The Origins and Development of the English Language

SEVENTH EDITION

John Algeo
Emeritus, University of Georgia

Carmen Acevedo Butcher
Scholar-in-Residence, Shorter University

Based on the original work of
Thomas Pyles

The Early Modern English Period (1500–1800)

Society, Spellings, and Sounds

The early Modern period was transformative for both England and the language. The sixteenth to eighteenth centuries were a time of revolutionary development, opening the way for English to become a world language.

SOME KEY EVENTS IN THE EARLY MODERN PERIOD

The following events during the early Modern English period significantly influenced the development of the English language.

- 1534   The Act of Supremacy established Henry VIII as "Supreme Head of the Church of England," and thus officially put civil authority above Church authority in England.
- 1549   *The Book of Common Prayer* was adopted and became an influence on English literary style. (See http://justus.anglican.org/resources/bcp/)
- 1558   At the age of 25, Elizabeth I became queen of England and, as a woman with a Renaissance education and a skill for leadership, began a forty-five-year reign that promoted statecraft, literature, science, exploration, and commerce.
- 1577–80   Sir Francis Drake circumnavigated the globe, the first Englishman to do so, and participated in the defeat of the Spanish Armada in 1588, thus removing an obstacle to English expansion overseas.
- 1590–1611   William Shakespeare wrote the bulk of his plays, from *Henry VI* to *The Tempest*.
- 1600   The East India Company was chartered to promote trade with Asia, leading eventually to the establishment of the British Raj in India.

- 1604   Robert Cawdrey published the first English dictionary, *A Table Alphabeticall.*
- 1607   Jamestown, Virginia, was established as the first permanent English settlement in America.
- 1611   The Authorized or King James Version of the Bible was produced by a committee of scholars and became, with *The Book of Common Prayer* and the works of Shakespeare, a major influence on English literary style.
- 1619   The first African slaves in North America arrived in Virginia.
- 1642–48   The Puritan Revolution overthrew the monarchy and established a military dictatorship, which lasted until the Restoration of King Charles II in 1660.
- 1660   The Royal Society was founded as the first English organization devoted to the promotion of scientific knowledge and research.
- 1670   Hudson's Bay Company was chartered for promoting trade and settlement in Canada.
- 1688   The Glorious Revolution was a bloodless coup in which Parliament invited William of Orange and his wife, Mary (daughter of the reigning English king), to assume the English throne, resulting in the establishment of Parliament's power over that of the monarchy.
- 1702   The first daily newspaper was published in London, resulting in the expanding power of the press to disseminate information and to form public opinion.
- 1719   Daniel Defoe published *Robinson Crusoe*, sometimes identified as the first modern novel in English.
- 1755   Samuel Johnson published his *Dictionary of the English Language.*
- 1775–83   The American Revolution resulted in the foundation of the first independent nation of English speakers outside the British Isles.
- 1788   The English first settled Australia near modern Sydney.

THE TRANSITION FROM MIDDLE TO MODERN ENGLISH

Despite vast changes in vocabulary and pronunciation, English speakers of the sixteenth century were unaware that they were leaving the Middle English period and entering the Modern. All such divisions between stages of the language's development are to some extent arbitrary, even though they are based on clear and significant internal changes in the language and also correlate with external events in the community of speakers.

EXPANSION OF THE ENGLISH VOCABULARY

The word stock of English was expanded greatly during the early Modern period in three ways. As literacy increased, a conscious need was felt to improve and amplify the vocabulary. As English speakers traveled abroad, they encountered new things that they needed new words to talk about. And as they traveled, they increasingly met speakers of other languages from whom they borrowed words.

During the Renaissance, an influx of Latin and Greek words (Chapter 12, 279–80) was associated with a vogue for inkhorn terms, so named from the fact that they were seldom spoken but were mainly written (with a pen dipped into an ink container made of horn). The influence of the Classical languages has remained strong ever since. French also continued to be a major source of loanwords into English (285–7), as it has been from the time of the Norman Conquest until today. In addition, Spanish and Portuguese (287–8) became significant sources for new words, especially as a result of colonial expansion in Latin America.

Many other languages contributed to the English vocabulary throughout the period. Celtic (281) and Scandinavian (281–2) continued their influence, but new impulses came from Italian (288) and German—both Low and High (289–91), including Yiddish (291). More far-flung influences were from the languages of Asia, Australasia, Africa, eastern Europe, Asia Minor, and the Americas (291–4).

Quite early in their history, the American colonies began to influence the general vocabulary with loanwords from the languages of both Amerindians and other European settlers in the New World. American colonists also changed the use of native English words and exported those changes, sometimes under protest, back to Britain. The first documented use of the word *lengthy* in the *Oxford English Dictionary* is by John Adams in his diary for January 3, 1759: "I grow too minute and lengthy." Early British reactions to this perceived Americanism are typified by a 1793 censorious judgment in the *British Critic:* "We shall, at all times, with pleasure, receive from our transatlantic brethren real improvements of our common mother-tongue: but we shall hardly be induced to admit such phrases as ... 'more lengthy', for longer, or more diffuse."

INNOVATION OF PRONUNCIATION AND CONSERVATION OF SPELLING

The fifteenth century, following the death of Chaucer in 1400, marked a turning point in the internal history of English, especially its pronunciation and spelling, for during this period the language underwent greater, more important phonological changes than in any other century before or since. Despite these radical changes in pronunciation, the old spelling was generally kept. William Caxton, who died in 1491, and the printers who followed him based their spellings, not on the pronunciation current in their day, but instead on late medieval manuscripts. Hence, although the quality of all the Middle English long vowels had changed, their spelling continued as it had been at earlier times. For instance, the Middle English [e:] of *feet, see, three*, etc. had been raised to [i:], but all such words went on being written as if no change had taken place. Consequently, the phonological value of many letters of the English alphabet changed drastically.

Printers and men of learning—misguided though they frequently were—greatly influenced English spelling. Learned men preferred archaic spellings, and they created some by respelling words etymologically. Printers also helped by normalizing older scribal practices. Although early printed works exhibit a

good many inconsistencies, still they are quite orderly compared with the every-day manuscript writing of the time.

THE ORTHOGRAPHY OF EARLY MODERN ENGLISH

The spelling conventions of early Modern English were distinctive in a number of ways.

In a few words, notably *the* and *thee*, early printed books sometimes used *y* to represent the sounds usually spelled *th*. This substitution was made because the letter *þ* was still much used in English manuscripts, but the early printers got their type fonts from the Continent, where the letter *þ* was not normal. So they substituted for *þ* the closest thing they found in the foreign fonts, namely *y*. Thus *the* and *thee* were both sometimes printed as y^e. The plural pronoun meaning 'you all,' on the other hand, was written *ye*. When the *e* was above the line, the *y* was always a makeshift for *þ* and never represented [y].

Writing letters superscript, especially the final letter of a word, was a device to indicate abbreviation, much as we use a period. This convention lasted right through the nineteenth century, for example, in M^r for *Mr.* or Genl for *General*. The abbreviation y^t stands for *that*. The form y^e for *the* survives to our own day in such pseudo-antique absurdities as "Ye Olde Choppe Suey Shoppe," in which it is usually pronounced as if it were the same word as the old pronoun *ye*. Needless to say, there is no justification whatever for such a pronunciation.

The present use of *i* for a vowel and *j* for a consonant was not established until the seventeenth century. In the King James Bible (1611) and the First Folio (1623) of Shakespeare, *i* is used for both values; see, for instance, the passage from the First Folio at the end of this chapter, in which Falstaff's first name is spelled *Iack*. Even after the distinction in writing was made, the feeling persisted for a long time that *i* and *j* were one and the same letter. Dr. Johnson's *Dictionary* (1755) puts them together alphabetically, and this practice continued well into the nineteenth century.

It was similar with the curved and angular forms of *u*—that is, *u* and *v*—they too were originally used more or less indiscriminately for either vowel or consonant. For example, an older text will have *iaspre, liue,* and *vnder,* for which a present-day edition may substitute *jaspre* 'jasper,' *live,* and *under,* with *j* and *v* for *i* and *u* when they indicate consonants, and *u* for initial *v* when it indicates a vowel. By the middle of the seventeenth century, most English printers were making the same distinctions. The matter was purely graphic; no question of pronunciation was involved in the substitution. Yet as with *i* and *j,* catalogues and indexes put *u* and *v* together well into the nineteenth century. So in dictionaries *vizier* was followed by *ulcer, unzoned* by *vocable,* and *iambic* was set between *jamb* and *jangle.*

The sound indicated by *h* had been lost in late Latin, and hence the letter has no phonetic significance in those Latin-derived languages that retain it in their spelling. The influence of Classical Latin had caused French scribes to restore the *h* in the spelling of many words—for instance, *habit, herbage,* and *homme*—though it was never pronounced. It was also sometimes inserted in

English words of French origin where it was not etymological—for instance, *habundance* (mistakenly regarded as coming from *habere* 'to have') and *abhominable* (supposed to be from Latin *ab* plus *homine*, explained as 'away from humanity, hence bestial'). When Shakespeare's pedant Holofernes by implication recommended this latter misspelling and consequent mispronunciation with [h] in *Love's Labour's Lost* ("This is abhominable, which he would call abbominable"), he was in very good company, at least as far as the writing of the word is concerned, for the error had been current since Middle English times. Writers of Medieval Latin and Old French had been similarly misled by a false notion of the etymology of the word.

During the Renaissance, *h* was inserted after *t* in a number of foreign words—for instance, *throne*, from Old French *trone*, which came into English with an initial [t] sound. The French word is from Latin *thronus*, borrowed from Greek, *th* being the normal Roman transliteration of Greek θ. The English respelling ultimately gave rise to a spelling pronunciation with [θ], as also in *theater* and *thesis*, which earlier had initial [t] as well. It was similar with the sound spelled *th* in *anthem*, *apothecary*, *Catherine* (the pet forms *Kate* and *Kit* preserve the older sound), and *Anthony* (compare *Tony*), which to a large extent has retained its historically expected pronunciation in British English. The only American pronunciation of *Anthony* is with [θ]. It is sometimes heard even in reference to Mark Antony, where the spelling does not encourage it. The *h* of *author*, from Old French *autor* (modern *auteur*), going back to Latin *auctor*, was first inserted by French scribes, to whom an *h* after *t* indicated no difference in pronunciation. When in the sixteenth century this fancy spelling began to be used in the English loanword, the way was paved for the modern pronunciation, historically a mispronunciation.

Other Renaissance respellings also effected changes in traditional pronunciations. An example is *schedule*, originally *cedule* from Old French. Its historically expected pronunciation would begin with [s], but the *sch-* spelling, a sixteenth-century innovation, changed that. Noah Webster recommended the American spelling pronunciation with initial [sk], as if the word were a Greek loan. The present-day British pronunciation of the first sound as [š] is also historically an error.

Debt and *doubt* are fancy etymological respellings of *det* and *dout* (both Middle English from Old French), the *b* having been inserted because it was perceived that these words were ultimately derivatives of Latin *debitum* and *dubitare*, respectively. The *c* in *indict* and the *b* in *subtle* are similar. The learned men responsible for such respellings were followed by pedants like Shakespeare's Holofernes, who complains of those "rackers of ortagriphie [orthography]" who say *dout* and *det* when they should say *doubt* and *debt*. "D, e, b, t, not d, e, t," he says, unaware that the word was indeed written *d, e, t* before schoolmasters like himself began tinkering with spelling.

Rhyme and *rhythm* are twin etymological respellings. English had borrowed *rime* from Old French about the year 1200, but in the sixteenth century scholars began to spell the word also as *rythme* or *rhythm* and then a bit later as *rhyme*. These respellings reflected the origin of the French word in Latin *rithmus* or *rythmus*, ultimately from Greek *rhythmos*. The *th* in the *rhythm*

spelling came to be pronounced, and that form has survived as a separate word with the distinct meaning of 'cadence.' For the meaning 'repetition of sound,' the older *rime* spelling, which has continued alongside the fancy upstart *rhyme*, is better both historically and orthographically, but today *rhyme* is more common and so is favored in this book. Both are in standard use.

Comptroller is a pseudo-learned respelling of *controller*, taken by English from Old French. The fancy spelling is doubtless due to an erroneous association with French *compte* 'count.' The word has fairly recently acquired a new pronunciation based on the misspelling. *Receipt* and *indict*, both taken from Anglo-French, and *victual*, from Old French, have been similarly remodeled to give them a Latin look; their traditional pronunciations have not as yet been affected, although a spelling pronunciation for the last is possible by those who do not realize that it is the same word as that spelled in the plural form *vittles*. *Parliament*, a respelling of the earlier *parlement* (a French loanword derived from the verb *parler* 'to speak'), has also fairly recently acquired a pronunciation such as the later spelling seems to indicate.

Another such change of long standing has resulted from the insertion of *l* in *fault* (ME *faute*, from Old French), a spelling suggested by Vulgar Latin *fallita* and strengthened by the analogy of *false*, which has come to us direct from Latin *falsus*. For a while the word continued to be pronounced without the *l*, rhyming with *ought* and *thought* in seventeenth-century poetry. In Dr. Johnson's day there was wavering between the older *l*-less and the newer pronunciation with *l*, as Johnson himself testifies in the *Dictionary*. The eighteenth-century orthoepists indicated the same wavering. They were men who conceived of themselves as exercising a directive function; they recommended and condemned, usually on quite irrelevant grounds. Seldom were they content merely to record variant pronunciations. Thomas Sheridan, the distinguished father of a more distinguished son named Richard Brinsley, in his *General Dictionary of the English Language* (1780) decides in favor of the *l*-less pronunciation of *fault*, as does James Elphinston in his *Propriety Ascertained* (1787). Robert Nares in his *Elements of Orthoëpy* (1784) records both pronunciations and makes no attempt to make a choice between them. John Walker in his *Critical Pronouncing Dictionary* (1791) declared that to omit the *l* made a "disgraceful exception," for the word would thus "desert its relation to the Latin *falsitas*." The history of the *l* of *vault* is quite similar.

Although such tinkering with the orthography is one cause of the discrepancy between spelling and pronunciation in Modern English, another and more important one is the change in the pronunciation of the tense vowels that helps to demark Middle from Modern English. This change, the most salient of all phonological developments in the history of English, is called the **Great Vowel Shift.**

THE GREAT VOWEL SHIFT

A comparison of the modern developments in parentheses in chapter 5 on Old English (94) shows clearly the modern representatives of the Old English long vowels. As has been pointed out, the latter changed only slightly in Middle

English: [a:], in Old English written *a*, as in *stān*, was rounded except in the Northern dialect to [ɔ:], in Middle English written *o(o)*, as in *stoon*. But this was really the only noteworthy change in quality. By the early Modern English period, however, all the long vowels had shifted: Middle English *ē*, as in *sweete* 'sweet,' had already acquired the value [i] that it currently has, and the others were well on their way to acquiring the values that they have in current English. The changes in the long vowels are summarized in the following table:

LONG VOWELS

Late Middle English	Early Modern English			Later English	
[a:] name ——————→	[æ:] ——————→	[ɛ:] ——————→	[e]	name
[e:] feet ——————→	[i]	——————————————————→		feet
[ɛ:] greet ——————→	[e]	——————————————————→		great
[i:] ride ——————→	[əɪ]	——————————————————→	[aɪ]	ride
[o:] boote ——————→	[u]	——————————————————→		boot
[ɔ:] boot ——————→	[o]	——————————————————→		boat
[u:] hous ——————→	[əʊ]	——————————————————→	[aʊ]	house

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In phonological terms:

1. The Middle English high vowels [i:] and [u:] were diphthongized, and then the vowels were centralized and lowered in two steps, first to [əi] and [əu], then to [aɪ] and [au].
2. Each of the Middle English mid vowels was raised one step—higher mid [e:] and [o:] to [i] and [u], respectively, and then lower mid [ɛ:] and [ɔ:] to [e] and [o], respectively.
3. The low vowel [a:] was fronted to [æ:] and then raised in two steps through [ɛ:] to [e].

In early Modern English, vowel quality generally became more important than quantity, so length is shown with early Modern vowels only for [æ:] and [ɛ:], which alone were distinguished from short vowels primarily by length. The beginning and ending points of the shift can also be displayed diagrammatically as in Figure 7.1 on page 158.

The stages by which the shift occurred and the cause of it are unknown. There are several theories, but as the evidence is ambiguous, they are best left to more specialized study. By some series of intermediate changes, long *ī*, as in Middle English *rīden* 'to ride,' became a diphthong [əi]. This pronunciation survives in certain types of speech, particularly before voiceless consonants. It went on in most types of English to become in the course of the seventeenth century [aɪ], though there are variations in pronunciation.

It was similar with Middle English long *ū*, as in *hous* 'house': it became [əu]. This [əu], surviving in eastern Virginia and in some types of Canadian English, became [au] at about the same time as [əi] became [aɪ].

Vowels without sample words are Middle English.
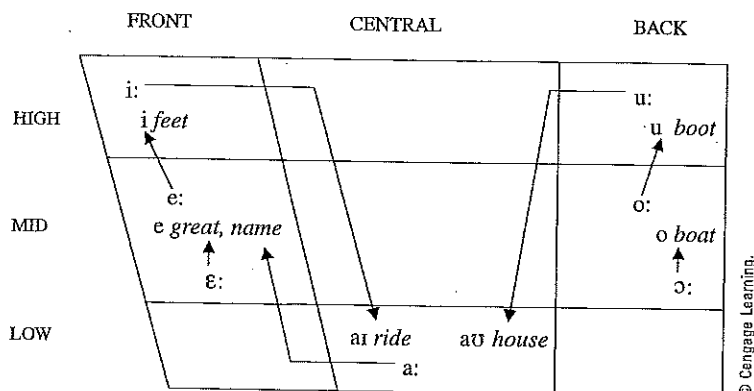Vowels with sample words are Modern English.

FIGURE 7.1 | GREAT VOWEL SHIFT

Middle English [o:], as in *ro(o)te* 'root,' became [u]. Laxing of this [u] to [ʊ] has occurred in *book, foot, good, look, took*, and other words; in *blood* and *flood* there has also been unrounding, resulting in [ə] in these two words. The chronology of this subsequent laxing and unrounding is difficult to establish, as is the distribution of the various developments. As Helge Kökeritz *(Shakespeare's Pronunciation* 236) points out, Shakespeare's rhyming of words that had Middle English long close *ō* gives no clue to his pronunciation, for he rhymes *food* with *good* and *flood, mood* with *blood, reprove* with *love* and *dove*. If these are not merely traditional rhymes, we must conclude that the distribution of [u], [ʊ], and [ə] was not in early Modern English the same as it is in current English, and there is indeed ample evidence that colloquial English did vacillate a good deal. This fact is not particularly surprising when we remember that there is at the present time a certain amount of wavering between [u] and [ʊ] in such words as *roof, broom, room, root*, and a few others.

The development of Middle English [ɔ:] is straightforwardly to [o] as in Modern English *home* and *stone*. However, in a few words this [ɔ:] was laxed perhaps before the Great Vowel Shift could affect it—for instance, in *hot*, from Middle English *hǫ(ǫ)t*.

Middle English *ā* as in *name* and *ai* as in *nail* had by the early fifteenth century been leveled as [a:] and thus were affected alike by the Great Vowel Shift. The resultant homophony of *tale* and *tail* provided Shakespeare and his contemporaries with what seems to have been an almost irresistible temptation to make off-color puns (for instance, in *The Two Gentlemen of Verona* 2.3.52ff and *Othello* 3.1.6ff). The current pronunciation of such words—that is, with [e]—became normal in standard English probably by the early years of the eighteenth century. All these pronunciations may have existed side by side, however, just as retarded and advanced pronunciations coexist in current English.

The development of Middle English [e:] to Modern English [i]—as in *three* and *kene* 'keen'—is quite regular.

:o [ʊ] has
ꭓod there
ology of
:ribution
ion 236)
ɜ close ō
d, *mood*
rhymes,
Modern
nce that
rprising
ꭓavering
thers.
ɔ] as in
s laxed
t, from

ifteenth
Vowel
nd his
ptation
..3.52ff
s, with
e eigh-
wever,

ı *three*

The development of Middle English [ɛ:], as in *hẹẹth* 'heath' and other such words, however, is complex. It has two results in early Modern English because of a change that seems to have occurred in late Middle English before the Great Vowel Shift operated. According to the Great Vowel Shift [ɛ:] becomes [e]; and that change is illustrated by Falstaff's *raisin–reason* pun of 1598, in the passage cited at the end of this chapter, and many other such puns—for example, *abased–a beast, grace–grease.* (A splendid treatment of Shakespeare's puns— sometimes childish, but frequently richly obscene—is in Part 2 of Kökeritz's *Shakespeare's Pronunciation,* and Jonathan Hope's *Shakespeare and Language* provides another excellent exploration of Shakespeare's paronomasia, as well as the visual iconography of Renaissance language and computer-aided studies.)

But there is also convincing evidence that in late Middle English times, before the Great Vowel Shift occurred, the vowel [e:] also came to exist as a dialect variant in words like *heath, beast,* and *grease.* Its precise history is unknown, but it may have developed as a pre-Great Vowel Shift raising in some variety of Middle English. So in late Middle English times, the *heath, beast,* and *grease* words could be pronounced in either of two ways—with [ɛ:] or with [e:]. Chaucer sometimes rhymes historically close *e* words with words that ordinarily had open *e* in his type of English, indicating his familiarity with such a pre-1400 raising of [ɛ:] to [e:].

When the Great Vowel Shift occurred, it raised [ɛ:] to [e] and also [e:] to [i] in both ways of pronouncing the *heath, beast,* and *grease* words. So in early Modern English those words also had two pronunciations, with either [e] (mainly by fashionable people) or with [i] by the less fashionable. And that social difference lasted until the eighteenth century. But fashions change. And during the eighteenth century, the unfashionable pronunciation of the *heath, beast,* and *grease* words with [i] became fashionable, except in a few old-fashioned hold- outs: *break, great, steak,* and *yea.* The present [i] vowel in such words as *heath, beast,* and *grease* is thus obviously, as Henry Wyld (211) puts it, "merely the result of the abandonment of one type of pronunciation and the adoption of another." Other authorities agree with Wyld's view—for example, Kökeritz (*Shakespeare's Pronunciation* 194–209) and Eric John Dobson (2:606–16).

PODEL
7.9

Before that change in fashion, many rhymes from the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries testify to the [e] pronunciation in words that today have [i] instead—for instance, Jonathan Swift's "You'd swear that so divine a creature / Felt no necessities of nature" ("Strephon and Chloe"), in which the rhyming words are to be pronounced [kretər] and [netər], and "You spoke a word began with H. / And I know whom you meant to teach" ("The Journal of a Modern Lady"), in which the rhyming words are [eč] and [teč].

The formerly standard and fashionable pronunciation with [e] survives today only in the handful of words mentioned above (*break, great, steak,* and *yea*) and in some dialects, such as Irish. A few surnames borne by families long associated with Ireland, like *Yeats* (compare *Keats*), *Re(a)gan,* and *Shea,* have also retained the pronunciation with [e], as does *Beatty* in American speech.

As Dobson (2:611) points out, "Throughout the [early] ModE period there was a struggle going on between two ways of pronouncing 'ME ẹ words'"; ulti- mately the [i] pronunciation was to win out, so that only a few words remain

as evidence of the [e] sound that prevailed in fashionable circles from about 1600 until the mid-eighteenth century. This process was gradual, as the fashion spread from one word to another.

OTHER VOWELS

STRESSED SHORT VOWELS

The stressed short vowels have remained relatively stable throughout the history of English. The most obvious changes affect Middle English short *a*, which shifted by way of [a] to [æ], and Middle English short *u*, which was unrounded and shifted to [ə], though its older value survives in a good many words in which the vowel was preceded by a labial consonant, especially if it was followed by *l*—for instance, *bull, full, pull, bush, push,* and *put* (but compare the variant *putt*).

It is evident that there was an unrounded variant of short *o*, reflected in spellings of the late sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Wyld (240–1) cites a number of examples of *a* for *o* in spellings, including Queen Elizabeth I's "I pray you stap the mouthes." This unrounding did not affect the language as a whole, but such doublets as *strop–strap* and *god–gad* remain to testify to its having occurred. Today [ɑ] is the typical American vowel of most words that had short [ɔ] in Middle English (*god, stop, clock,* and so forth). Short *e* has not changed, except occasionally before [ŋ], as in *string* and *wing* from Middle English *streng* and *wenge,* and short *i* remains what it has been since Germanic times.

SHORT VOWELS

Late Middle English	Early Modern English	Later English
[a] that →	[æ]	→
[ɛ] bed		→
[ɪ] in		→
[ɔ] on, odd		→ [ɔ] or [ɑ]
[ʊ] but →	[ə]	→

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DIPHTHONGS

The Middle English diphthongs had a tendency to monophthongize. For example, [au] in *lawe* and [ɔu] in *snow* were monophthongized to [ɔ] and [o], respectively. The early fifteenth-century merger of [æɪ] in *nail* with [a:] as in *name* has already been mentioned; the subsequent history of that diphthong was the same as that of the long vowel with which it merged.

The Middle English diphthongs [ɛu] and [ɪu], written *eu, ew, iu, iw,* and *u* (depending to some extent on when they were written), merged into [yu]. As we saw in Chapter 2, this [yu] has tended to be reduced to [u] in such words as

duty, ˀ
has be
after l.
from *p*
syllabl
argue ;
and *h*
mutua
Simila:
has be
circum
Th
of Fre
ui bec
(Chap
other
Middl
from (
[baɪl].
of the
plet "ˀ
one di
etymo
pronu
Th
[ɔɪ] is
gaudi
introd

Late N

[au] la
[ɔu] sɪ
[æɪ] n
[ɛu], l
[ʊɪ] jc
[ɔɪ] jc

QUAN

Quan
an or
and *p*
stand.

PODEL
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duty, Tuesday, lute, and *stews,* in which it follows an alveolar sound. The [y] has been retained at the beginning of a word (*use* as distinct from *ooze*) and after labials and velars: *b* (*beauty* as distinct from *booty*), *p* (*pew* as distinct from *pooh*), *m* (*mute* as distinct from *moot*), *v* (*view* as distinct from the first syllable of *voodoo*), *f* (*feud* as distinct from *food*), *g* (the second syllable of *argue* as distinct from *goo*), *k* (often spelled *c* as in *cute* as distinct from *coot*), and *h* (*hew* as distinct from *who*). After [z], this [y] ultimately gave rise by mutual assimilation to a new single sound [ž] in *azure, pleasure,* and the like. Similarly, the earlier medial or initial [sy] in *pressure, nation, sure,* and the like has become [š], though this was not a new sound, having occurred under other circumstances in Old English.

The Middle English diphthong [ʊɪ], occurring almost exclusively in words of French origin, such as *poison, join,* and *boil,* was written *oi* rather than *ui* because of the substitution of *o* for *u* next to stroke letters, in this case *i* (Chapter 6, 128). The first element of this diphthong shifted to [ə] along with other short *u*'s. The diphthong thus fell together with the development of Middle English *ī* as [əɪ], both subsequently becoming [aɪ]. So the verb *boil,* from Old French *boillir* (ultimately Lat. *bullīre*) became current nonstandard [baɪl]. Many rhymes in our older poetry testify to this identity in pronunciation of the reflexes of Middle English *ī* and *ui*—for instance, Alexander Pope's couplet "While expletives their feeble aid do join; / And ten low words oft creep in one dull line." The current standard pronunciation of words spelled with *oi* for etymological *ui* is based on the spelling. Some dialects, however, preserve the pronunciation with [aɪ] (Kurath and McDavid 167–8, maps 143–6).

The quite different Middle English diphthong spelled *oi* and pronounced [ɔɪ] is also of French origin, going back to Latin *au,* as in *joie* (ultimately Lat. *gaudia*) and *cloistre* (Lat. *claustrum*). It has not changed significantly since its introduction.

DIPHTHONGS

Late Middle English	Early Modern English			Later English
[aʊ] lawe	⟶ [ɔ]			⟶
[ɔʊ] snow	⟶ [o]			⟶
[æɪ] nail	⟶ [aː] ⟶ [æː]	⟶ [eː]		⟶ [e]
[eʊ], [ɪʊ] fewe, knew	⟶ [yu]			⟶
[ʊɪ] join	⟶ [əɪ]	⟶ [aɪ]		⟶ [ɔɪ]
[ɔɪ] joy				⟶

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QUANTITATIVE VOWEL CHANGES

Quantitative changes in the Modern English period include the lengthening of an originally short vowel before voiceless fricatives—of [æ] as in *staff, glass,* and *path* to [æː], which in the late eighteenth century was replaced by [ɑ] in standard British English; most forms of American English, however, keep the

unlengthened [æ]. Similarly, short *o* was lengthened in *soft, lost,* and *cloth*; that lengthened vowel survives in American English as [ɔ], compared with the [ɑ] of *sot, lot,* and *clot,* which comes directly from an earlier short *o* without lengthening. Short [ɔ] also lengthened before [g], as in *dog,* compared with *dock*. In *dog* versus *dock* the lengthening has resulted in a qualitatively distinct vowel in most varieties of American English, [ɔ] versus [ɑ]. The earlier laxing of [u] to [ʊ] in words such as *hood* and *good* has already been referred to in connection with the development of Middle English [oː] in the Great Vowel Shift. In *mother, brother, other,* and *smother,* originally long vowels were shortened (with eventual modification to [ə]). *Father* and (in some types of speech) *rather,* with originally short vowels, have undergone lengthening, for what reason we cannot be sure—quite contrary to the shortening that occurred in *lather* and *gather*.

EARLY MODERN ENGLISH CONSONANTS

The consonants of English, like the short vowels, have been rather stable, though certain losses have occurred within the Modern English period.

The Old English and Middle English voiceless palatal fricative [ç], occurring next to front vowels and still represented in our spelling by *gh* disappeared entirely, as in *bright, sigh,* and *weigh*. The identically written voiceless velar fricative [x], occurring next to back vowels, either disappeared, as in *taught, bought,* and *bough,* or became [f], as in *cough, laugh,* and *enough*. These changes occurred as early as the fifteenth century in England south of the Humber, though there is evidence that still in the later part of the sixteenth century old-fashioned speakers and a few pedants retained the sounds or at least thought that they ought to be retained (Kökeritz, *Shakespeare's Pronunciation* 306).

In the final sequence *-mb,* the *b* had disappeared in pronunciation before the beginning of the Modern English period, so the letter *b* could be added after final *m* where it did not etymologically belong, in *limb*. There was a similar tendency to reduce final *-nd,* as in *lawn,* from Middle English *laund*; confusion seems to have arisen, however, because a nonetymological *-d* has been added in *sound* and *lend* (ME *soun* and *lene*), though in the latter word the excrescent *d* occurred long before the Modern English period.

The *l* of the Middle English preconsonantal *al* was lost after first becoming a vowel: thus Middle English *al* and *au* fell together as *au,* ultimately becoming [ɔ] (as in *talk, walk*) or [æ] before *f* and *v* (as in *half, salve*) or [ɑ] before *m* (as in *calm, palm*). The *l* retained in the spelling of these words has led to spelling pronunciations, particularly when it occurs before *m*; many speakers now pronounce the *l* in words like *calm* and *palm*. The *l* of *ol* was similarly lost before certain consonants by vocalization, as in *folk, yolk, Holmes,* and the like.

A number of postvocalic *l*'s in English spelling were added because the ultimate Latin sources of their words had an *l,* although it had disappeared in French, from which the words were borrowed; ultimately those added *l*'s came to be pronounced from the new spellings. The *l* in the spelling of *falcon* was thus restored from the Latin etymon (ME *faucon,* from Old French, in which the vocalization to [ʊ] also occurred). A football team known as the *Falcons* is everywhere called [fælkənz], a pronunciation widely current for the bird long

before the appearance of the team. The spelling has as yet had little if any effect on the pronunciation of the name of the writer William Faulkner. Perhaps if the name had been written *Falconer*, which amounts to the same thing, the spelling pronunciation might in time have come to prevail. As noted above, the *l* in *fault* and *vault* was also inserted. The older pronunciation of the first of these words is indicated by Swift's "O, let him not debase your thoughts, / Or name him but to tell his faults" ("Directions for Making a Birth-Day Song").

In French loanwords like *host* and *humble* the *h*, because it is in the spelling, has gradually come to be pronounced in all but a few words; it was generally lacking in such words in early Modern English. In *herb*, the *h* remains silent for many American speakers, but is pronounced by others, and by British speakers generally. In other words, such as *hour*, the *h* is silent in all varieties of English.

There was an early loss of [r] before sibilants, not to be confused with the much later loss (not really normal before the nineteenth century) before any consonant or before a pause: older *barse* 'a type of fish' by such loss became *bass*, as *arse* became *ass*, and *bust, nuss, fust* developed from *burst, nurse, first*; this was not, however, a widespread change. An early loss of [r] before *l* is indicated by *palsy* (ME *parlesie*, a variant of *paralisie* 'paralysis').

The final unstressed syllable *-ure* was pronounced [ər], with preceding *t, d,* and *s* having the values [t], [d], and [s] or intervocalically [z], as in *nature* [-tər], *verdure* [-dər], *censure* [-sər], and *leisure* [-zər], until the nineteenth century. Though Noah Webster's use of such pronunciations was considered rustic and old-fashioned by his more elegant contemporaries, in his *Elementary Spelling Book* of 1843 he gave *gesture* and *jester* as homophones. The older pronunciation is indicated by many rhymes: to cite Dean Swift once more, "If this to clouds and stars will venture, / That creeps as far to reach the centre" ("Verses on Two Celebrated Modern Poets"). Webster was also opposed to [-č-] in *fortune, virtue,* and the like, which he seems to have associated with fast living. He preferred [-t-] in such words. But many of the pronunciations that he prescribed were scorned by all of the proper Bostonians of his day.

The initial consonant sequences *gn* and *kn*, still represented in our spelling of *gnarl, gnat, gnaw, knave, knead, knee,* and a few other words, had lost their first elements by the early seventeenth century. Loss of [k] is evidenced by the Shakespearean puns *knack–neck, knight–night,* and others cited by Kökeritz (*Shakespeare's Pronunciation* 305).

Final *-ing* when unstressed, as in verb forms like *walking* or *coming* and in pronouns like *nothing* and *something,* had long been practically universally pronounced [-ɪn]. According to Wyld (289), "This habit obtains in practically all Regional dialects of the South and South Midlands, and among large sections of speakers of Received Standard English." The velarization of the *n* to [ŋ] began as a hypercorrect pronunciation in the first quarter of the nineteenth century and, still according to Wyld, "has now a vogue among the educated at least as wide as the more conservative one with *-n*." Long before Wyld wrote these words, which would need some revision for British English today, the [-ɪn] pronunciation had come to be considered substandard in many parts of the United States, largely because of the crusade that teachers had conducted

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Left margin fragments:

:loth; that
the [ɑ] of
lengthen-
-k. In *dog*
-l in most
to [ʊ] in
tion with
ı *mother*,
ith even-
ith origi-
annot be
-r.

r stable,   **PODEL 7.5**

:ccurring
appeared
elar fric-
bought,
changes
-lumber,
ury old-
thought
)6).
ı before
ɛ added
a simi-
; confu-
ıs been
ord the

coming
coming
ɛ *m* (as
spelling
w pro-
before
ɛ.
he ulti-   **PODEL 7.9**
ıred in
ɛ came
m was
which
:ons is
l long

against it, though it continues to occur rather widely in unselfconscious speech on all social levels. Many spellings and rhymes in our older literature testify to the orthodoxy of what is popularly called "dropping the *g*"—in phonological terms, using dental [n] instead of velar [ŋ], for there is of course no [g] to be dropped. For instance, Swift wrote the couplets "See then what mortals place their bliss in! / Next morn betimes the bride was missing" ("Phyllis") and the delicate "His jordan [chamber pot] stood in manner fitting / Between his legs, to spew or spit in" ("Cassinus and Peter"). Inverse spellings such as Shakespeare's *cushings* (*cushions*), *javelings* (*javelins*), and *napking* (*napkin*) tell the same story (cited by Kökeritz, *Shakespeare's Pronunciation* 314).

EVIDENCE FOR EARLY MODERN PRONUNCIATION

Our knowledge of early Modern English pronunciation comes from many sources. Fortunately not all gentlefolk knew how to spell in earlier days, which is to say that they did not know conventional spellings. So they spelled phonetically, according to their lights. What is by modern standards a "misspelling," like *coat* for *court* or *crick* for *creek*, may tell us a good deal about the writer's pronunciation. A good many such writings have come down to us.

STRESS

Many words in early Modern English were stressed otherwise than they are in current speech, as we can tell especially from poetry. *Character, illustrate, concentrate,* and *contemplate* were all stressed on their second syllables, and most polysyllabic words in *-able* and *-ible* had initial stress, frequently with secondary stress on their penultimate syllables, as in Shakespeare's "'Tis sweet and commendable in your Nature, Hamlet." *Antique,* like *complete* and other words that now have final stress, had initial stress; *antique* is a doublet of *antic,* with which it was identical in pronunciation. But it is not always possible to come to a firm conclusion on the basis of verse, as the many instances of variant stress in Shakespeare's lines indicate (Kökeritz, *Shakespeare's Pronunciation* 392–8). It is likely that most of these variant stress placements occurred in actual speech; it would be surprising if they had not, considering the variations that occur in current English.

SCHOLARLY STUDIES

Henry Wyld in his *History of Modern Colloquial English* has used many memoirs, letters, diaries, and documents from this period as the basis for his conclusions concerning the pronunciation of early Modern English. Kökeritz relies somewhat more than Wyld on the grammars and spelling books that began to appear around the middle of the sixteenth century, which he considers "our most important sources of information" (17) for the pronunciation of English in Shakespeare's day—works such as John Hart's *An Orthographic* (1569) and *A Methode or Comfortable Beginning for All Unlearned* (1570), William Bullokar's *Booke at Large* (1580) and *Bref Grammar for English* (1586), Richard Mulcaster's *The*

First Part of the Elementarie (1582), and, in the following century, Alexander Gill's Logonomia Anglica (1619; 2nd ed., 1621) and Charles Butler's English Grammar (1633; 2nd ed., 1634), which has a list of homophones in its "Index of Words Like and Unlike." These same works, with others, provide the basis for Dobson's two-volume English Pronunciation 1500–1700.

There are special studies of these early Modern writers on language by Otto Jespersen (on Hart), Bror Danielsson (Hart and Gill), and R. E. Zachrisson (Bullokar), along with general studies of early Modern English by Wilhelm Horn and Martin Lehnert, Eilert Ekwall (A History of Modern English Sounds and Morphology), and Karl Luick. The first volume of Jespersen's Modern English Grammar on Historical Principles deals with early Modern English phonology and orthography.

The use of wordplay and rhyme has already been alluded to a number of times. Kökeritz makes extensive and most effective use of these in Shakespeare's Pronunciation, a work that has been cited a number of times heretofore. There is no dearth of evidence, though what we have is often difficult to interpret.

EARLY MODERN ENGLISH ILLUSTRATED

SPELLING

The following paragraph is the chapter "Rosemary" from Banckes's Herball (1525), a hodgepodge of botanical and medical lore and a good deal of sheer superstition thrown together and "impyrnted by me Richard Banckes, dwellynge in London, a lytel fro ye Stockes in ye Pultry, y^e .xxv. day of Marche. The yere of our lorde .M.CCCCC. & xxv." The only known original copies of this old black-letter "doctor book" are one in the British Museum and one in the Huntington Library in California. What became of the many other copies of the work, which went through at least fifteen editions, no one can say.

Noteworthy orthographic features of the book include the spelling y^e for the or thee, explained earlier in this chapter. Also, a line or tilde-like diacritic over a vowel indicates omission of a following n or m, as in thẽ for them and thã for than. This device is very ancient. The virgules, or slanting lines, are the equivalents of our commas, used to indicate brief pauses in reading. As was the custom, v is used initially (venymous, vnder) and u elsewhere (hurte, euyll), regardless of whether consonant or vowel was represented. Some of the final e's are used for justifying lines of type—that is, making even right-hand margins—a most useful expedient when type had to be set by hand. Long s (ſ), which must be carefully distinguished from the similar "f," is used initially and medially.

The statement in the first line about the herb's being "hote and dry" is an allusion to an ancient theory of matter that classified the nature of everything as a combination of hot or cold and moist or dry qualities.

Roſemary.

This herbe is hote and dry/ take the flowres and put them in a lynen clothe/ & ſo boyle them in fayre clene water to ye halfe & coole it & drynke it/ for it is moche worth agaynſt all euylles in the body. Alſo take the flowres & make powder therof and bynde it to the ryght arme in a lynen clothe/ and it ſhall make the lyght and

mery. Alſo ete the flowres with hony faſtynge with ſowre breed and there ſhall ryſe in the none euyll ſwellynges. Alſo take the flowres and put them in a cheſt amonge youre clothes or amonge bokes and moughtes [moths] ſhall not hurte them. Alſo boyle the flowres in gotes mylke & than let them ſtande all a nyght vnder the ayer fayre couered/ after that gyue hym to drynke thereof that hath the tyſyke [phthisic] and it ſhall delyuer hym. Alſo boyle the leues in whyte wyne & waſſhe thy face therwith/ thy berde & thy browes and there ſhall no cornes growe out/ but thou ſhall haue a fayre face. Alſo put the leues vnder thy beddes heed/ & thou ſhalbe delyuered of all euyll dremes. Alſo breke yᵉ leues ſmall to powder & laye them on a Canker & it ſhall flee it. Alſo take the leues & put thē into a veſſel of wyne and it ſhall preſerue yᵉ wyne fro tartneſſe & euyl ſauour/ and yf thou ſell that wyne, thou ſhall haue good lucke & ſpede [success] in the ſale. Alſo yf thou be feble with vnkyndly [unnatural] ſwette/ take and boyle the leues in clene water, & whan yᵉ water is colde do [put] therto as moche of whyte wyne/ & than make therin ſoppes & ete thou well therof/ & thou ſhal recouer appetyte. Alſo yf thou haue the flux boyle yᵉ leues in ſtronge Ayſell [vinegar] & than bynde them in a lynē [c]lothe and bynde it to thy wombe [belly] & anone the flux ſhal withdrawe. Alſo yf thy legges be blowen with the goute/ boyle the leues in water/ & than take the leues & bynde them in a lynen clothe aboute thy legges/ & it ſhall do yᵉ moche good. Alſo take the leues and boyle them in ſtronge Ayſell & bynde them in a clothe to thy ſtomake/ & it ſhall delyuer yᵉ of all euylles. Alſo yf thou haue the coughe/ drynke the water of the leues boyled in whyte wyne/ & thou ſhalbe hole. Alſo take the rynde of Roſemary & make powder therof and drynke it for the poſe [head cold]/ & thou ſhalbe delyuered therof. Alſo take the tymbre therof & brūne [burn] it to coles & make powder therof & thā put it into a lynen cloth and rubbe thy tethe therwith/ & yf there be ony wormes therin it ſhall flee them & kepe thy tethe from all euyls. Alſo make the a box of the wood and smell to it and it shall preſerne¹ thy youthe. Alſo put therof in thy doores or in thy howſe & thou ſhalbe without daunger of Adders and other venymous ſerpentes. Alſo make the a barell therof & drynke thou of the drynke that ſtandeth therin & thou nedes to fere no poyſon that ſhall hurte yᵉ and yf thou ſet it in thy garden kepe it honeſtly [decently] for it is moche profytable. Alſo yf a mā haue loſt his ſmellynge of the ayre orelles he maye not drawe his brethe/ make a fyre of the wood & bake his breed therwith & gyue it hym to ete & he ſhalbe hole.

PRONUNCIATION

All quotations from Shakespeare's plays in this chapter are from the First Folio (facsimile ed., London, 1910) with the line numbering of the *Globe* edition (1891) as given in Bartlett's *Concordance*. Roman type has been substituted for the italic used for proper names occurring in speeches in the First Folio, except for one instance in the passage cited below.

In the passage from Shakespeare's *1 Henry IV* (2.4.255–66) that follows, the phonetic transcription indicates a somewhat conservative pronunciation that was probably current in the south of England in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. Vowel length is indicated only in the single word *reason(s)*, in which it was distinctive. Stress is indicated, but no attempt has

¹ The printer has inadvertently turned the *u* that was in his copy, to make an *n*.

been made to show fine gradations. Prince Hal, Poins, and Falstaff, who has just told a whopping lie, are speaking:

Prin. Why, how could'ſt thou know theſe men in Kendall Greene, when it
[wəɪ 'həʊ 'kʊdst ðəʊ 'no ðɪz 'mɛn ɪn 'kɛndəl 'grin 'hwɛn ɪt

was ſo darke, thou could'ſt not ſee thy Hand? Come, tell vs your reaſon:
wəz 'so 'dærk ðəʊ 'kʊdst nɔt 'si ðəɪ 'hænd 'kʊm 'tɛl əs yər 'rɛːzən

what ſay'ſt thou to this?
hwæt 'sɛst ðəʊ tə 'ðɪs]

Poin. Come, your reaſon *Iack*, your reaſon.
'kʊm yər 'rɛːzən 'ʤæk yər 'rɛːzən

Falst. What, vpon compulſion? No: were I at the Strappado, or all the
'hwæt ə'pɔn kəm'pʊlsyən 'no 'wɛr əɪ æt ðə stræ'pædo ər 'ɔl ðə

Racks in the World, I would not tell you on compulſion. Giue you a
'ræks ɪn ðə 'wʊrld əɪ 'wʊld nɔt 'tɛl yu ɔn kəm'pʊlsyən 'gɪv yʊ ə

reaſon on compulſion? If Reaſons were as plentie as Blackberries,
'rɛːzən ɔn kəm'pʊlsyən ɪf 'rɛːzənz wɛr əz 'plɛnti əz 'blæk'bɛriz

I would giue no man a Reaſon vpon compulſion, I.
əɪ wəd 'gɪv 'no 'mæn ə 'rɛːzən ə'pɔn kəm'pʊlsyən 'əɪ]

In this transcription it is assumed that Falstaff, a gentleman (even if a somewhat decayed one) and an officer as well, would have been highly conservative in pronunciation, thus preferring slightly old-fashioned [sy] in *compulsion* to the newer [š] to be heard in the informal speech of his time (Kökeritz, *Shakespeare's Pronunciation* 317). It is also assumed that Falstaff used an unstressed form of *would* [wəd] in his last sentence, in contrast to the strongly stressed form [wuld] of his second sentence, and that, even though the Prince may have had the sequence [hw] in his speech, he would not have pronounced the [h] in his opening interjectional *Why*, thus following the usual practice of those American speakers of the last century who had [hw] when the word is interrogative, but [w] when it is an interjection or an expletive (Kenyon 159).

It is a great pity that there was no tape recorder at the Globe playhouse.

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