

Late Modern English

Peter Bojo

(Late) Modern English

- 1800 – present (dates are rather arbitrary)
- Industrial revolution: many inventions are of British origin...vocabulary:
train, electricity, telephone, telegraph...

The Rise of Prescriptive Grammar

- 1st half of 18th cent. Johnson's Dictionary – newly handled spelling and lexicon
- Attention turned to grammar
- Over 200 works on grammar and rhetoric between 1750 – 1800
- The most influential: Bishop Robert Lowth's SHORT INTRODUCTION TO ENGLISH GRAMMAR, Lindley Murray's ENGLISH GRAMMAR
- All of them pushed English rigidly to the mould of Latin

-
- The two books gave rise to what is now called TRADITIONAL GRAMMAR – here, the first attempts to correct grammatical usage were drawn up.
 - ESSENTIAL QUESTION: Whether the grammars and dictionaries should reflect the usage, describing and analyzing current practice, or should evaluate usage by prescribing certain forms as correct and others as incorrect.

- 1762 – we find Bishop Lowth saying

The principal design of a Grammar of any Language is to teach us to express ourselves with propriety in that Language; and to enable us to judge of every phrase and form of construction, whether it be right or not.



- Check the following examples



- (1) I am so glad we *are got* acquainted.
So, you *are come* at last!
- (2) What *say you* to the day?
she *doubted not*...
- (3) Fanny *shrunk* back...
and much was *ate*...
- (4) It is *a nothing* of a part...
to be taken *into the account*...
- (5) *Will not it* be a good plan?
It would quite shock you... *would not it?*
- (6) he told me *in* our journey...
She was small *of* her age.
- (7) I stood for a minute, feeling *dreadfully*.
It is really very *well* for a novel.
- (8) the *properest* manner...
the *richest* of the two...

New Nations, New Themes

- American Scholars in the 2nd half of 18th cent.
- Noah Webster's dissertation on the English language (1789)
- Institution of „American Standard“
- Spelling reform – changes in American orthography
- Step towards this direction – Webster's dictionary A COMPENDIOUS DICTIONARY OF THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE (1806), 28 000 words

-
- 1828 – Webster's - AN AMERICAN DICTIONARY OF THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE
 - Attacked by Britain for its „americanism“ (changes in spelling)
 - 19th cent – debates in America on country's direction
 - American literature (Ralph Waldo Emerson)

Variety Awareness

- 2nd half of 18th cent. - Consciousness rised about the natur and the use of language
- End of 18th cent – comparative philologies

Vocabulary

- The scientific vocabulary: hydrogen, molecule, nitrogen and oxygen
- The expansion of the general vocabulary: budgerigar from an Australian Aboriginal language, (tea-)caddy from Malay, ketchup from Chinese

Word-formation processes

- Compounding, the formation of new words from free morphemes: greenhouse, offside, grave-yard...

- Conversion:

another without any change of form. The word *market*, borrowed from Norman French in the twelfth century, was originally only a noun, as when we say 'A market is held there every Saturday.' Since the seventeenth century, however, it has also been possible to use *market* as a verb, as when we say 'ICI will market this product.' This kind of change is very rare in Old English, but is easy

-
- Blending: towards the end of the period: brunch, mimsy (miserable, flimsy)...
 - to create common nouns or verbs from the names of people or places –
pasteurize
 - Back-formation: sidle: created from sideling

The Verb System

- Structures attacked: **The house is building, The grammar is printing...**
- The house is being printed – formed in 18th cent.
- **four main markings of the verb:** the past, the perfect, the passive and the progressive
- gradually became possible to combine these markings in various ways in most constructions

-
- The progressive marking signals **continuing action over a period** ('John was working in the garden') or **repeated action over a period** ('Smith is scoring a lot of goals this season')
 - **Perfect marker:** implies that what is said bears on the immediate situation, or the situation at the time referred to????

Confusion over the perfect marking:

- Some handbooks of English for foreign learners say that the **perfect signals completed action**. That this is not so can be seen from such sentences as
- ‘Our family have lived in this house for three hundred years, and intend to go on doing so.’
- Alternatively, it is sometimes said that the **perfect refers to a nearer past**, and the past tense to a remoter past. But this is also wrong: it’s perfectly possible to say
- ‘I’ve only been there once, about twenty years ago’, and to receive the reply ‘Oh, I went there this morning.’

- If none of the four markings is used, and there is no modal auxiliary, we are left with what is traditionally called the **present tense of the verb** ('I go', 'he goes'). This is not a good name, however, for the so-called present tense can refer to the future
-
- ('I go to New York next week'),
 - to habitual action ('I go to work every morning'), and
 - even, in colloquial style, to the past
 - ('This chap storms into the pub, bangs on the counter, and says . . .'). It is preferable to call it the unmarked form of the verb

MO Syntax

- Disuse of T-V distinction (tu, vos) (thou, ye) used in both formal and informal context.
- Use of auxiliary verbs becomes mandatory in interrogative sentences