

# Language Change

[www.morelearning.net](http://www.morelearning.net)

# The language change module will show you:

How language has changed over time.

Language doesn't stand still.

English is a rich mixture of different language influences.

Written styles, spelling and punctuation have been affected by the written word.

Language is constantly being rearranged and reinterpreted by those that use it.

There are two camps: those who believe language to be degenerating

and those who feel that language is merely changing.

# Language Change Exam

Historical knowledge is not tested directly but a awareness of some of the key factors and attitudes affecting speakers' and writers' language choices in a given period of history is important to interpreting texts perceptively.

Language Change is a synoptic module testing the skills you've developed throughout the course.

# A brief history...

English belongs to the Indo-European language group. Within that are sub divisions and English falls into the Germanic group.

Old English 400 – 1150

Middle English – 1150 – 1450

Early Modern 1450 – 1700

Late Modern 1700 -

Old English begins with the invasions of the Angles, Saxons and Jutes. It ends around 1150.

Previously in England, there were Celtic tribes, who were driven to the edges by the Romans. These Celts became Welsh, Irish Gaelic & Scots Gaelic.

Then, the Vikings began invading and lots of their vocabulary was absorbed into the language.

Old English looks strange but many words we still use today are of Anglo-Saxon origin. They tend to be short, direct and forceful.

In Old English, meaning was less dependent on word order; constructions were more flexible. Therefore, inflections were used to indicate grammatical function.

# Middle English

In 1066, the Normans invaded bringing with them the French language. The influence was not immediate. French became the language of the Royal Court, government and law. There was lots of inter-marrying between French and English speakers which promoted the influence of French.

English survived spoken by the *ordinary* people but was heavily influenced by French. Perhaps as many as 10,000 words entered the language at this time.

French was elegant and refined in comparison with English e.g. premier and first.

Phonology was affected because speech rhythms became more varied. Old English usually stressed the first syllable, whereas French stressed all syllables equally, giving a softer sound.

Grammatically, English began to lose its inflections.

There was still no agreed system of spelling.

# Early Modern

In 1476, William Caxton introduced the printing press and this began the process of standardisation. The East Midland dialect was chosen for the texts he printed.

East Midland dialect included: London, Oxford and Cambridge which embraced the political, commercial and intellectual centres of the country.

Therefore, East Midland became the most prestigious and “correct” form of English.

In 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries, Latin became a strong influence as, during the Renaissance, scholars returned to classical texts and authors.

Approximately 50% of modern words are derived from Latin, including those which came via French. They gave us many prefixes and suffixes.

Early Modern reflected a time of transition between Middle English and our modern usage.

# Late Modern 1700-

This period is more recognisable to the modern reader.

Many rules of grammar we observe today began in the 18<sup>th</sup> century.

Samuel Johnson published his dictionary in 1755 which contributed to the standardisation of word meanings and spellings.

During this period, regional differences lessened owing to education, improved literacy and improved communications. Dialect words and expressions began to be replaced by a standard English. Regional slang is still alive and there are still differences in pronunciation.

Many new words entered the lexicon owing to scientific and technological advances.

# Lexical Change

Words being added to our vocabulary and dropping out of use:

**Neologism (coinage):**

**Borrowing:**

**Affixing:**

**Compounding:**

**Blends:**

**Conversion:**

**Clipping:**

**Back formation:**

**Acronyms:**

**Eponyms:**