

The State of Middle English

When compared to Old English, the linguistic developments of Middle English were in the considerable simplification of the language during that period. In fact, beginning in the 13th century, the three or four cases (declensions) of nouns in the singular were reduced to two, and the *-es* ending marking the plural of nouns was adopted. "Arbitrary" distinctions of grammatical gender were replaced by "natural" ones, contrary to French practice, which arbitrarily assigned the gender of nouns. The dual number (to indicate "two," as in Greek) fell into disuse, while the dative and accusative of pronouns were merged into a single form. Verb conjugation was also simplified by omitting endings and using a common form for the singular and plural of the past tenses of "strong verbs." As for writing, it had evolved from the Runic to the Latin alphabet when England as a whole became Christian. The Middle English writing system retained a number of characteristics inherited from Old English, but adapted them according to the writing system inherited from the Normans.

French Loan Words

Middle English vocabulary underwent a radical transformation due in large part to its borrowings from **Franco-Norman** and especially **Parisian French**. The English nobility and clergy, most of whom were fluent in French and English, littered their English with French words relating to government, the Church, the army, life at court, the arts, education, and medicine. A century after the arrival of William the Conqueror, more than 1,000 **Norman words** had entered Middle English. Eventually, so did roughly 10,000 **French words**. In reality, English and Franco-Norman melded so well that the lexical result was very supple and contained numerous terms. However, it is not always easy to distinguish Franco-Norman derivations from French ones in today's English. For example: *bargain* (bargaignier > barguigner), *bastard* (bastard, bâtard), *choice* (chois > choix), *crust* (cruste > croûte), *custom* (c Costume > coutume), *merchant* (marchand), *money* (monnaie), *mutton* (mouton), *pork* (porc), *toast* (toster > rôtir), etc.

Some idea of the standard English of the period can be found in this extract from *The Canterbury Tales*, by the famous English poet Geoffrey Chaucer (1340-1400):

He knew the **cause** of everich **maladye**
Were it of hoot or cold, or **moyste** or drye,
And where they **engendred** and of what **humour**;
He was a **verray parfit praktisour**.

Il connaissait la **cause** de toutes les **maladies**;
Qu'elles soient dues au chaud, au froid, au temps humide ou sec;
Il savait où elles se développaient et de quelles **humeurs** elles **provenaient**;
C'était un **praticien vraiment parfait**.

These Middle English verses contain at least eight words of French origin: **cause** (*cause*), **maladye** (*maladie*), **moyste** (*moite*), **engendred** (*engendrer*), **humour** (*humeur*), **verray** (*vrai*), **parfit** (*parfait*), and **praktisour** (old form

of *médecin*, doctor). Even this small sample illustrates the importance of the French contribution to the English vocabulary of the period.

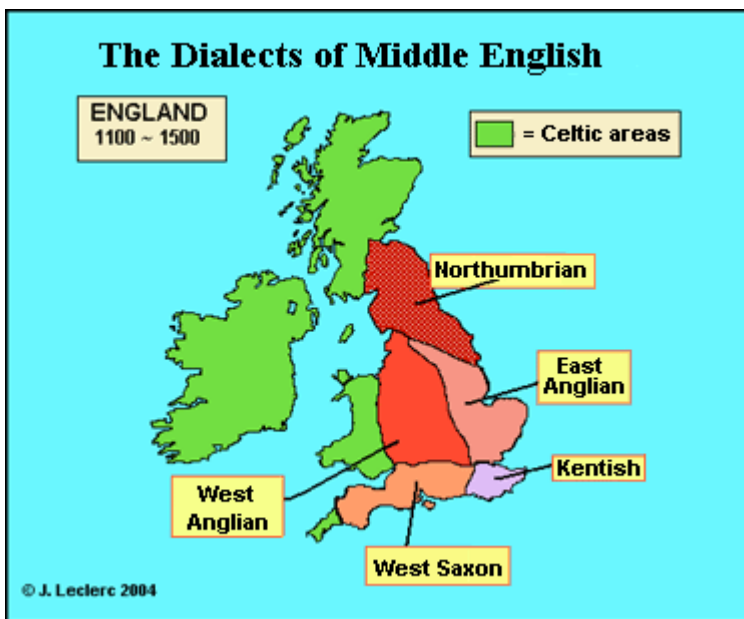
Latin Loan Words

English at this time underwent another massive Latinization, borrowing heavily from Medieval Latin, sometimes prompted by French: *attencioun* (attention), *diffusioun* (diffusion), *pastour* (pastor), *rectour* (rector), *actualyte* (actuality), *captivite* (captivity). Among the many terms of Latin origin to have survived are *allegory*, *conspiracy*, *contempt*, *homicide*, *incarnate*, *infinite*, *intellect*, *lapidary*, *lunatic*, *moderate*, *nervous*, *promote*, *quiet* (*quietus*), *rational*, *solidary*, *submit*, *suppress*, *temporal*, *tributary*, and *zenith*. In addition, English was enriched by **Latin suffixes and prefixes**, some of them borrowed through French. For example, the prefixes *de-* (deduce), *dis-* (distract), *ex-* (except), *inter-* (interval), *per-* (pervert), *pre-* (predestine), *pro-* (prosecute), and *sub-* (subscribe); and the suffixes *-able* (admirable), *-ible* (credible), *-al* (capital), *-ant/-ent* (important, different), *-ment* (argument, segment), etc. English would later draw from Latin in order to adjust its verbal and adjectival systems to its substantive one. Moreover, English "imported" terms from ancient regional languages spoken in medieval France, especially Angevin and Provençal.

Latin (or French) was also the medium for a number of words of **Greek** origin. Some 14th century examples include *agony*, *artery*, *basis*, *centre*, *character*, *climate*, *comedy*, *cycle*, *echo*, *fantasy*, *harmony*, *horizon*, *idiot*, *logic*, *magic*, *mystery*, *pomp*, *prune*, *schism*, *spasm*, *theatre*, and *tragedy*.

Dutch Loan Words

Finally, the Netherlands brought their share of lexical loan words, thanks to flourishing economic relations between England and Flanders at the time. There are words such as *poll* (meaning "man's head"), *clock*, *pickle*, *firkin*, *hop* (the plant), *skipper*, *deck*, *hose*(tube), *groat*, *wainscot*, *bulwark*, *luck*, *groove*, and *snap*.



Meanwhile, the **people of the English countryside** spoke only a Middle English dialect. The language map at left illustrates the locations of the varieties of Middle English dialects.

There were dialects in the north (equivalent to **Northumbrian**), southwest (**West Saxon**), southeast (**Kentish**), West Midlands (**West Anglian**), and East Midlands (**East Anglian**). Compared to the preceding Old English period, Celtic speech areas shrunk while Middle English ones grew, in Scotland as much as in Wales and Cornwall.

By the end of the 14th century, standard English was fully formed. It had developed in the area around London for various political, economic, and demographic reasons. Due to massive borrowing from Latin and French, the English of this period had become far removed from other Germanic languages such as German, Dutch, and Danish. And compared to Old English, it was completely transformed. This English was used by the people insofar as it corresponded to the speech around London, one that would become the language of public life, trade, and learning.

It is worth noting that English evolved unchecked, never having been "governed" by the rules generally imposed on official languages. Until now, Latin and French had been the languages used in official functions. In centuries to come, Latin would continue to exercise a profound influence on English, a Germanic language: no small feat!

MIDDLE AND NEW ENGLISH PERIODS Historical Background from the 11th to 15th century, 16th-19th c.

Plan

1. Economic and social conditions in the 11th – 12th c.
2. The Scandinavian invasions.
3. The Norman conquest.
4. Early and Late Middle English dialects.

5. Development of the national literary English language (16th-19th c.)
6. Spelling changes and the rules of reading.

Economic and social conditions. Period of established feudalism. Natural economy. Tools, local feuds, travel restrictions.

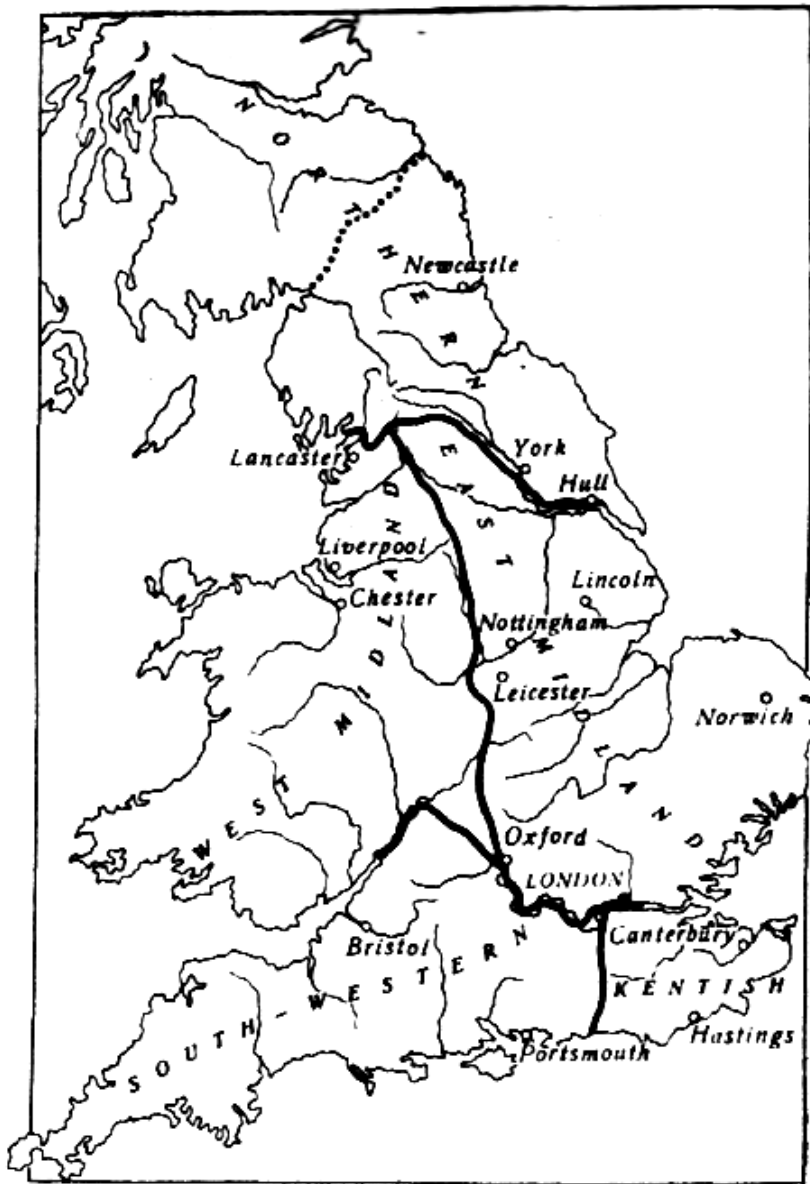
Effect of the Scandinavian invasions. "Danelaw". Political annexation of England by Denmark under Canute. The impact of the Scandinavian element on the linguistic situation. The increased regional differences.

The Norman conquest. The battle of Hastings (1066). Effect of the Norman conquest on the linguistic situation. The origin of the Normans. Norman domination in Britain. The decline of the written form of English. Official recognition of English. Early Middle English dialects. Southern (Kentish and South-Western), Central (West Midland and East Midland) and Northern. Extension of the English territory.

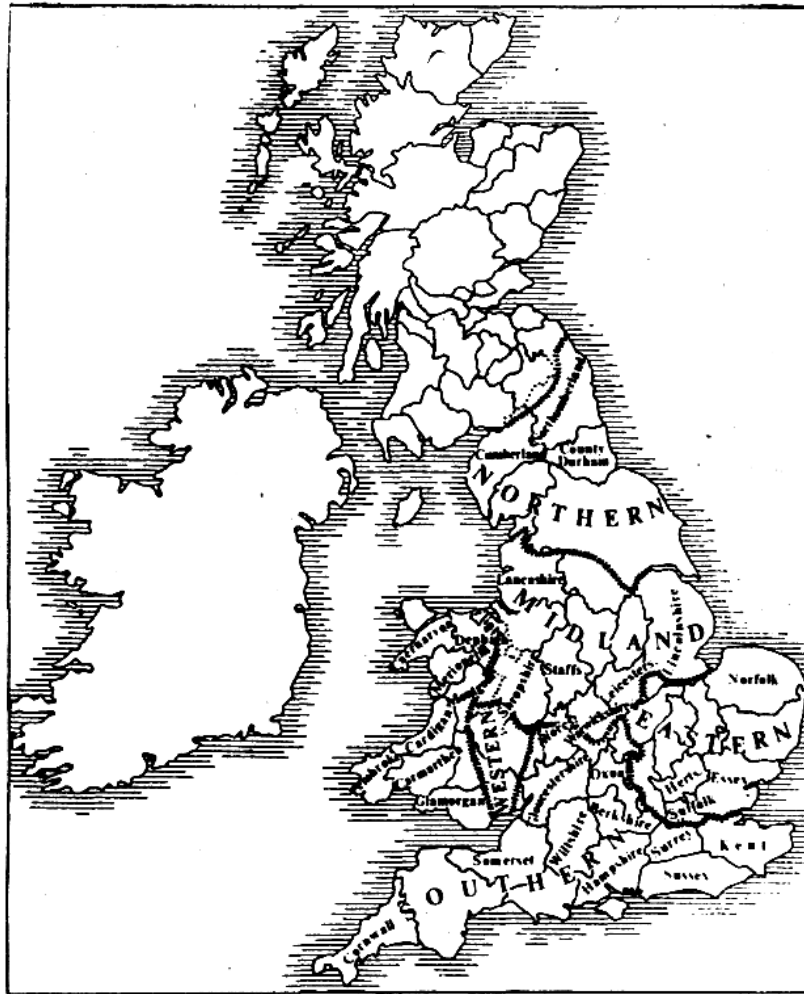
Early Middle English written records. Peterborough Chronicles.

Late Middle English. Reestablishment of English as the language of state and literature. Dialects in Late Middle English. London dialect. The inhabitants of London throughout its history. The Age of Chaucer.

Development of the national literary language in the 16th – 19th centuries. Economic and political unification. Development of the capitalist mode of production. The end of the Hundred Year's War. The War of Roses. Establishment of the absolute monarchy of Tudors. Conditions for linguistic unity. Consolidation of the English nation, formation of the national language. Progress of culture. Introduction of printing. W. Caxton and his spelling.



A map of Middle English dialects



A map of Modern English dialects

Expansion of English over the British Isles. Flourishing of literature in Early New English (Literary Renaissance). The age of Shakespeare. Establishment of the Written Standard. Normalising tendencies. Growing of the Spoken Standard. Varieties of English in Britain. Geographical Expansion of English outside the British Isles.

Spelling changes in Middle English. Rules of reading.

Peculiarities of Middle English Spelling

Letters indicating vowels	Letters indicating consonants
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Single letters	
a [a]	c [s] or [k]
y, as well as i [i]	f [f]
o [o] or [u]	g [dʒ] or [g]
	j [dʒ]
	k [k]
	s [s] or [z]
	v (often spelt as u) [v]
	y [j]
Digraphs	
ee [e:] or [a:]	ch, tch [ts]
ie [e:]	dg [dʒ]
oo [o:] or [ʊ:]	gh [xl or [x']]
ou [u:] or [ou]	qu [kw]
ow [u:] or [ou]	th [ð] or [θ]
	sh, sch, ssh [s]
	wh [hw]

Whan that Aprille with his shoures soote
 [xwan 'θat ap'rille 'wiθ his ' su:rəs 'so:tə]
the droghte of March hath perced.to the roote,
 [θə 'druxt of 'marts haθ 'persəd 'to: θə 'rotə
And bathed every veyne in swich licour,
 [and 'ba:ðəd 'evri 'vein in 'swits li'ku:rl
|Of which verhi engendred is the flour;
 [of 'xwits ver'tju: en'dʒendred 'is θə 'flu:r]

(When April with his sweet showers
The draught of March has pierced to the root,
And bathed every vein in such liquor,
Of Which (whose) virtue (power) engendered is the flower...)

Phonetic Changes in Middle and Early New English

Plan

1. Word accentuation in ME and ENE.
2. Changes in u stressed vowels.
3. Quantitative and qualitative changes in stressed vowels.
4. Evolution of consonants.

Word stress. New accentual patterns. Stress in loan-words: recessive and rhythmic tendencies. Phonological function of stress: distinguishing a verb from a noun.

Changes in unstressed vowels. The tendency towards phonetic reduction. Loss of unstressed vowels. The appearance of new unstressed vowels.

Main trends in the changes of stressed vowels. Quantitative vowel changes in Early Middle English. Phonetic conditions of lengthening and shortening. Restrictions to the rules. Qualitative vowel changes.

Quantitative Vowel Changes in Late Old English and Early Middle English

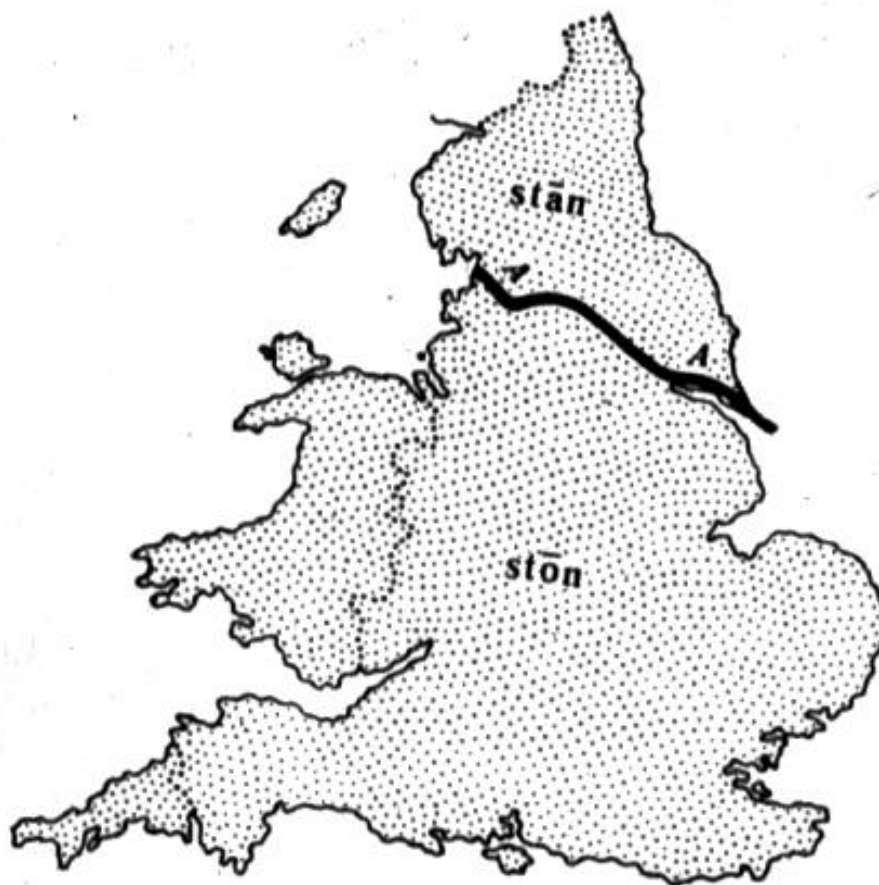
Phonetic conditions	Change illustrated	Examples		
		OE	ME	NE
Before homorganic consonant sequences:	Vowels become long	cild	child [tsi:ld]	<i>child</i>

sonorant plus plosive (<i>Id, nd, mb</i>)		findan	finden [fi:ndən]	<i>.find</i>
		climban	climben [ˈkli:mbən]	<i>climb</i>
		cold	cold [ˈko:ld]	<i>cold</i>
		feld	field [fe:ld]	<i>field</i>
		fundon	founden [ˈfu:ndən]	<i>found</i> (Past of <i>find</i>)
		gold	gold [go:ld]	<i>gold</i>
Before other consonant sequences	Vowels be- come short	fiftfs	fifty [ˈfifti]	<i>fifty</i>
		fedde	fedde [ˈfeddə]	<i>fed</i>
		mette	mette [ˈmettə]	<i>met</i>
		wisdom	wisdom [ˈwizdəm]	<i>wisdom</i>
In open syllables	Vowels be- come long and more open	mete	mete [ˈme:tə]	<i>meat</i>
		stelan	stelen [ˈste:lən]	<i>steal</i>
		macian	maken [ˈma:kən]	<i>make</i>
		talū	tale [ta:lə]	<i>tale</i>
		nosu	nose [ˈno:zə]	<i>nose</i>
		stolen	stolen [ˈsto:lən]	<i>stolen</i>

	yfel	yvel, evel [i:vəl] [e:vəl]	<i>evil</i>
	duru	doore ['do:rə]	<i>door</i>

Development of OE [y] and [y:] in ME dialects

OE	ME		NE
fyllan	Kentish	fullen ['fellən]	fill
	West Midland and South Western	<i>fullen</i> ['fyllən, fullən]	
	East Midland and Northern	<i>Fillen</i> [ˈfillən]	
<i>mýs</i>	Kentish	<i>Mees</i> [me:s]	<i>mice</i>
	West Midland and South Western	<i>mus, muis</i> [my:s, mu:s]	
	East Midland and Northern	<i>mis, mice</i> [mi:s]	



Development of Old English [a:] in Middle English dialects

OE	ME		NE
<i>stān</i>	Northern	<i>stan(e)</i> [sta:nə]	<i>stone</i>
	other fialects	<i>stoon</i> , <i>stone</i> [sto:n]	
<i>ald</i>	Northern	<i>ald</i> [a:ld]	<i>old</i>
	other dialects	<i>old</i> [o:ld]	

Development of Old English [æ, æ] in Middle English

OE →ME	OE	ME	NE
<i>æ→a</i>	<i>þæt</i>	that [θat]	that
	<i>earm</i>	arm [arm]	arm
	<i>blacu</i>	blak [blak]	black
<i>æ:→ε:</i>	<i>stræt</i>	street [strɛ:t]	street

Splitting of OE [a:] in Middle English

OE	ME	NE
<i>lond, land</i>	West Midlands <i>lond</i>	<i>land</i>
	other dialects <i>land</i>	
<i>Lon3, lan3</i>	West Midlands <i>long</i>	<i>long</i>
	other dialects <i>lang</i>	

Development of Old English Diphthongs in Early Middle English

Change illustrated		Examples	
OE ME	OE	ME	NE
ea: ε:	ēast	eest [ɛ:st]	<i>east</i>
	rēad	reed [rɛ:d]	<i>red</i>
æ: ε:	stræt	street [strɛ:t]	<i>street</i>

eo:	e:	dēop	deep [de:p]	<i>deep</i>
		cēosan	chesen ['tʃe:zən]	<i>choose</i>
e:	e:	hē	he [he:]	<i>he</i>
ie:	i:	līhtan	lighten ['li:x'ten]	<i>lighten hear</i>
	e:	hīeran	heren ['he:rən]	<i>rise</i>
i:	i:	rīsan	risen ['ri:zən]	<i>keep</i>
e:	e:	cēpan	kepen ['ke:pən]	
ea	a	earm	arm [arm]	<i>arm</i>
æ	a	bæc	back [bak]	<i>back</i>
eo	e	heorte	herte ['herte]	<i>heart</i>
e	e	bedd	bed [bed]	<i>bed</i>
ie	i	nieht, niht	night [nix't]	<i>night</i>
	e	hierde, hyrde	herd [herd]	<i>'shepherd*</i>
i	i	hit	it [it]	<i>it</i>
e	e	(see <i>bedd</i> above)		

Growth of New Diphthongs in Middle English

Change illustrated		Examples		
OE	ME	OE	ME	NE
e+j	ei	we3	wey [wei]	<i>way</i>
e:+j	ei	3rē3	grey [grei]	<i>grey</i>
æ+j	ai	mæ3	may [mai]	<i>may</i>

a+ γ	au	la3и	lawe ['lauə]	<i>law</i>
o+γ.	ou	bo3a	bowe I'bouə]	<i>bow</i>
a:+w	ou	cnāwan	knowen	<i>know</i>
a: +x			['knouən]	
		brāhte	braughte	<i>brought</i>
	au+x		['brauxte]	

Middle English Vowels

Monophthongs					Diphthongs	
Short	i	e	a	o	u	ei ai oi au
Long	i: e: ε:	a: o: o:	u:			au ou

The Great Vowel Shift

Change illustrated	Examples	
ME (intermediate stage) NE	ME	NE
i: ai	<i>time</i> [ti:mə] <i>fīnden</i> [ˈfɪndən]	<i>time</i> <i>find</i>
e: i:	<i>kepen</i> l'ke:pən] <i>field</i> [ˈfe:ld]	<i>keep</i> <i>field</i>

ɛ:	e:	i:	<i>street</i> [strɛ:t]	<i>street</i>
			<i>east</i> [ɛ:st]	<i>east</i>
			<i>stelen</i> ['stɛ:lən]	<i>steal</i>
a:		ei	<i>maken</i> ['ma:kən]	<i>make</i>
			<i>table</i> ['ta:blə]	<i>table</i>
ə:	o:	ou	<i>stone</i> ['sto:n]	<i>stone</i>
			<i>open</i> 1'o:pən]	<i>open</i>
			<i>soo</i> [so:]	<i>so</i>
o:		u:	<i>moon</i> [mo:n]	<i>moon</i>
			<i>goos</i> [go:s]	<i>goose</i>
u:		au	<i>mous</i> [mu:s]	<i>mouse</i>
			<i>founden</i> ['fu.ndən]	<i>found</i>
			<i>now</i> [nu:]	<i>now</i>
au		o:	<i>cause</i> ['kauzə]	<i>cause</i>
			<i>drawen</i> ['drauən]	<i>draw</i>

Vocalisation of r and Associated Vowel Changes

Change illustrated			Example	
	ME	NE	ME	NE
After short vowels	o + r	o:	<i>for</i> [for]	<i>for</i>
			<i>thorn</i> [torn]	<i>thorn</i>
	a+r	a:	<i>bar</i> [bar]	<i>bar</i>

	i + r		<i>dark</i> [dark]	<i>dark</i>
	e + r }	ə:	<i>first</i> [first]	<i>first</i>
	u + r		<i>serven</i> ['servant]	<i>serve</i>
			<i>fur</i> [fur]	<i>fur</i>
	ə + r	ə	<i>brother</i> ['broðər]	<i>brother</i>
After long vowels	i+r	aiə	<i>shire</i> ['Si:ra]	<i>shire</i>
	e: + r	iə	<i>beer</i> [be:r]	<i>beer</i>
	ɛ: + r	iə	<i>ere</i> ['e:r(ə)]	<i>ear</i>
	ɛ: + r	ɛə	<i>there</i> ['θɛr(ə)]	<i>there</i>
			<i>beren</i> ['berən]	<i>bear</i>
	a: + r	ɛə	<i>hare</i> ['ha:rə]	<i>hare</i>
	o: + r	oə/o:	<i>floor</i> [flo:r]	<i>floor</i>
	o: + r	uə	<i>moor</i> [mo:r]	<i>moor</i>
	u: + r	auə	<i>flour</i> [flu:r]	<i>flower</i>

Principal Quantitative Vowel Changes

	Early ME	Early NE
Lengthening	before <i>ld, nd, mb</i> in open syllables	before <i>ss, st, nt, ft</i>

Shortening	before other consonant clusters	before [θ, d, t, k]
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Development of Sibilants and Affricates in Early Middle English

Change illustrated			Examples	
OE	ME	OE	ME	NE
<i>k'</i>	<i>tʃ</i>	cild	<i>child</i> [tʃi:ld]	<i>child</i>
		tæcan	<i>techen</i> [tɛ:tʃən]	<i>teach</i>
<i>g'</i>	<i>dʒ</i>	ecse	<i>edge</i> ['edʒə]	<i>edge</i>
		brycge	<i>bridge</i> ['bridʒə]	<i>bridge</i>
<i>sk'</i>	<i>s</i>	fisc	<i>fish</i> [fiʃ]	<i>fish</i>
		sceap	<i>sheep</i> [ʃe:p]	<i>sheep</i>

Development of Sibilants and Affricates in Early New English

Change illustrated		Examples	
Late ME	NE	ME	NE
<i>sj</i>	<i>s</i>	<i>condicioun</i> [kondi'sju:n] <i>commissioun</i> [komi'sju:n]	<i>condition</i> <i>commission</i>
<i>zj</i>	<i>ʒ</i>	<i>plesure</i> [ple'zju:r(ə)] <i>visioun</i> [vi'zju:n]	<i>pleasure</i> <i>vision</i>

<i>tj</i>	<i>tʃ</i>	<i>nature</i> [na'tju:r(ə)]	<i>nature</i>
		<i>culture</i> [kul'tju:r(ə)]	<i>culture</i>
<i>dj</i>	<i>dʒ</i>	<i>souldier</i> [soul'djer]	<i>soldier</i>
		<i>procedure</i> [prose'dju:rə]	<i>procedure</i>

Voicing of Consonants in Early New English

Change illustrated		Examples	
ME	NE	ME	NE
s	z	<i>resemblen</i> [rə'semblən] <i>foxes</i> [foksəs] <i>was</i> [was] <i>is</i> [is] <i>his</i> [his]	<i>resemble</i> <i>foxes</i> <i>was</i> <i>is</i> <i>his</i>
f	v	<i>pensif</i> [pen'sif]	<i>pensive</i>
		<i>of</i> [of]	<i>of^l</i>
θ	ð	<i>there</i> [θɛ:rə] <i>they</i> [θei] <i>with</i> [wiθ]	<i>there</i> <i>they</i> <i>with</i>
ks	gz	<i>anxietie</i> [aŋksie'tiə]	<i>anxiety</i>

tj	d ₃	<i>luxurious</i> [luksju:r'iu:s]	<i>luxurious*</i>
		<i>knowleche</i> ['knoulətS]	<i>knowledge</i>
		<i>Greenwich</i> ['gre:nwitS]	<i>Greenwich</i> ['gri:nid3]

Development of monophthongs: [y] and [y:], [a:] and [ã] in Middle English dialects. Development of diphthongs: contraction to monophthongs. Growth of new diphthongs with *i*-glides and *u*-glides in Middle English due to vocalisation of [j] and [ɣ], [w] and [x]. Middle English vowel system.

The Great Vowel Shift. Some interpretations of the Great Vowel Shift. Changes of short vowels [a] and [u]. Growth of long monophthongs and diphthongs in Early New English due to the vocalisation of consonants. Development of [r] and associated vowel changes. Quantitative vowel changes in Early New English.

Evolution of consonants in Middle English and Early New English. Growth of sibilants and affricates from Old English palatal plosives. Appearance of sibilants and affricates due to the phonetic assimilation of loan-words in Early New English. Treatment of fricatives in Middle English and Early New English. Phonologisation of [f] and [v] in Middle English. Voicing of [s], [f], [θ], [ks], [tʃ] in Early New English. Voicing of consonants in many form-words. Loss of consonants.