Chapter 6
Middle English: 1150-1500
18 August 2013

The previous chapter examined the influence of other languages on English, i.e. its external history. This chapter focuses on internal changes. Middle English is usually considered to begin around 1150, when the synthetic character of Old English starts to change. For instance, in Middle English, a number of case endings simplify and become -e. This change occurs at different times in different parts of Britain: in the North and East, it proceeds faster than in the South and West, probably due to contact with Scandinavian that accelerated the pace of change. The many loans we discussed in the previous chapter and the loss of endings make Middle English look 'modern'.

Several different points in time can be considered as the end of Middle English: 1400, when the Great Vowel Shift starts; 1476, when printing is introduced; or 1485, when Henry VII comes to the throne. Here, we will consider the year 1500, when the most radical morphological and syntactic changes are complete, as the end of Middle English.

The organization of this chapter is similar to that of Chapter 4: sections 1 and 2 discuss the sources, writing system, and sounds of Middle English, and sections 3 and 4 examine its morphology and syntax (its grammar). Since Chapter 5 provided information about Old and Middle English vocabulary, section 5 of this chapter is about general word formation, not loans, and section 6 examines dialects. The chapter also provides texts for analysis.

1 Texts and Spelling

In this section, we will examine the types of Middle English texts available to us and the writing system of Middle English. First, however, we need to discuss the sociolinguistic context.

Clanchy (1979: 1-2) makes the argument that England after 1066 changes into a literate society. Where Anglo Saxon England produced 2,000 writs and charters that remain, the 13th century must have seen so much more since tens of thousands such documents survive. Writing became known in every village, no matter how remote, and this ubiquity had a profound effect on society. The (in)famous Domesday Book of 1086, recording in Latin the wealth and taxes to be paid, set the stage for these changes.

It is often said that only after 1300 does English reemerge as a language used for literature, the court, and the church (Baugh & Cable 2002: Chapter 6). Several historical dates are relevant to this reemergence: 1244, when it becomes illegal to hold land in both France and England; 1258, when Henry III uses both English and French for an official proclamation and English gradually
gains influence; 1349, when English is first used at Oxford University; and 1362, when Edward III opens Parliament in English. Several Middle English texts date from before 1300, however. One version of the Cursor Mundi dates from around 1300 and makes a case for writing in English in its prologue. Try to read the excerpt in (1), keeping in mind that ilk means 'very', same', lede 'people', at 'to', ilka 'each', sted 'place', and quat 'what'.

(1) **Cursor Mundi** - Northern version - 1300

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Line</th>
<th>Translation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>þis ilk bok is es translate</td>
<td>this book is easily translated</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In to Inglis tong to rede</td>
<td>Into English to speak</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>For the loue of Inglis lede</td>
<td>For the love of English people</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inglis lede of Ingland</td>
<td>English people of England</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>For the commun at understand</td>
<td>For the common at understanding</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frankis rimes here I redd</td>
<td>Frankish verses here I read</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comunlik in ilka sted</td>
<td>Commonly in each place</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mast es it wroght for frankis man</td>
<td>What does it mean for Frankish men</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quat is for him na frankis can?</td>
<td>What is for him not Frankish can</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In Ingland the nacion</td>
<td>In England the nation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Es Inglis man þar in commun</td>
<td>English man there in common</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>þe speche þat man wit mast may spede</td>
<td>the speech that man wishes may speed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mast þarwit to speke war nede</td>
<td>Most speak what is needed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Selden was for ani chance</td>
<td>Seldom was for any chance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Praised Inglis tong in france</td>
<td>Praised English tongue in France</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Giue we ilkan þare langage</td>
<td>Give us each language</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Me think we do þam non outrage</td>
<td>I think we do them no outrage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To laud and Inglis man i spell</td>
<td>To praise and English man I spell</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>þat understandes þat i tell</td>
<td>that understands what I tell</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(from Morris' 1874-93 edition; Cotton 232-250).

As (1) shows, in the Early Middle English period, English is not seen as a prestigious language and its use needs to be defended. After 1300, this changes, and many texts on different topics are written in English.

As with Old English, the Middle English text types available are varied: songs, travel accounts, recipes, medicinal handbooks, saints' lives, sermons, philosophical and scientific works, romances, and fiction. There are several plays, such as the Wakefield and York Cycles; government documents prepared at the Chancery; anonymous lyrics; works of the Gawain poet, John Wycliff, Margery of Kempe, and Julian of Norwich; William Langland's *Piers Plowman*; Geoffrey Chaucer's extensive writings; and letters written by members of prominent families. We have the Paston Letters (1420s-1503) and the letters of the Cely (1472-1488) and Stonor (1290-1483) families, which show a transition between Middle and Early Modern English. Table 6.1 provides a partial list of Middle English works; it lists areas of origin and approximate dates.
Many of these texts can be found in the original Middle English at
www.georgetown.edu/labyrinth/library/me/me.html or www.luminarium.org. Examples are provided in Appendices A to F. Some Middle English works provide an idea of daily life in the towns and castles, churches and monasteries (see Heer 1974). There was poverty and feudalism and life for most people was "short, nasty, and brutish" as Thomas Hobbes later said about humankind in general. You might want to explore some medieval history on your own.

Middle English texts are available to us from manuscripts (see the Auchinleck Manuscript at www.nls.uk/auchinleck from c1340). Before paper becomes available sometime in the 12th century, they are written on vellum. Figure 6.1 is a facsimile of an early Middle English manuscript, the 13th century Layamon's Brut.

Unfortunately, the manuscript in Figure 6.1 is not clear. Try to read the first few lines, using the transcription in Appendix A. Notice that Old English ash æ, yogh ʒ, thorn þ, and eth ð still occur. The use of ð indicates that the text is early. Unlike in Old English, the w in this text resembles the current one.
During Middle English, the æ and ð spellings are replaced relatively early by a and th/þ, respectively. In late Middle English, þ is replaced by the th used in French sources; before it is replaced, however, it starts to look like y, hence the writing of the as ye in ye olde shoppe. See, for instance, the facsimile of Cursor Mundi in Figure 6.2.

Each Middle English text is somewhat unique. For instance, the letters v and w are introduced, but their use differs from text to text: vppen 'up' and wiues 'wives' in Layamon (Figure 6.1 and Appendix A) and vertu 'virtue' in Chaucer (Appendix D). The t in words such as Artur, Antony, and Katerine changes to th, such as Arthur in Gawain (Appendix C), which remains to this day. This respelling is a result of the Renaissance realization that Latin has th in those words even though Middle English and French do not. Notice the difference between French auteur and English author.

At the end of the Middle English period, books start to get printed. Printing will be discussed in the next chapter since its effect is felt mainly in the Early Modern English period. Figure 6.3 shows an early printed page from Caxton's 1485 edition of Malory's Morte d'Arthur.

Which letters do you recognize as being different from either Old or Modern English? For instance, does Caxton still use the thorn? Also pay attention to capitalization and punctuation, both very different from Modern English.

Table 6.2 summarizes the changes in spelling during the Middle English period. As mentioned in Chapter 2, the cw in cwene and cwic changes to qu and the u in mus changes to ou, even before the sound changes from [u] to [aw]. Both of these changes are probably due to loans such as question and mountain, and by the influence of French scribes on the spelling. The ʒ (and y) are apparently introduced by French scribes to replace h and palatalized g in Lazamon, Ernleze (lines 1 and 3 of Appendix A), nizt, knizt, and ʒe. Other changes are the introduction of k alongside c (see Chapter 2 for where each occurs) and the switch from hw in hwat to wh in what, as in Chaucer. Figures 6.1 to 6.3 exemplify some of these changes.
Another new spelling device in Late Middle English is the use of double vowels, e.g. Old English *boc* becomes *book*; and *bete* *beet(e)*. Having provided some background on Middle English texts and spelling, we will now examine their sounds.

## 2 Middle English Sounds

An important trend in Middle English is **consonant deletion**, as in the case of [g], [h], [w], and [l], and **vowel shifting**, especially in non-northern texts. We will examine a number of sound changes and conclude this section with inventories of Middle English sounds.

First, listen to some later Middle English, e.g. the General prologue of Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales* at [http://www.luminarium.org/medlit/gp.htm](http://www.luminarium.org/medlit/gp.htm) or another site. The text is provided in Appendix D. Later Middle English is understandable with some effort. You might notice that in *April*, *soote*, *bathed*, and *seeke*, the vowel is pronounced as if it were French or Spanish. This is because the Great Vowel Shift has not occurred yet. Vowels also have more 'color' and do not become reduced (to schwa) as regularly as in Modern English; listen to the pronunciation of *inspired*, *corages*, *pilgrimages*, and *melodye*. In addition, in Chaucer's *knight*, most consonants are pronounced.

There are many sound changes between Old and Middle English; we will only discuss some of them. We will start with *g/ʒ* (probably pronounced as [ɣ] or [j] in Old English). The *g/ʒ* first becomes a [w] or [j] and merges with the preceding vowels to become a diphthong, as in (a) of Table 6.3. The words *foweles* in line 9 of Chaucer's *Prologue* (Appendix D) and *plow* in line 20 of *Piers* (Appendix B) show this change. As (b) of Table 6.3 shows, *g* also changes after [l] and [r].

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>OE</th>
<th>ME</th>
<th>OE</th>
<th>ME</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>cw</td>
<td>qu</td>
<td>c</td>
<td>ch, c, and k</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>hw</td>
<td>wh/w/qu</td>
<td>u</td>
<td>ou</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>þ/ð</td>
<td>th</td>
<td>h</td>
<td>ʒ/gh</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>sc</td>
<td>sh</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 6.2: Some Old to Middle English spelling changes
The phenomenon of *h*-dropping starts in Middle English, as in the Early Middle English (2) and in the Late Middle English (3).

(2)  *Ich abbe i min castlen seoue þusend kempen*

'I have in my castles seven thousand fighters.' (Layamon, *Brut* line 233)

(3)  *but ze wolden glade at an our in his liȝt*

'but you would be happy for an hour in his light.' (Wycliff, from *HC*)

The *h*-loss occurs in consonant clusters, such as *hlaf* 'loaf', *hraðor* 'rather', *hnutu* 'nut', and *hnacod* 'naked,' and the version without *h* gradually spreads. In Old English, the *h*-spelling is also used in words like *dohtor* 'daughter', *seah* 'saw', and *cniht* 'knight', that are pronounced with a voiceless velar or palatal fricative. By the 15th century, the latter sounds have also disappeared (except where they become an *f*, as in *laugh*).

The glide [w] is frequently deleted between a consonant such as [s] or [t] and a (back) vowel, as Table 6.4 shows. In Modern English spelling—but not pronunciation—*w* turns up again in some words. In Middle English, the situation is not settled, at least where the spelling is concerned and probably this is also true for the pronunciation. Thus, there is *so* in line 10 of *Piers* (Appendix B) and *swich* 'such' in line 2 of Chaucer (Appendix D).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>OE</th>
<th>ME</th>
<th>ModE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>swa [sw]</td>
<td>&gt; so</td>
<td>&gt; so [s]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>swilc [sw]</td>
<td>&gt; swilch</td>
<td>&gt; such [s]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>swutol [sw]</td>
<td>&gt; sutel</td>
<td>&gt; --- 'clear'</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>twa [tw]</td>
<td>&gt; to</td>
<td>&gt; two [t]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>sweord [sw]</td>
<td>&gt; sword</td>
<td>&gt; sword [s]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>an(d)swar [sw]</td>
<td>&gt; answere</td>
<td>&gt; answer [s]</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 6.4: Gradual deletion of [w]

Place names, such as *Norwich*, *Greenwich*, and *Warwick*, generally lack the [w] in pronunciation, but in others, such as *Ipswich*, the [w] has been reintroduced through spelling pronunciation.

Frequently, nasals delete, as in (a) of Table 6.5, or assimilate in place, as in (b). Liquids are also deleted, as in (c), or metathesized, as in (d).
Note that the liquid [l] still occurs in northern texts such as (1) above in words such as ilke 'each'.

**Vowels change in length** throughout the history of English. Short vowels become long and long ones short. Before a nasal or liquid and a voiced stop, Old English short vowels lengthen, e.g. the vowel in *lamb, comb, mild* lengthens, but this doesn’t happen before three consonants. That's why we have the contrast in vowel length between *children* and *child* since in the singular the lengthening did occur but not in the plural (due to the three consonants). Then sometimes, shortening occurs only in some forms and hence we have *the wind* and *to wind*. Vowel shortening occurred before clusters other than the ones mentioned above. For instance, the [e] in Old English *cepte* 'kept' is long but shortens before two consonants in Middle English and we therefore have the length contrast between *keep* and *kept*.

**Changes in vowel height** also occur. In non-northern texts, the long *a* sounds in *na, mast, ham,* and *ane* are spelled as *o* in Middle English and pronounced as [ɔ], resulting in Modern English *no, most, home,* and *one*. In northern texts, this change does not take place. However, the short *a* in *man and land* is often spelled as *o* in the North but not in the South.

Other sound changes are very regional as well. For instance, palatalization does not occur in the North either and thus, we have non-palatalized forms like *Frankis, kirk,* and *egg* where southern texts might have *French, church,* and *eye ‘egg’*. Many of the northern forms still survive in the North in the modern period, as we will see in a later chapter. Based on long *a* and palatalization, you might be able to tell what region the text in (1) is from! Take a look and we’ll come back to this later.

Table 6.6 provides the **inventory of Middle English consonants**. As mentioned in Chapter 4, the influx of French words with a [v] may have caused this sound to become a regular English sound, not one occurring only in voiced environments (through assimilation) as in Old English. There are also many loans with [z], especially in the Renaissance period. The velar nasal [ŋ] is still only used before other velars. The sound that is missing, in comparison with Modern English, is [ʒ],
and the sound that is present in Middle but not Modern English is [χ] (and presumably its palatal variant).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Manner:</th>
<th>stop</th>
<th>fricative</th>
<th>affricate</th>
<th>nasal</th>
<th>liquid</th>
<th>glide</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Place:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>labial</td>
<td>p/b</td>
<td>f/v</td>
<td></td>
<td>m</td>
<td>w</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>dental</td>
<td>θ/ð</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>alveolar</td>
<td>t/d</td>
<td>s/z</td>
<td></td>
<td>n</td>
<td>l, r</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>alveo-palatal</td>
<td>θ</td>
<td>tʃ/dʒ</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>j</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>velar</td>
<td>k/g</td>
<td>χ</td>
<td></td>
<td>ŋ</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>glottal</td>
<td>h</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 6.6: Middle English consonants

In Old English, the vowels have long and short variants. In Middle English, the short vowels change their height and are not just short variants of the long vowels. This is represented in Figure 6.4. Where short and long vowels have the same position, the long vowel is differentiated by a colon. The round front vowel, spelled y, as in hydan 'to hide', ultimately becomes an unrounded [i] and the [ɔj] sound, as in joy, comes in through borrowings from French (ME joie, cloistre, and joinen).

Figure 6.4: Middle English vowels (adapted from Minkova 2005b: 689)

In earlier texts, such as Layamon, Piers Plowman, and Gawain (Appendices A to C), a poetic device is used that is called **alliteration**, as in (4), where the [s] and [ʃ] alliterate in lines 1 and 2, respectively. Which sounds alliterate in lines 2 to 6?

(4) **Piers Plowman** - **West Midlands** - **Late C14**

In a somer seson . whan soft was the sonne

I shope me in shroudes . as I a shepe were 2

In habite as an heremite . vnholy of workes
Went wyde in this world wondres to here
Ac on a May mornynge on Maluerne hulles
Me byfel a ferly of fairy me thou3te

In a summer season, when the sun was mild, I put clothes on as if I were a sheep. In the habit of a hermit, unholy of works. [I] went wide in this world to hear wonders. And on a May morning, in the Malvern Hills, a marvellous thing happened to me through magic, I thought.

If you can listen to an audio version of *Piers Plowman* or *Gawain*, you’ll notice that the alliteration stands out.

This section provided a list of Middle English sound changes. The list is not exhaustive, but it does give an idea of the shifts taking place. Table 6.6 and Figure 6.4 give an idea of the end result.

3 Middle English Morphology

In this section, we will examine Middle English the grammatical marking of pronouns and the endings on nouns, adjectives, and verbs. The trend here is towards a loss of endings; in the next section, we’ll see an increase in grammatical words. This change towards a loss of endings has been argued to be the result of the shift in stress on words. In Indo-European, words do not have a fixed stress; in Germanic, the root carried the stress. This meant that endings were less prominent to the person listening. As I mentioned in chapter 1, the question then becomes: what caused the shift in stress?

The Middle English pronouns see many changes resulting in the system summarized in Table 6.7. Even more so than in Old English, many of the forms in Table 6.7 have variant spellings: *thai, thei, thaim* for third person plural (the *OED* gives 19 variants spellings); and *she, sho(e), shey*, and *sha* for third person feminine singular (the *OED* lists over 30 variants).
Table 6.7: Late Middle English pronouns

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Singular</th>
<th>Plural</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>First</td>
<td>NOM</td>
<td>ic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>GEN</td>
<td>min</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>DAT/ACC</td>
<td>me</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Second</td>
<td>NOM</td>
<td>thou</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>GEN</td>
<td>thi(n)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>DAT/ACC</td>
<td>thee</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Third</td>
<td>NOM</td>
<td>she/he/it</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>GEN</td>
<td>her/his/it</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>DAT/ACC</td>
<td>her/him/it</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Five of the changes between Old and Middle English involve the following: (a) the introduction of a feminine *she*, (b) the introduction of a plural *they*, (c) a change in the use of second persons, (d) the loss of the dative-accusative distinction, and (e) the loss of the dual.

As for the first change, a special feminine singular *sho/she* is introduced: (5a) shows the early *ha* (but *heo* was also frequent) whereas (5b) and (5c) show the new forms.

(5) a. *Ah pah ha gung were ha heold ...*
    'but though she was young, she kept...' (*Katherine, d'Ardenne* p. 18)

b. *In al denemark nis wimman | So fayr so sche*
    'In all of Denmark there is no woman as fair as she.' (*Havelok* 1720-1)

c. *ʒho wass ... Elysabæþ ʒehatenn*
    'She was called Elisabeth.' (*Ormulum* 115, Holt edition)

This change starts in the North but its origins are controversial. One theory is that it derives from the demonstrative *seo/sio*.

Secondly, the Old English third person plural pronouns with an initial *h-* are gradually replaced by ones with an initial *th-*. The change starts in the North with the nominative and, as I have said in the previous chapter, this innovation is most likely due to Scandinavian contact. As examples of early and later use, compare sentences (6a) and (6b), and look at (6c) for northern use.

(6) a. *wat heo ihoten weoren; & wonene heo comen*
    'what they were called and from-where they came.' (*Layamon, Brut* 8, Appendix A)
b.  *That hem hath holpen whan that they were seeke*
   'which helped them when they were ill.' *(CT Prologue, 18, Appendix D)*

c.  *Ran and ouertok þam pare*
   '[He] ran and overtook them there.' *(Cursor Mundi, Cotton 4900)*

In the earlier Layamon, the *h*-initial pronoun heo is the norm, as in (6a), both for the nominative (shown in (6a)) and the accusative (not shown). In (6b), from the later Chaucer, the nominative plural is already they, even though the accusative/dative is still hem. In the early northern (6c), even the accusative is them. *LALME* provides the map in Figure 6.5 for the accusative forms, showing the South was the last to change.

*Keep earlier figure, p. 121*

Figure 6.5: The Late Middle English spread of *them* and *hem*

A third point to note is that the second person pronouns are used differently in Middle English than in Old and Modern English. In Old English, thou and thee are singular and ye and you plural. In Middle English, the singular becomes the familiar form, similar to French *tu*, and the plural becomes the polite form, similar to French *vous*. The forms of thou and ye in the *Canterbury Tales* provide a marvelous mirror of social relationships during that time, as we will see in Exercise 1. The host uses thou to address the (drunken) miller but not the knight, prioress, or clerk. In *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, King Arthur generally uses thou, whereas Gawain uses ye to King Arthur. Later, around 1600, ye is lost, thou and thee are used less frequently, and you (from Old English *eow*) becomes the common form, as we’ll see in Shakespeare's plays as well.

A fourth difference with Old English is that the accusative forms mec, pec, usic, eowic, hie, and hine disappear early. Only the accusative hine survives into Early Middle English, as you can see, for example, in Appendix A, lines 33 and 34. The last difference is the loss of the dual; it survives into Early Middle English, as (7) shows.

(7)  *þat fehten wit scullen unc seoluen*
   that fight 1.DUAL shall 1.DUAL selves
   'That we shall fight each other.' *(Layamon, Caligula 11809)*

As mentioned in Chapter 4, special reflexive pronouns are not common in Old English. Third person ones start to occur in Late Old English and second and first person ones appear in Middle English, as in (8a). Middle English also still uses regular pronouns, as shown in (8b).
As we will see in the next chapter, the use of both the new reflexives with \textit{self} and the old ones without \textit{self} continues for some time. The actual change involves the Old English adjective \textit{self} being reanalyzed by learners of Middle English as a noun with a possessive \textit{my} or \textit{thy}. The third person has an accusative pronoun \textit{him} before \textit{self} because it changed when \textit{self} was still an adjective modifying a pronoun. The first and second person reflexives were formed when \textit{self} was a noun, so \textit{my}, \textit{thy}, \textit{our}, and \textit{your} are possessives.

Old English demonstratives can function as \textbf{relatives}. This ceases to be the case in Middle English and \textit{that} becomes the preferred relative marker, as in (9), from a slightly later version of Layamon.

\begin{exe}
\entry{9} {after þan flode. \textbf{pat} fram God com. \textbf{pat} al ere acwelde.}
\entry{10} {the est orisonte, \textbf{which that} is clepid comounly the ascendent}
\end{exe}

As mentioned in Chapter 5, it has been suggested that the relative pronoun \textit{who(m)} appears in later Middle English in imitation of French \textit{qui} 'who'. The \textit{wh}-pronoun can also occur together with the regular complementizer, as (10) shows for \textit{which}.

In demonstratives, relatives, adjectives, and nouns, we see a major \textbf{reduction of forms} and \textbf{endings}. If you have access to the electronic Middle English Compendium in your library, search for endings such as \textit{-um}. You will find very few, mainly names such as \textit{Iulium} and \textit{Antigonum} (in Layamon) and direct loans such as \textit{solsticium} 'solstice' (in Chaucer); you will not find these endings as case endings. The case endings of demonstratives, adjectives, and nouns simplify in this period and the number of different forms decreases.
Nouns still have a genitive singular ending -es (e.g. *Leouenædes sone* in Appendix A, line 2) but very little else. In the plural, the Old English nominative and accusative -as simplify to -es for all cases in Middle English (e.g. *shoures* in Appendix D, line 1). In Early Middle English, there are some dative nominal endings in -e, especially after prepositions, as in (11) from Layamon.

> (11) *þe from Drihtene com*
> which from Lord-DAT came
> 'which came from the Lord.' (Layamon, *Brut* line 10)

Table 6.8 presents the combinations of the definite article the and the noun sonne 'sun' in all cases and numbers in Late Middle English, as in Chaucer. These endings would be the same for all regular nouns, irrespective of their gender.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Case</th>
<th>Singular</th>
<th>Plural</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>NOM</td>
<td>the sonne</td>
<td>the sonnes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GEN</td>
<td>the sonnes</td>
<td>the sonnes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DAT/ACC</td>
<td>the sonne</td>
<td>the sonnes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 6.8: Late Middle English articles and nouns

Adjectives, like demonstratives and nouns, have lost most endings by Late Middle English. This starts in the North and the East Midlands. The last remnant of an ending is the -e in *this goode man*, or the supposedly archaic *ye olde shoppe*.

In Old English, adverbs are formed by endings such as -e or -lice. In Middle English, -e is lost and -lic reduces to -ly, as in (12).

> (12) *He made the peple pitously to synge*
> 'He made the people sing compassionately.' (Chaucer, *The Friar's Tale* 1316)

In Modern English, a few adverbs lose the -ly ending, as we will see in Chapter 8. Note that pitously in (12) is used differently from piteously in Modern English, as in *piteously poor*. This is a shift from a regular adverb to a degree adverb, one that very and really have undergone as well.

As we saw in Chapter 4, verbs have a complicated set of endings depending on the person and number of the subject and when the action takes place. In Middle English, these endings
simplify starting in the North, as shown in Table 5.6. The results for Late Middle English are shown in Table 6.9. This reduction of forms continues into the Early Modern English period.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Present indicative</th>
<th>Subjunctive</th>
<th>Imperative</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>ic find(e)</td>
<td>S find(e)</td>
<td>S find</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>thou findes(t)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>he findeþ/he findes</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P</td>
<td>we, ye(e), thei findeþ/en</td>
<td>P find(en)</td>
<td>P findeþ/es</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Past**

<p>| | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>S</td>
<td>fond(e)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P</td>
<td>found(en)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Past participle: (y)founden

Table 6.9: Late Middle English present and past tense verb agreement

Table 6.9 uses a strong verb, as can be seen from the stem vowel change between present find(e) and past fond(e). It lists a subjunctive, which is quickly disappearing and being replaced by modals or infinitives. A weak verb such as luve(n) 'love' would have the same endings in the present as a strong one, but its past would be ic/he luvede, þu luvedest; the past plural would be luvede(n).

In Middle English, some verbs can be either strong or weak. For instance, walked is weak and welk is strong and they co-occur in the same text, as (13a) and (13b) show, which are both from Chaucer.

(13) a. as that I welk alone.

b. in the feeldes walked we.

Verbs that are currently weak such as laughed and helped could be strong loughe/lawghe and holp(en) respectively (see (6b) above). Even if a verb form is strong, there can be variation, e.g. the three-some sing, sang, sung can be simplified as sing, sang, sang or as sing, sung, sung (or other variations). Looking through the Middle English texts (available at [http://quod.lib.umich.edu/m/med](http://quod.lib.umich.edu/m/med)), however, I only found sang as the simple past and sung as the participle. Sometimes, as in the case of the intransitive strong lie (past lay and participle lain) and transitive weak lay (past laid and participle laid), the two are mixed up. This happened early for some verbs, e.g. dive had a strong intransitive form dufan ‘to dive’ in Old English (with past deaf/dufon and participle dofen) and a weak transitive dyfan ‘to dip’ (past dyfde and participle gedyfde). According to the OED, the strong form became obsolete by 1300 and the verb changed to
weak. The modern past tense *dove* is an unrelated and relatively new ‘strong’ form, made to sound like *drive* and its past *drove*!

Strong verbs are expected to disappear for internal reasons, e.g. simplification of the system, unless another pattern can be found, as in the verb *dive* did in another verb *drive*. Language moves toward increased regularity as seen from the fact that children make most strong verbs weak (*singed* rather than *sang*), which is the expected direction of change. Indeed, according to Baugh and Cable, "[n]early a third of the strong verbs in Old English seem to have died out early in the Middle English period.[... ] more than a hundred... were lost at the beginning of the Middle English period" (2002: 163). Sixty-eight strong verbs remain in Modern English and the reason not all strong verbs have been lost, according to Baugh and Cable, is that the "impulse seems to have been checked, possibly by the steady rise of English in the social scale" (2002: 164). If their assumption is correct, that would be an external reason for the continuation of strong verbal forms. I’m personally not sure what caused it!

As a last point in this section, we will look at the **past participle**. In Old English, it has a *ge-* prefix (as in Modern German and Dutch). The prefix is frequent in the *Peterborough Chronicle* before 1130, as in (14a), but virtually disappears after 1130 in that text, as (14b) shows.

(14) a. *Headda abbott heafde ær gewrton hu Wulfhere ...*  
'Headda the abbot had before written how Wulfhere ...' (*PC*, 350, written before a960)

b. *hefde numen Fulk's eorles gingre dohter*  
had taken Fulk's earl younger daughter  
'had taken the younger daughter of Fulk, the count.' (*PC*, 1124)

The *Peterborough Chronicle* is from an area in the former Danelaw, northeast of London. The disappearance of *ge-* is further advanced in these areas (see Mustanoja 1960: 446). In a few cases, we see a complete loss of *ge-* as in *numen* in (14b). In most other Middle English texts, the prefix on the verb first changes from *ge-* to *y/i-* as in (15) from Chaucer, or is lost.

(15) *Hath in the ram his halve cours yronne*  
has in the Ram her half course run  
'has half run her cours in (the sign of) the Ram.' (*Canterbury Tales Prologue* 8)

The prefix later disappears completely. Check whether Gawain has a prefix in Appendix C!

In this section, we examined the morphology of Middle English words, specifically pronouns, nouns, and verbs. This sketch showed a loss of endings, i.e. a change away from a
synthetic system. We turn to syntax next where we’ll see an increase in grammatical words, i.e. a
turn towards an analytic system.

4 Middle English Syntax

All the changes we discussed in the previous section—the loss of endings for case, gender, and
number on nouns, adjectives, demonstratives, and pronouns—are a move away from a synthetic
language. We’ll now discuss some of the signs that Middle English is becoming more analytic: the
increase in articles in Middle English, the introduction of comparative more and superlative most,
the stricter word order, an increase in auxiliaries and in pleonastic subject pronouns, and the use of
sentence connectors (complementizers and relatives). We will also discuss the use of certain
adverbs.

In Old English, demonstratives occur although much less often and articles do not. Remember the beginning of Caedmon’s Hymn, repeated as (16)?

(16) Nu scylun hergan hefaenricaes uard metudaes maecti end his modgidanc
Now shall praise heaven-kingdom's guardian Lord's might and his thought
‘Now we must praise the guardian of the heavenly kingdom, the Measurer’s might and
his mind-plans.’

I have bolded the definite articles we might use in Modern English. In the Middle English period,
there is a real increase in the use of demonstratives and of articles. Look at the articles in (17) and
decide if this is from an Old or Middle English text!

(17) SIBEN be sege and be assaut watz sessed at Troye,
‘Since the siege and the assault were ceased at Troy’
be borg brittened and brent to brondez and askez,
‘the battlements broken and burnt to brands and ashes’
be tulk þat be trammes of tresoun þer wroþt
‘the man that the plots of treason there made/framed’
Watz tried for his tricherie, þe trewest on erþe.
‘was tried for his treachery, the worst on earth.’
In (17), there are six instances of *þe* `the’ and they appear almost in the same way they would in Modern English, so the text is definitely not Old English. Some of you may recognize it as the beginning lines from *Gawain and the Green Knight* (see Appendix C), i.e. Middle English.

In Old English, there are demonstratives that appear before a noun to indicate definiteness, as in (18a). These demonstratives differ depending on their case and number; by Middle English, the demonstrative is phonetically reduced to the article *the*, as in (18b), not marked for gender or case.

(18) a. *hu ða æþelingas ellen fremedon*
how those nobles courage did
‘how those nobles performed heroic acts.’ (*Beowulf* 3)

b. *& gaddre-sst swa þe clene corn All fra þe chaff togeddre*
and gather-2S so the clean wheat all from the chaff together
‘and so you gather the clear wheat from the chaff.’ (*Ormulum* 1484-5, Holt edition)

Indefinite articles, such as *a* and *an*, do not occur either. The *OED* gives the first instances as (19), from the same text that perhaps also has the earliest instance of the definite article. Note a missing *a* before *tune* ‘town’ in (19a).

(19) a. *Wel þu myhtes faren al a dæis fare, sculdest thu neure finden man in tune sittende.*
‘Well might you travel all a day’s journey, you would never find a man sitting in a town.’ (*Peterborough Chronicle* 1137)

b. *He spedde litel & be gode rihte, for he was an yuel man*
‘He prospered little and by good right because he was an evil man.’ (*Peterborough Chronicle* 1140)

In Modern English, the indefinite article *a* is used before words starting with a consonant and *an* before words starting with a vowel (e.g. *a table* but *an object*). This is not yet the case in Middle English, as the first line of Appendix A shows: *an preost* 'a priest', not *a preost*. In the North, *an* is reduced to *a* before consonants early, as in (19b), but in the South it lingers until the middle of the 14th century.

Adjectives can occur in the **comparative** (synthetic *nicer* or analytic *more interesting*) and **superlative** (synthetic *nicest* or analytic *most interesting*) and the shift towards an analytic language is expected to result in more *more* and *most* forms. In Middle English, these analytic forms are indeed on the increase. However, as we will also notice with the loss of strong verbs, this trend does not continue, again for unknown reasons. In Modern English, the analytic form is only used in
longer words, unlike in Middle English (see Mustanoja 1960: 279). Chaucer has *moost sweete* and *moost wise* as well as *moost feithful* and *moost precious* and in the Early Modern period there are three possibilities—sweeter, more sweet, and more sweeter.

The *word order* in Middle English is still relatively free, compared to Modern English. However, with the grammaticalization of prepositions, demonstratives, and some verbs—which become indicators of case, definiteness, and tense, respectively—a stricter order is established. For instance, articles can only occur before nouns and auxiliaries before verbs. Let us examine a few sentences that are technically from Late Old English, but their syntax really makes them Early Middle English. Both are taken from the same entry in the *Peterborough Chronicle*.

(20) a. *Þis gære for pe king Stephne ofer sæ to Normandi*
    this year went the king Stephen over sea to Normandy
    'In this year King Stephen went over the sea to Normandy.'

b. *Hi hadden him manred maked and athes sworn*
    they had him homage made and oaths sworn
    'They had done homage to him and sworn oaths.' (*PC*, 1137)

In (20a), the verb *for 'went'* comes after the adverbia*l Þis gære* and before the subject *pe king Stephne*. This means that the finite verb is in second position, as it generally was in Old English; in Modern English that order is reversed and the subject has to precede the verb. In (20b), the finite verb *hadden* occurs in second position, but the objects *him, manred 'homage', and athes 'oaths'* precede the non-finite verbs *maked* and *sworen*. This OV order combined with having the verb in second position remains possible until Late Middle English. Check the Chaucer text (Appendix D) for examples.

There are a few other points to note about these sentences. Since (20a) and (20b) are from Late Old/Early Middle English, there are no articles before *sæ* (even though there is an 'extra' one before *king*). The third person plural is still *hi* in (20b), rather than *they*, but the plural ending on the noun *athes* is already *-es*, rather than the Old English *-as* of Chapter 4. The past participles in (20b) lack the prefix *ge-*.

The word order in the *noun phrase* might indicate French influence. French often places the adjective after the noun and marks it for number. This order is shown in (21), and can be found in Appendix D as well.

(21) *in othere places delitables*
    'in other delightful places' (*CT, Franklin's Tale* 899)
The word order in *wh*-questions is very similar to that of Old English and differs from Modern English only in that full (finite) verbs can be fronted, as in (22).

(22) Who **looketh** lightly now but palamoun? (CT, Knight's Tale 1870)

Yes/no questions are occasionally introduced by *whether*, reduced to *wher* in (23a), a remnant of Old English. Most of the time, the word order is like Modern English except that the main verb can be in sentence-initial position, as in (23b), rather than just the auxiliary.

(23) a. **Wher is nat this the sone of a smyth, or carpenter?**
   'Is this not the son of a smith or carpenter?' (Wycliff, Matthew 13. 55, from the OED)

   b. **Wostow nat wel the olde clerkes sawe**
   'Know-you nat well the old scholar's saying?' (CT, The Knight's Tale 1163)

In Early Middle English, **subject pronouns** are not yet obligatory, as (24) shows.

(24) *Katerine* - South West Midlands - Early 13C

þeos meiden lette lutel of þe seide. ant smirkinde smeðeliche
'This maiden thought little of what he said and smiling smoothly'

ʒef him þullich onswere. al ich iseo þine sahen sottiliche isette.
'gave him a smooth answer. I see all your savings are foolishly put out'

cleopest þeo þing godes þe nowðer sturien ne mahen
'Call [you] those things good that neither stir nor have power.'

(Bodley version, from d'Ardenne's 1977 edition, p. 24)

Later, probably a little after 1250, they become obligatory, e.g. *hi* in (20b) (see van Gelderen 2000: 125-147).

There is also a transition to **nominate subjects**. Sentences (25a) and (25b) are from different versions of Layamon's *Brut*. The former is from an earlier version (Caligula) and the subject is dative; the latter is from a later version (Otho) and the subject is nominative.

(25) a. **þer-fore him ofte scomede. 7 his heorte gromede**
   there-fore him.DAT often shamed and his heart angered
   'therefore he often felt ashamed and enraged.' (Caligula 6868)

b. **þar-fore he ofte samede. and his heorte gramede**
   'Therefore he (=NOM) often felt shame and his heart was troubled.'
**Pleonastic subjects** become more common as well, as in (26) from Chaucer. This shows the language is in a more analytic stage. *There* is grammaticalizing from a locative adverb to a placeholder for the subject.

(26) With hym **ther** was his sone, a yong squire. (*CT*, Prologue 79)

In Early Middle English, the pleonastic subject is still optional, however, as in (27). The Modern English gloss would include the pleonastic 'there' (as in Allen's 1992 translation).

(27) *An preost wes on leoden; Lazamon wes ihoten*
A priest was among people, Layamon was named
'There was a priest around, whose name was Layamon' (Layamon 1)

We now turn to auxiliaries and sentence connectors. In Old and Middle English, auxiliaries are less frequent than in Modern English, as (28) shows. Modern English would have an additional auxiliary here, 'What **are** you doing'.

(28) What, how! What do ye, maister Nicholay?
How may ye slepen al the longe day?
(Chaucer, *Miller's Tale* 71.3437-8)

In (29), the auxiliary *be*(*en*) and the -**ing** on the main verb express that the action is (or was) in progress; *have* indicates that the action started sometime in the past and continues up to now.

(29) We **have been** practicing. (from the BNC)

Even though they are not as frequent, there are Middle English constructions, such as (30a), where an auxiliary and the preposition *on/an* express that the action is ongoing. The first auxiliary *do* appears around 1400, namely in Chaucer's (30b).

(30) a. *pa cheorles wenden to *pan wuden. & warliche heom hudden.*
 *alle bute tweien. toward *pan kinge heo weoren beien.*
 *and iuunden *pene king. *paer he wes an slaeting*
The freemen went into the wood and took cover warily except for two [who] went towards the king where he was on hunting' (Layamon, *Brut Caligula* 6137-9)

b. His yonge sone, that three yeer was of age

Un-to him seyde, fader, why do ye wepe? (*CT, The Monk's Tale*, 441-2)

The changes in the use of *do* are interesting. In (30b), *do* is used as in Modern English, for support in questions (and negatives); this use of *do* first begins around the time of (30b). In Middle and Early Modern English *do* was also more often used in regular affirmatives (e.g. *I did see him*).

Related to the change in the status of verbs—many grammaticalize to become auxiliaries—is the change in the status of the **infinitive marker** *to*. Many linguists consider this *to* a non-finite auxiliary, indicating that the action of the verb following it is in the future or is unreal. When it becomes an actual non-finite marker (in addition to a preposition), it becomes more independent, and split infinitives start to appear in Early Middle English, as in (31) to (33).

(31)  *fo[r] to londes seche*
     for to countries seek
     'to seek countries.' (Layamon *Brut Otho*, 6915)

(32)  *for to hire finde*
     for to him find
     'in order to find him.' (Otho, 8490)

(33)  *Blessid be þou lord off hevyn ... Synfull men for to þus lede In paradice*
     'Blessed are you, heavenly lord, to thus lead sinful men in paradise.'
     (*Cursor Mundi* Fairfax 18440-3)

There are also examples of split infinitives in Later Middle English, as in (34) and (35).

(34)  *Y say to zou, to nat swere on al manere*
     'I say to you to not curse in all ways.' (Wycliff, *Matthew* 5, 34)

(35)  *Poul seilp, þu þat prechist to not steyl, stelist*
     'Paul says, you that preach to not steal steals.' (*Apology for the Lollards* 57)

In Later Middle English, e.g. Chaucer, sequences of auxiliaries, as in (36), start to appear; the end of the 14th century marks a significant increase in auxiliaries.

(36)  *If I so ofte myghte have ywedded bee* (*CT, Wife of Bath Prologue*, 7)
In Early Middle English, the connection between sentences is similar to that of Old English: sentences are less frequently embedded in each other than in Modern English. For instance, the already quoted (37a) is from the beginning of Layamon (Appendix A); Modern English would have (37b) or (37c).

(37)  
   a. An preost wes on leoden; Lazamon wes ihoten.  
   b. A priest was living among the people and his name was Layamon.  
   c. A priest, who was named Layamon, was living among the people.

In (a), there is no connection between the two sentences; in (b), and connects the sentences through coordination; and in (c), one of the sentences is embedded into the other by means of a relative pronoun who, also called subordination. We can see the change from less to more connection take place in Middle English. For instance, in the more archaic (Caligula) version of Layamon's Brut (38a), the two sentences are not formally connected, shown by the two instances of þenne. In the less archaic (Otho) version, the two are embedded, as (38b) shows, since one þenne has become a wan 'when'.

(38)  
   a. þenne he þe treoweðe alre best on. þenne bi-swikes tu heom  
      Then he you trusts all best on. Then betray you him (Layamon, Caligula 1705)  
   b. Wan hii þe troueþ alre best. þan þou heom bi-swikest  
      When he you trusts of-all best. Then you him betray (Otho 1705)  
      'When he trusts you the best, (then) you betray him.'

A real increase in sentence complementizers such as till and for can be seen in the last part of the Peterborough Chronicle. Roughly after 1130, examples such as (39) and (40) appear.

(39)  
   for þæt ilc gær warth þe king ded  
   'because that same year was the king dead.' (PC, for the year 1135)

(40)  
   þar he nam þe bicop Roger of Sereberi & Alexander bicop of Lincol & te Canceler  
        Roger hise neues. & dide ælle in prisun. til hi iafen up here castles  
   'There he [= king Stephen] took bishop Roger of Salisbury and bishop Alexander of Lincoln and chancellor Roger, his nephew, and put them all in prison till they gave up their castles.'  
   (PC, for the year 1137)
As a last syntactic point, we will explore the changes in **negative adverbs**. The Old English negative adverb *ne*, see (41) of Chapter 4, reduces to a weaker word and is reinforced by a strong negative, starting in Old English, see (42) in Chapter 4. In Middle English, reinforcement by a post-verbal adverb such as *nawiht* ('no creature') is also frequent, as shown in Middle English (41). Subsequently, the post-verbal negative becomes the regular negative *not* or *nat*, especially in late Middle English, as in (42).

(41)  *for of al his strengðe ne drede we nawiht*

because of all his strength not dread we nothing

*for nis his strengðe noht wurð bute hwer-se he i-findeð eðeliche*

because not-is his strength not worth except where he finds frailty

'Because we do not dread his strength since it is only relevant where he finds frailty' (Sawles Warde, d'Ardenne 175/9-10)

(42)  *He may nat wepe, althogh hym soore smerte*

'He may not weep, although he hurts sorely' (*CT Prologue* 230)

Multiple negatives, as in (41), are lost in Late ME, but the negative *not* starts to contract with an auxiliary, e.g. *cannot*, as early as 1380. The negative –*not* weakens and a second negative is introduced again in many varieties of modern English. This is known as Jespersen's Cycle after the Danish linguist who discussed it at length (although the phenomenon was known before him). It occurs in many languages: in French *ne pas* is losing *ne* in colloquial French.

With this knowledge about the sounds and grammar of Middle English, we can examine more of the passage of (17), the beginning lines of *Gawain* (see Appendix C for even more)

(43)  **Gawain**  -  **NW Midlands**  -  **Mid C14**

*SIPEN ðe sege and ðe assaut watz sesed at Troye*

Since the siege and the assault were ceased at Troy

*ðe borg brittened and brent to brondeʒ and askez,*

the battlements broken and burnt to brands and ashes

*ðe tulk ðat ðe trammes of tresoun ðer wroʒt*

the man that the plots of treason there made/framed

*Watz tried for his tricheri, ðe trewest on erþe:*

was tried for his treachery, the truest on earth.

*Hit watz Ennias ðe athel, and his highe kynde,*

It was Aeneas the noble and his high kin
That afterwards conquered provinces and masters became

Welneȝe of al þe wele in þe west iles

Wellnigh of all the wealth in the western regions (from Tolkien & Gordon's 1925 edition)

The word order is modern, especially in the main clause: the subject *be sege* and *be assaut* precedes the auxiliary *watz* and the verb *sesed*, which in turn precede the adverbial *at Troye* in the first line. In the second line, *brent* precedes *to brondez and askez*, and *tried* precedes *for his tricherie* in line 4. In contrast, in the relative clause in line 3 the verb *wroȝt* follows the object *þe trammes of tresoun*, a remnant of the older order. The verb *bicone* also follows its object in line 6 since it is part of a relative clause.

As mentioned before, definite articles are frequent and reduced to an invariant form *þe*. The endings on the nouns are restricted to plural -*eȝ*, -*ez*, or *es*, but there may be a dative -*e* on *erþe*. The relative pronoun in line 3 is the Middle English *þat*.

The spelling shows much evidence of this being a (Late) Middle English text: *þ* and *ȝ* occur, but *æ* and *ð* do not. The *ȝ* in *borȝ* may show palatalization and the pronunciation of *sege* and *sesed* (if you can listen to it) includes the pre-GVS [e]. There are many loans from French: *sege*, *assaut*, *tresoun*, *tricherie*, *deprecet*, and *patrounes* are all introduced from French in the Middle English period roughly with the spelling that occurs in *Gawain*. Later, alternations are made—etymological respellings by inserting the *l* in *assault* around 1530. The word *try* in its modern, legal sense is based on French, but this particular sense developed in Anglo-French. *Tulk* 'man' and *trammes* 'plots' in line 3 are Northernisms, possibly from Scandinavian.

Table 6.10 provides a summary of the characteristics of Middle English. Chapter 4 has a similar table for Old English. Compare the two and you’ll notice that Middle English is losing some of the synthetic characteristics so obvious in Old English, e.g. fewer case and agreement endings.
**Morphology:**
a. Pronouns change (e.g. loss of the dative/accusative distinction)
b. Case endings on nouns and adjectives disappear gradually
c. Agreement on verbs simplifies
d. Strong verbs become weak; subjunctives are expressed through modals and infinitives

**Syntax:**
e. Word order changes to SVO
f. Subject pronouns are needed
g. Pleonastic (or dummy) subjects are introduced (= grammaticalization)
h. Auxiliaries and articles are introduced (= grammaticalization)
i. Embeddings increase (= grammaticalization)
j. Multiple negatives occur

Table 6.10: Characteristics of Middle English

Additional references on Middle English grammar are Mustanoja's (1960) *A Middle English Syntax*, Fischer's (1992) contribution to the *Cambridge History of the English Language* Middle English volume, and Denison's (1993) *English Historical Syntax*. The Middle English Dictionary is freely available at [http://quod.lib.umich.edu/m/med](http://quod.lib.umich.edu/m/med). In the next section, we will rely on Dalton-Puffer's (1996) work on Middle English prefixes and suffixes; see also Nevalainen (1999).

5 Middle English Word Formation

As shown in the previous chapter, very noticeable changes in Middle English appear in the lexicon as thousands of loans are introduced into the language. In this chapter, we will discuss some ways words are formed, the role of Latinate affixes, and some changes in word meaning.

**Compounds** are frequent in Old English and remain so to the present. Many Old English compounds have disappeared and new ones have been created. It is my impression from reading Middle English texts, however, that compounding is not as frequent in Middle English as it in Old or Early Modern English. This may be due to the wealth of loans in Middle English. Compare, for instance, the Old English Riddles (Appendix D of Chapter 4) to Chaucer (Appendix D of this chapter). We could also explore the new compounds in Middle English by year using the advanced search in the *OED*. If you search the year 1320, you get the compounds in (44) among others. Note that it is not clear what all of them mean.

(44) barehead, blindwharved, church-hawe, dunghill, foot-hot, glow-worm, love-drink, polecat, shoulder-bone.
In Old English, the following **derivational suffixes** are used to create abstract nouns: -*dom*, -*hede* (-*hade*, etc.), -*lac* (-*lec*, etc.), -*ness*, -*ship*, and -*ung* (-*ing*, etc.). Many of them remain active in Middle English: *fredom*, *liklihede*, *worship*, and *makyng* (all from Chaucer). Several Romance suffixes with the same function as the Old English ones are also introduced: -*acy*, -*age*, -*al*, -*aunce* (-*ence*, etc.), -*(a)cioun* (-*ation*, etc.), -*(e)rie*, -*ite*, and -*ment*. It is interesting to note that in Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*, there are only 45 instances of -*dom*, as in *kingdom* and *cristendom*, but 389 instances of -*age*, as in *pilgrimage*, *avauntage*, and *visage*. The French suffix is not only more frequent, but also shows greater variety.

Some Old English suffixes, such as -*er(e)*, -*end*, -*el*, and -*ling*, form agent nouns: *worshiper*, *allwaldend*, and *fosterling*. The Romance innovations -*ant*, -*ard*, -*arie*, -*erel*, -*esse*, -*ist*, -*istre*, and –*our* are used in *servant*, *niggard*, *secretary*, *ministre*, and *conquerour*.

Old English suffixes that form adjectives are -*ed*, -*en*, -*fold*, -*ful*, -*ig* (-*y*, etc.), -*less*, -*ly* (-*lich*, etc.), -*som* (-*sum*, etc), -*ward*, and –*wise*: *thousandfold*, *blisful*, *homeward*, and *otherwise*. The Romance ones, -*able*, -*al*, -*ive*, and -*ous*, are found in *mesurable*, *moral*, and *jalous*. We will not examine the verbal suffixes (and prefixes) that enter via French and Latin (but see Dalton-Puffer 1993). Some Germanic and Romance suffixes are listed in Table 6.11 with near synonymous examples.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Germanic</th>
<th>Latin/French</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>-<em>dom</em>/-hood (freedom; likelihood)</td>
<td>-<em>ite</em> (liberty; probability)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-hood (boyhood)</td>
<td>-<em>ence</em> (adolescence)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-<em>ful</em> (sinful)</td>
<td>-<em>al</em> (not moral)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-<em>ing</em> (beginning)</td>
<td>-<em>ment</em> (commencement)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-ship (worship)</td>
<td>-<em>ation</em> (adoration)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Table 6.11: Some synonymous Germanic and Romance suffixes*

**Meaning changes** continue to take place, also after Middle English where it was perhaps accelerated by the many loans. As Table 6.11 shows, *beginning* and *commencement* are synonyms in Middle English. When *commencement* first comes into the language in 1250, it means 'time of beginning' and this meaning remains a minor one. By 1387, *commencement* is attested as meaning 'taking the degree of Master or Doctor'. *Commencement Day* is first attested in 1606, and nowadays the academic use of *commencement* is the prevalent one.

When French and Latin words enter the language, they are often in competition with 'native' words. Typically, however, borrowed words narrow, as in the case of *commencement*, *adolescence*,
and adoration. The majority of words have shifted their meanings and you can track that using the OED. A well-known shift is that of silly, mentioned in the previous chapter; in Appendix A (line 4) it is used with the older meaning of 'happy, blissful'.

6 Middle English Dialects

In Chapter 4, we briefly discussed Old English dialects. Dialectal differences are more obvious for Middle English since we have more texts available from the different areas. The differences are also obvious because a Middle English standard had not arisen yet (unlike in Later Old English) so that pronunciation differences are often clear from the spelling of words. In this section, we will examine a few of the features that characterize the different areas.

Figure 6.6 offers a simplified version of the map found on www.hf.ntnu.no/engelsk/staff/johannesson/?oe/texts/imed/intro/dialchar.html.

Many dialect differences are obvious because the sound changes in Old and Middle English did not have the same impact in all areas. For instance, palatalization of the velar stops [k] and [g] is a southern phenomenon as is the voicing of initial fricatives in words such as vather and the change of long a to o. The fronting of the fricative [ʃ] to [s], on the other hand, is typical of the North. Thus, more sound change seems to occur in non-northern areas. Changes in the morphology are the opposite: the loss of endings starts in the North as does the replacement of third person pronouns and the marking on the non-finite forms, such as participles and infinitives. The main characteristics of Middle English dialects are provided in Table 6.12, where the East and West Midlands are combined. The East Midlands varieties pattern more with the North and the West Midlands ones more with the South. Not all changes predict geographical origin as well as others, so be careful to use as many of these together as you can.
Sound and spelling:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Feature</th>
<th>North</th>
<th>Midlands</th>
<th>South</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Palatalization of velars [k]; [g], e.g. frankis</td>
<td>no change:</td>
<td>mixed:</td>
<td>change to:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Long [a] &gt; [o]</td>
<td>[k]; [g] or [tʃ]; [j]</td>
<td></td>
<td>[tʃ]; [j], e.g. french</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Short on-an</td>
<td>[a], e.g. ham</td>
<td>mainly [o]</td>
<td>[v]; [z], e.g. vather</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Voicing of initial fricatives on, e.g. mon</td>
<td>[f]; [s]</td>
<td>[f]; [s]</td>
<td>[v]; [z], e.g. vather</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>hw-/qu- spelling</td>
<td>qu-</td>
<td>hw-</td>
<td>hw-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fronting of [ʃ] to [s]</td>
<td>[s], e.g. sal</td>
<td>[s] or [ʃ]</td>
<td>[ʃ], e.g. shal</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Morphology and syntax:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Feature</th>
<th>North</th>
<th>Midlands</th>
<th>South</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Third plural pronoun</td>
<td>change to:</td>
<td>mixed:</td>
<td>no change:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feminine third NOM S</td>
<td>they/them</td>
<td>they/hem</td>
<td>hi/hem</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Verbal present tense</td>
<td>she</td>
<td>she/heo</td>
<td>heo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Present participle</td>
<td>-(e)s</td>
<td>mixed</td>
<td>like Old English</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Past participle</td>
<td>-ande</td>
<td>-ende</td>
<td>-ing/inde</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Infinitive marker</td>
<td>no prefix</td>
<td>y/~i-</td>
<td>y/~i-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Preposition till</td>
<td>occasionally at</td>
<td>to</td>
<td>to</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 6.12: Middle English dialect characteristics

An atlas relevant to Middle English dialects, *A Linguistic Atlas of Late Middle English* (LALME), covers texts from the 14th and 15th centuries. It provides maps of where *hem* and *them* are used, for instance.

Examples of dialect features are obvious in (1) above, repeated as (45).

(45) **Cursor Mundi** - Northern version - 1300

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Line</th>
<th>Meaning</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>þis ilk bok is es translate</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In to Inglis tong to rede</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>For the loue of Inglis lede</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inglis lede of Ingland</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>For the commun at understand</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frankis rimes here I redd</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comunlik in ilka sted</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mast es it wroght for frankis man</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quat is for him na frankis can?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Of Ingland the nacion</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Es Inglis man þar in commun</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The speche þat man wit mast may spede
Mast þarvit to speke war nede
Selden was for ani chance
Praised Inglis tong in france
Giue we ilkan þare langage
Me think we do þam non outrage
To laud and Inglis man i spell
þat understandes þat i tell.

There are multiple versions of *Cursor Mundi*, the text (45) is taken from the northern (Cotton) version. In this version, we see words such as *Inglis, Frankis, comunlik, ilkan* 'each', and *mast* 'most', characteristic of a Northern text: [s] rather than [ʃ], [k] rather than [tʃ], and [a] rather than [ɔ]. The spelling of *quat* 'what' confirms that it is northern. The morphological features provide further evidence: *þam* 'them', not *hem*, and a verbal ending on *understandes* in the last line are both northern.

In (46) and (47), two characteristic lines for other dialects are provided. See if you can tell which is northern and which southern:

(46) *Efter þe zeue benes þet byeþ y-conteyned in holi pater noster ous behoueþ to spekene mid greate reuerence*
After the seven gifts that are contained in (the) holy our father we need to speak with great reverence

(47) *Quanne he hauede þi s pleinte maked | þer-after stronglike he quaked*
when he had this complaint made thereafter strongly he said

In (46), the voiced initial fricative in *zeue* 'seven' indicates southern origin as do the -þ ending on the plural verb *byeþ* 'are' and the y-prefix on the participle. In (47), the spelling of *quanne* 'when' indicates northern origins as does the absence of the y/ge- prefix on the participle *maked*. Sentence (46) is taken from Dan Michel's *Ayenbite of Inwit* ('Remorse of Conscience'), which is from Kent, i.e. the South, from 1340; (47) is from *Havelok*, a Northeast Midlands text from the end of the 13th century.

More lines from *Ayenbite of Inwit* are provided in (48). Note the voiced initial fricative and the verbal and other endings, as in (46), and also the Southern [o] in *zuo* and the *an* in *man*:

(48) *Ayenbite of Inwit* - Southern 1340
Be Peril of Slacnesse

After that [peril] comes slackness which comes from the fault of courage and of evil habits.

that binds so the man who hardly troubles himself to do well

otherwise it comes from ignorance and from fowl heat.

whereby the man starves so his heart and his body through fasts

and in such illness that he cannot labor in God's service

and falls into the slackness so that he has no taste nor devotion to do well.

(from Morris' 1866 edition)

More lines from Havelok are given in (49). Typical northern features include the use of til and hondes (and aren); typical southern features are the use of he and him for the third person plural, palatalization in michel. Note how that even though it is an earlier text than Ayenbite, it is much more readable. If the first line translates as `All who heard his summons', and ferden `went', and hore `mercy', can you read the rest?

(49) **Havelok** - Northeast Midlands - 1280

Alle þat the writes herden
Sorful an sori til him ferden 2
He wrungen hondes and wepen sore
And yerne preyden cristes hore 4
þat he wolde turnen him
vt of þat yuel þat was so grim 6
þanne he weren comen alle
Bifor þe king into the halle 8
At winchestre þer he lay
"Welcome" he seyde "be ye ay!" 10
Ful michel þanke kan y yow
That ye aren comen to me now!" 12
The lines in (50) are from the beginning of *Sir Orfeo*, from the manuscript that was possibly written around London in the beginning of the 14th century. Paying attention to verbs and participles, how can you tell it is from the South? Note that *wite* means 'know', *harping* 'in song', *ferli* 'marvelous', *wer* 'war', *bourdes* 'entertainment'.

(50)  

Sir Orfeo - South Midlands - 1330-40

We redeþ oft an d findeþ ywrite,  
And þis clerkes wele it wite,  
Layes þat ben in harping  
Ben yfounde of ferli þing.  
Sum beþe of wer and sum of wo,  
And sum of joie and mirþe also,  
And sum of trecherie and of gile,  
Of old aventours þat fel while,  
And sum of bourdes and ribaudy,  
And mani þer beþ of fairy.  

(from Bliss' 1954 edition)

The full text of *Sir Orfeo* with notes is available at [www.lib.rochester.edu/camelot/teams/orfeo.htm](http://www.lib.rochester.edu/camelot/teams/orfeo.htm) and an electronic copy of the manuscript is available at [http://auchinleck.nls.uk/mss/orfeo.html](http://auchinleck.nls.uk/mss/orfeo.html).

We will briefly go over the areas of the works listed in Table 6.1 and add a few authors. Well-known southern writers and texts are Chaucer (1C14), Gower (1C14), Ayenbite of Inwit (1340), and the *Owl and the Nightingale* (c1200). West Midlands texts include the *Gawain* texts (C14), some of the manuscripts of the Katerine-group (Bodley 34, c1230), and Layamon's *Brut* (C13). East Midland texts include the *Peterborough Chronicles* (C12), *Vices and Virtues* (eC13), the works of Ormulum (C12), Julian of Norwich (IC14) and Margery Kempe (C15), and the letters by the Paston Family (C15). Northern writings include the Cotton version of the *Cursor Mundi* (c1300), Richard Rolle's work (IC14), the *Rule of St Benet* (C15), and the *York Plays* (IC15).

7 Conclusion

This chapter has provided a description of Middle English between 1150 and 1500. The general trend in this period is towards an analytic language: endings related to cases and verbal agreement
simplify and grammatical words, such as articles and auxiliaries, appear. Sound changes occur, especially in southern areas and become relevant to dialect differentiation. Many morphological changes seem to start in the North. Word formation is very creative, as it continues to be, and Germanic and Romance suffixes provide a wealth of almost synonymous words.

**Keywords:** emergence of English after 1300, Middle English spelling, deletion of consonants, pronominal changes, loss of case and agreement, introduction of articles and auxiliaries (grammaticalization), Germanic and Romance suffixes, compounding, meaning change, and dialect characteristics.

In the next chapter, we will see that not much changes in the morphology and syntax after 1500; we can therefore end this chapter with a timeline of some internal changes, anticipating some of the later ones.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>IE</th>
<th>Germanic</th>
<th>OE</th>
<th>ME</th>
<th>eModE</th>
<th>ModE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>6000 BP</td>
<td>2000 BP</td>
<td>450 CE</td>
<td>1150</td>
<td>1400</td>
<td>1500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grimm's Law</td>
<td>palatalization</td>
<td>long a&gt;o</td>
<td>GVS starts</td>
<td>GVS ends</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>weak verbs</td>
<td>breaking, i-umlaut</td>
<td>loss of endings</td>
<td>more auxiliaries</td>
<td>word order fixed</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>introduction of articles, prepositions, auxiliaries</td>
<td>regularization of verbal markings</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 6.7: Some internal changes

The texts in the Appendices are organized in chronological order. The first ones are therefore the most synthetic and hardest to read (if you are a native speaker of Modern English). This has been done to provide a sense for how the language changes; you could, of course, start from the back.

**Exercises**

1. Look at the excerpt from Chaucer's *The Miller's Prologue* (from Benson's 1987 edition)

How Middle English is this text? To answer the question, you could compare certain aspects (sounds, morphology, syntax, or lexicon) to Old or Modern English. For instance, what is the word order like? Is the verb ever last? If so, what does that show?

Some helpful words: *unbokeled* 'unbuckled', *male* 'pouch', *konnie/kan* 'know', *quite* 'match', *unnethe* 'hardly', *nolde* 'not wanted', *avalen* 'take off', *nones* 'occasion', *leeve* 'dear', *thriftily* 'properly', *clappe* 'noisy talk', and *eek* 'also'.

Chaucer

Oure Hooste lough and swoor, "So moot I gon,
This gooth aright; unbokeled is the male.
Lat se now who shal telle another tale;
For trewely the game is wel bigonne.
Now telleth ye, sir Monk, if that ye konne,
Somwhat to quite with the Knightes tale."
The Millere, that for drownken was al pale,
So that unnethe upon his hors he sat,
He nolde avalen neither hood ne hat,
Ne abyde no man for his curteisie,
But in Pilates voys he gan to cry,
And swoor by armes, and by blood and bones,
I kan a noble tale for the nones,
With which I wol now quite the knyghtes tale.
Oure Hooste saugh that he was drownke of ale,
And seyde, "Abyd, Robyn, my leeve brother;
Some bettre man shal telle us first another.
Abyd, and lat us werken thriftily."
By goddes soule, quod he, that wol nat I;
For I wol speke, or elles go my wey.
Oure hoost answerde, tel on, a devel wey!
Thou art a fool; thy wit is overcome."
Now herkneth, quod the millere, alle and some!
But first I make a protestacioun
That I am drownke, I knowe it by my soun;
And therfore if that I mysspeke or seye
Wyte it the ale of southwerk, I you preye.
For I wol telle a legende and a lyf
Bothe of a carpenter and of his wyf;
How that a clerk hath set the wrightes cappe.
The reve answerde and seyde, stynyt thy clappe!
Lat be thy lewed drovenk harlotrye.
It is a synne and eek a greet folye
To apeyren any man, or hym defame,
And eek to bryngen wyves in swich fame.
Thou mayst ynogh of othere thynges seyn.
OE               ModE
a. heofon     >   heaven
b. cyssan     >   kiss
c. boga       >   bow
d. fæger      >   fair
e. hnecca     >   neck
f. anlic      >   only

5. What might (a) mean, and what can you say about the verb in Chaucer's (a). How would you translate (b) into Modern English?

a. And so byfel that yn his slep hym thoughte
   That in a forest faste he welk to wepe
   (Chaucer, Troilus & Criseyde, V 1234-5)

b. Per ase peos pingces beod per is riht religium
   there as these things are there is right religion
   (Ancrene Riwle 12, from OED entry of thereas)

6. Provide a smoother translation for the first 13 lines of Layamon in Appendix A and comment on how many endings and determiners there are. Would you say this is Early or Late Middle English? Does the text have obvious dialect features?

7. List some features that make Piers Plowman's English (Appendix B) more like Modern English than Layamon.

8. The text in Appendix C uses ʒ for a variety of sounds. List those sounds.

9. Read the beginning of the Canterbury Tales (Appendix D) aloud, possibly after listening to it.

10. Take a look at the text in Appendix E. Can you tell what dialect it is?

11. Having examined some varieties of Middle English, list some Northernisms in the Old English of the first version of Appendix B.
12. The *Reeve's Tale*, part of Chaucer's *CT*, includes the quote below. Thinking about dialect, what is significant? (*hopur* is 'hopper' and *howgates* is 'how')

    'By God, right by the hopur wil I stande'
    Quod John 'and se howgates the corn gas in.
    yet saugh I nevere, by my fader kyn,
    How that the hopur wagges til and fra'.

13. Comment on some of the more unusual spellings in Appendix F.
Appendix A

Layamon

As mentioned, Layamon exists in two versions (available from www.georgetown.edu/labyrinth/library/me/me.html). Figure 6.1 shows the first page of the Caligula version, transcribed below. The standard text edition is by Brook & Leslie (1963) and the Chaucer studio (http://english.byu.edu/chaucer) has an audio version at a reasonable price. Allen (1992) has a translation and a very basic translation for the first few lines is given to get you started.

An preost wes on leoden; Laʒamon wes ihoten.
he wes Leouenaðes sone; liðe him beo Drihten.
He wonede at Ernlege; at æðelen are chirechen.

5

Hit com him on mode; & on his mern þonke.
þet he wolde of Engle; þa æðelen tellen.
wat heo ihoten weoren; & wonene heo comen.

10

He was the son of Liefnoth, let God have mercy on him
He lived at Areley, at a lovely church
up Severn's bank. Blissful he thought it
it came on his mind a merry thought
that he wanted of the English nobles tell
what they were called and from-where they came
that England first owned
after the flood which came from God
which killed all which that it found
except Noah and Sem, Japhet and Ham
and their four wives who with them were on the Ark

& heore four wiues; þe mid heorn weren on archen.
Laʒamon gon liðen; wide ʒond þas leode.

15

& bi-won þa æþela boc; þa he to bisne nom.
He nom þa Englisca boc; þa makede Seint Beda.
An-ðer he nom on Latin; þe makede Seinte Albin.
& þe feiere Austin; þe fulluht broute hider in.

20

Boc he nom þe þridde; leide þer amidden.
þa makede a Frenchis clerc;
Wace wes ihoten; þe wel couþe writen.
& he hoe ʒeþ þare æþelen; Ælienor
þe wes Henries quene; þes heþes kinges.
Laʒamon leide þeos boc; & þa leaf wende.
he heom leofliche bi-heold. ðiþ him beo Drihten.

25

Fæþeren he nom mid fingren; & fiede on boc-felle.
& þa sóþere word; sette to-gadere.
& þa þre boc; þrumde to are.
Nu bidde[ð] Laʒamon alene æþele mon;
for þene almiten Godd.

30

þet þeos boc rede; & leornia þeos runan.
þat he þeos sóþfeste word; segge to-sumne.
for his fader saule; þa hine for[ð] brouhte.
& for his moder saule; þa hine to monne iber.

35

& for his awene saule; þat hine þe selre beo. Amen.
Appendix B

Piers Plowman

The two excerpts from *Piers Plowman* (B-Text) are taken from Skeat's standard 1886 edition. The date of this version is supposed to be from 1377-79. This English is slightly easier to read for a speaker of Modern English than Layamon. A translation is available on [www.luminarium.org/medlit/plowman.htm](http://www.luminarium.org/medlit/plowman.htm), which site also has different editions of the Middle English text. The second part can be listened to on [www.english.vt.edu/~baugh/Medieval/envy.htm](http://www.english.vt.edu/~baugh/Medieval/envy.htm).

I (lines 1-30)

In a somer seson . whan soft was the sonne
I shope me in shroudes . as I a shepe were
In habite as an heremite . vnholy of workes
Went wyde in this world . wondres to here
Ac on a May mornynge . on Maluerne hulles
Me byfel a ferly . of fairy me thouȝte
I was very forwardred . and went me to reste
Vnder a brode banke . bi a borones side
And as I lay and lened . and loked in the wateres
I slombred in a slepyng . it sweyued so merye
Thanne gan I to meten . a merueilouse sweuene
That I was in a wildernesse . wist I neuer where
As I bihelde in-to the est . an hiegh to the sonne
I seigh a toure on a toft . trielich ymaked
A depe dale binethe . a dongeon there-inne
With depe dyches and derke . and dredful of sight
A faire felde ful of folke . fonde I there bytwene
Of alle maner of men . the mene and the riche
Worcyng and wandryng . as the worlde asketh
Some putten hem to the plow . pleyed ful seide
In settyng and in sowyng . swonken ful harde
And wonnen that wastours . with glotonye destruyeth
And some putten hem to pruyde . apparailed hem ther-after
In contenaunce of clothynge . comen disguised
In prayers and in penance . putten hem manye
Al for loue of owre lorde . luyedun ful streyte
In hope forto haue . heueneriche blisse
As ancres and heremites . that holden hem in here selles
And coueiten nought in contre . to kairen aboute
For no likerous liflode . her lykam to plese

II (lines 5076-5133)

INUIDIA

Enuye with heuy herte . asked after schrifte
And carefullich mea culpa . he comsed to shewe
He was as pale as a pelet . in the palsy he semed
And clothed in a caurimaury . I couthe it nou
In kirtel and kourteby . and a knyf bi his syde
Of a freres frokke . were the forsleues
Of a leke hadde yleye . longe in the sonne
His body was to-bolle for wratthe . that he bote his lippes
And wryngynge he ȝede with the fiste . to wreke hymself he thouȝte
With werkes or with wordes . whan he seighe his tyme
Eche a worde that he warpe . was of an addres tonge
Of chydynge and of chalangynge . was his chief lyflode
With bakbitynge and bismere . and beryng of fals witnesse
This was al his curteisye . where that euere he shewed hym 15
I wolde ben yshryue quod this schrewe . and I for shame durst
I wolde be gladder bi god . that Gybbe had meschaunce
Than thoue I had this woke ywonne . a weye of Essex chese
I haue a neigbore neyse me . I haue ennuyed hym ofe
And lowen on hym to lorde . to don hym lese his siluer 20
And made his frendes ben his foon . thowr my false tonge
His grace and his good happes . greueth me ful sore
Bitwene many and many . I make debate ofte
That bothe lyf and lyme . is lost thorw my speche
And when I mete him in market . that I moste hate
I hailse hym hendeliche . as I his frende were
For he is dougtryer than I . I dar do non other
Ac hadde I manystre and myȝte . god wote my wille
And when I come to the kirke . and sholde knele to the rode
And preye for the pople . as the prest techeth 30
For pilgrimes and for palmers . for alle the pople after
Thanne I crye on my knees . that Cryste ȝif hem sorwe
That beren away my bolle . and my broke schete
Awey fro the auter thanne . turne I myn eyghen
And bholde how Eleyne . hath a newe cote 35
I wishe thanne it were myne . and al the webbe after
And of mennes lesynge I laughe . that liketh myn herte
And for her wynnynge I wepe . and waille the tyme
And deme that hij don ille . there I do wel worse
Who-so vndernymeth me here-of . I hate hym dedly after
I wolde that vche a wyght . were my knaue 40
For who-so hath more than I . that angreth me sore
And thus I lyue louelies . lyke a luther dogge
That al my body bolneth . for bitter of my galle
I myȝte nouȝte eet many ȝeres . as a man ȝowȝte
For enuye and yuel wille . is yuel to defye 45
May no sugre ne swete thinge . asswage my swellynge
Ne no diapenidion . dryue it fro myne herte
Ne noyther schrifte ne shame . but ho-so schrape my mawe
ȝus redili quod Repentauence . and radde hym to the beste
Sorwe of synnes . is sauacioun of soules
I am sori quod that segge . I am but selde other
And that maketh me thus megre . for I ne may me venge
Amonges burgeyses haue I be . dwellynge at Londoun 50
And gert bakbitinge be a brocoure . to blame mennes ware
Whan he solde and I nouȝte . thanne was I redy
To lye and to loure on my neigbore . and to lakke his chaffare
I wil amende this ȝif I may. thowr myȝte of God almyȝty

Appendix C
Sir Gawain and the Green Knight

The introduction of *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* is given here in the edition by Tolkien and Gordon (1925). A facsimile appears in Figure 6.8 and you can listen to the introduction on [http://athena.english.vt.edu/~baugh/Medieval/SGGK2.htm](http://athena.english.vt.edu/~baugh/Medieval/SGGK2.htm). A page of resources (with modern translations) can be found at [www.luminarium.org/medlit/gawainre.htm](http://www.luminarium.org/medlit/gawainre.htm) and images of the manuscript are available at [http://faculty.virginia.edu/engl381ck/three.html](http://faculty.virginia.edu/engl381ck/three.html). A translation for a portion of the text has been given.

Lines 1-19

Since the siege and the assault were ceased at Troy, the battlements broken and burnt to brands and ashes was tried for his treachery, the worst on earth that afterwards conquered provinces and masters became

Welnege of al þe wele in þe west iles.  
Fro riche Romulus to Rome ricchis hym swyþe, 
With gret bobbaunce þat burȝe he biges vpon fyrst, 
And neuenes hit his aune nome, as hit now hat; 
Ticius to Tuskan and telled bigynnes, 
Langaberde in Lumbardie lyftes vp homes, 
And fer ouer þe French flod Felix Brutus 
On mony bonkkes ful brode Bretayn he settez 
wyth wynne, 
Where werre and wrake and wonder 
Bi syþez hatz wont þerinne, 
And oft boþe blysse and blunder 
Ful skete hatz skyfted synne.

Lines 37 - 49

This king was at Camelot during Christmas with many gracious lords, the best people 
with fine revelry and carefree joy there held men tournaments from time to time  
Jousted gallantly these gentle knights

The went to the court to do carols (dances and singing) for there the feast lasted a full fifteen days with all the meat and mirth that could be 
Because this fair folk in their prime, in the hall,
The following lines have interesting vocabulary, some inherited from Old English and some Scandinavian: *renk* 'man', *gomen* 'man' (OE *guma*), *leudlez* 'people-less, i.e. alone', *fole* 'horse', *frythez* 'wood', *gate* 'road', *karp* 'speak', *wonde* 'hesitated', *frayned* 'questioned' (OE *fregnan*), and *frekez* 'men' (OE *freca*):

**Gawain lines 691-810**

Now ridez þis renk þur þe ryalme of Logres, Sir Gauan, on Godez halue, þar hym no gomen þoþt.
Oft leudlez alone he lengez on nyȝtez
Þer he fonde noȝt hym byfore þe fare þat he lyked.
Hade he no fere bot his fole bi frythez and dounez,
Ne no gome bot God bi gate wyth to karp,
Til þat he neyed ful neghe into þe Norþe Walez.
Alle þe iles of Anglesay on lyft half he haldez,
And farez ouer þe fordez by þe forlondez,
Ouer at þe Holy Hede, til he hade eft bonk
In þe wyldrenesse of Wyrale; wonde þer bot lyte
And ay he frayned, as he ferde, at frekez þat he met,
If þay hade herde any karp of a knyȝt grene,
And al nykked hym wyth nay, þat neuer in her lyue
<Figure 6.8: Facsimile of Gawain>

**Keep figure from previous edition, p. 147**

The following lines have interesting vocabulary, some inherited from Old English and some Scandinavian: *renk* 'man', *gomen* 'man' (OE *guma*), *leudlez* 'people-less, i.e. alone', *fole* 'horse', *frythez* 'wood', *gate* 'road', *karp* 'speak', *wonde* 'hesitated', *frayned* 'questioned' (OE *fregnan*), and *frekez* 'men' (OE *freca*):

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For were wrathed hym not so much þat wynter nas wors,
When þe colde cler water fro þe cloudez schadde,
And fres er hit falle myȝt to þe fale erpe;
Ner slayn wyth þe slete he sleped in his yrnes
Mo nyȝte þen innoghe in naked rokke,
þer as claterande fro þe crest þe colde borne rennez,
And henged he þe ouer his hede in hard isse-ikkles.
Þus in peryl and payne and plytes ful harde
Bi contray cayrez þis knyȝt, tyl Krystmasse euen,
al one;
þe knyȝt wel þat tyde
To Mary made his mone,
þat ho hym red to ryde
And wysse hym to sum wone.

Bi a mounte on þe morne meryly he rydes
Into a forest ful dep, þat ferly watz wylde,
Hiȝe hillez on vche a halue, and holtwodez vnder
Of hore okez ful hoge a hundreth togeder;
þe hasel and þe haȝþorne were harled al samen,
With roȝe raged mosses rayled aywhere,
With mony bryddezen vnlyȝpe vpon bare twyges,
þat pitosly þer piped for pyne of þe colde.
þe gome vpon Gryngolet glydez hem vnder,
þurȝ mony misy and myre, mon al hym one,
Carande for his costes, lest he ne keuer schulde
To se þe seruyse of þat syre, þat on þat self nyȝt
Of a burde watz borne oure baret to quelle;
And þerfore sykyng he sayde, 'I beseche þe, lorde,
And Mary, þat is myldest moder so dere,
Of sum herber þer heȝly I myȝt here masse,
Ande þy matynez to-morne, mekely I ask,
And þerto prestfy I pray my pater and aue and crede.'
He rode in his prayere,
And cryed for his mysdede,
He sayned hym in syȝes sere,
And sayde 'Cros Kryst me spede!'
Inspired hath in every holt and heeth
Tendre croppes, and the yonge sonne
Hath in the ram his halve cours yronne,
And smale foweles maken melodye,
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.
Bifil that in that seson on a day,
In southwerk at the tabard as I lay
Redy to wenden on my pilgrymage
To caunterbury with ful devout corage,
At nyght was come into that hostelrye
Wel nyne and twenty in a compaignye,
Of sondry folk, by aventure yfalle
In felaweshipe, and pilgrimes were they alle,
That toward caunterbury wolden ryde.
The chambres and the stables weren wyde,
And wel we weren esed atte beste.
And shortly, whan the sonne was to reste,
So hadde I spoken with hem everichon
That I was of hir felaweshipe anon,
And made forward erly for to ryse,
To take oure wey ther as I yow devyse.
But nathelees, whil I have tyme and space,
Er that I ferther in this tale pace,
Me thynketh it acordaunt to resoun
To telle yow al the condicioun
Of ech of hem, so as it semed me,
And whiche they weren, and of what degree,
And eek in what array that they were inne;
And at a knyght than wol I first bigynne.
Appendix E
Anonymous lyrics
Both lyrics below are from the 13th century and look southern. The words you might not be familiar
with are awe 'ewe', sterteth 'leaps', swik 'stop', fugheles 'birds', and necheth 'comes near'.

I
Sumer is icumen in
Sumer is icumen in
lhude sing, cuccu!
Groweth sed and bloweth med
and springth the wude nu.
Sing cuccu!

Awe bletheth after lomb,
ilouth after calve cu;
bulluc sterteth, bucke verteth
murie sing, cuccu!

Cuccu, Cuccu!
Wel singes thu Cuccu,
Ne swik thu naver nu

Sing Cuccu, nu sing Cuccu!

II
Miri it is while sumer ilast
Miri it is while sumer ilast
with fugheles song;
oc nu necheth windes blast
and weder strong.
Ei, ei! what this nicht is long!
And ich, wit wel michel wrong,
soregh and murn and fast.

Appendix F
Paston Letters
The Paston family letters from around 1425 provide some insight into the affairs of a (well-to-do)
family. The letters contain wills, recipes, and other information. Margaret Paston was probably
literate but dictated her letters. The one below is to her husband John in 1443, as it appears in Davis'

To my ryght worchepful husbond Jhon Paston, dwellyng in þe Innere Temple at London, in hast.
Ryth worshipful hosome, I recomande me to yow, desyryng hertely to here of your wylfare, thanckyng God of your
a-mendyng of þe grete dysese þat ye have hade; and I thancke yow for þe letter þat ye sent me, for be my trowthe my moder
and I were nowth in hertys es fro þe tyme þat we woste of your sekenesse tyl we woste verely of your a-mendyng. My moder
hat be-hestyd a-nodyr ymmage of wax of þe weytte of yow to Oyur Lady of Walsyngham, and sche sent iij nobelys to þe iij
orderys of freys at Norweche to pray for yow; and I have be-hestyd to gon on pylgreyynnays to Walsyngham and to Sent
Levenardys for yow. Be my trowth, I had neuer so hevy a sesyn as I had fro þe tyme þat I woste of your sekenesse tyl I woste
of your a-mendyng, and ʒyth myn hert is in no grete esse, ne nowth xal be tyl I wott þat ʒe ben very hol.

Your fader and myn was dys day sevenyth at Bekelys for a matyr of the Pryor of Bromholme, and he lay at
Gerlyston þat nyth and was þer tyl it was ix of þe cloke and þe toder day. And I sentte thedryr for a gounne, and my moder
seyde þat I xulde non have dens tyl I had be þer a-ʒen; and so þei cowde non gete. My fader Garneyss sentte me worde þat he
xulde ben here þe nexth weke, and myn emme also, and pleyn hem here wyth herre hawkys; and þei xulde have me hom wyth
hem. And, so God help me, I xal excusuusse me of myn gowyng dedyr yf I may, for I sopose þat I xal reedlyer have tydyngys
from yow herre dan i xulde have þer.

I xal sende my moder a tokyn þat sche toke me, for I sopose þe tyme is cum þat I xulde sendeth here yf I kepe þe
be-hest þat I have made-I sopose I have tolde yow wat it was. I pray yow hertely þat [ye] wol wochesaf to sende me a letter as
hastely as ʒe may, yf wrytyn be non dysesse to yow, and þat ye wollen wochesaf to sende me worde quowe your sor dott. Yf I
mythe have hade my wylle I xulde a seyne yow eir dys tyme. I wolde ʒe xulde ben here þe nexth weke, and myn emme also, and pleyn hem here wyth herre hawkys; and þei xulde have me hom wyth
hem. And, so God help me, I xal excusuusse me of myn gowyng dedyr yf I may, for I sopose þat I xal reedlyer have tydyngys
from yow herre dan i xulde have þer.

I xal sende yow a noothy letter as hastely as I may. I thancke yow þat ʒe wolde wochesaf to remember my gyrdyl, and þat ʒe
wolde wryte to me at his tyme, for I sopose þe wrytyng was non esse to yow. All-myth God have yow in his kepyn and sende
yow helthe. Wretyn at Oxenede in ryth grete hast on Sent Mihyllys Evyn.

Yours, M. Paston

My modyr gretit ʒow wel and sendyt ʒow Godys bllysyng and here, and sche prayith ʒow, and I pray ʒow also, þat ʒe be
wel dyetyd of mete and dryngke, for þat is þe grettest helpe þat ʒe may haue now to your helthe ward. Your sone faryth wel,
bleyssyd be God.