

Early Modern English

Historical events:

- 1476 Printing press brought to England by Caxton: the press facilitates, but does not cause, increases in literacy
- 1485 Henry Tudor ascends the throne, ending War of the Roses
- 1497 John Cabot discovers Nova Scotia (instead of finding NW passage to China)
- 1534 Henry VIII becomes head of the English Church
- 1549 English Book of Common Prayer: an influence on literary style
- 1558 Eliz. becomes Queen
- 1577 – 80 Sir Francis Drake circles globe
- 1590 – 1611 Shakespeare is writing
- 1600 E. India Company founded
- 1604 Cawdrey published first English dictionary
- 1607 Jamestown – 1st permanent English settlement in New World
- 1611 Authorized version of Bible
- 1642-48 English Civil War: Cromwell and the protectorate
- 1660 restoration of King Charles II
- 1660 founding of royal society
- 1688 glorious revolution, William of Orange becomes king
- 1702 1st daily newspaper in London
- 1755 Johnson's Dictionary
- 1775-83 American Revolution
- 1788 first English settlement in Australia

The transition to Modern English

- expansion of the vocabulary
- vogue for inhorn words (seldom spoken, mainly written)
- French continues as a major source of loans
- Spanish and Portuguese also
- also Italian and German
- influence of the American colonies on the language – often led to criticism in England: words like *lengthy*

the 15th c. saw great changes in pronunciation – the Great Vowel Shift – but

- -- Caxton and other printers based spelling norms not on pronunciation but on medieval mss.
- -- the learned preferred archaic spelling, often respelled words to reflect etymology as a result, spelling and pronunciation became uncoupled

spelling:

- type fonts didn't have the thorn, þ, since they were imported; so printers substituted y for thorn: ye, yt
- i/j not distinguished as separate sounds/letters till end of 17th c.
- u/v not distinct till later 17c; even after the distinction was common, they were lumped together as one letter in dictionaries
- late Latin lost /h/, but influence of Classical Latin often restored it, in spelling, in French: habit, homme
- it was also added, unetymologically, to English words mistakenly derived: *habundance* (not from habere); *abominable* (not from ab-homo, = bestial)

- h inserted after t in a number of foreign words: *throne* (OF *trone*, < Lat. *thronus*); also *theater*, *thesis*. The new spelling > sound change. Others: *anthem*, *apothecary*, *Catherine* (cf *Kat*, *Kit*, *Kate*, *Kitty*), *Anthony* > *Tony*
- *author* < Lat. *auctor*; h added by French scribes, with no pronunciation change (*auteur*); but in English we have come to pronounce it.
- *schedule* < OF *cedule*, a small piece of paper; Webster recommended *sk-* as if < Gk., a sheet of papyrus; British *sh-* also reflects misspelling
- *debt*, *doubt*, subtle have unetym. b: *dette*, *doute*;
- *indict* unetym c: *indite*
- *rime* < OF, c. 1200, but respelled *rhyme*, *rhythm* in 16c on analogy w. Gk original, *rhythmos*—spelled *rime* in the textbook
- *comptroller* a pseudo-learned spelling of *controller*. now it is repronounced as well
- *receipt* (Fr. *recette*)
- *victual* (*vittel*)
- *parliament*, < *parlement*, now often repronounced
- *fault* < OF *faute*, strengthened by *false*, directly from lat. *falsus* (also, *vault*, *falcon*); leads to spelling pronunciations
- by 18c, [l] began to be pronounced: *calme*; but not *folk*, *yolk*. ? *Holmes*

Great Vowel Shift

stages are unknown

- a: > [e] *name*
 - e: > [i] *fete* > *feet*
 - 3: > [e] *grete* > *great*
 - [i:] > [ai] *ride* > *ride*
 - o: > [u] *boote* > *boot*
 - *boot* > *boat*
 - [u:] > [au] *hus* > *house*
-
- raising, fronting, diphthongization
 - process often went word by word
 - -ure pronounced -er
 - palatal fricative > 0 *bright*, *sigh*, *weigh*
 - velar fricative > f or 0 *taught*, *bough*, *rough*, *cough*
 - -mb > /m/
 - al, au > au *falcon*, *fault*,
 - but: *half*, *salve*, *psalm* /ae/ or /a/
 - initial h- from French began to be pronounced: *humble*, *host*
 - *** r lost before sibilants: *barse* > *bass*, *arse* > *ass*, *burst*, *nurse* > *buss*, *nuss*, *first* > *fust*
 - **** final -ing /in/ velarized pronun. began as hypercorrection in early 19c
 - (inverse spellings: *cushings* for *cushions*)

Stress: *ible/able* words usu had initial stress: *commendable*

- loss of final unstressed schwa: occurred by end of 14th c., and is not strictly part of the EmnE changes
- the short vowels didn't change all that much; [a] > [ae] *that*

where do we get the evidence for pronunciation?

- naïve spellings
- rhyme
- less often, commentators note a trend or oddity, or complain about an error

forms and syntax

standardization of English, pushed by needs of centralized government. – record-keeping, procedures, communication across the country
 starts, according to John Fisher, with 15c Court of Chancery, then taken up by printers, finally by teachers, makers of dictionaries and grammars [but Crystal disagrees on Chancery influence]
 the existence of a std, and its study, go hand-in-hand: it's a language that must be described, taught, and learned (esp. by those not to the manner/manor born)
 dictionaries and grammars are the two sorts of studies of std language that first appear (usage commentaries come somewhat later)
 English replaces French as the language of government in the late ME period; it replaces Latin as the language of religion with the reformation, and the adoption of the Book of Common Prayer
 English suddenly finds itself being used for secular purposes, once again, and for religious purposes for the first time
 social mobility was increasing in Late ME period, shift of power from nobility to middle class, by end of 18th c
 early dictionaries: explicating hard words, at first, then a more general list of the words of the language
 claims that Dr. Johnson's dictionary *fixed* English spelling
 the role of the lexicographer not simply as recorder but as prescriber of forms
 some of his definitions are amusing; others very precise; he's the first to use extensive quotes to illustrate usage and meaning

purism:

- a matter of temperament; purism found everywhere, in all times and cultures; connected in part to notion of language as divine in origin – and thus perfect in its beginnings and in need of constant protection against corruption
- Latin regarded as a perfect language, one which had not changed in 1,000 years (wrong!) – so bringing English to a Latin-like state of perfection was one goal of purists like Lowth
- Lowth, like Swift before him, complained about the current state of the language and the corrupt usage of contemporary authors
- Lindley Murray wrote another influential grammar, one actually used in schools
- belief that the laws of language are rooted in logic and reason: hence such rules as the stricture against double negatives
- modern linguistics hasn't had much effect on notions of ideal and perfectible language

nouns:

-es plural general by end of ME
 use of apostrophe to disting. gen. sg. from plural poss. not widely used until 17-18c
 irreg. plurals: feet, geese, mice, teeth, men, women;
 some -n plurals: shoon, eyen, oxen; in these, -n is added by analogy: kine (obs, cf OE, ky,), brethren (brothru), children (cildru)
 oxen the only pure survival of an OE -en plural
 zero-plurals: deer, sheep, swine, folk, kind; folk and kind develop -s plurals in EMnE
 horse/horses coexist as plurals 13c-17c, when horses takes over.
 the his-genitive
 Augustus his daughter (EK's gloss to Spenser's SC, 1579)
 Elizabeth Holland her house (1546)
 possible double origin: topic/comment My brother, his main interest is football.
 also, misattributed as the source of the -s genitive, due to unaspirated his; occasionally used with females: Mrs. Sands his maid.

group genitive: a word group comes to be construed as a unit – the apostrophe becomes freed from the inflected noun and attached to the phrase instead:

Wife's Tale of Biside Bath/Wife of Bath Her Tale > Wife of Bath's Tale

everybody's else > everybody else's

's no longer a simple inflectional ending added just to words; it is added to phrases as well; it becomes an enclitic particle, added to the end of the last word of the phrase, but referring not solely to that word but to the entire phrase

uninflected genitive: for conscience sake, Lady Day, Lady Chapel, ladybird, a six-mile walk, a 20-minute drive

Adjectives and adverbs:

with loss of –n, and further loss of final schwa, adjs. lose # and definiteness, become invariable in form

continue to compare with –er, –est, but increasingly add *more*, *most* (analytical comparison)

double comparison used for emphasis: the most unkindest cut of all

-ly not yet fully required of adverbs: sure rather than surely

pronouns:

remain the most highly-inflected of the pts of sp, but undergo some major and minor changes

personal— I comes to be capitalized to help it stand out in texts

my/mine, thy/thine pattern like a/an; this leads to metathesis: a napron, an apron / mine uncle, my nuncle; mine ed(ward), my ned

until by 18c, my/mine separate: my becomes possessive, mine nominal

confusion of where the -n belongs > Ned, Nelly (<Eleanor), Nolly (Oliver), nuncle (King Lear), and today in a whole nother

(-s forms had this distinction since ME: her/hers, etc/)

loss of thou— as early as 13c ye, you, your acquires sg. polite function; often the distinction is used for effect:

Qn.: Hamlet, thou hast thy Father much offended.

Ham.: Mother, you have my Father much offended.

Qn.: Come, come, you answer with a wicked tongue.

th- forms lost in upper-class speech in 16th c., generally by 18c, persist in dialect.; thee persists in sub/obj forms of older generation of Quakers

ye – nom you – acc; distinction lost in 16th c.

unstressed he often written a: quotha,

later 16c, its arises (replacing it/his or it/it paradigm)

royal we dies out in late 19c

editorial we exists as early as OE

you, youse, you'uns, you-all, you guys

you was/you were distinction made 17c-18c

th- forms replace h- in 3 pers plural by end of 15c, except 'em

relative and interrogative pronouns:

who as simple relative in 16c

King James uses *which* rather than *who*

concern over proper case of pronoun doesn't manifest till 19th c. school grammars; nominative invariably occurred after coordinating conjunction: *between you and I*

after as/than: nom or acc.: than I/me co-occur

be takes both nom and acc pronouns: It is I/me
 who/whom not of great concern to most speakers; the *whom* sleuths are actually not
 traditionalists but upstarts seeking to apply *new* standards to old practices

verbs:

lie/lay and sit/set confusion

drug, seed: "irregular" uses applying alternative patterns; *aten* for *eaten*.
 drink, drank, drunk, drunken
 hang, hung, hung/hanged, hanged
 fly, flew, flown; but the pa. tense of *to fly out* in baseball is *flied*
 survivals of older pp: *boughten bread*

verb inflection: I sit, thou sittest/sitst, he/she/it sitteth/sits (-s form dominates by 17c)

pret: thou sat/sattest/satst

to be: thou art/were/wast/werst/wert
 we/you they are/be

he don't is older than doesn't
 an't for am/are/is not late 17c ; ain't appears in late 18c
 an't and aren't fall together in 18c with Brit. loss of r before a consonant; aren't arises when ain't
 becomes stigmatized
 it's replaces 'tis in 17c
 no replacement for 'twas
 it'll replaces 'twill

progressive be + -ing rare before 15c, infrequent before 17c
 progressive passive, *is being built*, not used until late 18c;
is building is the preferred form
do becomes a verbal aux in 17c: I do wonder
shall/will rule first prescribed in 17c (John Wallis, *Grammatica Linguae Anglicanae*, 1653)
 impersonals: methinks, meseems > *I think*, but *It seems to me*.
 increased importance for **prepositions** with loss of case inflections and increased use of
 prepositional phrases in their place
 prefixed prep. *on*: even in OE > *a-* in words like *asleep*, *afield*, *abed*, as well as *twice a day*.