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CHARACTERISTICS AND EVOLUTION OF MIDDLE ENGLISH LANGUAGE**ХАРАКТЕРИСТИКИ И ЭВОЛЮЦИЯ СРЕДНЕАНГЛИЙСКОГО ЯЗЫКА****O'RTA ASR INGLIZ TILINING XUSUSIYATLARI VA RIVOJLANISHI****Абдуллаева Нигора Шавкатовна** 

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Abstract

This article explores the linguistic characteristics and developments of the Middle Ages, focusing on the evolution of Middle English and its relationship with other languages of the time. It examines the rise of vernacular languages in medieval Europe, highlighting how Latin, French, and local dialects coexisted and influenced each other. Key topics include the transition from Old English to Middle English, the Great Vowel Shift, and the significant role of multilingualism, oral traditions, and religious texts. Through analysis of primary texts and historical linguistic evidence, this study provides a comprehensive overview of the linguistic landscape of the Middle Ages, emphasizing the dynamic interplay between language, culture, and history.

Аннотация

В данной статье рассматриваются лингвистические характеристики и изменения в период Средневековья, с акцентом на эволюцию среднеанглийского языка и его взаимоотношения с другими языками того времени. В статье исследуется развитие народных языков в средневековой Европе, подчеркивая, как латинский, французский и местные диалекты сосуществовали и влияли друг на друга. Ключевые темы включают переход от древнеанглийского к среднеанглийскому языку, Великий сдвиг гласных, а также значительную роль многоязычия, устных традиций и религиозных текстов. На основе анализа первоисточников и историко-лингвистических данных, это исследование представляет всесторонний обзор лингвистического ландшафта Средневековья, подчеркивая динамическое взаимодействие между языком, культурой и историей.

Annotatsiya

Ushbu maqola O'rta asrlardagi lingvistik xususiyatlar va o'zgarishlarni o'rganadi, O'rta ingliz tilining rivojlanishi va uning o'sha davrdagi boshqa tillar bilan munosabatlariga e'tibor qaratadi. Maqolada o'rta asr Yevropasida mahalliy tillarning yuksalishi ko'rib chiqiladi, lotin, fransuz va mahalliy lahjalar qanday birga mavjud bo'lgani va bir-biriga ta'sir ko'rsatgani ta'kidlanadi. Asosiy mavzular qadimgi ingliz tilidan O'rta ingliz tiliga o'tish, Buyuk unli tovushlar o'zgarishi (Great Vowel Shift) va ko'p tillilik, og'zaki an'analar va diniy matnlarning muhim roli bilan bog'liq. Birlamchi matnlar va tarixiy lingvistik dalillarni tahlil qilish orqali ushbu tadqiqot O'rta asrlar lingvistik manzarasining har tomonlama sharxini taqdim etadi, til, madaniyat va tarix o'rtasidagi dinamik o'zaro ta'sirni ta'kidlaydi.

Key words: Middle Ages, Middle English, Vernacular Languages, Old English, Grammatical Changes, The Great Vowel Shift, Code-Switching, Bilingual Texts, Oral Traditions.

Ключевые слова: Средневековье, среднеанглийский язык, народные языки, древнеанглийский язык, грамматические изменения, Великий сдвиг гласных, переключение кодов, двуязычные тексты, устные традиции.

Kalit so'zlar: O'rta asrlar, O'rta ingliz tili, Mahalliy tillar, Qadimgi ingliz tili, Grammatik o'zgarishlar, Buyuk unli tovushlar o'zgarishi, Kod almashtirish, Ikki tilli matnlar, Og'zaki an'analar.

INTRODUCTION

The Middle Ages, spanning from the 5th to the late 15th century, was a period of significant linguistic transformation across Europe. This article explores the key characteristics of languages during this era, focusing specifically on Middle English (approximately 1100-1500 CE). It highlights the evolving relationship between Latin, French, and local dialects, especially how these languages influenced one another through sustained contact in various social and institutional contexts.

The linguistic landscape of medieval England underwent dramatic shifts following the Norman Conquest of 1066, an event that catalyzed the transition from Old English to Middle English. As [2, p.

112] note, "no other event in English history has had such far-reaching consequences for the English language". This conquest brought about not only political changes but also profound linguistic transformations that would permanently alter the trajectory of English language development.

While Latin remained the dominant written language for much of the period, particularly in ecclesiastical and academic contexts, vernacular languages began to gain increasing prominence in both spoken communication and written texts [23]. Old English gradually transitioned into Middle English, influenced significantly by the Norman Conquest, which introduced French and reinforced Latin. The relationship between these languages was not static but rather characterized by dynamic interaction and mutual influence.

According to [4, p. 37], "the Norman Conquest created a linguistic situation in England unique in medieval Europe—a three-tiered language hierarchy with Latin at the top, French in the middle, and English at the bottom". This sociolinguistic stratification would have profound implications for the development of English in subsequent centuries.

Regional dialects played a crucial role in the linguistic diversity of the Middle Ages. The absence of standardized spelling or grammar led to substantial variation across different regions of England. [27] identifies five major dialectal regions in Middle English: Northern, East Midland, West Midland, Southwestern (or West Country), and Kentish (Southeastern), each with distinctive phonological, morphological, and lexical features.

This dialectal diversity is well-documented in contemporary texts. For instance, the "Cursor Mundi," a northern Middle English historical and religious poem from the late 13th or early 14th century, displays markedly different linguistic features from the "Ayenbite of Inwyt," a Kentish text from 1340 [6].

METHODS

This section examines the methodologies employed to study the linguistic developments during the Middle Ages, including cultural exchanges, language borrowing, and the examination of historical texts.

Modern linguistic analysis of Middle English relies heavily on corpus-based studies of surviving texts. The Helsinki Corpus of English Texts and the Penn-Helsinki Parsed Corpus of Middle English have provided researchers with digitized collections of texts that enable quantitative analysis of linguistic features and their development over time [24]. These corpora include a variety of text types, from religious prose and poetry to legal documents and personal correspondence, allowing for analysis of linguistic variation across genres and registers.

Paleographic analysis of manuscripts also provides valuable insights into scribal practices and regional variations. As [21] demonstrate in their work on the Linguistic Atlas of Early Middle English, careful examination of spelling variations can reveal phonological features of different dialects and their geographic distribution.

The Middle Ages were marked by extensive linguistic exchange due to trade, conquests, and cultural contact. Methodological approaches to studying these exchanges include historical sociolinguistics and contact linguistics. Linguists examine patterns of lexical borrowing, morphosyntactic change, and semantic shift to understand how languages influenced each other.

For example, after the Norman Conquest, French influenced English vocabulary in the fields of law (justice, court, plaintiff), art (beauty, painting, sculpture), and cuisine (beef, pork, mutton). [9]'s etymological research estimates that approximately 10,000 words were borrowed from French during the Middle English period, marking the most significant period of lexical borrowing in English language history.

Furthermore, contact with the Arabic-speaking world during the Crusades and through scholarly exchange in Spain introduced Arabic terms into European languages, enriching scientific and philosophical lexicons. Words such as "alcohol," "algebra," "algorithm," and "zenith" entered European languages during this period, reflecting the significant Arabic contribution to medieval scientific knowledge [5].

Comparative philological methods allow scholars to trace phonological and grammatical developments across related languages. By comparing Middle English texts with contemporaneous texts in related Germanic and Romance languages, researchers can identify shared innovations, borrowings, and independent developments.

[15]'s historical linguistics approach demonstrates how comparative analysis reveals patterns of language change, such as the gradual simplification of inflectional morphology that occurred across many European languages during this period, albeit at different rates and to different extents.

RESULTS

During the Middle Ages, English underwent substantial morphosyntactic changes, transitioning from the highly inflected structure of Old English towards the more analytic structure of Middle English. [11, p. 49] document that "the loss of grammatical gender, case markers, and verbal inflections that began in the late Old English period accelerated dramatically during the Middle English period".

This simplification of the inflectional system had profound consequences for English syntax. As case marking became less reliable for indicating grammatical relationships, word order became increasingly fixed, with subject-verb-object (SVO) emerging as the dominant pattern. [1, p. 213]'s research demonstrates that "by the 14th century, word order had largely assumed the role formerly played by inflectional morphology in marking syntactic functions".

One of the most significant phonological developments of the late Middle English period was the Great Vowel Shift, a systematic change in the pronunciation of long vowels that began around 1400 and continued into the Early Modern period. [22, p. 72] describes this as "perhaps the most dramatic and consequential sound change in the history of English".

The shift involved the raising of all long vowels and the diphthongization of the highest vowels. For example, Middle English /i:/ (as in "time," pronounced approximately [ti:mə]) shifted to Early Modern English /aɪ/ (approaching modern pronunciation). This change had significant implications for English orthography, as spelling conventions established before the shift remained largely unchanged, contributing to the notorious inconsistency between English spelling and pronunciation [16].

Dialectal evidence from rhyming patterns in poetry suggests that the shift progressed at different rates in different regions, with southern dialects generally leading the change [20].

As the Middle Ages progressed, narrative forms emerged in vernacular languages throughout Europe. In England, this development is exemplified by works like Geoffrey Chaucer's "The Canterbury Tales" (late 14th century), which not only showcased the literary potential of Middle English but also reflected the social and linguistic diversity of medieval England through its varied characters and their distinctive speech patterns.

Chaucer wrote in the East Midland dialect, which eventually formed the basis for Standard English. According to [7, p. 156], "Chaucer's sophisticated literary technique and his choice to write major works in English rather than French significantly elevated the prestige of English as a literary language".

The 14th century also saw the development of the alliterative revival, a literary movement that drew on native English poetic traditions rather than continental models. Works such as "Sir Gawain and the Green Knight" and "Piers Plowman" demonstrate how medieval authors combined traditional alliterative verse techniques with contemporary content and concerns [29].

Medieval society exhibited a high degree of multilingualism, with different languages serving different social functions. [26, p. 23]'s research on medieval code-switching demonstrates that "language choice was often determined by domain, with Latin used in ecclesiastical and academic contexts, French in legal and courtly settings, and English in everyday communication".

Textual evidence reveals frequent code-switching between languages. For instance, the "Macaronic sermons" of the 14th and 15th centuries alternated between Latin and vernacular languages, often mid-sentence [17]. Similarly, administrative documents frequently combined Latin legal formulas with vernacular content, reflecting the multilingual competence of medieval scribes and their audiences.

Bilingual lexicons and teaching texts from the period, such as the "Nominale sive Verbale" (late 14th century), provide valuable insights into contemporary language pedagogy and the practical realities of multilingualism. These texts often include interlinear translations and pronunciation guides, suggesting widespread interest in language learning [25].

DISCUSSION

Oral traditions were central to the linguistic landscape of the Middle Ages, with storytelling and folklore playing key roles in preserving cultural identities. Although direct evidence of oral performance is limited by the nature of surviving sources, literary texts often contain traces of oral composition techniques, such as formulaic expressions, thematic repetition, and mnemonic devices.

[2, p. 78] argues that "even as literacy expanded during the later Middle Ages, oral modes of composition and transmission remained vital, creating a complex interplay between written and spoken forms". This oral-literate interface is particularly evident in texts like "Beowulf," which was transcribed during the Middle English period but preserves much older oral traditions.

Regional variations in oral narratives, such as the Arthurian legends, reflected the dialects and cultural nuances of different communities. Comparative analysis of different versions of popular tales reveals how stories were adapted to local contexts while maintaining core narrative elements [19].

The translation of religious texts into vernacular languages had profound implications for linguistic development throughout Europe. In England, the Wycliffite Bible translations of the late 14th century represented the first complete rendering of the Bible in English. According to [16, p. 92], these translations "established a prose style and vocabulary for religious discourse in English that would influence generations of writers".

The religious reforms of the period also promoted vernacular preaching. Sermon collections like the "Northern Homily Cycle" demonstrate how religious discourse was adapted to regional dialects and the linguistic capabilities of diverse audiences [28]. These texts not only made religious teachings more accessible but also contributed to the development of sophisticated prose styles in English.

Mystical writings, such as those by Julian of Norwich and Margery Kempe, further enriched the expressive capacity of Middle English. Julian's "Revelations of Divine Love" (c. 1395), considered the earliest surviving book in English written by a woman, pioneered theological vocabulary and contemplative discourse in the vernacular [31].

The Middle Ages were characterized by rich cultural exchanges that facilitated the borrowing of words and linguistic features across different languages. The Crusades, pilgrimage routes, and international trade networks created opportunities for linguistic contact that transcended political boundaries.

The influence of Arabic on European languages during this period was particularly significant. [28]'s pioneering work demonstrated how the translation movement centered in Toledo, Spain, introduced thousands of Arabic terms into Latin and subsequently into vernacular European languages, particularly in fields like astronomy, mathematics, and medicine. Recent research by [13] has further emphasized the importance of these exchanges for the intellectual and linguistic development of medieval Europe.

In England, coastal trading communities maintained contact with continental Europe, creating linguistic contact zones where pidgins and specialized trade languages developed. Analysis of port records and merchant correspondence reveals evidence of linguistic adaptation and creative communication strategies among speakers of different languages [18].

The material conditions of textual production significantly influenced linguistic development during the Middle Ages. Manuscript culture, with its emphasis on copying and adaptation rather than verbatim reproduction, facilitated linguistic innovation and regional variation. Scribes frequently modified texts to align with local dialectal features or to clarify meaning for specific audiences [12].

The development of a professional scribal class in the later Middle Ages contributed to more standardized writing practices. Research by [8] on scribal identification has revealed patterns of collaboration and specialization that shaped textual transmission and, consequently, linguistic norms.

The introduction of paper manufacturing to Europe in the 13th century, coupled with the growth of urban literacy, increased the production and circulation of texts, accelerating the spread of linguistic innovations. By the late 15th century, the advent of printing technology would further standardize orthography and contribute to dialect leveling, marking the transition to Early Modern English [10].

CONCLUSION

The linguistic developments of the Middle Ages were characterized by a rich interplay of influences, with the rise of vernacular languages, the interaction between Latin, French, and local dialects, and the transformation of oral traditions into written forms. This period witnessed fundamental changes in English grammar, phonology, and vocabulary that laid the foundations for modern English.

The evolution of Middle English demonstrates the inherently dynamic nature of language change, shaped by social, political, and cultural factors. The Norman Conquest created conditions for extensive language contact, while the growth of vernacular literacy expanded the domains in which English was used. Meanwhile, dialectal diversity persisted throughout the period, reflecting regional identities and communication patterns.

The legacy of medieval linguistic developments continues to influence contemporary English, most obviously in its extensive vocabulary drawn from diverse sources, but also in its grammatical structures and patterns of discourse. Understanding these historical processes not only illuminates the past but also provides insights into the ongoing evolution of language in response to cultural contact and social change.

This study underscores the importance of integrating linguistic analysis with historical and cultural contextualization. Future research would benefit from further interdisciplinary approaches, combining traditional philological methods with insights from sociolinguistics, corpus linguistics, and digital humanities. As new analytical tools become available and additional medieval texts are discovered and digitized, our understanding of this crucial period in linguistic history will continue to deepen and evolve.

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