital Blood.
Maids, Matrons, Widows, mix their common Moans:
Orphans their Sires, and Sires lament their Sons
Acestes, fir'd with just Disdain, to see
The Palm usurp'd without a Victory;
Reproch'd Enelius thus ...
The Pastor pleas'd with his dire Victory,
Beholds the satiate Flames in Sheets ascend the Sky:
... the Coast was free
From Foreign or Domestick Enemy:
He heav'd it at a Lift: and pos'd on high,
Ran stag'ring on, against his Enemy.

Then, as her Strength with Years increas'd, began
To pierce aloft in Air the soaring Swan;
And from the Clouds to fetch the heron and the Crane.

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The guilt of Blood and Sacrilegious War:
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From Noise and Tumults, and destructive War:
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His Father Hyrcanus of Noble Blood;
His Mother was a Ham'tress of the Wood:
... The Brambles drank his Blood;
And his torn Limbs are left, the Vulture's Food.
Resume your ancient Care; and if the God
Your Sirs, and you, resolve on Foreign Blood:
His knocking Knees are bent beneath the Load:
And shivering Cold congeals his vital Blood.
Maids, Matrons, Widows, mix their common Moans:
Orphans their Sires, and Sires lament their Sons
Acestes, fir'd with just Disdain, to see
The Palm usurp'd without a Victory;
Reproch'd Enelius thus ...
The Pastor pleas'd with his dire Victory,
Beholds the satiate Flames in Sheets ascend the Sky:
... the Coast was free
From Foreign or Domestick Enemy:
He heav'd it at a Lift: and pos'd on high,
Ran stag'ring on, against his Enemy.

It seems odd at first that enemy could apparently rhyme with either free, MnE /friː/ and high, MnE /haɪ/, but the vowel of high was still in the process of shifting, in Dryden's time, from /aɪ/ to /aɪ.1/ and the vowel of free from /fi/ to /fi.1/, and pronunciations varied.

This explains the following word-play in Shakespeare's The Two Gentlemen of Verona a century earlier. The dialogue is between Protheus, 'a gentleman of Verona', and Speed, 'a clownish servant'. The word Ay (yes) is spelt /ɪ, noddy meant foolish.
TEXT 124 – George Meriton’s A Yorkshire Dialogue, 1683

(The extract begins at line 155 of the original. The Yorkshire dialectal pronunciation of the is spelt in the Dialogue as ‘th.”)

A York-shire DIALOGUE, In its pure Natural DIALECT: As it is now commonly Spoken in the North parts of York-Shire Being a Miscellaneous discourse, or Hotchpotch of several Country Affaires, begun by a Daughter and her Mother, and continued by the Father, Son, Uncle, Neese, and Land-Lord.

F. = Father, M. = Mother, D. = Daughter, N. = Niece.

F. What ails our Tibb, that she urles seay ith Newke,
Shee’s nut Reel, she leauks an Awd farrand Leauke.

D. Father. Iye gitten cawd, I can scarce tawke,
And my Snurles are seay sayr stopt, I can nut snawke,

N. How duz my Cozen Tibb Naunt I mun nut stay,
1 hard she got a Cawd the other day,

M. Eey wallanceerin, wita gang and see,
Shee’s aboun ‘ith Chawmber, Thou may Climb upth Stee.
Shee’s on a dovening now gang defly Nan,
And mack as little din as eer Thou can.

N. Your mains fluid, there’s an awd saying you knowe
That there’s no Carron will kill a Crawl:
If she be nut as dead as a deaur Naile,
Hee mack her flyer and semper like Flesh Cael.
What Tibb I see, Thou is nut yet quite dead,
Leauke at me woman, and saucd up thy head.

D. Ah Nan steeko’th wunderboard, and mack it darke,
My Neen are vâra sayr, they stou and wark.
They are seay Gummy and Furr’d up sometime.
I can nut leauke ar’th Leet, nor see a stime.

N. Come come, I can mack Thee Leetsome and blythe.
Here will bo thy awd Sweet-heart here Belve.
He tell’s me seay I say him but last night
O Tibb he is as fine as omny Kneet.

D. Nay Nan Thou dus but jest there’s neay sike thing,
He woos another Lass and gave her a Ring.

N. Away away great fool take thou no Care,
He swears that hee’ll love thee for evermore.
And sayes as ever he whomps his Soul to saue,
He’ll either wed to Thee, or tull his graue ...

11. Modern English – the eighteenth century

A standard language is achieved when writers use prescribed and agreed forms of the vocabulary and grammar, regardless of the dialectal variety of the language that each one may speak. As a result, regional and class dialects, which are themselves no less rule-governed and systematic than an agreed standard, tend to be regarded as inferior. This chapter presents some of the evidence about attitudes towards, and beliefs about, the standard language and the dialects in the eighteenth century. The linguistic changes that have taken place from the eighteenth century to the present day are relatively few and will be discussed in the next chapter.

11.1 Correcting, improving and ascertaining the language

11.1.1 'The continual Corruption of our English Tongue'

During the eighteenth century, many pamphlets, articles and grammar books were published on the topic of correcting, improving and, if possible, fixing the language in a perfected form. One word that recurred time and time again in referring to the state of the English language was corruption. You will find it in the following text, which is an extract from an article written by Jonathan Swift (1667–1745) in 1710 in the journal The Tatler. The complete article took the form of a supposed letter written to Isaac Bickerstaff, a pseudonym for Jonathan Swift.

TEXT 125 – The Tatler, 26 September 1710

The following Letter has laid before me many great and manifest Evils in the World of Letters which I had overlooked; but they open to me a very busy Scene, and it will require no small Care and Application to amend Errors which are become so universal ... ,

To Isaac Bickerstaff Esq.

SIR,

There are some Abuses among us of great Consequence, the Reformation of which is properly your Province, tho', as far as I have been conversant in your Papers, you have not yet considered them. These are, the deplorable Ignorance that for some Years hath reigned among our English Writers, the great depravity of our Taste, and the continual Corruption of our Style ...

These two Evils, Ignorance and Want of Taste, have produced a Third; I mean, the continual Corruption of our English Tongue, which, without some timely Remedy, will suffer more by the false Refinements of twenty Years past, than it hath been improved in the foregoing Hundred ...

But instead of giving you a List of the late Refinements crept into our Language, I here send you the Copy of a Letter I received some Time ago from a most accomplished person in this Way of Writing, upon which I shall make some Remarks. It is in these Terms.

SIR,

I couldn't get the Things you sent for all about Town.... I think it's come down my self, and then I'd ha' brat you; but I haunts, and I believe I can't don't, that's Poze.... Tom begins to g'mself Ains because he's going with the Pleasure's.... 'Tis said, the French King will bamboo't us agen, which causes many Speculations. The Jacks, and others of that Kidney, are very upush, and alert upon't, as you may see by their Phizz's.... Will Hazzard has got the Hips, having lost to the Tune of Five hundred Pound, th'o he understands Play very well, no body better. He has promis's me upon Rep, to leave off Play; but, you know 'tis a Weakness he's too apt to give into, th'o he has as much Wit as any Man, no body more. He has lain incog ever since.... The Mob's very quiet with us now.... I believe you that I banter'd you in my Last like a Country Put.... I shut't leave Town this Month, &c.

This Letter is in every Point an admirable Pattern of the present polite Way of Writing; nor is it of less Authority for being an Epistle ... The first Thing that strikes your Eye is the Breaks at the End of almost every Sentence; of which I know not the Use, only that it is a Refinement, and very frequently practised. Then you will observe the Abbreviations and Ellisions, by which Consomants of most obdurate Sound are joined together, without one softening Vowel to intervene; and all this only to make one Syllable of two, directly contrary to the Example of the Greeks and Romans; altogether of the Gothick Strain, and a natural Tendency towards retarding into barbarity, which delights in Monosyllables, and uniting of Muse Consomants; as it is observable in all the Northern Languages. And this is still more visible in the next refinement, which consists in pronouncing the first Syllable in a Word that has many, and dismissing the rest; such as Phizz, Hips, Mobbs, Pozz, Rep, and many more; when we are already overloaded with Monosyllables, which are the disgrace of our Language ...

The Third Refinement observable in the Letter I send you, consists in the Choice of certain Words invented by some Pretty Fellows, such as Banter, Bamberacle, Country Put, and Kidney, as it is there applied; some of which are now struggling for the Vogue, and others are in Possession of it. I have done my utmost for some Years past to stop the Progress of Mobbs and Banter, but have been plaintly borne down by Numbers, and betrayed by those who promised to assist me.

In the Last Place, you are to take Notice of certain choice Phrases scattered through the Letter; some of them tolerable enough, till they were worn to Rags by servile Imitators. You might easily find them, though they were in a different Print, and therefore I need not disturb them.

These are the false Refinements in our Style which you ought to correct; First, by Argument and fair Means; but if those fail, I think you are to make Use of your Authority as Censor, and by an Annual Index Expurgatorius expunge all Words and Phrases that are offensive to good Sense, and condemn those barbarous Mutations of cont ...
Vowels and Syllables. In this last Point, the usual pretence is, that they spell as they speak; A Noble Standard for a Language! to depend upon the Caprice of every Coxcomb, who, because Words are the Cloth of our Thoughts, cues them out, and shapes them as he pleases, and changes them other than his Dress ... And upon this Head I should be glad you would bestow some Advice upon several young Readers in our Churches, who coming up from the University, full fraught with Admiration of our Town Politeness, will needs correct the Style of their Prayer Books. In reading the Absolution, they are very careful to say pardons and absolvetes; and in the Prayer for the Royal Family, it must be endeve'um, envech'um, prosper'um, and brung'um. Then in their Sermons they use all the modern Terms of Art, Sham, Banter, Mob, Bubibble, Bully, Cutting, Shuffling, and Paloung ... I should be glad to see you the Instrument of introducing into our Style that Simplicity which is the best and truest ornament of most Things in Life ...

I am, with great Respect,  

SIR.  

Your, &c.

(i) Discuss what the word corruption implies as a metaphor of language. Is it a plausible and acceptable concept?

(ii) List the features of contemporary language use that Swift objected to.

(iii) Discuss Swift's argument and his own use of language, for example, his irony and the connotations of words like Errors, Evils, Abuses, deplorable, depravity, corruption, suffer, barbarity, disgrace, betrayed, mutilated, coxcomb.

(iv) Are there any significant differences between Swift's punctuation and present-day conventions? (The dots in the second Letter (...), quoted within the main letter addressed to 'Isaac Bickerstaff', are part of the punctuation which Swift objected to the Breaks at the End of almost every Sentence). Elsewhere (...) they mark omissions from the original longer text.

Some of the contracted or colloquial forms that Swift disliked were:

- banter: humorous ridicule (n), to make fun of (vb) (origin unknown, regarded by Swift as slang)
- Hips/hip: hypochondria, depression
- mcog: incognito, concealed identity
- Jacks: lads, chaps
- Mob/mob: originally shortened from mobile, from Latin mobile vulgus, the movable or excitable crowd, hence the rabble
- Phizz: physiognomy, face
- Plempos: pleinpotentiary, representative
- Put: fool, dolt, bumpkin (origin not known)
- Poz: positive, certain
- Rep: reputation

The Absolution in The Book of Common Prayer, which Swift referred to, contains the words he pardaneth and absolveth.

You can see that what Swift disliked was certain new colloquial words and phrases, and fashionable features of pronunciation – all part of spoken usage rather than written. He specifically condemned these as features of style, that is, of deliberate choices of words and structures from the resources of the language. But at the same time, he referred in general to the Corruption of our English Tongue, an evaluative metaphor that implied worsening and decay, as if the style he disliked to hear could affect everyone’s use of English, both written and spoken.

This attitude of condemnation, focusing on relatively trivial aspects of contemporary usage, was taken up time and time again throughout the eighteenth century, and has continued to the present day. It is important to study it and to assess its effects. One obvious effect is that non-standard varieties of the language tend to become stigmatised as substandard, while Standard English is thought of as the English language, rather than as the prestige dialect of the language.

The language and speech of educated men and women of the south-east, especially in London, Oxford and Cambridge, was, as we have already observed, the source of Standard English. This was John Hart’s ‘best and most perfect English’ (see Section 9.7.1) and George Puttenham’s ‘usual speech of the Court, and that of London and the shires lying about London’ (see Section 9.7.2). The following text from the 1770s illustrates the establishment of this choice.

TEXT 126 – James Beattie’s Theory of Language, 1774

Are, then, all provincial accents equally good? By no means. Of accent, as well as of spelling, syntax, and idiom, there is a standard in every polite nation. And, in all these particulars, the example of approved authors, and the practice of those, who, by their rank, education, and way of life, have had the best opportunities to know men and manners, and domestick and foreign literature, ought undoubtedly to give the law. Now it is in the metropolis of a kingdom, and in the most famous schools of learning, where the greatest repute may be expected of persons adorned with all useful and elegant accomplishments. The language, therefore, of the most learned and polite persons in London, and the neighbouring Universities of Oxford and Cambridge, ought to be accounted the standard of the English tongue, especially in accent and pronunciation: syntax, spelling, and idiom, having been ascertained by the prudence of good authors, and the consent of former ages.

Activity 11.2

Discuss your response to James Beattie’s assertions. Does his argument hold good for the present day?
11.2.1 The Augustan Age and Classical perfection

Some writers thought that the 'state of perfection' would be achieved some time in the future, but later eighteenth century grammarians placed it in the early and mid-eighteenth century language of writers like Addison, Steele, Pope and Swift himself. This period is known as the 'Augustan Age' (from the period of the reign of the Roman Emperor Augustus, 27 BC to AD 14, when great writers like Virgil, Horace and Ovid flourished). The language and literature of Classical Rome and Greece were still the foundation of education in the eighteenth century. Writers copied the forms of Classical literature, like the epic, the ode, and dramatic tragedy, while the Latin and Greek languages were models of perfection in their unchangeable state, which writers hoped English could attain. The influence of the sound of Latin and Greek helps to explain Swift's dislike of 'Northern' consonant clusters (see Text 125).

The vernacular Latin language of the first century had, of course, continued to change, so that after various centuries its several dialects had evolved into French, Italian, Spanish and the other Romance languages. But Classical Latin was fixed and ascertained, because its vocabulary and grammar were derived from the literature of its greatest period. This state seemed to be in complete contrast to contemporary English, and so, following Swift, many other writers and grammarians sought to improve the language. Somewhere, in the past or the future, lay the perfected English language.

11.3 'The Genius of the Language'

There are few references to the language of ordinary people by eighteenth century writers on language — the grammarians — it is beneath a grammarian's attempt' (Adeney, Bury in 1772). But even writers whom they admired were not necessarily taken as models of good English either. Authors' writings were subjected to detailed scrutiny for supposed errors. Grammarians sometimes spoke of 'the Genius of the Language' or 'the Idiom of the Tongue' as a criterion for judgement, the word genus meaning sometimes character or spirit, or simply grammata. But, in practice, this concept meant little more than the intuition of the grammarian; what he thought or felt sounded right, expressed in the Latin phrase Ipsa dixit the himself says. Sometimes this reliance on personal opinion was clearly stated:

...to commute: to I look upon not to be English.

It will be easily discovered that I have paid no regard to authority. I have censured even our best pensmen, where they have departed from what I conceive to be the idiom of the tongue, or where I have thought they violate grammar without necessity. To judge by the rule of Ipsa dixit is the way to perpetuate error.

(on the wrong use of prepositions) ... even by Swift, Temple, Addison, and other writers of the highest reputation; some of them, indeed, with such shameful impropriety as one must think must shock every English ear, and almost induce the reader to suppose the writers to be foreigners.

(Reflections on the English Language, Robert Baket, 1770)

Notice that Baker condemns Ipsa dixit when applied to 'the best pensmen', but not when applied to himself.
From Old English to Standard English

Often, appeals were made to Reason, or Analogy (a similar form to be found elsewhere in the language):

In doubtful cases regard ought to be had in our decisions to the analogy of the language ... Of 'Whether he will or not' and 'Whether he will or not', it is only the latter that is analogical ... when you supply the ellipsis, you find it necessary to use the adverb not, 'Whether he will or will not'.

(Philosophy of Rhetoric, George Campbell, 1776)

Grammarians were not always consistent in their arguments, however. They recognised that the evidence for the vocabulary and grammar of a language must be derived from what people actually wrote and spoke, referred to sometimes as Custom:

Reason permits that we give way to Custom, though contrary to Reason. Analogy is not the Mistress of Language. She prescribes only the Laws of Custom.

(Art of Speaking, 1708)

This point of view is argued in greater detail in the following text.

TEXT 128 - Joseph Priestley's Rudiments of English Grammar, 1769

It must be allowed, that the custom of speaking is the original, and only just standard of any language. We see, in all grammars, that this is sufficient to establish a rule, even contrary to the strongest analogies of the language with itself. Must not this custom, therefore, be allowed to have some weight, in favour of those forms of speech, to which our best writers and speakers seem evidently prone; forms which are contrary to no analogy of the language with itself, and which have been disapproved by grammarians, only from certain abstract and arbitrary considerations, and when their decisions were not prompted by the genius of the language; which discovers itself in nothing more than in the general propensity of those who use it to certain modes of construction? I think, however, that I have not, in any case, seemed to favour what our grammarians will call an irregularity, but where the genius of the language, and not only single examples, but the general practice of those who write it, and the almost universal custom of all who speak it, have obliged me to do so. I also think I have seemed to favour those irregularities, no more than the degree of the propensity I have first mentioned, when unchecked by a regard to arbitrary rules, in those who use the forms of speech I refer to, will authorize me.

Activity 11.4

Discuss Joseph Priestley's assessment of the relative values of custom, analogy, the genius of the language and the disapproval of grammarians in deciding the forms of a standard language.

11.4 Bishop Lowth's grammar

One in particular of the many grammar books of the eighteenth century had a lasting influence on later grammars which were published for use in schools in the late eighteenth century and throughout the nineteenth century — Robert Lowth's A Short Introduction to English Grammar, 1762. Lowth's attitude was prescriptive — that is, he prescribed or laid down what he himself considered to be correct usage, as illustrated in the following:

Grammar is the Art of rightly expressing our thoughts by Words etc ...

The principal design of a Grammar of any Language is to teach us to express ourselves with propriety in that Language, and to be able to judge of every phrase and form of construction, whether it be right or not etc ...

TEXT 129 – Robert Lowth's A Short Introduction to English Grammar, 1762 (i)

It is now about fifty years since Dr. Swift made a public remonstrance, addressed to the Earl of Oxford, then Lord Treasurer, of the imperfect State of our Language; alluding in particular, "that in many instances it 'offended against every part of Grammar.'" Swift must be allowed to have been a good judge of this matter. He was himself very attentive to this part, both in his own writings, and in his remarks upon those of his friends: he is one of our best correctors, and perhaps our very best prose writer. Indeed the judgiments of this complaint, as far as I can find, hath never been mistaken; and yet no effectual method hath hitherto been taken to redress the grievance of which he complains.

But let us consider, how, and in what extent, we are to understand this charge brought against the English Language. Does it mean, that the English Language as it is spoken by the polite part of the nation, and as it stands in the writings of our most approved authors, oftentimes.offends against every part of Grammar? Thus far, I am afraid, the charge is true.

The following text is an example of Lowth's prescriptive method as stated in his book, in which he is stating the use of will and shall, together with a short extract from his prose.

TEXT 130 – Robert Lowth's A Short Introduction to English Grammar, 1762 (ii)

Will in the first Person singular and plural promises or threatens; in the second and third Person only foretells: shall on the contrary, in the first Person singly foretells; in the second and third Person commands or threatens.

Do and done make the Present Time; did, had, the Past; shall, will, the Future: let the Imperative Mode: may, might, could, could, should, the Subjunctive. The Prepositions to placed before the Verb makes the Infinitive Mode. Have and be through their several Modes and Times are placed only before the Perfect and Passive Participles respectively; the self only before the Verb itself in its Primary Form.
Activity 11.5

Identify the inconsistency between Lowth's prescription and his actual use of will or shall.

Lowth's book was intended for those who were already well educated. This can be inferred from part of the preface:

A Grammatical Study of our own Language makes no part of the ordinary method of instruction which we pass thro' in our childhood ...

The use of the first person we implies that his readers, like him, will have studied Latin and Greek at school — the ancient or learned languages. This, however, did not in his opinion provide them with a knowledge of English grammar, even though they lived in polite society and read English literature, activities not followed by most of the population at the time.

Text 131 — Robert Lowth's *A Short Introduction to English Grammar*, 1762 (iii)

Much practice in the polite world, and a general acquaintance with the best authors, are good helps, but alone will hardly be sufficient: we have writers, who have enjoyed these advantages in their full extent, and yet cannot be recommended as models of an accurate style. Much less then will what is commonly called Learning serve the purpose; that is, a critical knowledge of ancient languages, and much reading of ancient authors ...

In a word, it was calculated for the use of the Learner even of the lowest class. Those who enter more deeply into this subject, will find it fully and accurately handled, with the greatest exactness of investigation, perspicuity of exposition, and elegance of method. A Treatise entitled HERMES, by JAMES HARRIS Esq; the most beautiful and perfect example of Analysis that has been exhibited since the days of Aristotle.

*class in this extract does not mean social class, but grade or standard of achievement.

11.5 Literary styles in the eighteenth century

The style of writing of Lowth and other grammarians is very 'formal'; its vocabulary and structure are unlike that of everyday language. Here are two short contrasting examples of eighteenth-century writing, the first from a diary and so informal or 'ordinary' prose, and the second from a literary journal. Literary prose adopts its own fashionable choices from the language at different periods, while ordinary language in speech and writing continues generally unremarked.

Text 132 — Thomas Hearne's *Remarks and Collections*, 1715

MAY 28 (Sat.), This being the Duke of Brunswick, commonly called King George's Birthday, some of the Bells were jumbled in Oxford, by the care of some of the Whiggish, Fanatical Crew; but as I did not observe the Day in the least myself, so it was little taken notice of (unless by way of ridicule) by other honest People, who are for K. James IIId, who is the undoubted King of these Kingdoms, & 'tis heartily wished by them that he may be restored.

This Day I saw one Ward with Dr. Charlett, who, it seems hath printed several Things. He is a clergy Man. I must inquire about him.

11.6 'The depraved language of the common People'

The standard language recognised by eighteenth century grammarians was that variety used by what they called 'the Learned and Polite Persons of the Nation' (Swift) — polite in the sense of polished, refined, elegant, well-bred. By definition, the language of the common people was inferior. This had far-reaching social consequences, as we shall see later in the chapter. Here is some of the evidence on the language of common people, which also explains why we know much less about the regional, social and spoken varieties of eighteenth century English, except what we can infer from novices, plays, letters and other indirect sources — and they were not worth the attention of scholars.

Text 134 — On the language of common people

... themselves and Families (from the Monthly Review) ... a very bad Expression, though very common. It is mere 'shopkeepers cant' and will always be found contemptible in the Ears of persons of any Taste.

(Reflections on the English Language, Robert Baker, 1770)

(on most an end for most commonly) ... is an expression that would almost disgrace the mouth of a 'huckney-coachman.'

(Remarks on the English Language, Robert Baker, 1779)

... though sometimes it may be difficult, if not impossible to reduce common speech to rule, and indeed it is beneath a grammarians's attempt.

(Plain and Complete Grammar, Anselm Bayly, 1772)

No absolute monarch hath it more in his power to nobilitate a person of obscure birth, than it is in the power of good use to ennoble words of low or dubious extraction: such, for instance, as have either arisen, nobody knows how, like fib, bant, bigom, fop, flippant, among the 'rubble', or like flimsy, sprung from the cant of the manufacturers.

(Philosophy of Rhetoric, George Campbell, 1776)
Nor are all words which are not found in the vocabulary, to be lamented as omissions. Of the laborious and mercantile part of the people, the diction is in great measure casual and mutable; many of their terms are formed for some temporary or local convenience, and though current at certain times and places, are in others utterly unknown. This fugitive cant, which is always in a state of increase or decay, cannot be regarded as any part of the durable materials of a language, and therefore must be suffered to perish with other things unworthy of preservation.

(Dictionary, Samuel Johnson, 1755)

My Animadversions will extend to such Phrases only as People in decent Life madly and wildly adopt... Purity and Politeness of Expression... is the only external Distinction which remains between a gentleman and a valet: a lady and a Mantuemaker (= dress-maker).

(Aristarchus, Philip Withers, 1788)

Such comments as these clearly show that the divisions of eighteenth century society were marked by language as much as by birth, rank, wealth and education.

11.7 Language and class

The evidence of the following quotations suggests that if the language of the common people was regarded as inferior by the educated upper classes in the eighteenth century, then their ideas and thoughts would be similarly devalued.

The best Expressions grow low and degenerate, when profaned by the populace, and applied to mean things. The use they make of them, infecting them with a mean and abject Idea, causes that we cannot use them without suffering and defiling those things, which are signified by them.

But it is no hard matter to discern between the depraved Language of common People, and the noble refind expressions of the Gentry, whose condition and merits have advanced them above the other.

(Art of Speaking, rendered into English from the French of Messeurs du Port Royal 1676, 2nd edn., 1708)

Language was regarded as the dress of thought, or, to use another simple metaphor, the mirror of thought. It was believed that there was a direct relationship between good language and good thinking. On the one hand was the dominant social class, the Gentry, whose language and way of life were variously described as polite, civilized, elegant, noble, refined, tasteful and pure. On the other hand were the laborious and mercantile part of the people, shopkeepers and hackney-coachmen, the rabble, whose language was vulgar, barbarous, contemptible, low, degenerate, profane, mean, abject and depraved.

This view was reinforced by a theory of language that was called 'Universal Grammar'. The following quotations illustrate a belief in the direct connection between language and the mind, or soul, and in the superior value of abstract thought over the senses. They are taken from Hermes: or a Philosophical Inquiry Concerning Language and Universal Grammar, published in 1751 by James Harris, the author who was commended by Bishop Lowth (see Text 131):

'Tis a phrase often applied to a man, when speaking, that he speaks his Mind: as much as to say, that his Speech or Discourse is a publishing of some Emotion or Motive of his Soul.

The VULGAR merged in Sense from their earliest Infancy, and never once dreaming any thing to be worthy of pursuit, but what pampers their Appetite, or fills their Parch, imagine nothing to be real, but what may be tasted, or touched.

For students of language today, the differences between Standard English and regional dialects are viewed as linguistically superficial and unimportant. The same meanings can be conveyed as easily in one as in the other, although we cannot, in everyday life, ignore the social connotations of regional and non-standard speech, which are still very powerful in conveying and maintaining attitudes.

In the eighteenth century, the linguistic differences between refined and common speech were held to match fundamental differences in intellect and morality. The gulf between the two was reinforced by the fact that education was in the 'learned languages' Latin and Greek. The classical Greek language and literature in particular were judged to be the most perfect.

Now the Language of these Greeks was truly like themselves: it was conformable to their transcendent and universal Genius.

'There to be wished, that those amongst us, who either write or read, with a view to employ their liberal leisure... were to be wished, I say, that the liberal (if they have any relish for letters) would respect the finished Models of Greek Literature... (Hermes, James Harris, 1751)

As it was believed that the contrasts between the refined language of the classically educated class and the vulgar language of the common people mirrored equal differences in intellectual capabilities, and also in virtue or morality, such beliefs had social and political consequences.

The most devastating aspect of 18th century assessments of language was its philosophical justification of this notion of vulgarity.

(The Politics of Language 1791–1819, Olivia Smith, OUP, 1984)

These social and political consequences can be demonstrated. The years of the long wars with France (1793–1815) following the French Revolution of 1789 were marked by the political oppression of popular movements for reform. Ideas about language were used to protect the government from criticism. For example, the notion of vulgarity of language became an excuse to dismiss a series of petitions to Parliament calling for the reform of the voting system. If the language of the 'labouring classes' was by definition inferior, incapable of expressing coherent thought, and also of dubious moral value, then it was impossible for them to use language properly in order to argue their own case.

Liberty of speech and freedom of discussion in this House form an essential part of the constitution: but it is necessary that persons coming forward as petitioners, should address the House in decent and respectful language.

(Parliamentary Debates xxx,779)

Here are short extracts from three petitions presented to Parliament. The first was presented by 'tradesmen and artificers, unpossessed of freehold land' in Sheffield in 1793 and was rejected; the second, by 'twelve freeholders' from Reading in 1810, was accepted; the third was presented by non-voters from Yorkshire in 1817. At that time, only men who owned freehold land had the vote.

TEXT 135a – Petition to Parliament, 1793

Your petitioners are lovers of peace, of liberty, and justice. They are in general tradesmen and artificers, unpossessed of freehold land, and consequently have no voice in choosing members to sit in parliament; — but though they may not be freeholders, they are men, and do not think themselves fairly used in being excluded the rights of citizens... (Parliamentary Debates xxx,776)
TEXT 135b – Petition to Parliament, 1810

The petitioners cannot conceive it possible that his Majesty's present incapable and arbitrary ministers should be still permitted to carry on the government of the country, after having wasted our resources in fruitless expeditions, and having shown no regard but in support of antiquated prejudices, and in attacks upon the liberties of the subject ...

(Parliamentary Debates xvi.955)

TEXT 135c – Petition to Parliament, 1817

The petitioners have a full and immovable conviction, a conviction which they believe to be universal throughout the kingdom, that the House doth not, in any constitutional or rational sense, represent the nation; that, when the people have ceased to be represented, the constitution is subverted; that taxation without representation is slavery ...

(Parliamentary Debates xxxiv. 81–2, quoted in Olivia Smith op cit)

Activity 11.7

(i) Discuss the charge that the language of the first petition was 'indirect and disrespectful', and compare it with another comment made at the time: 'I suspect that the objection to the roughness of the language was not the real cause why this petition was opposed.'

(ii) Discuss the view expressed in Parliament at the time that the language of the second petition 'though firm as it ought to be, was respectful'.

(iii) The Tory minister George Canning said of the third petition 'if such language were tolerated, there was an end of the House of Commons, and of the present system of government'. What is objectionable in the language?

The grammar and spelling of these extracts are perfectly 'correct'. In contrast, consider the following example of a letter of protest against the enclosure of common land, written anonymously by 'the Combin'd of the Parish of Cheshunt' to their local landowner. It uses non-standard spelling, punctuation and grammar, which clearly would have provided Parliament with an excuse for its dismissal.

TEXT 136 – Letter to Oliver Cromwell Esquire, of Cheshunt Park, 27 February 1799

... Resolutions is made by the aforesaid Combind that you intend of inclosing Our Command Command fields Lammas Meads Marches &c We Resolute before that bloody and unlawful act is finished to have your hearis blood if you proceede in the aforesaid bloody act We like horse leaches will cry give, giv and who have split the blood of every one that wishes to rob the innocent unborn. It shall not be in your power to say I am safe from the hands of my Enemy for We like birds of pray prively lie in wait to spill the blood of the aforesaid Characters whose names and places of abode are as prurified sores in our Nostrils. Who declair that thou shall not say I am safe when thou goest to thy bed for beware that thou liest not thine eyes up in the most mist of flames ...


11.8 William Cobbett and the politics of language

William Cobbett (1763–1835) was the son of a farmer from Farnham, Surrey, and self-educated. From 1785 to 1791, he served in a foot regiment in Canada, and left the army after trying, and failing, to bring some officers to trial for embezzlement. He spent the rest of his life in writing, journalism and farming, and became an MP in 1832 after the passing of the Reform Act.

Cobbett began a weekly newspaper, The Political Register, in 1802 as a Tory, but soon became converted to the radical cause of social and Parliamentary reform, and wrote and edited The Political Register until his death in 1835, campaigning against social injustice and government corruption.

In Section 11.7, we saw how the concept of vulgarity of language was used to deny the value of the meaning and content of petitions to Parliament. Cobbett referred to this in an edition of The Political Register which was written in America, where he had gone after the suspension of habeas corpus in England.

TEXT 137 – William Cobbett's The Political Register, 29 November 1817

The present project ... is to communicate to all uneducated Reformers, a knowledge of Grammar. The people, you know, were accused of presenting petitions not grammatically correct. And those petitions were rejected, the petitioners being 'ignorant'; though some of them were afterwards put into prison, for being 'better informed'...

No doubt remains in my mind, that there was more talent discovered, and more political knowledge, by the leaders among the Reformers, than have ever been shown, at any period of time, by the Members of the two Houses of Parliament.

There was only one thing in which any of you were deficient, and that was in the mere art of so arranging the words in your Resolutions and Petitions as to make these compositions what is called grammatically correct. Hence, men of a hundredth part of the mind of some of the authors of the Petitions were enabled to cavil at them on this account, and to infer from this incorrectness, that the Petitioners were a set of poor ignorant creatures, who knew nothing of what they were talking; a set of the Lower Classes, who ought never to raise their reading above that of children's books, Christmas Carols, and the like.

For my part, I have always held a mere knowledge of the rules of grammar very cheap. It is a study, which demands hardly any powers of mind. To possess a knowledge of those rules is a pitiful qualification ...

Grammar is to literary composition what a linch-pin is to a wagon. It is a poor pitiful thing in itself; it bears no part of the weight; adds not in the least the to the celerity; but, still the wagon cannot very well and safely go on without it ...

Therefore, trifling, and even contemptible, as this branch of knowledge is in itself, it is of vast importance as to the means of giving to the great powers of the mind their proper effect ... The grammarians from whom a man of genius learns his rules has little more claim to a share of such a man's renown than has the goose, which yields the pens with which he writes: but, still the pens are necessary, and so is the grammar.
Cobbett’s writings, like Tom Paine’s *The Rights of Man* in 1792 and *The Age of Reason* in 1794, were proof that the language of men of humble class origins could be effective in argument, but both Cobbett and Paine wrote in Standard English. Cobbett was well aware of the connotations of non-standard language and wrote an account of how he had taught himself correct grammar. He does not use the term standard himself and follows the common practice of implying that only this variety of English has grammar. He wrote under the name Peter Porcupine.

TEXT 138 – William Cobbett’s *The Life and Adventures of Peter Porcupine*, 1796

One branch of learning, however, I went to the bottom with, and that the most essential branch too, the grammar of my mother tongue. I had experienced the want of a knowledge of grammar during my stay with Mr Holland; but it is very probable that I never should have thought of encountering the study of it, had not accident placed me under a man whose friendship extended beyond his interest. Writing a fair hand procured me the honour of being copyist to Colonel Deberg, the commandant of the garrison...

Being totally ignorant of the rules of grammar, I necessarily made many mistakes in copying, because no one can copy letter by letter, nor even word by word. The colonel saw my deficiency, and strongly recommended study. He enforced his advice with a sort of injunction, and with a promise of reward in case of success.

I procured me a Lowth’s grammar, and applied myself to the study of it with unceasing assiduity, and not without some profit; for, though it was a considerable time before I fully comprehended all that I read, still I read and studied with such unremitting attention, that, at last, I could write without falling into any very gross errors. The pains I took cannot be described: I wrote the whole grammar out two or three times; I got it by heart; I repeated it every morning and every evening; and, when on guard, I imposed on myself the task of saying it all over once every time I was posted sentinel. To this exercise of my memory I ascribe the retentiveness of which I have since found it capable, and to the success with which it was attended, I ascribe the perseverance that has led to the acquirement of the little learning of which I am the master.

Cobbett was thus convinced of the need to master standard grammar:

Without understanding this, you cannot hope to become fit for anything beyond mere trade or agriculture... Without a knowledge of grammar, it is impossible for you to write correctly; and, it is by mere accident that you speak correctly; and, pray bear in mind, that all well-informed persons judge of a man’s mind (until they have other means of judging) by his writing or speaking.

(Advice to Young Men, William Cobbett)

and he followed up his conviction by writing a grammar book, in the form of a series of letters addressed to his son.

TEXT 139 – William Cobbett’s *A Grammar of the English Language*, 1817

... grammar teaches us how to make use of words... to the acquiring of this branch of knowledge, my dear son, there is one motive, which, though it ought, at all times, to be strongly felt, ought, at the present time, to be so felt in an extraordinary degree: I mean that desire which every man, and especially every young man, should entertain to be able to assert with effect the rights and liberties of his country.

... And when we hear a Hampshire plough-boy say, ‘Pon Cherry cheek have giv’d I thick handkercher’ we know very well that he means to say, ‘Pon Cherry cheech has given me this handkercher’ and yet, we are but too apt to laugh at him, and to call him ignorant; which is wrong; because he has no pretensions to a knowledge of grammar, and he may be very skilful as a plough-boy.
12. Postscript – to the present day

The purpose of this book – to describe how present-day Standard English has developed from its origins in OE a thousand years ago – has effectively been achieved in the preceding chapters.

12.1 Some developments in the language since the eighteenth century

There is a constant change in the vocabulary of the language, and it goes without saying that there have been many losses and gains of words since the eighteenth century. English is a language that has taken in and assimilated words from many foreign languages to add to the core vocabulary of Germanic, French and Latin words.

12.1.1 Spelling

The standard orthography was fixed in the eighteenth century by the agreed practice of printers. Dr Johnson set down accepted spellings in his Dictionary of 1755, and also recorded some of the arbitrary choices of 'custom':

... thus I write, in compliance with a numberless majority, convey and inreagh, deceit and recept, fancy and phantom. A few words found in the original versions of eighteenth century texts have changed, for example, cloathing, terreur, phynasys and publick, but there are not many. More recently, it has become acceptable to change the <ae> spelling to <ee> in a few words of Latin derivation, and to write medieval for mediæval, and archæology for archæology. Some American spellings have also become acceptable in Britain, such as program as a result of its use in computer programming. With few exceptions, it is true to say that our spelling system was fixed over 200 years ago and every attempt to reform it has failed.

12.1.2 Grammar

While the underlying rules of grammar have remained unchanged, their use in speech and writing has continued to develop into forms that distinguish the varieties of language use since the eighteenth century. This can perhaps be explained in terms of style, and so is the subject of a different kind of course book. In present-day English, we can observe, in some varieties of language use, a greater degree of complexity in both the noun phrase and the verb phrase.

**Noun phrases**

Modifiers of nouns normally precede the head of the noun phrase (NP) when they are words (usually adjectives or nouns) or short phrases, as in a red brick, the brick wall and the red brick wall, and follow it when they are phrases or clauses. The rule of pre-modification has developed so that much longer strings of words and phrases can now precede the head word, as in a never to be forgotten experience.

This style is a particular feature of newspaper headlines. For example, the news statement that might be written as:

There has been a report on the treatment of suspects in police stations in Northern Ireland ... can be turned into a NP as:

A Northern Ireland police station suspect treatment report in which a series of post-modifying prepositional phrases (PrepPs) become pre-modifying NPs within the larger NP.

![Activity 12.1](image)

**State the grammatical rule for converting the clause into a NP.**

The process of converting clauses with verbs into nouns is called **nominalisation**, and the word itself is an example of that process. It is a marked feature of some contemporary styles, including academic and formal writing, and tends to omit the agents or actors who actually do things; for example:

S P C

There has been no convincing explanation of the attempt ... is only the beginning of a longer sentence. It might have been written:

X has not convinced us by explaining how Y attempted ...

in which main verbs are used instead of nouns or a modifying participle, and the subjects X and Y would have to be named.

This is a trend in style which depends upon the fact that the grammar of English permits nominalisation readily.

**Verb phrases**

If you compare the possible forms of the verb phrase (VP) in contemporary English with any OE text, you will find that OE verb phrases were generally shorter, and OE grammar lacked the forms of VP that have developed since. In MnE, it is possible to construct VPs like:

she has been being treated ...

hasn't she been being treated?

won't she have been being treated?

which use **auxiliary verbs** to combine the grammatical features of tense (past or present), aspect (perfective or progressive), voice (active or passive) and mood (declarative or interrogative), to which we can add:

She seems to manage to be able to keep on being treated ...
12.2 The continuity of prescriptive judgements on language use

We judge others by their speech as much as by other aspects of their behaviour, but some people are much more positive in their reactions. The relationship between social class and language use in the eighteenth century, which was described in Chapter 11, has been maintained throughout the nineteenth century up to the present day. Here, for example, is the Dean of Canterbury, Henry Alford D.D., writing in a book called The Queen's English: Stray Notes on Speaking and Spelling in 1864.

Full text of text 140 - Dean Alford's The Queen's English, 1864

And first and foremost, let me notice that worst of all faults, the leaving out of the aspirate where it ought to be, and putting it in where it ought not to be. This is a vulgarism not confined to this or that province of England, nor especially prevalent in one county or another, but common throughout England to persons of low breeding and inferior education, principally to those among the inhabitants of towns. Nothing so surely stamps a man as below the mark in intelligence, self-respect, and energy, as this unfortunate habit...

As I write these lines, which I do while waiting in a refreshment-room at Reading, between a Great-Western and a South-Eastern train, I hear one of two commercial gentlemen, from a neighbouring table, telling his friend that 'his ed used to have ready to burst.'

Activity 12.2

Discuss Dean Alford's comments on the pronunciation of words beginning with <sh>.

Alford's attitude is no different from that of some eighteenth century grammarians in their references to the depraved language of the common People (see Section 11.6). One feature of common usage that is still taught as an error is what is called the 'split infinitive'. Here is Dean Alford on the subject:

A correspondent states as his own usage, and defends, the insertion of an adverb between the sign of the infinitive mood and the verb. He gives as an instance, 'so scientifically illustrate.' But surely this is a practice entirely unknown to English speakers and writers. It seems to me, that we ever regard the 'in' of the infinitive as inseparable from its verb.

12.3 The grammar of spoken English today

The invention of sound recording, and especially of the portable tape recorder, has made it possible for us to study the spoken language in a way that students of language were formerly quite unable to do. It has always been known that spoken English differed from written English, but even an experienced shorthand writer would to some extent idealise what was said and omit features that seemed irrelevant.

Here is a transcription of some recorded informal contemporary spoken English, which uses written symbols to indicate spoken features of the language. The conventions of written punctuation are deliberately not used. The symbols represent stress patterns, contained in tone units (units of information into which we divide our speech), each having a tone syllable marked by stress and a change of pitch.

The speaker is an educated user of Standard English, and the topic is linguistic acceptability, but the transcription, even if punctuated with capital letters, full-stops and commas as if it were written, would not be acceptable as written English.

The conventions used in the transcription are as follows:

- The end of a tone unit (or tone group) is marked (.)
- The word containing the tone syllable (or nucleus) is printed in bold type.
- The place where two speakers overlap is marked (,)
- A micro-pause in speech is marked with a stop (;); longer breaks are marked with one or more dashes (--).

The text is part of a longer conversation between two women in their twenties. A is a secretary and B is a university lecturer.

Postscript - to the present day

The Dean is wrong in his assertion that the practice is 'entirely unknown'. The idea that it is ungrammatical to put an adverb between to and the verb was an invention of prescriptive grammarians, but it has been handed on as a solecism (violation of the rules of grammar) by one generation of school teachers after another. It has become an easy marker of 'good English', but avoiding it can lead to ambiguity.

Activity 12.3

The following paragraph appeared in a daily newspaper in August 1989. It shows how some contemporary journalists still avoid the 'split infinitive' at all costs. Was the correction unambiguous?

TEXT 141

Correction

Our front page report yesterday on microwave cooking mistakenly stated that in tests of 83 cook-chill and ready-cooked products, Sainsbury's found the instructions on 10 products always failed to ensure the foods were fully heated to 70C. The story should have said the instructions failed always to ensure the foods were fully heated to 70C — that is, they sometimes failed to ensure this.

(The Guardian 24 August 1989)
TEXT 142 – Contemporary spoken English

A well what do they put, in a computing programme? I --
B well you'll hear a lot about it in due course. It's what they call
C IT tests, which stands for investigating language accep-
D [mm]
A tability.
B mm.
A and they've done those on groups of undergraduates. We don't
B [mm]
A know what
B [mm] erm battery things!
A [mm]
B yes. erm sort of, science graduates
A [mm] German graduates! English graduates [mm] and so on and asked
B them -- there are various types of test they gave them. They
gave them a sentence and there are four answers they can give
A [mm]
B either it's acceptable! it's not acceptable.
A [mm]
B it's marginal. Or you know it's somewhere between and then.
A [mm]
B when they mark up the results have a fourth category which
A [mm]
B is their answer was incoherent.
B [mm]
A yes.
B [mm]
A that's one type. Then there's an operation test they're
B interested in. Well particularly seeing various adverbs and
A [mm]
B they write something like I entirely dot dot dot! -- and the
A [mm]
B student has to complete the sentence --
B [mm]
A well with entirely! They'll nearly all write agree with you!
B [mm]
A [mm]
B and entirely and agree. -- go together!
B [mm]
A [mm]
B collate or something it's called.
B [mm]
A yeah!
B [mm]
B [laughs -- I and then they in fact try another adverb]
A [mm]
B and then there'll be an absolute range of verbs that you
A [mm]
B know it's quite interesting! The word in the theories they had a
A [mm]
B sentence with entirely! And god people to er transform it into the
A [mm]
B negative!
A [mm]
B this is very tricky. I should have thought there were.
B yes well quite! They do that sort of thing you see and then they
A [mm]
B see what they've produced! And then they sort of score them.
B [mm]
A up in a certain [way] and they'll say have they. Erm -- have
B [mm]
A yes.
B they done what they were told to and if not why not! And then
A [mm]
B there are various reasons why not! And they were scored! And given
A [mm]
B a mark! And it's quite in credible!
A [mm]
B I think that's one of the most valuable things that I've thought was being done in.
B [mm]
A mm.
B in the battery test because it should relate quite directly to
A [mm]
B the meaning of word!
B yes.

(Adapted from Corpus of English Conversation, Swartvik and Quirk, C. W. K. Gleeson Lund. S.1.5., 465-553, p. 135-7.)

Postscript – to the present day

Activity 12.4

(i) Edit the transcription, omitting all non-fluency features that belong to speech only (e.g.,
hesitations, self-corrections and repetitions), but retaining the identical vocabulary and
word order.

(ii) Examine the edited version for evidence of differences between the vocabulary and
grammar of informal spoken English and written English.

(iii) Rewrite B's part of the conversation in a style that conforms to the conventions of written
Standard English.

(For a full analysis, see Commentary 21 in the Text Commentary Book.)

12.4 From OE to MnE – comparing historical texts

If you have worked through most of the book, you should now find it easier to recognise texts
from different historical periods of the language, and to describe how they differ from
contemporary English. Even a very short example will illustrate this, chosen virtually at
random. To illustrate some of the changes in the language from OE to MnE that have been
described, consider the following, which is the first verse from Chapter 3 of The Book of
Genesis.

TEXT 143 – Genesis 3:1

Late tenth century OE
ee swylice seo neddre was gespre þonne caele Pa ðe ðere nytenu
pe God gewowe ofer eorþ Pan, and seo neddre cwæþ to pam
wife, hwæ forðeoh God cow þæt ge ætun leomc treowe
binnan paradisum.

Late fourteenth century ME

But the serpent was feller than alle tywynge hecesis of erthe
which the Lord God hadde maad. Which serpent seide to the
woman. Why comandide God to soul that se schuilde not ete
of eech tre of paradis.

EMnE, 1611

Now the serpent was more subtile then any beast of the field,
which the Lord God had made, and he said unto the woman, Yea,
hath God said, Ye shall not eat of every tree of the garden?

MnE, 1961

The serpent was more crafty than any wild creature that the
LORD God had made. He said to the woman, 'is it true that
God has forbidden you to eat from any tree in the garden?'

12.4.1 Commentary on Text 143

The following detailed description of the extracts gives a pattern that can be applied to the
comparison of any two or more texts.

Make a series of columns, one for each text, and an extra one to record any reflexes of the
older words that have survived into MnE but are not used in later translations. Write down the
equivalent words or phrases from each text.
Can you tell if different spellings of the same word are due to sound changes, or simply different spelling conventions?

Some spelling conventions must have changed after the OE period, for example:

- the Old English *cyning* 'king' was pronounced as /ˈkɪŋ/ in ME and became /ˈkɪŋ/ in MnE, as in 'the king' in 1161,
- the Old English *wæs* 'was' was pronounced as /wæz/ in ME and became /wɛz/ in MnE, as in 'was the adder'.
- *<a>*, *<s>*, and *<t>*, were often interchangeable in ME and MnE, as in *lyngene, saide, sayed, soniely, and sustil*.
- *<s>*, *<o>*, and *<ë>*, were introduced during the ME period and written for both the consonant */n/ and the vowel /œ/ at the beginning of a word (word-initial), for example, *verily and wnder*; letter *<a>* was used in the middle (word-medial) or at the end of a word (word-final), for example, *lyngene, vnner (= under), dust, and thou*. They were then variant forms of the same letter, just as today we use upper and lower case variants of the same letters, for example, *<A>, <a>* and *<o>*.

The spelling evidence is of some sound changes that occurred after the OE period.

The word *naddre* in OE now has the form *adder*, as well as a restricted meaning. The pronunciation of the phrase *a nadder* is identical to that of an *adder*. The indefinite article *an* was not part of OE grammar, so the change of *nadder* to *adder* came later, between the fourteenth and sixteenth centuries. The dialectal form *naddar* was still in use at least into the nineteenth century.

The diphthong vowels of *valle, eorpan, forhæad, and treowne* have smoothed to become single vowels.

It is not possible to recognise all the sound changes from the spelling alone, because MnE spelling does not reflect them: for example, the MnE pronunciation of *was* is /wɛz/ but the spelling has not changed since its earlier pronunciation as *wæs*.

**Word structure**

Are there changes in word suffixes (endings)?

The order of the consonants *re* and *of* of *naddre* and *geworthite* has changed to *er* and *ra*. Other examples are *bræd, břerch, and bræn*, which come from OE *břead*, *břercha*, and *břan*. The linguistic term for this reversal of sounds is *metathesis*.

The pronoun *od-r-e*, however, is not an example of this. It is a shortened form of *ofer-e*, from *od-r*, and -e is a suffix.

*valle, rytn-e, geworth-e* and *eorpan*: these suffixes have been lost. *beest*-is has been reduced to *beast*.

**Grammar**

Is the OE word order different from MnE?

The following texts are historical translations of the story of Peter's denial, from the New Testament, St Matthew's Gospel, Chapter 26 verses 69-75. Versions in contemporary Scots and Bislama pidgin English are also provided.
TEXT 144 – Late West Saxon OE c.1050

Pyn spræce Pe gesweotolæg

69 Petrus soðlice set ut on Þam cæfurne. Pe com to hym an
beow ðæt ðæt. Pe ware myd Þam galæliscan helende.
70 Pe wydæc eft myd all Peht be hys man Þing ne
ceode. 73 Pe æterum fyrest gesæde Untan be Þæt
stodan. Þæt ðæt on Þære. Soðlice Pe Þæt ofan of hym.
74 Pe gesweotolæg. 74 Pe æterum he Þæt syned. Peht
be Þære Þæt af Pe man ne ceode. 74 Pe æterum
he Þæt syned. Peht be Þære Þæt af Pe man ne ceode.

(The West-Saxon Gospels, M. Grünberg, Scheltema & Holkema, 1967)

TEXT 145 – Fourteenth century S. Midlands dialect

‘thi speche makith thee known’

69 And Petr sat with ouen in the halle; and a damysel com
to hym, and seide, Thou were with Iesus of Galilée. 70 And
he denye byer alle men, and seide, Y woot not what thou
seist, 73 And when he yede out of the gate, another
damysel say hym, and seide to hym that were ther, And
this was with Iesus of Nazareth. 72 And elsoone he denye with
an ooth, For I knewe not the man. 73 And a litl alter, the
that stodden camen, and seiden to Petr, treult thou art of
him; for thi speche makith thee known. 74 Thanne he bigan
to ware and to swere, that he knewe not the man. And anon
the cock crowe. 75 And Petr bithought on the word of Iesus,
that he hadde seid, Before the cock crowe, thane thou schal
deny me. And he yede out, and wepte bittleri.

(The Wycliffite Bible)

TEXT 146 – Early sixteenth century Scots, c.1520

(This Scots version is made from Text 145, and is of interest because it makes clear some of the dialectal differences between Scots and Wycliffe’s Midlands dialect.)

‘thi speche makis thee knawe’

69 And Petr sat without in the hall: and a damysele com to
him, and said, Thou was with Jesu of Galile. 70 And he
denyed before al men, and said, I wot not what thou sayest.
71 And quhen he yede out at the yet, an whil damysele saw
him, and said to thame that were thare, And this was with Jesu
of Nazare. 72 And eisoon he denyed with an ooth, For I
knew not the man. 73 And a leitl ooth thai that stode com
and said to Petr, treuld thou art of thame; for thi speche
makis thee knawe. 74 Than he began to ware and to swere
that he knew not the man. And anon the cock swere, 75 And
Petr bethought on the word of Jesu, that he had said,
Before the cock crow, thrise thou sol denye me. And he yede
out, and wept bittlerie.

(The New Testament in Scots, being Purvey’s revision of Wycliffe’s version turned into Scots by Murdoch Nisbet c.1520, Scottish Text Society 1901)

TEXT 147 – EMNE, 1582

‘for euen thy speache doth bevvraty thee’

69 But Peter sate without in the court: and there came to him one womens,
saying: Thou also wost with IESVS the Galilæe. 70 But he denied before
them all, saying, I wot not what thou sayest. 71 And as he went out of the
gate, an other women saw him, and she said to them that were there, And
this felowe also wos with IESVS the Nazare. 72 And agane he denied
with an ooth, That I know not the man. 73 And after a little they came that
stoode by, and said to Peter, Surely thou also art of them: for euen thy speache
doth bevvraty thee. 74 Then he began to curse and to swear that he knewe
not the man. And incontinent the cocke crewe. 75 And Peter remembered
the word of IESVS whiche he had said, before the cocke crow, thou shalt deny me thrisre. And going forth, he wepte bittlerie.


TEXT 148 – EMNE, 1611

‘for thy speech bewrayeth thee’

69 Now Peter sat without in the palace: and a damosell came vnto him,
saying, Thou also wast with Iesus of Galilée. 70 But he denied before
them all, saying, I know not what thou sayest. 71 And when he was gone
out into the porch, another maid saw him, and said vnto them that were
there, This fellow was also with Jesus of Nazareth. 72 And aganne he denied
with an oath, I do not know the man. 73 And after a while came vnto him
they that stood by, and said to Peter, Surely thou also art one of them, for
thy speech bewrayeth thee. 74 Then becam he to curse and to swear, saying,
I know not the man. And immediately the cocke crow. 75 And Peter
remembered the words of Iesus, which said vnto him, Before the cocke crow,
thou shalt deny mee thrice. And hee went out, and wept bittlerie.

(King James Bible)
TEXT 149 – Twentieth century Scots

"your Galilee twang ous ye"

69 Meantime, Peter wis sittin furth i the close, whan a servan-quayn cam up an said til him, 'Ye war wi the man frae Galilee, Jesus, tae, I'm thinkin.'

70 But he denied it afore them aa: 'I kenn'a what ye mean,' said he; 71 and wi that he gaed out intil the pend.

Here anither servan-lass saw him an said tae the fowk staundin about, 'This chiel wis wi yon Nazarene Jesus.'

72 Again Peter wadna tak wi it, but said wi an aith. 'I kenn'a the man!'

73 A wee after, the staunders-by gaed up til him an said, 'Ay, but ye war sae wi him, tae: your Galilee twang ous ye.'

74 At that he fell tae hamin an swerin at he hed nae kenn'a o the man ava. An than a cock crew, 75 an it cam back tae Peter hou Jesus hed said til him, 'Afore the cock craws, ye will disavow me thrice: and he gaed out an grav a sar, sar greit.


TEXT 150 – MnE

'your accent gives you away!'

69 Meanwhile Peter was sitting outside in the courtyard when a serving-maid accosted him and said, 'You were there too with Jesus the Galilean.' 70 Peter denied it in face of them all. 'I do not know what you mean,' he said. 71 He then went out to the gateway, where another girl, seeing him, said to the people there, 'This fellow was with Jesus of Nazareth.' 72 Once again he denied it, saying with an oath, 'I do not know the man.' 73 Shortly afterwards the bystanders came up and said to Peter, 'Surely you are another of them; your accent gives you away!' 74 At this he broke into curses and declared with an oath: 'I do not know the man.' 75 At that moment a cock crew; and Peter remembered how Jesus had said, 'Before the cock crows you will disown me three times.' He went outside, and wept bitterly.

(New English Bible, 1961)

Finally, here is the same Biblical extract in Bislama, a pidgin language based on English, from Vanuatu (formerly the New Hebrides) in the West Pacific. Read it aloud as if it were in phonetic script, because the spelling system is based on the spoken language, and you should be able to match the sense with the preceding texts. For example, yad is pronounced yadəl, like English yard, get is ʒetə, like gate, ruma like rooster, and savə is a two-syllable word like savvy, meaning know.

TEXT 151 – Bislama

from Gud Nyus Bilong Jisas Krais

'tok bilong yu i tok bilong man Galili iu'

69 Pita i stap sidhon aofsaid long yad bilong houa iu. Nao van haoxel i kam long em, i talem long em, i se 'Yu tu, yu stap weter man Galili iu, Jisas.' 70 Be long fei bilong olgeta eviawan, Pita i haidem samting iu. Em i ansa, i se 'Mi mi no save samting iu, we yu yu stap talem.' 71 Nao em i goaat long get bilong yad iu. Nao wan narafisa gel i lukem em. Nao i talem long ol man we oll stap stanap long ples iu, i se 'Man ia i weter man Naseret ia, Jisas.' 72 Be Pita i haidem bakegen, i mekem strong tok, nau em i talem se 'Mi mi no save man iu.' 73 Gogo smol taem nomo, ol man ia we oll stap stanap long ples iu, oli kam long Pita, oli talem long em, oli se, 'Be i tru ia, yu yu wan long olgeta. Yu laku, tok bilong yu i tok bilong man Galili iu.' 74 Nao Pita i mekem tok we i strong moa, i se 'Sipos mi mi gyaman, bambae God i gvey pams long mi. Mi mi no save man ia.' Nao wantaem rusta i singout. 75 Nao Pita i tinguina tok ia we Jisas i bin talem long em, i se 'Tuem rusta i no singout yet, yu, be bambae yu save haidem tr iem, se yu no save mi.' Nao em i go aofsaid, em i kraekne tumas.

(The Four Gospels in New Hebrides Bislama, The Bible Society in New Zealand, 1971)

Activity 12.5

Make a contrastive study of the language, using some or all of the texts given (Texts 144–151) as evidence of some of the principal changes that have taken place since the OE period in vocabulary, word and sentence structure, spelling and pronunciation.
This list is a selection of books which teachers, lecturers and advanced students will find useful for further reading and reference. Separate editions of Old, Middle and Early Modern English texts are not listed.

The history and development of the English language

Baugh, A.C. and Cable, T.
*A History of the English Language*, 3rd edn

Pyles, T. and Algeo, J.
*The Origins & Development of the English Language*, 3rd edn
(Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1982).
(This textbook has an accompanying work-book)

Strang, Barbara
*A History of English*
(Methuen, 1970).

Leith, Dick
*A Social History of English*
(Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1983).

Skegg, D.G.
*A History of English Spelling*
(Manchester UP, 1974).

Partridge, A.C.
*A Companion to Old & Middle English Studies*
(Deutsch, 1982).

Old English

Mitchell, B. and Robinson, F.C.
*A Guide to Old English*, 4th edn
(Blackwell, 1986).

Quirk, R. and Wrenn, C.L.
*An Old English Grammar*
(Methuen, 1955).

Quirk, R., Adams, V. and Davy, D.
*Old English Literature: A Practical Introduction*
(Edward Arnold, 1975).

Sweet, H.
*The Student's Dictionary of Anglo-Saxon*

Davis, N.
*Sweet's Anglo-Saxon Primer*, 9th edn
(Oxford UP, 1953).

Garmonsway, G.N.
*The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* (translation)
(Dent, 1972).

Swanton, M
*Anglo-Saxon Prose* (translation)
(Dent, 1975).

Bradley, S.A.J.
*Anglo-Saxon Poetry* (translation)
(Dent, 1982).

Middle English

Bennett, J.A.W. and Smithers, G.V.
*Early Middle English Verse & Prose*, 2nd edn (anthology)

Sisam, K.
*Fourteenth Century Verse & Prose*
(Oxford UP, 1921).

Burnley, D.
*A Guide to Chaucer's Language*
(Macmillan, 1983).

Early Modern English

Barber, C.
*Early Modern English*
(Deutsch, 1976).

Blake, Norman
*The Language of Shakespeare*
(Macmillan, 1985).
From Old English to Standard English

Modern English

Quirk, R. et al.
A Comprehensive Grammar of the English Language
(Longman, 1985).

Barber, C.
Linguistic Change in Present-Day English
(Oliver & Boyd, 1964).

Foster, B.
The Changing English Language

Potter, S.
Changing English
(Deutsch, 1969).

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