ENGLISH 4660 (McGowan)
Section II Assignments

Using These Assignment Discussions

Fennell’s *History* contains considerable information and presents it using terms and methods that are sometimes new to you. To help you read productively, Mr. McGowan has shaped these assignment clusters. Look over the assignment sequence, and read the summary discussions before tackling a reading assignment. Use these discussions to help direct your reading and to identify basic concepts and details he is emphasizing in our study of the English language.

Note that writing assignments are usually due at the start of the class; dates refer to that day’s class. E-mail assignments must be sent by 9:30 a.m. of the class day.

Section II Overview

Much of our effort in the next section of our course will be to develop a sense of the changes that distinguish Middle English from Old English and then early Modern English from Middle English. We’ll work to develop a knowledge of Middle English helpful to reading Chaucer, a masterful writer of the late Middle English Southeast Midlands dialect of the London area. We’ll use Shakespeare as an unusually rich writer who uses the exuberant openness of Early Modern English in his art. A continuing interest will be developing the ability to read linguistic texts, i.e., to interpret Fennell’s discussions and start to recognize her special concerns in sociolinguistics.

We’ll also pay more attention to using the *Oxford English Dictionary* and other dictionaries as linguistic and literary research tools. You’ll use them in researching your Word Museum projects.

Monday, 10 June
Topics: Middle English cultural backgrounds. Middle English grammar and morphology: loss of inflections and grammatical gender, sound change and analogy, Norse influences.
Reading: Fennell 35 middle paragraph (§2.3.1) and 94-106, “Middle English Grammar” handout, and the article on *she* in *OED*.
On-line quiz deadline: Take the second *Professor and the Madman* quiz before class.
E-mail Assignment: Send Mr. McGowan an e-mail including a proposal for your Word Museum project. Identify your word, resources you’re using, and some dimensions or concepts you intend to show in your poster. Write your exercise in Standard Written English, and use professional conventions as far as e-mail allows.
Pre-Reading Discussion: We’ve already memorized the dates of the Middle English period–1100 and 1500–and noted it as the language of Chaucer. We’ll view part of *The Story of English* video on Middle English that emphasizes two important cultural influences, the Norman Conquest and the influx of Danish speakers in the north and west during the latter part of the Old English period. Learn the following dates: 1066 Norman Conquest, 1204 loss of Continental holdings by Anglo-Normans, 1348 Black Plague, and 1476 printing in England.

After the Norman Conquest, England is ruled by a French-speaking minority, and much of its educational and ecclesiastical establishment uses Latin, the common language of European learning and the Roman Church. Some educated or politically powerful people are bilingual or even trilingual. Latin and French serve as superstratum languages. But the majority of speakers speak English, and English is still the language of many writers. In Middle English, the language shows a much greater propensity for borrowing terms from French and Latin, particularly as compared to
Old English with its conservative drift toward internal borrowing. Much of the size and flexibility of English lexicon comes from these circumstances.

Fennell provides a quick survey of historical events. She also describes important phonological changes. We’ll only memorize two of these changes at this point, but become a person who can read Fennell’s descriptions, recognizes most of the phonetic symbols, and can apply these descriptions to words.

Some scholars label Middle English “the period of leveled inflections.” This leveling was caused by three main processes: sound change in final syllables, analogy with the predominant a-stem strong masculine nouns, and the language situation of Norse and English in the north of England. Because of sound changes that made inflections less distinctive, English loses much of its inflectional complexity. These changes caused the language to move from a synthetic to analytic grammar and to acquire inflectional simplicity.

McGowan summarizes some main features of the ME grammatical system in his handout. Compare them with the OE system and our Present Day English system. Notice places OE was more complex and PDE has become even simpler.

Compare the ME pronoun system in Fennell 102 with the pronoun paradigm on your OE item-arrangement grammar. We are very interested in understanding the ME pronoun structure of Chaucer’s language, the Southeast Midlands dialect of the second half of the fourteenth century. To read Chaucer adequately we need to understand his pronouns, including his peculiar third person plural forms, where northern they, developed from Old Norse, had become the subject form, but the southern native English hem and here remained the object and possessive.

In the video The Story of English, linguist Tom Shippey associates some of this change with the speech situation of Danish and English speakers communicating with one another. We’ll also pay attention to the more general application of certain endings of the a-stem strong masculine declension, a process called analogy. Fennell also notes the developing of one kind of function word–prepositions–that contributes to analytic grammar in ME (102).

Simplification of the definite article to the eradicated one of the main ways to determine grammatical gender; thus, English develops natural (rather than grammatical) gender.

We’ll examine the verb inflections in order to be informed readers of Chaucer. He maintains distinctive person forms in the singular, but in his dialect, the -en (sometimes -e or zero grade) ending takes over the plural present, replacing Old English -að. Scandinavian influences on 3rd person singular present verb inflection begin the northern use of -es {S_e}, a form that will spread to other dialects and become our Modern English standard inflection. The borrowing of this verb inflection joins the borrowing of the function words they, their, and them, as exceptional examples of external borrowing affecting inflection morphology and grammar.

Tuesday, 11 June
Topics: Changes in the English lexicon during Middle English, large scale borrowings from Anglo-Norman and Central French, loss of native words and weakening of internal borrowing.
Reading: Fennell 106-08.
Writing Exercise: Identify the language from which the following terms were borrowed into Middle English and give a reason for their borrowing during this period: duke, court, justice, crucifix, chapel, cardinal, confessor, roast, fry (v.), combustion. Pay attention to the immediate source for the borrowing; don’t worry about the more removed etymons. Probably a standard dictionary–and not the OED–would be easier to work with for this assignment. A good source for such checking is The
American Heritage Dictionary, or you can also use the Merriam-Webster’s Collegiate online dictionary; both are clickable from our course website <www1.appstate.edu/~mcgowant/4660.htm>. Develop a series of short paragraphs discussing your discoveries and conclusions; don’t just submit a chart.

**Pre-Reading Discussion:** In the early part of the Middle English period, the special position of Anglo-Norman as superstratum language led to the introduction of many AN words into the English lexicon. As the period continued, French continued to provide loan words, but from the Central French dialect of Paris, the language of international courtly society in the Middle Ages. Because of its use in religion, education, and science, Latin gave new words to English. In your reading, consider the kinds of cultural developments and technological changes that encourage borrowing words from other languages.

**Wednesday, 12 June**  
**Topics:** Middle English phonology and the sounds of Chaucer’s English. Southeast Midlands spelling, dialects, and Middle English literature.  
**Reading:** (1) Memorize the vowel symbols on the course phonemic symbols handout. (2) Read the introduction to Chaucer’s language in some standard anthology, e.g., *The Norton Anthology of English Literature*, Volume I. (3) Look over the handout “Chaucer’s Sounds.” (4) Fennell 86 and 108-15.  
**Writing Exercise:** Use the “Chaucer’s Sounds” handout and your knowledge of Modern English pronunciation to complete ME vowel transcription exercise.  
**Pre-Reading Discussion:** In class, we’ll work to develop some competence in reading the opening reverdie of Chaucer’s *Canterbury Tales* aloud. Here are some basic rules in working with Middle English writing: 1. If it’s spelled, pronounce it. 2. Remember long vowels are pre-Great Vowel Shift. 3. Distinguish open- and close-long-e by ModE spelling. 4. Distinguish open- and close-long-o by ModE pronunciation. 5. Short vowels haven’t changed much from ME to ModE, but Chaucer has no /æ/ or /ʌ/. 6. Remember medial and final gh signals the voiceless velar fricative /x/. 6. Pronounce final-e as /ə/ except where the next word begins with a vowel sound. This rule helps you to hear some of Chaucer’s inflections. Our class discussion will explain these and add more knowledge of Chaucer’s pronunciation.

During the Middle English period, literature appeared in regional dialect forms. This dialectal diversity is an effect of the temporary role of Anglo-French as a superstratum language. That situation offset the development of late West Saxon as a literary standard language.

Because of important cultural influences, the dialect of the Southeast Midlands becomes a preferred form of written English. Fennell discusses the early role of Wycliffite writings and their subsequent failure to become a standard. The conventions used by the Chancery clerks in London, government record writers, are in a general way accepted as the standard forms for writing.

Because printing, established by William Caxton in 1476, develops in this dialect area, printing practices use these forms and they become the basis of many characteristics of Modern English spelling. Certain vowel spellings become established, but their pronunciations change because of the Great Vowel Shift. Certain consonants are spelled because they are pronounced in Middle English, but these are lost—become “silent”—in the development of Modern English, yet their graphs are maintained in standard spellings. But the preferences in Middle English are not as consistently fixed as in standard Modern English; the language propriety of the eighteenth century hasn’t exercised its emphasis on a “fixed” set of spellings.
**Thursday, 13 June**

**Topics**: Social backgrounds and the rise of a ME standard. Theories of creolization in Middle English and /h/-dropping.

**Reading**: Fennell 116-33.

**On-line quiz deadline**: Chapters 6-7 of *The Professor and the Madman*. Notice the special role that Minor creates for himself in discovering distinctive uses of words. His work habits and methods become especially helpful in the development of the OED.

**Pre-reading Discussion**: The decline of French as a superstratum language occurred because of the loss of Continental Norman holdings and the development of English nationalism. Fennell notes these developments, but also stresses important social changes, including the rise of a middle class and the effects of the Black Death. Other economic and social factors contribute to the preferring of Southeast Midlands forms in writing—the construction of a ME standard.

Fennell reviews theories about the rise of simplified forms of Middle English, what modern language scholars call pidgin and creole. Although she finally rejects the creolization theory, the concepts and research will help us understand some later modern developments both in Vernacular Black English and some World English forms.

Fennell also describes the loss of /h/ in word initial position over a broad historical period. We know that pronunciation from Eliza Doolittle in *My Fair Lady* and the Beatles’ Liverpudlian talk. Fennell describes interesting social distinctions: in early ME, this loss apparently reflected interference from Anglo-French and became a mark of prestige, but by the eighteenth century, social critics considered it a vulgarism.

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**Friday, 14 June**

**Topics**: Early Modern English backgrounds, the Great Vowel Shift, and English spelling.

**Reading**: Fennel 135-38, 141, and 158-61; McGowan Great Vowel Shift chart.

**Word Museum Activity**: Displays begin today and continue through 26 June.

**Administrative Consideration**: Last day to drop class without academic penalty.

**Pre-Reading Discussion**: The reading gives an overview of important cultural developments that affected the development of Modern English. It explains cultural, technological, and sociological reasons for the promotion of literacy and a standard form of the language, the international influence of English, the use of English in the discourse of specialized fields, and modern attitudes about language. Recall that the expansiveness of the lexicon and our word formation system allows English to be a very versatile language. Get a sense of how and why new words have developed and old words have changed their meanings and forms.

The sixteenth century combines the expansion of English cultural consciousness through Renaissance humanism, Protestant personal religion, and colonial exploration. External history affecting internal language history includes the growth of commerce and communication, exploration and colonial expansion, the emphasis on personal reading in the Protestant Reformation and great interest in religious and quasi-psychological subjectivity, and the printing and translation of Latin and Greek works into English. In western Europe, vernacular languages were displacing Latin as the language of scholarship and serious literature, but to handle concepts long expressed by Latin words, often the classical terms were borrowed into English’s lexicon.

Language changes over time. A major change that distinguishes Early Modern English from Middle English was a systemic change of the long vowels: the Great Vowel Shift. Fennell’s
description gives you a sense of theories about the sequence of changes in the landmark sound change. McGowan’s chart gives an oversimplified but workable model of these changes. Memorize the steps on that sheet. The long vowel pronunciations changed, but their spellings didn’t because standardization was developing mainly through the rise of printing and its favoring the London Chancery standard spellings. English shares the Latin alphabet with French and Spanish, but the Great Vowel Shift makes our “aeiou” different.

**Monday, 17 June**

**Topics:** Early Modern English morphology and syntax: Reduced inflections, development of analytic forms, and pronoun paradigms.

**Reading:** Fennell 141-47.

**Writing Exercise:** Use the *OED* to discover a word with a large number of different spellings over its history. Discuss the patterns and differences, and hypothesize why certain forms appeared. Submit your exercise typed and using course professional conventions.

**Research Work:** Continue research on word study projects. Begin review for Section II examination.

**Professor and Madman quiz deadline:** Chapters 8-9. In his backyard “Scriptorium,” Professor Murray by plodding methodology assembles entries for the *OED*, with the occasional special help of Dr. Minor. Murray finally meets this remarkable correspondent after discovering his special circumstances.

**Pre-Reading Discussion:** Some linguists argue that “inflectonal simplicity” is an asset supporting the development of English as a world language. We review the progressive simplification of our noun, adjective, and verb inflections, but pay some attention to some slightly different early Modern English forms, including *-est* as a second person singular verb inflection, the supplanting of *-eth* by the *-es* Northern form, the simplifying of strong verbs by their reduction of forms or shift to the weak verb dental suffix pattern, and the loss of schwa in the pronunciation of inflections. This study should make us more comfortable working with the texts of Shakespeare’s works and the King James Version of the Bible.

By early Modern English, with the exception of *thou/thee*, the pronoun system we use in Present Day English is well established. Recall that this system included the replacement of the third person plural OE *h*-forms with Northern *th*-forms, borrowed from Scandinavian. The standardizing of *they/them/their* is an interesting example of how a denigrated dialect can influence the Standard. Within the pronoun system, this change helped distinguish plural forms from other third person singular forms and promoted clarity of communication.

**Tuesday, 18 June**

**Topics:** Review of Middle English and Early Modern English changes.

**Reading:** Class notes, Pre-Reading Discussions, Section II glossary webpages, and study helps.

**Class Activity:** Section II examination on ME and EModE.