

Early Modern English (eME) (1500-1700)

1. Historical background

1.1. The rise of English

Various factors played a role in the establishment of English and led to the defeat of Latin:

- Reformation
- Nationalism
- Rise of reading public
- Introduction of printing
- Purist movement (1573, Ralph Lever)

1.2. The significance of Latin

During the Renaissance English was under strong influence from Latin:

- Scholarship, education and science
- Loan-words from Latin
- Inkhorn terms
- Remodelling of words

2. Word formation

2.1. Coining

The invention of totally new terms

2.2. Affixation

The coining of new words by the use of prefixes and suffixes

2.3. Compounding

The combination of two or more free morphemes

2.4. Conversion

The process by which one word is derived from another with no change of form.

3. Grammar

3.1. Subjunctive

Non-inflected 2nd and 3rd person singular present (e.g. "he go")
Used to signal doubt, hypothesis and uncertainty

3.2. You vs. Thou

Patronizing use of “thou”

3.3. Pronoun determiner *its*

Traditional possessive form if “its“ was “his“

3.4. Reflexive use

Ordinary pronouns instead of “-self”

3.5. Perfect tense (have vs. be)

“have“: continuing process

“be“: result of the action

3.6. Dummy auxiliary

Old causative use of “do“ (“He did them build a castle“ meaning “He made them build a castle“) died out, its place being taken by “make“ and “cause“.

From the 16th century onwards “do“ is used as a semantically empty auxiliary.

4. The Great Vowel Shift (GVS)

Change in pronunciation in the 15th and 16th century. Main series of changes is called the Great Vowel Shift (GVS). It affected mainly the long vowels of Middle English (ME), but there were also changes in the system of short vowels.

4.1. Vowel System

4.1.1. Long Vowels

ME long vowel phonemes:

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Phoneme	i:	e:	ɛ:	a:	ɔ:	o:	u:
Phonetic transcription	[i:]	[e:]	[ɛ:]	[a:]	[ɔ:]	[o:]	[u:]
Example	child	seed	meat	dame	boat	food	house

Changes to the ME long vowels:

1.) **i:** diphthongized: [i:] > [ɔi] > [ai]

example 'tide': [ti:d] > [tɔid] > [taid]

2.) **u:** diphthongized: [u:] > [əu] (Shakespeare time) > [au] (17th cent./ today)

example 'house': [hu:s] > [həus] > [haus]

3.) **ɛ:** raised: [ɛ:] > [i:]

example 'meet': [me:t] > [mi:t]

4.) **ɛ:** raised: [ɛ:] > [e:]

example 'meat': [mɛ:t] > [me:t] or [mi:t]

prone to shortening

5.) **o:** raised: [o:] > [u:]

example 'food': [fo:d] > [fu:d]

many words underwent vowel-shortening, then becoming [ʊ] and later [ʌ]

(example 'blood'). When vowel-shortening took place later than 16th century, it remained [ʊ] (example 'foot').

6) **o:** raised: [ɔ:] > [o:]

example 'boat': [bɔ:t] > [bo:t]

[o:] is diphthongized around 1800 to [ou]

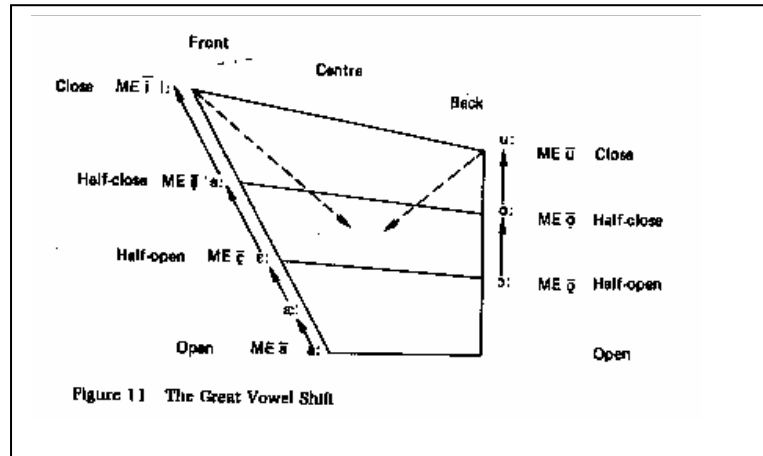
7.) **a:** raised: [a:] > [æ:] (already completed in around 1500) > [ɛ:] (16th cent.) > [e:]

example 'dame': [da:m] > [dæ:m] > [dɛ:m] > [de:m]

Summary: The highest vowels of ME became diphthongized and thus provided space for the lower vowels to move upward and take their place.

Furthermore, a completely new phoneme arises: /ɒ:/ from ME /au/. The new phoneme also undergoes the GVS and is raised to [ɔ:].

Example 'laud': [laud] > [lɒ:d] > [lɔ:d]



4.1.2. Short Vowels

Only small changes took place to the ME short vowels. The most important is that ME *u* split into two distinct phonemes.

1. 'cut': [cut] > [cʌt]

2. 'pull': [pull] > [pʊll] ; [ʊ] appears when followed by /l/ or preceded by /w/, /p/, /b/, /f/.

4.1.3. ME diphthongs

Many become pure vowels during the eME-period.

Examples: 'laud': [laud] > [lɒ:d] > [lɔ:d]

'maid': [maid] > [mɛid] (early 16th cent.) > [mɛ:d] (end of 16th cent.)

'soul': [sɔul] > [sɔ:l]

'use': [niʊ] > [nju:] or [u:]

4.2. Consonants

New consonant phonemes:

1.) /ŋ/, change of status of being an allophone of OE and ME /n/ ([siŋg]) to a phoneme of its own because of the loss of the final /g/: [siŋ]. Difference between [sin] and [siŋ].

2.) /ʒ/: ME [vizjən] > eME [viʒən]

Loss of consonants:

1.) Initial /k-/ is lost about 1600 in words like 'knee', 'knight'.

2.) Initial /g-/ is lost in words like 'gnat'.

3.) Initial /w-/ is lost in words like 'write'.

4.) Non-initial /w-/ is lost before back rounded vowels (words like 'sword') and at the beginning of unstressed syllables ('answer').

5.) Loss of [ç] and [x], the latter is sometimes replaced by [f] (draught).

5. Literature

Charles Barber: Early Modern English, Andre Deutsch London, 1976

Charles Barber: The English language: a historical introduction, Cambridge University Press

Thomas Pyles: The Origins and Development of the English Language, 2nd edition, Harcourt Brace Jovanovich Inc. NY 1971

This handout can be downloaded at http://www.chrissilutz.de/downloads/eme_handout.pdf

Development of some ME vowels:

ME pho- neme	i: [ti:d] (tide)	ɛ: [grɛ:n] (green)	ɛ: [me:t] (meat) [gre:t] (great) [ste:k] (steak)	a: [ma:k] (make)	ai [maid] (maid)	ou [soul] (soul)	ɔ: [bo:t] (boat)	iu [viu] (view) [tʃiu] (chew)	ɒ: [fɔ:d] (food) [blo:d] (blood) [fo:t] (foot)	u: [hu:s] (house)	u [put] (put) [kut] (cut)					
eME 1 st stage	[təid]	[grɪ:n]	[mɛ:t] [grɛ:t] [ste:k]	[mæ:k]	[mɛid]	[soul]	[bo:t]	[viu]	[fu:d] [fu:t]	[blɒd]	[həus] [pʊt] [kʊt]					
eME 2 nd stage	[təid]	[grɪ:n]	[me:t] [gre:t] [ste:k]	[mɛ:k]	[mɛ:d]	[so:l]	[bo:t]	[viu]	[fu:d] [fu:t]	[blɒd]	[həus] [pʊt] [kʊt]					
end of eME period	ai [taid]	i: [grɪ:n] [mi:t]	[me:t] [gre:t] [ste:k]	[me:t] [me:k] [me:d]	e: [me:k] [me:d]	o: [so:l] [bo:t]	ju: [vju:] [tʃu:]	u: [fu:d]	ʊ [fʊt]	ʌ [blʌd]	aʊ [haʊs]	ʊ [pʊt] [kʌt]				
Present English (PE)		i: [mi:t]		ei [greit] [steik]	[meik] [meid]	əʊ [səʊl] [bəʊt]										
PE Spell- ing	tide	green	meat	great steak	make	maid	soul	boat	view	chew	food	foot	blood	house	put	cut

Chaucer: Canterbury Tales

General Prologue (ll.1-18)

Whan that Aprille with his shoures soote
The droghte of Marche hath perced to the roote,
And bathed every veyne in swich licour,
Of which vertu engendred is the flour;
Whan Zephirus eek with his sweete breeth
Inspired hath in every holt and heeth
The tendre croppes, and the yonge sonne
Hath in the Ram his half cours y-ronne,
And smale foweles maken meldodye,
That slepen al the nyght with open ye,
(So priketh hem nature in hir corages):
Thanne longen folk to goon on pilgrimages,
And palmeres for to seken straunge strondes
To ferne halwes, kowthe in sondry londes;
And specially, from every shires ende
Of Engelond to Caunterbury they wende,
The hooly blisful martir for to seke,
That hem hath holpen whan that they were seeke.

The Miller's Prologue (ll.196-217)

The Millere was a stout carl for the nones;
Ful byg he was of brawn, and eek of bones.
That proved wel, for over al ther he cam,
At wrastlyng he wolde have alwey the ram.
He was short-sholdred, brood, a thikke knarre;
Ther was no dore that he nolde heve of harre,
Or breke it at a rennyng with his heed.
His berd as any sowe of fox was reed,
And therto brood, as though it were a spade.
Upon the cop right of his nose he hade
A werte, and theron stood a toft of herys,
Reed as the brustles of a sowes erys;
His nosethirles blake were and wyde.
A swerd and a bokeler bar he by his syde.
His mouth as greet was as a greet forneys.
He was a langlere and a goliardeys,
And that was moost of synne and harlotries.
Wel koude he stelen corn and tollen thries;
And yet he hadde a thombe of gold, pardee.
A whit cote and a blew hood wered he.
A baggepipe wel koude he blowe and sowne,
And therwithal he broghte us out of towne.