

## Introduction to Linguistics Handout 6

### LANGUAGE CHANGE

#### Old English (449-1100 C. E.)

Nū sculon herigean heofonrices Weard,  
Now we must praise heaven-kingdom's Guardian,

Meotodes meahhte ond his mōðgeƿanc,  
The Creator's might and his mind-plans,

weorc Wuldorfæder, swā hē wundra gehwæs,  
the work of the glory-father, when he of wonders of every one,

ēce Drihten, ðr onstealde.  
eternal lord the beginning established.

(excerpt from *Caedmon's Hymn*, seventh century C. E.)

#### Middle English (1100-1500)

Whan that Aprille with his shoures soote  
The droghte of March hath perced to the roote...

When April with its sweet showers  
The drought of March has pierced to the root...

(Chaucer: *The Canterbury Tales*)

#### Modern English (1500-present)

The *Summoning of Everyman* called it is,  
That of our lives and ending shows  
How transitory we be all day.  
The matter is wonder precious,  
But the intent of it is more gracious  
And sweet to bear away.

(*Everyman*, about 1485)

A man may fish with the worm that hath eat of a king, and eat of the fish that  
hath fed of that worm

(Shakespeare: *Hamlet*)

**Regular sound correspondences:** mūs-mouse (also between two dialects or related languages)

Genetically related languages: developed from the same parent language.

English-French-German f-p correspondence: Indo-European divided into small groups. One of those groups underwent a sound change p→f. This is present in Germanic languages, Romance languages did not experience this change.

**Phonological changes:** loss of /x/, the velar fricative: [nixt]

addition of /ʒ/: leisure

allophones becoming separate phonemes: [f]-[v] (between two vowels), now

/f /-v/.

**Phonological rules:** delete unstressed short vowels at the end of words: house, bathe, [z] and [ð] became phonemes. Finally the unstressed vowel deletion rule and the intervocalic voicing rule were lost.

## THE GREAT VOWEL SHIFT (1400-1600)

a major change in the history of English that resulted in new phonemic representation of words and morphemes. It affected the seven long, or tense, vowels of Middle English, e.g:

[mi:s]	[maj:s]	mice
[mu:s]	[maʊs]	mouse
[ge:s]	[gi:s]	geese
[go:s]	[gu:s]	goose
[na:m.ɪ]	[ne:m]	name

→ the highest vowels [i:] and [u:] fell off to become diphthongs, the long vowels underwent an increase in tongue height (as if to fill in the space left when the highest vowels became diphthongs). In addition, [a] was fronted.

GVS responsible for many of the spelling inconsistencies of English.

### Morphological changes:

English has replaced its depleted case system with an equally expressive system of prepositions and stricter constraints on word order.

### Syntactic changes:

Modern English: SVO (fixed), Old English: SOV (free) → phrase structure rules changed

double negation grammatical in OE:

*Ʒæt he na siƷƷan geboren ne wurde*

that he never after born not would-be

that he should never be born after that                      na = ne (not) + a (ever)

comparative and superlative: in Malory's *Tales of King Arthur* double constructions occur:

*more gladder, moost royallest, moost shamefullest*

### Lexical changes:

Addition of words: compounding (afternoon, offshore, railroad, water cooler, etc.), derivation (finalize,

Borrowings: loan words vs. native words (!etymology)

direct/indirect borrowing from Old Norse, Celtic languages, French, Latin, Greek, Spanish, Native American, Yiddish, Italian, etc.

*feast*: directly from French

*algebra*: borrowed from Spanish, which borrowed it from Arabic

Latin and Greek productive prefixes and suffixes: *-ex, -able/ible*

Loss of words: *beseem*: to be suitable, *wherefore*: why

### Semantic changes:

**Broadening:** *dogge*: a specific breed of dog

*bird*: a young bird, *companion*: a person with whom you shared bread

**Narrowing:** *meat*: food, *hound*: dog, *starve*: to die

*girl*: young person of either sex

**Meaning Shifts:** *bead*: prayer, *silly*: happy, *nice*: ignorant

### Why do languages change?

Gradual changes (the spread of the change over an entire speech community). Many factors contribute, the "theory of least effort" is counteracted by the need to limit potential ambiguity. Other factors: imperfect learning of the adult dialects by children, analogic change, physiological mechanisms (assimilation), etc., etc.