

Old English

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Eng 315

Compare these samples:

From Beowulf, c. 700?:

Hwæt! We Gardena in geardagum,
beodcyniga, þrym gefrunon,
hu ða æþelingas ellen fremedon.
Of Scyld Scefing sceaþena þreatum,
monegum mægþum, meodosetla ofteah,
egsode eorlas. Syððan ærest wearð
feasceaf funden, he þæs frofre gebad,
weox under wolcnum, weorðmyndum þah,
oðþæt him æghwylc þara ymbsittendra
ofer honrade hyran scolde,
gomban gildan. þæt wæs god cyning!

From Geoffrey Chaucer, Prologue to the Canterbury Tales, c. 1380

Whan that aprill with his shoures soote
The droghte of march hath peiced to the roote,
And bathed every veyne in swich licour
Of which vertu engendred is the flour;
Whan zepirus eek with his sweete breeth
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 seke

Medieval Period of English

- Old English (Anglo-Saxon period)
 - Roughly 500-1150
- Middle English (Anglo-Norman / English periods)
 - Roughly 1066-1500

Key Cultural Periods of Old English

- Celts
- Romans, 55 bce – 410
- Angles, Saxons, Jutes (Germanic), 449
- Vikings (Scandinavian)
 - Looters, 865
 - Colonizers, 900s
- Normans, 1066



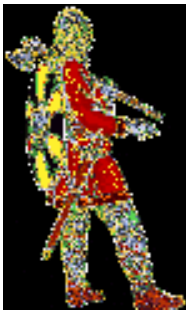


Some Important Characteristics of Old English

- Phonology & Orthography
 - Different vowels sounds; no independent /ə/ sound
 - Different characters: æ, þ, ð (Æ, Þ, Ð)
- Syntax
 - Synthetic vs. analytic languages
 - Modern English is analytic; Old English is synthetic
 - Paratactic vs. Hypotactic style



Old English Syntax 1: Word Order



- Exercise from *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*



Old English Syntax 2: Inflections

- Six classes of nouns
- Seven classes of strong verbs, plus a variety of weak verbs
- Grammatical gender
- Inflection exercise



Old English Syntax 3: Strong/Weak Adjectives

- Strong/Weak Adjective exercise



Old English Phonology

- Practice reading the Anglo-Saxon Lord's Prayer
- Compare: <http://www.georgetown.edu/faculty/ballic/oe/patermoster-oe.html>



Old English Morphology

- Few words from Latin; none from French
- About 85% of the OE vocabulary has been lost, replaced by words borrowed from French and Latin after the OE period
- Basic morphology of A/S is German

Borrowing

- In general, a language borrows words from a second language when speakers of the first language encounter things or concepts not present in the speaker's culture

Celtic Borrowing

- Hardly any borrowing (see handout)



Scandinavian Borrowing

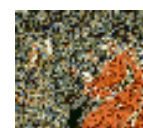
- Relatively few words
- Vocabulary emphasizes nautical matters, law, and domestic words
- Some Scandinavian and OE words were very similar
 - a phonological test to distinguish some

Latin Borrowing

- Borrowings fall into four categories (see handout)
- Four categories
 1. Latin already incorporated into German before the Anglo-Saxons came to Britain (also sometimes called "zero period")
 2. Latin that the Celtic peoples had picked up during Roman occupation of Britain ("first period")



3. Church Latin used by early Christian missionaries to England (after 597) ("Second period")
4. Scholastic Latin used during after the Benedictine Reform ("later Second period")



How do we know when a Latin word Enters English?

- Some of the older OE words underwent a sound change called “breaking”
- Compare borrowed word to the original
- If a borrowed Latin word underwent breaking, it is likely Latin of the zero or first period
- Words that didn’t undergo breaking are later borrowings
- Historical Linguistics Exercise

Old English Style

- Paratactic prose and verse
- Poetic features
 - Alliteration
 - Hemistich/caesura
 - Elaborate metaphors
- Exercise: Cædmon’s Hymn

Alfred the Great (reigned 871-899)

- Only British king to be called “the Great”
- Preserved Saxon culture in Wessex by eventually defeating the Danes in a series of decisive battles
- Alfred and the cakes



Alfred’s Program of Learning

- State of formal education
- Exercise: Preface to Pastoral Care
- Alfred’s Wessex dialect remains the main version of Old English studied today
- Alfred jewel



AELFRED MEC HEHT GEWYRCAN

Putting It All Together

- Exercise: Parable translation