



## HISTORY OF THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE

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**Abstract.** English is one of the most widely spoken languages in the world. And its development so far consists of several stages. In this article, the author talks about the history of the English language and the changes that occurred during its transformation.

**Keywords.** Old English, Middle English, Modern English, changes, language, period, centuries

The study of the history of the English language will require the knowledge of related subjects: the data of the subjects already studied. Linguistic terminology and notions of general linguistics are not explained in the course - they are supposed to have been studied in the introductory university linguistics courses. Language system is viewed in the divisions generally recognized among the researchers of English, but with a special attention to its history.

### **Causes of language changes**

In studying the history of a language we are faced with a number of problems concerning the driving forces or causes of changes in the language. The causes can apparently be of two kinds: external and internal.

- **External causes:** language is influenced by factors lying outside it, or, extralinguistic factors. Such historic events as social changes, wars, consequences, migration, cultural contacts and the like strongly influence a language, especially its vocabulary.

- **Internal causes:** many changes that occur in the history of language cannot be traced to any extralinguistic causes; the driving power in such cases is within the language itself. Most changes in the phonetic structure of a language, and also in its grammatical structure, are due to internal causes, for example due to the general tendency of language to economy: speakers tend to make their utterances as efficient as possible, they try to exert the least effort in communicating with language (thus making use of abbreviations, simple grammar structures in spoken language.) Also, many changes are caused by analogy, when speakers tend to liken similar words and grammatical phenomena.



## Periods in the History of English

The history of English is conventionally divided into three periods usually called Old English (or Anglo-Saxon), Middle English, and Modern English.

### The Old English period: brief outline and main features

**Dates:** 7<sup>th</sup> -11<sup>th</sup> centuries AD. This earliest period begins with the migration of certain Germanic tribes from the continent to Britain in the fifth century A.D, though no records of their language survive from before the seventh century, and it continues until the end of the eleventh century or a bit later. By that time Latin, Old Norse (the language of the Viking invaders), and especially the Anglo-Norman French of the dominant class after the Norman Conquest in 1066 had begun to have a substantial impact on the lexicon, and the well-developed inflectional system that typifies the grammar of Old English had begun to break down.

### Main features the period in the language development.

- 1) After the English scholar Henry Sweet, this period is called the period of full endings. This means that any vowel may be found in an unstressed ending.
- 2) Spelling was phonetic, i.e. all the letters were pronounced.
- 3) There were long and short vowels and long and short consonants (germinates). Some sounds do not exist now.
- 4) OE was an inflected language, whose words showed their grammatical function in the sentence by changes in the word itself. The word order was free.
- 5) The noun had 2 numbers, three genders (masculine, feminine, neuter), 4 cases (Nominative, Genitive, Dative, Accusative) and several types of declension according to the stem-suffix.
- 6) There were two types of adjective declension, strong and weak. (after pronouns)
- 7) There verbs were divided in two main groups: strong and weak. Strong verbs formed their preterite and Participle II by change of the root vowel; weak verbs formed these forms by addition of the suffix -d(e). The verb had only two tenses - Present and Past.
- 8) There was no article, its function was performed by the demonstrative pronoun *seo* (that).

### The old English Noun

Old English nouns were declined - that is, the ending of the noun changed to reflect its function in the sentence. There were five major cases: nominative, genitive, dative, accusative, and instrumental.

The **nominative case** indicated the subject of the sentence, for example *se cyning* means 'the king'. It was also used for direct address. Adjectives in the predicate (qualifying a noun on the other side of 'to be') were also in the nominative.



The **accusative** indicated the direct object of the sentence ,for example *Æþelbald lufode þone cyning* means "Æþelbald loved the king" where *Æþelbald* is the subject and the king is the subject .Already the accusative had begun to merge with the nominative ;it was never distinguished in the plural ,or in a neuter noun.

The **genitive case** indicated possession ,for example the *þæs cyninges scip* is "the ship of king "or "the king's ship".

The **dative case** indicated the indirect object of the sentence,for example *hringas þæm cyning* means "rings for the king"or "rings to the king".There were also several verbs which took direct objects in the dative.

**The instrumental case** indicated an instrument used to achieve something,for example *lifde sweorde*,"he lived by the sword",where *sweorde* is the instrumental form of *sweord*.During the Old English period,the instrumental was falling out of use ,having largely merged with the dative.Only pronouns and strong adjectives retained separate forms for the instrumental.

### **The Middle English period:brief outline and main features**

**Dates:**12<sup>th</sup> -15<sup>th</sup> centuries.The period of the Norman rule.

It is considered that Middle English period approximately started after the Norman invasion of 1066 and lasted to the mid-to-late 15<sup>th</sup> century, when the Chancery Standard, form of London based English ,began to become widespread, a process aided by the introduction of the printing press into England by William Caxton in the 1470s.This period is marked by considerable changes in phonology,morphology,syntax and vocabulary.It was the period when English started to acquire its modern shape.

### **Main features the period in the language development;**

1)Thus period is often referred to as the period of leveled endings this meanings that vowels of unstressed endings have been leveled into a neutral vowel ,represented by a letter **e**.

2)A lot of new words were borrowed from French.

3)New vowels and consanants appeared:[ʃ,ʒ,ɔʒ]

4)Spelling was changed via the the traditions of French scribes:sc (sh,c[k'])(ch,þ,ð (th.

5)Middle English was the period of levelling of endings .All unstressed vowels in the suffixes and flexions were pronounced like **e or i**.

6)The noun had at that time only two cases -the common case and the possessive case.The adjective lost its case-system altogether.

7)There appeared some new analytical verb forms:Perfect, Continuous and Future.

8)The non-finite form of the Gerund appeared.



**The Modern English period in the language development.** 1) A lot of borrowed words from Latin, French, Italian in the Renaissance period.

2) English came into contact with other cultures around the world and distinctive dialects of English developed in the many areas which Britain had colonized, numerous other languages made small but interesting contributions to its word-stock.

3) Modern English is also called "the period of lost endings". In grammar there was a further tendency to unify different forms of flexions: the plural of nouns is generally formed by adding **-es**, the third person singular of the verbs in the Present rather takes **-es** than **-eth**, more and more strong verbs take the endings **-ed** in the Past Indefinite and Past Participle, etc

The categories of noun and verb take their modern shape .

4) The neutral vowel of unsressed endings was lost : sorwe-sorw-sorrow.

5) as the result of the Great Vowel Shift modern long vowels and diphthongs appeared.

#### **Example; bite**

Chaucer's pronunciation [**bit**], Shakespeare's pronunciation [beit], Present-day pronunciation [**bait**].

#### **Take**

Middle English pronunciation [**ta:ke**], Modern English [**teik**]

5) Spelling in the most cases did not change , which resulted in its modern complicated form.

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