A Social and Cultural History of English

S. Gramley, WS 2009-10
The 15th Century
The advent of printing; the rise of London English (Chancellery English); the Plague and the end of the 100 Years’ War; Renaissance learning and vernacular literature (15th century)

Text 13: Resolution of the London brewers (1422)
Text 14: Osbern Bokenham (1440)
Text 15: from Caxton’s Prolog to *Eneydos* (1490)

Baugh and Cable, chap. 7
read §§ 111-122 (on grammar),
skim §§ 123-130 (on vocabulary), and
read §§ 131-145 (on borrowing and loss)
The Middle English Period

Political Development:
- Vernacular state, culture, and language (koinéization; standardization)
- London as capital and economic center (functional expansion)
- Peasants’ Revolt
  
  The Wars of the Roses

The Spread of Learning; Religion:
- Lollards and religious movement
- Translation of the Bible into English
- Introduction of printing and spreading literacy
- Renaissance learning and vernacular literature

Economic Development:
- Internal trade
  
  Growth of manufacturing and foreign trade
- Merchants and guilds and their use of English

Foreign Involvement:
- 100 Years’ War

Demographic Development:
- Black Death (and the 100 Years’ War) → class mobility
- Growth of London → geographic mobility
The Middle English Period
Political Development: Wars of the Roses (1455-1485)

York (Richard, Duke of York; Edward IV, Richard III) vs.
Lancaster (Henry IV (Bollingbroke), Henry V, and Henry VI, Edward of Westminster, Henry VII)

- Dynastic struggles with political upheaval and a change in the balance of power
- Support for York from the commercial classes in London
- Devastation of Southern England by Lancaster
- Parliamentary support for York (i.e. Edward IV)
- Weakening of feudal power; strengthening of the merchant classes
- End of England’s continental power and claims
- Emergence of the House of Tudor under Henry Tudor, a Lancastrian
- Centralized power under the Tudors: Henry VII, Henry VIII, Edward VI, Mary I, Elizabeth I
The Middle English Period
Translations of the Bible into the vernacular

Vernacular translations, prohibited by the Synod of Toulouse (1229), were widely ignored, but not in England because of association of translation with the Lollards: “Someone reading the English translation was still given an interpretation, but by the translator rather than the priest. A further problem is that the reader cold be misled by the meaning of everyday English words, and fail to grasp the exact meaning of the original.” (Knowles: 72)

Actually, translations were made again and again.
Known translations into OE

- Aldhelm, Bishop of Sherborne (b. 639 d. 25 May 709) thought to have translated the Psalms (disputed).
- Caedmon mentioned by Bede as one who sang poems in Old English based on the Bible stories (not translation as such).
- Bede: a translation of the Gospel of John (c. 735).
- The *Vespasian Psalter*, an interlinear gloss in a manuscript of the Psalms (c. 850; in the Mercian dialect).
- Eleven other 9th century glosses of the Psalms, including Eadwine's *Canterbury Psalter* [3]
- King Alfred had passages of the Bible circulated in the vernacular around AD 900, possibly including the 50 Psalms in the *Paris Psalter*.
- Between 950 and 970, a gloss in the Northumbrian dialect of Old English (the *Northumbrian Gloss on the Gospels*) added to the *Lindisfarne Gospels*
1401: Debate on suitability of English for a translation of the Bible (→ not suitable, clearly a political decision) led to the law de hæretico comburendo, which linked popular literacy to sedition: “heretics were accused of making unlawful conventicles and confederations, setting up schools, writing books and wickedly instructing and informing the people” (Knowles: 64). Open discussions of heresy were legal – in Latin; Latin remained language of conservative scholarship.

Lollard work put the Bible above the Church; scholarly study of it (the written text) challenged the oral tradition of the Church (ibid.: 64-71) and, of course, the authority of the Church.

This was a struggle to extend English to the domain of religion and to replace Latin with it.
Major translations of the Bible (1)

7th century ff: Various OE (partial) translations
990: Alfred’s Wessex translation
1381ff: Wycliffe’s translation
   Tyndale – burned as heretic in 1536 – made a translation which appeared in:
1537: Matthew Bible: with royal assent
1540: Great Bible: nobility could read it aloud;
   womenfolk and merchants for themselves;
   common people not at all
1560: The Geneva Bible (Calvinist marginal notes)
1568: Bishop’s Bible (authorized by Elizabeth I)
1582: Rheims Bible (Roman Catholic)
1611: The King James (Authorized) Version (KJV)
Major translations of the Bible (2)

1881, 1885: English Revised Version (RV)
1901: American Standard Version (of above) (ASV)
1946, 1952: The Revised Standard Version (RSV) (US)
   change in archaic English of second-person
   pronouns, *thou, thee, thy*, and verb forms *art, hast,*
   *hadst, didst*, etc. In KJV, RV and ASV for both God
   and humans. In RSV used only for God, a fairly
   common practice for Bible translations until the
   mid-1970s.
1961, 1970: The New English Bible (UK)
1966: Good News for Modern Man (US)
1989: Revised English Bible (UK) (“gender accurate”)

The beginning of the Lord's Prayer in Old English (Wessex; Lindesfarne), Middle English (Wycliffe), Early Modern English (KJV), and Modern English (late 20th century: Good News)

Fæder ūre, ṭū ṭe eart on heofonum,
Fader urer õu arǭ ŵu bist in heofnum + in heofnas
O oure father which arte in heve
Our father which art in heaven,
Our father in heaven:

sī ṭīn nama gehālgod.
sie gehalgad noma ŏin.
hallowed be thy name.
hallowed be thy name.
may your holy name be honored;

tōbecume ņīn rīce.
to-cymeǭ ric ŏin
Let thy kyngdome come.
Thy kingdom come.
may your kingdom come;
A Shift in the Social Balance

All of the following factors indicate changes in the economic and political centers of power and allow us to make conclusions about the language forms which were recognized as standard.

1. **demographic**: the major population center in the 14\textsuperscript{th} century was south of the Humber River and in the East Midland (where the Black Death, 1349-1400, was less severe);

2. **economic**: the East Midland area was the center of exportation of wool + grain in the 13\textsuperscript{th} and 14\textsuperscript{th} centuries;

3. **government**: increasingly more midlanders and northerners were prominent in the London city government;

4. **production of goods**: in the 15\textsuperscript{th} century:
   - Yorkshire led in woolens;
   - northern and western counties in wool;
   - the East Midlands in grain;
   - London, Norfolk, Essex, Devon in shipping; after 1486 (Henry VII) woolens overtook wool in the export trade;

5. **enclosures**: proceeded apacelate in 15\textsuperscript{th} and 16\textsuperscript{th} centuries;

6. **GDP**: in 1560 grain overtook wool in profitability in England
The Middle English Period
Koinéization and standardization (esp. spelling; London speech and writing)

At the beginning of the 13th century people from all over England were moving to London and bringing their widely divergent dialects with them. Thoughts turned increasingly to the question of standards. Factors include language contact, social climbing, education (Shaklee: 41).

These (and demographic) factors indicate changes in the economic and political centers of power and allow us to make conclusions about the language forms which were recognized as standard. Note esp. the importance of woolens and of grain from the north and east midlands respectively.
"If we posit the axiom that standard is the sociolect of the upper classes, then somehow certain characteristics of the northern dialect had to penetrate the prestige dialect." (Shaklee: 58)

This was made possible by the extremely fluid social situation in the 14th century, which started out with a rigidly structures society, but one which was changed by the population losses of the Black Death (30-40% of the English population) and the Hundred Years' War, which cost the lives of much of the old nobility. Henry VII sought to fill offices increasingly often with people from the middle classes (businessmen).

"Most of the northern forms seem to be working their way up from the bottom, probably moving up into the upper-class sociolect as speakers of the dialect move into the upper class." (ibid.)
The Middle English Period
Koinéization and standardization (esp. spelling; London speech and writing)

Caxton contributed greatly to standardization with his printing press (late 15th century): 1476ff.
There seem to have been two standards in London:
• a spoken one and
• the written "Chancery standard."
The latter moved more quickly toward what would be Standard English while the former was slower to lose its ME features.

Chancery has characteristics of modern standard from the northern dialects: 3rd person plural pronouns in *th*; adverbs in *-ly* rather than southern *–lich*; southern *-eth* in the 3rd person singular and *be/ben*; midland past participles in *-en*. London dialect retained *her* and *hem* and the occasional *y* (Shaklee: 48f).
The Middle English Period
Expansion of domains / functional expansion

As English took over functions once reserved for Latin or French, it also expanded its domains of use.

Latin had been the language of law and the state and of the church. The Middle Class grew from the 14th century on as the number of manufacturers, traders, merchants increased. They were based in London and the towns (not rural); and they were international in outlook.

They used English (not Latin) for records in London guilds from the 1380s on; in 1384 a municipal London proclamation appeared in English (ibid.: 52). English was again used officially, esp. by the royal bureaucracy after 1420 (the London brewers adopted English in 1422) (Knowles: 54).

French had been the everyday language of communication among the Norman nobility – only until the end of the 1st half of the 13th century.
Language change

hey, here, hem are moving to they, their, them (northern forms)

be is moving to are (a northern form)

- these two are apparently not stigmatized –

-th is retained for -s (3rd sing) (a prestigious northern form)

-th/ø is retained for -th (3rd plur) (a stigmatized northern form) (Shaklee: 58f)
Chancery Standard

Chancery has characteristics of modern standard from

- **the northern dialects**
  - 3rd person plural pronouns in -th;
  - adverbs in -ly rather than southern –lich;

- **southern**
  - -eth in the 3rd person singular and
  - be/ben;

- **midland**
  - past participles in -en.

- **London dialect** retained
  - her and hem and
  - the occasional y- (Shaklee: 48f).

By the end of the 16th century the preferred dialect was that of London. By this time London was a center of commerce as well.
The Middle English Period
Wave theory

In an earlier period the "family model" of language was applied: Indo-European ("the mother"), Germanic, Romance ("daughters" of Indo-European and "sisters" of each other).

In prehistoric times and, indeed, in early historical times location was probably the most significant feature which marked off speakers into separate communities. People were likely to speak like other members of the same community and more or less differently from outsiders. This (spatial) distance led to the emergence of distinct dialects and eventually to distinct, no longer mutually intelligible languages.

In every language community there are linguistic variants. As particular speakers (and, in the same sense, speech communities) gain in power and prestige, their variants are adopted in neighboring areas, spreading like waves around a stone thrown into a pond.
The Middle English Period
New grammatical patterns

Word order changes

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<th>Year</th>
<th>Accusative object before verb</th>
<th>1000</th>
<th>1200</th>
<th>1300</th>
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<td>52.5%</td>
<td>52.7%</td>
<td>40+%</td>
<td>14.3%</td>
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<tr>
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<td>after verb</td>
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<td>46.3%</td>
<td>60-%</td>
<td>85.7%</td>
<td>98.13%</td>
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(Fries 1940, qtd. in Hopper and Traugott 1993: 60)
The Middle English Period
New grammatical patterns

Pronouns
Relative *who* for OE *be* on model of French *qui* (relative and interrogatory); *weorþan* replaced by *be* as passive auxiliary

Case leveling of *ye you* on model of French *vous*, but also use of *ye* as an object in some varieties of English.

2nd person pronouns: *you* between equals; use of *thou* to indicate “I am superior”; *thou* less for intimacy than for insult. “The highly marked nature of *thou* must be borne in mind when interpreting its use by political and religious radicals …” (Knowles: 58)
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