

## MODERN ENGLISH PERIOD

### GROWTH OF MODERN ENGLISH

In 1453, many scholars fled from Constantinople as it fell into the hands of the Turks. They fled to Western Europe with the books they could rescue. They settled mainly in Germany and Italy and started the intellectual awakening in Europe which came to be known as the **Renaissance**.

- (i) The Renaissance reached England in the year 1500 and influenced language and literature. The Renaissance had a great impact because of its scholarship and added many new words to the vocabulary. It marked the beginning of the modern age in the history of the English language.
- (ii) Latin had a direct influence on the English language. Italian words also began to make their appearance in English in connection with music and arts. The new words remained a part of the vocabulary and gradually became popular.
- (iii) The Renaissance was followed by the Reformation which was primarily a religious and political change. The Authorised Version of the Bible in 1611 provided new words and imparted a new style. As it was used constantly in the Church and in the homes, it set a standard for the English language.
- (iv) Apart from this, great literary figures like Shakespeare and Milton contributed to the growth of the language with their imagination and scholarship.
- (v) The printing press also contributed towards the development of the English language. The printed medium established a standard, uniform language. It popularized new coinages which became an accepted part of language. Printing also fixed spellings making it uniform.
- (vi) Another unifying force was the development of means of communication through commerce. The transportation of commodities also led to the transport of ideas through language. The voyages of discovery and the expansion of the British Empire led to the spread of the English language.
- (vii) Another important factor which contributed to the growth of Standard English was social consciousness. Social interaction between different classes brought about a consciousness about the language used. The language used by the educated, upper class became a standard as compared to the language of the uneducated, lower classes.

### ASPECTS OF CHANGE IN MODERN ENGLISH

During the early Modern English period, the diverse socio-cultural, political and religious factors affected the language greatly in various aspects. The changes in Modern English can be seen in four different aspects: (a) Grammatical changes (b) Changes in pronunciation (c) Changes in spelling (d) Changes in vocabulary

### CHANGES IN PRONUNCIATION

The major changes in pronunciation were lengthening of vowels and diphthongization of lengthened vowels. These changes were a continuation and completion of what had begun in Middle English.

- (i) Short **ǣ** was lengthened when followed by the consonants **s**, **f** and **th** even when these happened to be closing consonants in a syllable. This resulted in the modern long **ā** in words like *bath*, *father*, *rather*, *master*, *craft*, etc. The lengthening did not occur in all words and among all speakers.
- (ii) In words like *palm*, *calm*, *half*, *calf*, etc., where the consonant **l** immediately preceding a lip consonant was pronounced earlier had become silent when the short **ǣ** became lengthened.
- (iii) The long **ā** in words like *cake*, *ale*, *dame*, *fame*, etc. were already undergoing change as **ē**. By the end of the sixteenth century the long **ā** in a number of other words of French origin



such as *change*, *danger*, *safe*, etc. also underwent a similar change. Exceptions to this rule are *chance*, *chant*, *grant*, *aunt*, etc. where the long **ā** is retained.

The long **ā** in *clerk*, *Berkeley*, *Berkshire*, *Derby*, etc. gets a deviant spelling but its development is historically correct. The orthographical combination **er**, when followed by another consonant was pronounced **ar** in medieval times. This has remained the same.

- (iv) In Middle English long **ē** was modified into long **ī**. This change was complete by 1550 and this vowel was written as **ee** or **ea** or **ie**.

Ex: *feet*, *seek*, *deep*, *heat*, *field*, etc.

- (v) The long **ī** underwent change and became the diphthong **āi**.

Ex: *fire*, *white*, *light*, *life*, *ride*, etc.

- (vi) The long **ū** changed and became the diphthong **āu**

Ex: *house*, *mouse*, *cow*, etc.

These were some of the major changes in pronunciation during the Modern Age.

### CHANGES IN SPELLING

The Renaissance and the printed book contributed much to set and standardize spelling. English spelling got fixed to a more or less permanent position by the end of the Restoration period except for a few minor changes in the subsequent centuries. The following are some of the changes in the early part of the Modern English period:

- (i) The final unsounded **e** as in *home*, *stone*, *bone*, etc. became accepted as the sign of a long syllable.
- (ii) The symbols **u** and **v**; **i**, and **j** were interchangeable respectively for a long time. By the end of the seventeenth century it was firmly established that **u** and **i** represented vowel sounds and **v** and **j** represented consonants.
- (iii) Another noteworthy change was the reversion of Latinized spellings to certain words which had already entered the English vocabulary through French. For example, the silent letter **b** found in the words **debt** and **doubt** is a latter addition during the Modern English period. Both these words were written as **dette** and **doute** respectively in Middle English following the tradition of French. But the Renaissance scholars in their anxiety to prove the origin of these words from Latin **debitum** and **dubitum** inserted the **b** which found no place in pronunciation.

Similar is the change of spelling for the word from **choir** from Middle English **quire** in order to show that it came from Latin **chorus**.

Another peculiar case is an original Anglo-Saxon word **igland** getting a similar treatment by connecting it to the Latin word **insula**. The silent letters **s** in island is thus a pedantic intrusion by connecting the word to the Latin root **insula** and ignoring the fact that it had developed from the native word **igland**.

### CHANGES IN GRAMMAR

There were not very many changes in Modern English as felt in Middle English in grammar. The move towards simplification of grammar found further development in Modern English.

- (i) The conjugational inflections in the plural verbs finally disappeared.
- (ii) The possessive adjectives **his** was used earlier for both masculine and neuter gender alike. In Modern English it came to be confined to the masculine alone by the introduction of **it** for the neuter possessive.
- (iii) The addition of **s** to form plural nouns became an established practice which completely routed out the use of inflectional affixes and the mutated vowels.
- (iv) Adding the suffixes **-er** and **-est** to the positive degree replaced the mutated comparison of adjectives to form comparative and superlative degrees.

## CHANGES IN VOCABULARY.

Renaissance had a direct impact on the enrichment of Modern English vocabulary.

- (i) A number of synonyms came into existence to make distinctions in meanings especially with reference to adjectives. Often these synonymous words could be grouped into three.

- One from the native root
- One from the French and
- One from the Latin

Though the three words mean the same, slight differences had developed.

Ex: Native	French	Latin
kingly	royal	regal

These words are associated with the noun **king**. **Kingly** refers to the great qualities of a king. **Royal** means 'related to a king' as in royal family or royal signature. **Regal** suggests pomp, splendour and majesty of a king. Other such examples are:

Native	French	Latin
friendly	amiable	amicable
childish	infantile	puerile

- (ii) Another interesting feature of the English language is the use of adjectives of classical derivations to correspond to native nouns. For example, for the native noun **hand**, **manual** is the adjective. Though there is an adjective **handy**, it has a different meaning. Similarly, for the noun **nose**, **nasal** is the adjective which has no equivalent to **nosey**. **Feminine** is different from **womanly**. A long list of such occurrences can be compiled from the Modern English language.