

# The development of the English standard

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Master's thesis / Diplomski rad

2012

Degree Grantor / Ustanova koja je dodijelila akademski / stručni stupanj: **Josip Juraj Strossmayer University of Osijek, Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences / Sveučilište Josipa Jurja Strossmayera u Osijeku, Filozofski fakultet**

Permanent link / Trajna poveznica: <https://um.nsk.hr/um:nbn:hr:142:315905>

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Download date / Datum preuzimanja: **2024-09-21**



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Sveučilište J.J. Strossmayera u Osijeku

Filozofski fakultet

Diplomski studij Engleskog i hrvatskog jezika i književnosti

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The development of the English Standard / Razvoj engleskog standarda

Diplomski rad

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Osijek, 2012.

## Summary:

The object of this paper is to present a depiction of various political, educational and linguistic processes which led to the development of Standard English. From its inception with King Ælfred in the late ninth century, through the demise of the standard after the Norman Conquest followed by its subsequent rise from the ashes in the fifteenth century, the paper will present all the major changes that affected both the English Standard itself and the *attitude* of the English people toward it. Putting a symbolic end with the publication of the *Lyrical Ballads* in 1798, a work attacking the idea of the use of prescriptive language for poetry, this discussion will be complete since the changes in the language after the eighteenth century no longer apply to the standard but to various stylistic and dialectal differences.

Apart from various external developments surrounding the creation of the standardized variety of English, we will also show the internal (orthographic, morphological, syntactic, lexical etc) changes that shaped the face of Standard English through history. Starting with a short description of what is traditionally meant by the term Standard language (and more precisely Standard English), and followed by the explanation of which of the many standardized varieties of English is chosen as the topic, the paper will move on the main part, consisting of a two way description of historical and linguistic changes characteristic for each period. The division of the history of the English Standard is taken from N. F. Blake's *A History of the English Language*.

Keywords: written standard, Schriftsprache, Ælfred's English, orthography, phonology, word-order, syntax, word-formation, borrowing...

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## 1. Introduction

### 1.1. What is Standard English?

The very term Standard English is elusive. Since it originally developed as a common system of writing, as will be shown later in the paper, it is generally considered a dialect of *educated speech* and thus in laic terms also considered a synonym of “good” or “proper” English. In fact, for a long time of its history it was generally accepted as the *only* good variety of the language. Of course, in today’s linguistic circles all dialects are not only accepted but encouraged. Considering that Standard English is free of any connection with a particular group of English users, it is the variety used in public communication:

Not only is it different from the dialects linguistically... it differs from them socially and politically also. Unlike the dialects, it is not tied to any particular region or country; but it is a universal form of English, the kind used everywhere by educated people. (Dillard, 1976: 268)

One matter of debate in today's linguistic circles is which English to consider standard. The validity of the term depends on many factors, most prevalent of them being the locality it is related with. A form that is considered standard in one region may be considered non-standard in another. From its humble beginnings in England somewhere around the fifth century (the “time of birth” of its predecessor, the *englisc* or *saxonic* language), English has spread to every continent (except, presumably, Antarctica) and many different national varieties of it have developed. Hence, we now have American, Australian, New Zealand, Canadian and many other “Englishes”, each with its own characteristics of vocabulary, grammar and pronunciation. The main two candidates for a universal Standard English are the two major standard varieties - American and British English. The question of whether there can be only one type of language all speakers of English can strive for is an ongoing one, but this paper will not go into detailed analyses of it. Rather, we will accept the resolution to the question of standards given by S. Robertson: “...while there is no single standard for Britain and America, actual variances ... are not enough to cause any real difficulty to Englishmen and Americans reading each other’s books. In other words, the two national standards differ so little that they coexist easily.” (Robertson, 1954: 400) Thus, the question of the *right* standard will not be dealt with here.

Furthermore, it is important to point out that even though some authors go so far as to claim that the English Standard, despite being called *English*, no longer has any necessary connection with England since it has become more of a universal language unassociated with

a single nation, the focus of this paper will be the description of the development of the language used *in England* through standardization. This standardization was complete somewhere at the end of the eighteenth century when the English of England reached the state similar to that of today in most of its important aspects.

One final important note regarding what we know as the Standard has to be mentioned, i.e. the area of language that has to be excluded from the framework of the standard – pronunciation. Since spoken language is non-uniform even today, consisting of so many different varieties that no two people can be said to talk in the same way, a standard language can only be achieved in writing. N.F. Blake confirms this attitude in his *History of the English Language*: “The standard language remains standard only in writing; and even in writing it has been easier to impose a standard on spelling than on syntax or lexis... Sounds, on the other hand, remain outside the standard language.” (Blake, 1996: 8) Spoken English of the older periods was much more dynamic and diverse than can be concluded. Writing down all the different pronunciations, dialects and such is virtually impossible even today, regardless of the advancement of technology, and was even more difficult in the old days:

The scholars and priests who adapted the Roman alphabet to their own modes of speech did not regard it as part of their duty to set down the everyday spoken form of the language... We can only assume, from later developments, that the spoken language was much more fluid and variegated than the surviving written records show. (Burchfield, 1985: 4)

Thus, this paper will focus on the development of the *written* form of Standard English, ignoring the attempts of achieving standard *pronunciation*.

## **1.2. Periodization of the history of Standard English**

The history of the English language is traditionally divided into three periods: Old English (abbreviated to OE; 500-1100 AD), Middle English (ME; 1100-1485) and Modern English (ModE; 1485-present day). Such a division, according to N. F. Blake, is ultimately flawed and the reasons for it are mainly political, not linguistic. Old English, for instance, is separated from ME in that the Norman Conquest brought new settlers who spoke French and in that way changed the nature of English. However, a similar invasion from the Vikings at the end of the eighth century, although linguistically equally important, did not receive a similar status among historians. Thus, Blake’s alternative division is the one which will be used here. It focuses more on the developments within the language and changing attitudes toward it than on historical events.

The history of the Standard English is divided into four important periods. The first period begins with the standardization done by King Ælfred in the late ninth century and ends with the fall of that standardization due to the Norman Conquest in the mid-thirteenth. The second period, ranging from that invasion to the reemergence of a standard around 1400, although marked by a lack of standardized varieties of English, still includes changes in the language which are important for the later standardization. The most important time periods for the topic of standardization are the two from 1440 to 1660 and from 1660 to roughly 1789, in which all the major rules as well as the basic structure of English were laid down and regularized. After the eighteenth century the changes in the English language regarded mostly lexis and style of usage, while standardization was basically complete.

## 2. Pre-Ælfred times

English belongs to the Germanic branch of the larger Indo-European language family. The beginning of Old English is usually associated with the invasion of the three Germanic races –the Angles (arriving from the area which is now modern Denmark), Saxons (who came from what is now West Germany) and Jutes (from Jutland and the North Sea). It was the Angles' name that extended to most of the land, which was called *Englaland* (the land of the Angles). The three races in time became completely separated from their continental Germanic peoples and mixed with the British people, who belonged to a different cultural as well as linguistic group. This contact resulted in a common language which the people called *englisc* or *saxonic*, depending on the Germanic family in question. It is this language that is in literature called Anglo-Saxon or Old English.

The exact “date of birth” of this Old English is still a matter of some debate. There are numerous authors who equal it with the aforementioned invasion, some who say that “English officially starts when the Germanic tribes and their languages reach the British Isles, in 449. “ (Gelderen, 2006: 2) and finally authors like Blake who, in an attempt to be more precise , claim that the birth of the *real* English should be connected with the introduction of writing into England which came with the conversion of the Anglo-Saxons to Christianity around the end of the sixth century AD. Before it, the English we know was not yet created and consequently the inhabitants of the British isles cannot be said to have spoken it: ” He or she spoke a variety of West Germanic and that may have contributed to the amalgam which would ultimately develop into the English language, but it would not be appropriate to suggest that a language which we could call English existed at that time.” (Blake, 1996: 3)

On the other hand, since English used around the sixth century AD was very diverse, the beginning of the English Standard is set at the late ninth century and the establishment of the first standard language in England.



### **3. The process of standardization**

#### **3.1. First attempts at standardization (from late ninth century to 1250)**

##### **The historical background:**

It is most often the political or educational force that establishes and maintains the standard. Such force was not present on the British Isles until the late ninth century, which saw the unification of Anglo-Saxon England under a single ruler. This, among other things, required the creation of a standard language valid for all citizens. The ruler, King Ælfred, was not only a great military leader, but also a scholar as interested in an educational reform as he was in fighting off the invading Danes of his time.

It is perhaps important to mention that sporadic outbursts of standardized writing are known to have happened even before Ælfred's time. For instance, a manuscript dating from the early ninth century called *Life of St. Chad* shows relative standardization followed by the scribes of Mercia, which indicates that the concept of standardization pre-dates the late ninth century. However, this standardization lacked the political will needed to make it accepted anywhere beyond the borders of the immediate area of its usage. On the other hand, there is a strong possibility that Ælfred imitated what had happened there when he started his standardization.

Ælfred's mission was to restore the tradition of letters which had decayed during many years of war. He made his court the center of learning and culture in England and helped establish the West Saxon way of writing Old English as standard. This standard, according to Francis (1965:211), "prevailed for two hundred years or more and almost totally superseded the local writing systems of other parts of England... Furthermore, the advantages of a standard system caused it to be preserved even after the phonological system had undergone considerable change." Indeed, between the ninth and the eleventh century West Saxon was an English *koine*, used for public communication among all parts of England. This standard, of course, applied only to the written language while the spoken, as always, consisted of various dialects: "... the establishment of West Saxon in the later Old English period had the effect of giving the written language an increasingly uniform and constant character, so that official and literary documents less and less represented the state of the current spoken language". (Bolton, 1972: 16)

Most prose written in West Saxon (and, in fact, in Old English in general) comes from his time, one example of which are the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicles*, an important document designed to set the political and historical record straight. During Ælfred's reign important texts were translated from Latin into English, among others Bede's *Historia ecclesiastica* and Pope Gregory's *Cura pastoralis*, which Ælfred himself translated. A copy was sent to every bishop, along with a message in the preface of the translation that he wants to remedy the clergy's ignorance of Latin. Ælfred wrote of the former days when men came from abroad to seek knowledge, and noted that in his time there were very few priests who could translate from Latin into English. Those and many other translations were all done under Ælfred's supervision and thus it can be said to have followed the first Standard English, even if it was not at first highly standardized:

Up to 891 the annals retain a broad similarity and all seem to have been copied from a version made under Ælfred's sponsorship and perhaps at his command. These copies were distributed to various monastic foundations where they were continued. From this point they diverge in what they relate since the various copies reflect local conditions. (Blake, 1996: 86-87)

Without Ælfred's direct supervision, the copies displayed an increasing variety in writing.

In fact, it can be said that Ælfred merely made the first step to the creation of the standard while another important factor - the enduring rise of the ecclesiastical power in the tenth century, did the rest. Although the impact of the church in Ælfred's time was relatively insignificant, he still needed to employ men like the Mercian Bishop Asser to participate in his cultural and educational reform. This rise was of a great linguistic importance, and especially took swing during the reigns of Edgar (959-975) and Ethelred the Unready (978-1016). In 910 at Cluny a Benedictine house was established which revived the tarnished image of monasticism, and whose monks had close links with England. Three of them were of the most importance –Dunstan (bishop of Canterbury), Ethelwold (bishop of Winchester) and Oswald (bishop of Worcester). The three worked together to reform the church of England and in doing so affected the language. Among those three, Ethelwold is the key figure when it comes to the topic of standardization:

At the monastery in Winchester he created a school devoted to the spread of learning and religion, and associated it with that school we have ... a series of manuscripts which can lay claim, by their regularity and consistency, to be the first evidence in English of a written standard language or Schriftsprache. (Hogg; *Cambridge HoE Vol.1*, 1992: 13)

With the encouragement and help of the king, Ethelwold set upon a vigorous program of teaching and instruction and a regularization of the language and thus virtually put an end to the haphazard writing from Ælfred's time.

This standard, in literature called *Schriftsprache* (German for Standard language) was especially popularized by Ælfric, Ethelwold's pupil and a prolific writer, author of one of the earliest grammars used for translating Latin texts into English. It was precisely the type of language that Ælfric promoted that in the eleventh century became used throughout the country, in places like Canterbury, Worcester and York. This standard, however, was not exactly what could be called literary by today's standards:

Of course, these... were important ecclesiastical centres, and it might be better to think of this *schriftsprache* as an ecclesiastical rather than literary standard. The principal prose texts were ecclesiastical rather than literary, and, as was inevitable at the time, almost all the centers of writing were in religious scriptoria. (Hogg; *Cambridge HoE Vol.1*, 1992: 14)

In literature regarding the history of English, King Ælfred's dialect is termed Early West Saxon, while the dialect of the great prose writer Ælfric (995-1025) is known as Late West Saxon. This Late West Saxon, according to Blake, is the Standard English of the time.

### **The linguistic background:**

Since it was the familiar Latin orthography that was used in writing, the OE alphabet was in many ways similar to today's. Only a few letters were used that are no longer present, the letters *þ/Þ* (thorn), *ð/Ð* (eth) and *Æ* and *æ* (ash). *þ/Þ* and *ð/Ð*, in Modern English represented as the sounds "th", were in the OE period used interchangeably to represent both voiced "th" ( as in *with*) and unvoiced "th" ( as in *thud*). The letters *Æ* and *æ* were pronounced in the same way as the *a* in, for instance, *bat*. Similarly, some letters used today were not part of the OE orthography. The letters *j, v* were not used as well as the letter *w*. The letters *q, x, z* were extremely rare. Another feature of OE standard worth mentioning is that consonants, as well as vowels, had their long and short forms, the long ones indicated usually by doubling (*hoppian* – 'to hop', *bledde* – 'bled').

The next important thing to consider regarding this dialect is the standardized vocabulary developed at the school at Winchester. Most noticeably, it did not usually stand for foreign loans. Even Latin, the language of education in that time, provided fewer loans than one could expect from its higher status. Apart from a handful of words which were used among the people (eg. *mæsse* – 'mass', *non* – 'midday', *offrian* – 'to offer' etc), most Latin

words were restricted to glossaries and never got into the written or spoken language. The most effective “brake” in adopting loan words was the sufficient number of suffixes and prefixes available for lexical enlargement. The prefix *-for*, for instance, carried the sense of loss and thus the word *forweorþan* meant ‘to perish’, whereas the root *weorþan* meant ‘to become’. OE words in general exhibited lexical transparency, meaning that a word would depict what was meant by it (eg. *countryside*) which will in later developments be lost.

Another frequent vehicle for verbal creativity undoubtedly was compounding. “As any page of an Anglo-Saxon dictionary will show, compound words were abundant in Old English; and in every succeeding age of the language a multitude of new compounds have come into existence.”(Bradley, 1975: 78) These compounds were fixed in that they followed a relatively stable principle- that the modifying element should always come before the main element or head, i.e. the last element expresses general meaning, whilst the prefixed element is less general (for instance, the second element of *apple-tree* reveals only that it is a tree, while the first element says which particular kind it is). These principles are mostly inherited from Proto-Indo-European.

In syntactic matters, Old English abandoned its Germanic roots when it comes to word order and replaced its SOV order for a mixed one, but with the tendency to put the verb in the second position. However, since it was a synthetic language, word order was not as important as inflections in indicating grammatical relationships. Endings for nouns, pronouns and adjectives were divided into four cases: the nominative (naming), genitive (possessive), accusative (used to indicate receivers of an action) and dative/instrumental (used to indicate indirect receivers of an action)

In personal pronouns, OE had a dual form in addition to the singular and plural ones, used to indicate two closely related persons. This dual form was used both for first and second person, as listed on the tables below.

Table 1: First Person Personal Pronouns Paradigm

Case	Singular	Dual	Plural
Nominative	ic = I	wit = we two	we = we
Genitive	min = mine	uncer = of us two (of ours)	user or ure = of us (our)
Accusative	me or mec = me (direct object)	uncor uncit = us two (direct object)	us or usic = us (direct object)
Dative/Instrumental	me = with me (or indirect object)	unc = with us two (or indirect object)	us = with us (or indirect object)

Table 2: Second Person Personal Pronouns Paradigm

Case	Singular	Dual	Plural
Nominative	ɸu = you (singular)	git = you two	ge = you (plural = "y'all" or "younz")
Genitive	ɸin = your (singular)	incer = of your two (yours)	eower = your (plural = "y'all's" or "younz's")
Accusative	ɸe or ɸec = you (direct object)	inc or incit = you two (direct object)	eow or eowic = you (direct object)
Dative/Instrumental	ɸe = with you (or indirect object)	inc = with you two (or indirect object)	eow = with you (or indirect object)

The third person of personal pronouns did not contain the dual, but consisted of masculine, feminine and neuter forms (Table 3).

Table 3: Third Person Personal Pronouns Paradigm

Case	Masculine	Neuter	Feminine	All Genders Plural
Nominative	he = he	hit=it	heo/hie = she	hi/hie = they
Genitive	his = his	his = its	hire = hers	hira = theirs
Accusative	hine = him (direct object)	hit = it (direct object)	heo/hie = her (direct object)	hi/hie = them (direct object)
Dative / Instrumental	him = with him (indirect object)	him = with it (indirect object)	hire = with her (indirect object)	him/heom= with them (indirect object)

OE adjectives were divided into strong and weak ones, depending on their usage in a sentence. The distinction was made clear by the use of demonstratives assisting them, so that in the sentence „Kings are *kind* to their subjects“ the adjective is strong, whereas in the sentence „That wise king ruled Wessex“ it is weak. This distinction is important because different declensions were used depending on whether an adjective was strong or weak, as seen in the tables below. Inflections for comparison also existed, the regular forms of which were *-ra*, *-est/-ost* (*earm/ earmra /earmost* – poor/poorer/poorest), but there are lots of irregular forms as well. Periphrastic comparison was also known but virtually non-existent.

Table 1: Singular Strong Declension Adjectives

Case	Masculine	Neuter	Feminine
Nominative	gōd (-) = good	gōd (-)	gōd (u/-)
Genitive	gōdes	gōdes	gōdre
Accusative	gōdne	gōd (-)	gōde
Dative	gōdum	gōdum	gōdre
Instrumental	gōde	gōde	gōdre

Table 2: Plural Strong Declension Adjectives

Case	Masculine	Neuter	Feminine
Nominative	Gōde = good	gōd (-)	gōda, gōde
Genitive	gōdra	gōdra	gōdra
Accusative	gōde	gōd (u,-)	gōda, gōde
Dative/Instrumental	gōdum	gōdum	gōdum

Table 3: Singular Weak Declension Adjectives

Case	Masculine	Neuter	Feminine
Nominative	gōda = good	gōde	gōde
Genitive	gōdan	gōdan	gōdan
Accusative	gōdan	gōde	gōdan
Dative/Instrumental	gōdan	gōdan	gōdan

Similarly, OE nouns were also divided into the strong and the weak: “The most basic distinction of declensional types was between weak nouns, which had a base-form ending in a vowel, and added an *-n* in their inflected forms, and strong nouns, whose inflection was mainly vocalic.” (Strang, 1970: 295) So, the distinction was made depending on the final letter of the stem, i.e. the nouns whose stems ended with a consonant were strong and those whose stems ended in a vowel were weak. As in the case of adjectives, different endings were attached to the stem depending on its ending and therefore different grammatical functions were indicated. The strong declension was further subdivided into the first, second and third declensions. These declensions are in most dictionaries also named according to gender (i.e. masculine, neuter and feminine), as OE nouns did generally have grammatical genders. However, they did not necessarily reflect the *natural* gender of the concept which they denoted: “The nouns of OE have grammatical gender... and usually these genders are arbitrary. Thus, if we look up in the glossary the nouns given... we shall find that *mūþ* is masculine, *nosu* is feminine and *eare* is neuter; in the same way we shall find *hrōf* (m.), *flōr*(f.) and *hūs* (n.)”<sup>1</sup> (Blakeley, 1975: 13). Still, in most cases grammatical genders did in fact reflect reality (fæder (m.), mōdor (f.), etc).

The First Strong Declension (Table 1): was used to label the nouns which end in consonants. Some dictionaries use the term *masculine*.

Table 1: The First Strong Declension (masculine)

Case	Singular	Plural
Nominative	cyning (king, subject)	cyningas (kings, subject)
Genitive	cyninges ( of the king)	cyninga (of the kings)
Accusative	cyning (direct object)	cyningas (direct object)
Dative / Instrumental	cyninge (indirect object)	cyningum (indirect object)

<sup>1</sup> OE *mūþ* = ModE 'mouth'; OE *nosu*= ModE 'nose' ; OE *eare* = ModE 'ear' ; OE *hrōf* = ModE 'roof ' ; OE *flōr* = ModE 'floor' ; OE *hūs* = ModE 'house'

The Second Strong Declension (Table 2) was used to label the nouns which end in consonants but whose plurals use *u* instead of *as*. The declension for singulars is thus the same as for the First declension. This declension is labeled as *neuter* in dictionaries.

Table 2: The Second Strong Declension (neuter)

Case	Singular	Plural
Nominative	scip (ship, subject)	scipu (ships , subject)
Genitive	scipes ( of the ship)	scipa (of the ships)
Accusative	scip (direct object)	scipu (direct object)
Dative / Instrumental	scipe (indirect object)	scipum (indirect object)

Finally, the Third Strong Declension (Table 3) is marked as *feminine* in dictionaries. In OE it was used for specific words like those for *help*, *need* and *gift*.

Table 3: The Third Strong Declension (feminine)

Case	Singular	Plural
Nominative	giefu (gift, subject)	giefa/e (gifts , subject)
Genitive	giefe ( of the gift)	giefa/ena (of the gifts)
Accusative	giefe (direct object)	giefa/e (direct object)
Dative / Instrumental	giefe (with the gift, ind.obj)	giefum (indirect object)

The declension of the weak nouns, i.e. nouns whose stems end in a vowel is often referred to as the fourth declension. In this declension the gender is irrelevant.

Table 4: The Fourth Declension (weak nouns)

Case	Singular	Plural
Nominative	draca (dragon, subject)	dracan (dragons, subject)
Genitive	dracan( of the dragon)	dracena (of the gifts)
Accusative	dracan (direct object)	dracan (direct object)
Dative / Instrumental	dracan (with the dragon, indirect object)	dracum(indirect object)



Old English used no articles as we know them today, but the adjectives *se* ('that'), *þæt* ('that') and *seo* ('that', 'those') and the numeral *an* (an article that evolved from a numeral and generally occurred in a numeral meaning) did develop some aspects of the definite and indefinite article. "The articles...differentiated from ordinary adjectives mainly by their relatively fixed position and generalized meaning. They by no means function as markers of the onset of a NP, nor, indeed, will they fully come to do so during the medieval phase of English." (Strang, 1970: 300)

As for OE verbs, they can be divided into the weak, strong, preterite-present verbs and irregular verbs. Weak verbs were the ones which had to add an ending to a stem (*d*, *t* or *ð*) to indicate person, number, tense and mood, the way most ModE verbs do today. Examples of the strong and weak forms are listed in tables below (Table 1, 2).

Table 1: First Conjugation Weak Verbs, Indicative Mood

Singular	
1 <sup>st</sup> person	Deme = remove
2 <sup>nd</sup> person	demest
3 <sup>rd</sup> person	demeð
Plural	
1 <sup>st</sup> /2 <sup>nd</sup> /3 <sup>rd</sup> persons	demaþ

Strong verbs were verbs in which the vowel in the stem is changed to indicate tenses. This distinction remains to this day.

Table 2: Strong Verbs Examples

Infinitive	3 <sup>rd</sup> Person Sg. Past	All Plurals Past	Past Participle
Bitan = to bite	bat	biton	biten
Springan = to spring	sprang	sprungon	sprungen

Three moods were used: indicative, subjunctive and imperative. Future was expressed through the use of adverbs and a form of pre-modals, i.e. the verbs that will become modal in ModE (*Hi willað cuman* – He will come). Finally, the progressive sense was indicated through the use of verbs like *weorþan* ('to become'), *wesan* ('to be') and *habban* ('to have') together with the present participle.

Adverbs were in this period most commonly formed from adjectives by adding an ending, usually *-a* or *-e*, e.g. *bealde* ('boldly'), *beorhte* ('brightly') etc. If an adjective ended in *-e* it was often indistinguishable from the adverb. One other suffix, *-lic* (*cynelic* – 'kingly', 'royal'), when it had its dative ending in *-e* (*cynelice*), was also important for later development.

It is important to point out that the standardization of the English language under King Ælfred and the *Schriftsprache* was an important linguistic phenomenon for the Old English period, but that it had little influence on what we recognize today as Standard English. The Norman Conquest, starting with the Battle of Hastings of 1066, broke this standard down and ushered a period of linguistic variety and disorder lasting for three centuries. "Such an evolution was later disrupted by the Norman Conquest, but with the development of printing together with other more centralizing tendencies, the emergence of a standard form became once more, from the fifteenth century on, a major characteristic of the language." (Hogg; *Cambridge HoE Vol.1*, 1992: xiii) During this time, writers again adapted their spelling to the changed language and various local dialects as standardization was again not pursued.

### **3.2. The fall of the OE Standard**

This term covers the period from the start of the demise of the Late West Saxon standard (coupled with the simultaneous loss of the sense of English political unity) under Norman rule in 1066 up to the beginning of the fifteenth century when English was again reinstated to serve in various activities such as teaching or trade: "We move in this period from a phase of westernly-based standardization to one without standardization. Except for regional movements flourishing and dying out, we reach a time when all local dialects are on a par." (Strang, 1970: 284)

#### **3.2.1. Aftermath of first standard**

At the brink of the Norman Conquest, written and spoken English were used throughout what is now present-day England. After the invasion the new ruling élite spoke Norman French while Latin gradually replaced English as the medium of legal record.

Interestingly, even with the pressure of Latin and French the OE standard will not be completely abandoned until about the middle of the thirteenth century:

Since many texts written before the Conquest were copied, the OE standard was still kept alive. The bulk of the population immediately after 1066 – approximately four million people, according to some estimates, most densely clustered in the southern half of England – continued to speak English, and written OE, notably the great prose homilies of AElfric and Wulfstan, continued

to be copied for at least a century after the Conquest. (Horobin and Smith, 2002: 26, 27)

The care for the OE standard is especially evident in the fact that, when it became too difficult for contemporaries to understand Old English, scribes would even add glosses to explain the difficult words. Even though those translations were not necessarily accurate, they nevertheless showed a competent understanding of the earlier language. Some of the continued texts include the previously mentioned *Life of St. Chad*, as well as the *Peterborough Chronicle*, a copy of the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* kept at Peterborough until 1154. N.F. Blake points out that “the first thing to recognize is that this historical document was continued in English until almost a century after the Conquest in a monastery which was important enough to have many French abbots and in a bishopric which had French bishops.” (Blake, 1996: 114)

The Norman Conquest also included a replacement of English bishops for Norman ones which left dire consequences for the English language. Monasteries were no longer upholders of the *Schriftsprache* because Normans brought their own orthography based on Latin, which pushed out the norms of Standard language created by Ælfred, Ethelwold, Ælfric and others. As the new monks copied their texts, research shows that they gradually transferred some of their spelling habits into English and so inevitably changed its look:

What in fact was happening was that the West Saxon standard was collapsing in the face of these new pressures. Gradually, as less writing in English was done under the impact of the use of Latin and of French, the old spelling system was abandoned. No central unified system was put in its place... (Blake; *Cambridge HoE Vol.2*, 1992: 10)

Thus the very Old English alphabet which had up to that point been stable and fixed since the early ninth century was now beginning to change under the aforementioned French influence. This copying without the control of a standard inevitably resulted in haphazard writing, since each scribe made individual copies for a locally restricted audience. This meant that each scriptorium had its own spelling rules different both from other scriptoria and even between different scribes of the same scriptorium at different times.

This variety also arose due to the predominance of Latin and French as languages for “global” communication: “As a result, when it was written, English after the Conquest began to exhibit marked dialectal diversity in the written mode as Latin and French took on the documentary and more broadly literary functions hitherto met by ‘standard OE’.” (Horobin and Smith, 2002: 32) Roughly speaking, three main dialects were distinguishable: Northern, Midland (consisting of East and West Midland) and Southern. The dialect important for the

topic of standardization is the East Midland one, spoken in the area between the rivers Humber and Thames. It is this dialect that contributed most to the formation of standard, becoming more or less its basis, as confirmed by Francis (1963: 211) “In the late fourteenth century a new standard, based on the speech and writing practice of London, developed. There continued to be other local systems, but they gradually gave way to the London standard.”

The year 1121/1122 can be taken as the dividing year between following the West Saxon dialect of the OE period and taking up the new, East Midland conceptions. The language of the annals written up until then is basically OE. The influence of the standard is easily found in cases of hypercorrection by the scribes for whom it did not represent their spoken language. For instance, the usage of *y* in all the words with the vowel sound /e/ even in cases where the OE writers would have used *e* (*wyrre* instead of *werre* in the Anglo-Saxon word for ‘war’) because the scribes recognized that *y* was the characteristic letter for that sound in the standard written language. The annals from 1122 represent the dialect of the East Midlands, although they are still strongly influenced by the OE Standard. Using the above example, the old West Saxon letter *y* is now represented by *e* in most texts. Also, the plural of the present indicative ends in *-en* and not in *-að* as in OE.

The last known attempt of creating a writing system based on the OE one can be traced back to a centre of literary culture on Wigmore which included a school where scribes were trained to reproduce a spelling system devised by the master of the scriptorium. This school and its spelling system were established at the late twelfth century and were operational for about fifty years. This system still included three symbols for short vowels (*e*, *ea* and *a*) which had by that time been abandoned in other parts of England. It also retained the symbols *c*, *sc* and *ȝ* which were by that time replaced with their French equivalents *ch*, *sch*, *g*. This spelling system was influenced by memories of the Old English standard, but its influence was limited to only a small geographical area.

Finally, at the middle of the thirteenth century the OE standard was completely abandoned as there were no further attempts to create a standard writing system based on the one found earlier, i.e. the Old English one.

### 3.2.2. Interregnum (from 1250 to 1400)

What followed was a period of confusion, with one standard abandoned and the other not yet in creation, which N. F. Blake dubbed “interregnum” (a word indicating an interval between two reigns). It was marked by the use of various written forms in different dialects. Since the topic is standardization differences between dialects will not be mentioned here, only the general changes regarding all dialects.

The word order, which was still mixed at the beginning of the post-Conquest period, was now almost completely established as the ModE SVO order, with occasional strays from the path.

Changes influenced word formation as well. Most prefixes fall out of the language, and those that were productive like *-un* have their range of meanings limited. Suffixes follow the same fate, albeit with fewer losses. Suffixes like *-ful* and *-ish* remain productive, and even new ones emerge, like *-ling* in *darling*.

Personal pronouns witnessed a demise of the OE dual, while in the other personal pronouns the original four forms were reduced to three thanks to the merger of the OE dative and accusative forms. The first person, for instance, was thus left with the forms *I*, *me* and *min(e)*. This period also saw the development of relative pronouns of which *that* was the most frequent one, used mostly for restrictive clauses. Wh-relatives *who* and *whose* were used for interrogative pronouns, while *which* was slower to develop.

In nouns the grammatical gender, already inconsistent in the OE period, had by now disappeared. Nouns also lost most of their endings and most plurals in *-e* (eg. *giefē*) disappeared.

The reduction of inflections had an impact of verbs as well. After the weakening of vowels in unstressed syllables to /ə/ (schwa), weak verbs were reduced to two forms and strong verbs were mostly transferred to the weak category. Perfect and pluperfect forms are developed, formed by the present or preterite tense of the verb *to have* and the past participle of another verb. Modal auxiliaries were subject to intense grammaticalisation so that the modal *shall*, for instance, adopted the future reference and lost all others. The main negative became *not/nat* placed after the verb (eg. I say not, I know not).

The OE dative ending in *-e* of the adverbial suffix *-lic* fell in this period and the suffix developed in the ModE adverbial suffix *-ly*:

The ending *-ly*, representing the Old English *-lic*, forming adverbs of manner from adjectives, became in Middle English much more common, because the final *-e*, which in Old English was the ordinary adverbial suffix, ceased to be pronounced, so that the adjective and its related adverb became identical in form. (Bradley, 1975: 91)

The distinction between a determiner and pre-determiner was less rigid than in ModE. Expressions like *each a*, *many a*, *some the* and *many the* were frequent before nouns.

The influence of French was also visible in lexis as the OE antagonism toward foreign words abated. Whereas “OE seems to have been relatively inhospitable to words from other languages; by contrast, a characteristic feature of ME is its habit of borrowing from other languages to increase its word-stock“. (Horobin and Smith, 2002: 71) The usage of French in higher social circles as well as trade led to such a great influx of French words into the English language that some authors go so far as to consider English a dialect of French. Although this claim is certainly a bit far-fetched it must be admitted that ModE owes a large portion of vocabulary to the French language acquired at that time.

What the language would have been like if William had not succeeded in making good his claim to the English throne can only be a matter of conjecture... In particular it would have lacked the greater part of that enormous number of French words which today make English seem on the side of vocabulary almost as much a Romance as a Teutonic language. (Baugh, 1976: 127)

Even so, during all this time English was in fact in competition with French. Although French was used in government and law communication common people still continued to speak English, and according to Francis (1963: 13) “since they outweighed French speakers in numbers, if not in wealth and power, they forced bilingualism upon their superiors.” Thus, a large number of tradesmen, clergy and soldiers were in fact bilingual, using both English and French. Latin was also still in use, but only in the domain of education. In all other areas it was becoming obsolete mainly for the lack of words for new concepts that arrived so that it had to borrow heavily from Anglo-Norman.

Gradually, English resurfaced as the main language of the country. This process was mostly expedited in 1204 when the kings of England (mainly King John) lost Normandy and chose England as the nation they wanted to belong to. Shortly after English was becoming a matter of general use among the upper classes that were so unfamiliar with French that they had to learn it as a second language. Finally, the domination of French in England completely ended in the course of the 14<sup>th</sup> century, as some documents (for instance *Cursor Mundi*) tell of the change of attitude that the proper language for Englishmen to know and use is English.

### 3.3. 1400-1660

#### The historical background

The period from 1400 to 1660 is central for the formation of the standard. The thirteenth and fourteenth centuries saw the growth of medieval English towns, mostly as a result of the increase of cross-Channel trade. The towns themselves, especially London, grew with that trade and this growth had grave consequences for the language. Since London offered countless job opportunities, it attracted many people from the country who picked up some of the speech of London. The influence was actually reciprocal, many visitors brought in traits of their local speech which mingled with the London idiom, and back to their homes took back their speech, now modified by the forms of the great city. London English, hence, took in as well as it gave. This contact resulted in the fifteenth century with a uniform dialect used in the entire East Midlands, with which the London dialect agreed with in all the important aspects. So, to be precise, London dialect derived from a mixture of ME dialects, but was strongly influenced by the East Midlands dialect in particular. Thus, it could be said that the history of Standard English is basically a history of London English.

As in speech, various writing standards were followed. The fact that certain standardization appeared in such a metropolis as London may sound in itself surprising, since London did not have a tradition that religious houses had to base their standardization on. Unlike them, London was characterized by secular writing. However, documents from that era show that certain secular writers have worked for major organizations and thus followed certain proscribed standards which they then carried into their private copying. "From the close of the 14c there grows in England a class of secular professional scribes who...might conform to a house-style almost as fixed as that of the modern press, and train their young pupils in the same traditions." (Strang, 1970: 157) Perhaps the most well-known is the Court of the Lord Chancellor situated in the city of Westminster, better known under the name Chancery: "... the written English that developed there in the 15<sup>th</sup> century was to become a standard, both in its style of handwriting (secretary or Chancery hand) and in its vocabulary and grammar." (Freeborn, 1998: 247)

Interestingly enough, a parallel can be drawn here between the debate on the emergence of English itself and the debate on the birth of the new standard. Whereas some scholars put the beginning of the standard simply around the time when the population of London started to become rapidly mixed, other authors, like Blake, recognize it only in the emergence of Chancery English.

This variety of English owes its name to the secretariat of the state of late medieval government from which it spread to the whole country. The most important figure in its creation was Henry V, who in 1415 renewed the war against France and thus needed way to encourage a sense of unity among the English. Again drawing a parallel between a previous period and this one, Henry, like King Ælfred before him, sought to establish English as the official written language for promoting English nationalism and thus had to make some form of a standard. He used English in his private correspondence produced for him by the Signet Office, and it was from this office that standardized spelling came out of and was extended to the Chancery (the ways by which the members of the Signet Office chose their preferred forms, however, remain unknown). Since documents from the Chancery were sent throughout the country, the influence of Chancery English spread to the whole country. By the mid-15th century it was used for most official purposes except by the Church (which used Latin) and for some legal purposes (for which French was used).

With Latin and French out of use in most aspects of social life, English was free to become the national written and spoken language. However, it had to go through one last obstacle, one that linguist dubbed the “inferiority complex of English”:

A living language like English could never appear as perfect as a dead language like Latin, which was the language which provided the model for all grammatical systems. Equally a language that had only recently formed standardized varieties ... could hardly be compared with a language like French. (Blake, 1996: 182)

Basically, the value of a language was determined by its ability to be used for general writing. It was only with Chaucer’s writing that English was given a “fighting chance” against the two model languages.

The culmination of this development is marked by the introduction of the printing press by William Caxton in 1476, which “had the effect of creating a demand for a standard written English” (Bolton, 1972: 16) This first English publisher was not only a printer of other people's writing, he also translated and edited many of the books he printed, and also actively participated in the selection of the language to be the standard for his printing work, in order to promote the stylistic virtues of the texts he wanted to sell. As an avid admirer of Chaucer’s writing style, he would print his works without change, while “correcting” the works of others (Mallory’s *Morte D’Arthur*, for instance) he did not consider equally worthy. He replaced Malory’s vocabulary with words of French origin which he considered more sophisticated, thus often harming the literary quality of the work: ” The result is a book which in style is no



different from the many romances being issued at the time, for all specific and particular vocabulary was replaced by generalized vocabulary of French origin.“ (Blake; *Cambridge HoE, Vol. 2*, 1992: 531) . He even divided his target audience into two groups, the courtly and non-courtly ones. Texts intended for the former group were written in the old-fashioned style, while the latter would enjoy the new style by Chaucer. His interference, however, seems to have been mostly focused on vocabulary, while he did not pay much attention to syntax.

Active discussions about the language took swing in the next century: “From the 16<sup>th</sup> century onwards, there is evidence that the need for a standard in spelling, pronunciation and grammar was actively discussed...” (Freeborn, 1998: 224) These discussions were accompanied by various attempts at standardization:”The attempts to establish a standard spelling are numerous: in the 1550s, for instance, Cheke suggests having long vowels in *maad* ‘made’ but no final-e. “(Gelderen, 2006: 180) Another example of an attempt to establish a standard is the 1589 book written by George Puttenham called *The Arte of English Poesie*, in which the poet advises his colleagues that the language of the educated people , not common folk, should be the language of poetry. Those educated people were the upper classes of London and the south-east, and it is their language that the poet recommends.

Two important sources gave linguists a glimpse of the language used by the common people in this era – the Paston letters from the fifteenth century and the Lisle letters from the sixteenth. Although the letters showed some differences in spelling, they also proved that a certain standard was being followed: “There were some inconsistencies within an individual’s spelling, especially in the use of a system redundant final (e) on many words, but they had clearly learned” (Freeborn, 1998: 273). The main reason why those differences occurred was the lack of dictionaries and spelling books for people to refer to. During the 16<sup>th</sup> century, as an answer to a growing sense that English needed a form of spelling and grammar all speakers should agree on, the first dictionaries were published. They revealed to the whole nation that there weren’t enough letters of the alphabet to match their pronunciation, so a spelling reform was soon advocated. The first person to do so was John Hart, author of the *Ortographie* (1569). Despite recommendations his (and those of the other writers) the English spelling system was never altered to fit the changed pronunciations. The reasons for it are obvious. Firstly- it is hard to decide which alternative to choose among many, and secondly- it is virtually impossible to change spelling rules every time a new pronunciation takes over.

## The linguistic background:

In writing, this new standard did not have strict uniformity at first. For instance, *i* and *y* interchanged freely, as well as *þ* and *th*. New graphs, like *ea*, were introduced. This period still maintained the difference between long and short vowels in writing. Long vowels were marked in two ways, either by doubling the vowel or by the use of the final *e* after a consonant (for example, *boke* was an alternative to *book*). Of course, printing played a vital role in preserving as well as enhancing the standard. The system of punctuation marks used in Middle English (a full stop, a semicolon and a question mark) was expanded with printing to include the colon, semi-colon, comma, exclamation mark and brackets (used for emphasis or for marking an insertion). The apostrophe was introduced in the sixteenth century to indicate a missing vowel. Nevertheless, printing still showed a lack of uniformity regarding capitalization as capitalization practices vary. Some writers, for instance, use capitals for most or all nouns and for starting various syntactic units.

The SVO word order in the organization of the sentence is now fully established. Verbs without an expressed subject even introduced a dummy subject like *–it* or made the former dative the subject form (*Me thinks-I think*) in order to submit to this rule: “The transformation of English into an analytic language continues in the Early Modern English period... in syntactic terms, this transformation leads to an increasingly fixed word order. “ (Gelderen, 2006 171)

In the personal pronouns the first person singular is always *I*, the possessive is *my/myne* and the plural *we* and *our*. Second person has 3 forms – *ye/you/yow*, with *your/yowr* as the possessive. Third person singular forms are as they are today, while the plural is most often *they*. The genitive of neuter, *–his*, was expanded by new forms *–it* and *–its*. The old singular forms *thou/thee* were limited only to the language of poetry, while abandoned in everyday communication. The commonest relative pronoun at the beginning of the period, *that*, was now matched in frequency by *which*, and then by *whom*, *whose* and *who*. The ModE distinction between the usage of the forms *who* and *whom* for human and *which* for inhuman antecedent, however, is not yet regularized.

In adjectives the use of *more/most* in the comparative and the superlative emerges, although it is mixed with the endings *–er/–est*, and double comparisons like *more harder* become frequent. Also, the OE distinction between strong and weak adjectives remains, albeit less strictly enforced (eg. the *gode* man vs. the man was *god*).

The indefinite article separates itself from the numeral *one* and becomes *an*. Also, the loss of the final /n/ before consonants develops.

In nouns endings were lost as the language became more analytic. In the plural the suffix *-es* was so well established that anomalous forms were greatly reduced (*dracan*, *dracum* > *draces*). Also, plurals in *-n* and zero are reduced almost to the extent in ModE. The table below shows a typical declension of the time (Table 1).

Table 1: Basic Noun Declension of the Fifteenth Century

Case	Singular	Plural
Nominative	Stoon = stone	stoones
Genitive	stoones	stoones
Accusative	stoon	stoones
Dative	stoone	stoones

Prepositions are of course commonly used in OE, but in ME they became even more common, taking over many of the functions of the inflexional system (The dukes daughter *of* Tyntagelle).

Verbs continue to lose their inflections, so that the OE *-e* (eg. *deme* – ‘remove’) for first person and *(e)st* (eg. *demest*) for the second are lost, the former around 1400 and the latter somewhat later when the plural *ye/you* was extended. The only significant difference from ModE is the ending for third person singular. Where ModE would use *-s*, Chancery English uses *-eth*. This *-eth* will in the later part of this period become reduced only to the language of poetry. “The *(e)th* ending was the indigenous southern ending, and had been incorporated into early standard usage. During the 16c a more northerly *-s* form, long familiar to educated London speakers, began to enter their speech; it has finally prevailed.” (Strang, 1970: 146) Modal verbs, which were written in various ways like *coude*, *shal*, *shoulde*, *wol* or *wolde* now appear more regularly in their modern forms: *can*, *could*, *shall*, *should* and *would*. Also, this period witnesses the trend of using *will* for first person and *shall* for the second and third persons. The present tense still expresses futurity, though forms with *will/shall* increase. Irregular verbs went through little changes. The distinction between past and perfect was not yet as clear as it is in ModE, as Shakespeare, for instance, uses the structure *has been* where a ModE writer would use *was*, and the structure “*I was not angry since I came to France*”, where the *since* clause would in ModE demand the perfect in the preceding verb. Also, the

main syntactic innovation in the verb phrase during this period was the rise of the impersonal verb (eg. *us thynketh*: it seems to us, *hem thought*: it seemed to them) as well as the phrasal verb. Impersonal verbs were used even in previous times, but only in this period did they become widely used.

In negation, the position of the negator *not* was changed as it was now placed in front of the verb, as in ModE. Double negation, a taboo in modern English, was then still common.

The suffix *-ly* (eg. *unkyndely*) is most frequently used to indicate adverbs, along with *-e* (*brighte-* ‘brightly’) and, rarely, *-liche* (*roialiche-* ‘royally’). The ability of the adverb to be placed anywhere in the sentence is reduced as it was not accepted anymore to have it put between the verb and object. (eg. He caught often the train. > He often caught the train.)

In syntax, the shift to analytic language becomes obvious and the idea that each sentence should have a subject and predicate becomes dominant.

This period is also characterized by a great lexical expansion, mainly through borrowing (mostly from Latin), but also through the formation of new words, which leaves as a consequence a loss of transparency:

It was in this period that the English language lost its transparency as the large number of words inserted into the lexicon destroyed the cohesion in words belonging to the same semantic field... A word like *rural* becomes the adjective for countryside, but there is no surface link between them although they relate to the same field of meaning. (Blake, 1996: 227)

In addition to the usual donor-languages like Latin and French, English in this period borrowed from Spanish, Dutch and Arabic through trade. Word-formation was also encouraged, with many affixes added to the usual list.

Through this entire period a sort of antipathy toward foreign words as well as attitudes reemerged, particularly among the Puritans who were especially anti-Latin and fought for ordinary English. This antipathy was silenced only with the political changes of the next period.

### 3.4. 1660-1789

#### The historical background:

This chapter is for all intents and purposes final in the discussion of standard. Between the restoration of the monarchy and the symbolic end in 1789 (the publication of the *Lyrical Ballads*) the English Standard was completed in all the important aspects. As Dennis Freeborn explains in the preface of his book on standard: The standard language which had been established in written English by that time has not changed significantly, apart from losses and gains in vocabulary. Its usage and styles have of course continued to change, but the underlying system has not.” (Freeborn, 1998: 2)

The arrival of Charles II from his exile in France to the English throne resulted again in the influx of French ideas. The wish to imitate French attitudes which were considered sophisticated was even greater than in the previous period. The *Academie Francaise*, for instance, was considered by many of the English higher class to be a model worthy of imitation. Once again, the number of French loan words dramatically increased.

Some texts, for instance John Bunyan’s *The Pilgrims Progress* (1678) provide a glimpse of the everyday colloquial writing of the 1670s. The text shows that “spelling was by now standardized in a form which has hardly changed since” (Freeborn, 1998: 352) Apart from a few minor details like the capitalizing of some nouns (his *reason was, for that the Valley was altogether without Honor*) and the absence of the apostrophe in the title, it is clearly the spelling of today.

This period saw the rise of a very restricted form of usage called the “polite” usage, which was used by the “learned” and was in many ways separate from the “inferior” colloquial use. Language was regarded as a mirror of thought which meant that only a person speaking “learned” language could be considered a good “thinker”. In pronunciation, for instance, it was important to deviate as little as possible from the written form. Thus, one could not speak proper English if he or she did not know the rules of orthography. Simply imitating the pronunciation of the upper classes was not enough; “polite” speech had to be learned through education. Therefore, it is evident that this period had a standard to be followed by all. Unlike the standard of the previous period which was based on the language of the court, in this period it was based on the polite language of gentlemen. However, this language had a crucial weakness – it was more abstract than concrete. Since concrete things like those regarding various sciences were not considered worthy of the “polite” language, it could not be used for the whole range of communication purposes.

By 1660 the choice of the educated London class speech as standard was accepted, but apart from some consistency in spelling due mostly to the printing press there was no regulation of usage. The main reason for this was the absence of any academy which would dictate what was acceptable in language and what was not.

Until the 1650s, there is much debate on vocabulary and spelling, and English is technically without a standard, i.e. the language of one social or regional group that is typically taught in schools and used in official circles. The centuries that follow impose many restrictions on linguistic freedoms and the need for an Academy is debated. (Gelderen, 2006: 180)

It is worth noting that an attempt toward creating a sort of official body for regulating the language was made in 1662 when Charles II established the Royal Society. This society possessed the qualities needed for the task: "For one thing, as a scientific body it was concerned to rid the language of any excesses and weaknesses of expression which would impede the communication of scientific discoveries."(Bolton, 1972: 47) Also, it provided a forum for the learned members of society to discuss, among other things, matters of language. One of the members, John Evelyn, wrote down the tasks which the society would tackle, which included a grammar, a reform of orthography and a general dictionary. However, due to insufficient political support the committee failed and no academy was founded. Instead, a great number of dictionaries and grammars were written which ultimately took over the functions that an academy would have and slowly created a standard that we know today.

The grammar which became the standard for this period was *A Short Introduction to English Grammar: with Critical Notes* by Robert Lowth. In the preface of his work Lowth points out the main issue of English of his time:

The English Language hath been much cultivated during the last two hundred years... it hath been greatly enlarged in extent and compass...its variety, richness, and elegance, have been tried with good success, in verse and in prose, upon all subjects, and in every kind of style: but whatever other improvements it may have received, it hath made no advances in Grammatical accuracy. (Lowth, quoted in Blake, 1996: 248)

Lowth intended this grammar to be descriptive, but it turned out to be prescriptive instead. For instance, he specifically states that the **definitive** article *a* can only be joined with words in the singular number and even gives an example of the incorrect usage from Atterbury's Sermons "... employed as *a means* of doing good" and correcting it to *a mean*. Even though the plural was and still is common and accepted in speech, this example portrays the usage of strict application of rules in the language.

This tendency for proscription was evident among the dictionary makers as well, who wanted to expel everything foreign, archaic or vulgar from their works. In fact, two major criteria for including words in dictionaries were that the words had to still be in regular use and that they had to be used by good writers.

In addition to the vocabulary, “true pronunciation” started to be included in dictionaries. For instance, the *Lingua Britannica Reformata* (1749) by Benjamin Martin provides rules for correct pronunciation and spelling, including for the first time the process of branding (marking of words considered vulgar or obsolete) which later dictionary makers like Samuel Johnson will adopt. “The dictionaries contributed to standardization of the language and to the principle of linguistic politeness through their emphasis on proper spelling and pronunciation and on their willingness to judge whether words were appropriate to polite language or not.” (Blake, 1996: 252) The focus on correct pronunciation was even stronger in the second half of the eighteenth century. Thomas Sheridan, author of the 1780 *General Dictionary of the English Language*, after recognizing the many differences in pronunciation chose the one spoken at the court of Queen Anne as the standard. This standard was then imitated by others.

This strict prescription of what is acceptable in language and what is not naturally had opponents. Swift, for instance, loathed new colloquial words and phrases, considering them a proof of the *decay* of the language: “This attitude of condemnation, focusing upon relatively trivial aspects of contemporary use, was taken up time and time again throughout the 18<sup>th</sup> century and has continued to the present day.”(Freeborn, 1998: 379) Still, various works continued to be published calling for the improving of the language during the entire eighteenth century. Perhaps the final stamp of the standard was Johnson’s Dictionary from 1755, a standard reference work for over 150 years:

Johnson’s dictionary is the only English dictionary ever compiled by a writer of the first rank. In the second half of the eighteenth century and well into the nineteenth, in its various editions and adaptations, it remained a primary work of reference for scholars and writers of the day until it came to be superseded by the great dictionaries of Charles Richardson and (in America) Noah Webster, and in due course by the Oxford English dictionary and its derivatives. (Burchfield, 1985: 87)

### **The linguistic background:**

The standardization of spelling brought it more or less to the stage known today as the letters *i/j* and *u/v* became clearly separated out as vowels and consonants, although some minor differences could still be mentioned. The use of *k* in the endings *-ick* of words like *music* lasted till the end of the period and the uncertainty about the usage of *i* or *y* in words like *style* was still evident. Also, the use of capitals was still disparate and a far cry from today's. From 1650 to 1750 capitals were abundant, with two strategies for their usage. One dictated that capitals should be used for all nouns and the other that they should be used only for nouns that demanded emphasis. After 1750 the use of capitals decreases and by 1800 it is close to what is found today. These spelling rules, like today, were only applied to official communication. In private correspondence various private systems were used, and not even Johnson was beyond that. For instance, he uses three spellings of *does*, including *dos* and *do's*.

Nouns generally behaved the same way as they do today. The substitution of the *-s* plural for most of the remaining *-n* plurals was complete (*eyen-* 'eyes', *housen-* 'houses') leaving only the ModE irregular forms like *oxen*, *brethren* etc. Only the plural of the genitive form still caused confusion with some writers using *-s* without an apostrophe and others with it.

The use of indefinite articles *a/an* became regularized, *an* being used before vowels and *a* before consonants.

Two major changes affected personal pronouns: the replacement of *his* by *its* in the neuter gender and the loss of the distinction between the second singular and plural forms. In the relative pronouns the role of *that* further decreases with *who* taking its place. The rule that *which* should be used for inanimate and *who* for animate antecedents was also made in this period.

The verbs had by the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century reached their modern patterns. Examples of *-(e)th* could in the plural did continue, but were becoming rare. Auxiliaries continued to expand their functions, but grammarians tried to regulate them, insisting on the distinction between *shall* and *will*. *Shall* was to be used in the first person only for futurity and in the second and third persons for commands and threats, while *will* was to be used vice versa. The passive form of the progressive is found in some cases, and the historic present increases in frequency. The distinction between past and perfect had by the seventeenth century become



clear. The modals *would* and *should* are used to express a wish and are often used in conjunction with *rather*. Contracted forms like *don't*, *shan't*, *won't* or *can't* emerge in this period as well.

In adjectives the two ways of marking comparative and superlative forms, either with inflectional endings *-er/-est* or by using *more* and *most* were becoming regularized. The rule was that the former should be used with monosyllabic and the later with polysyllabic adjectives. The use of double comparisons was no longer tolerated in proper language.

As for adverbs, the demands for order in the language system led to the ending *-ly* becoming the proper inflection for adverbs so that inflectionless adverbs were systematically reduced. Only a few common adverbs like *fast* avoided the conversion.

This period continued to borrow words from other languages with some languages that had never before had any influence on English (India, America and the Caribbean) as a result of the colonial expansion. Classical languages continue to provide new words, but not in the same extent.

Finally, the last feature of this period important for standardization is not a change in the language, but a change in the *attitude* toward language. The number of pamphlets, journals, periodicals, grammars and dictionaries published attests to the fact that there was far more debate on language and its issues than in any of the previous periods. Thus, the period between 1660 and the end of the eighteenth century set the standard for all future discussions on the language.

#### **4. Conclusion**

A majority of authors agree on the fact that, when it comes to standardization, all the important rules and regulations were set in the eighteenth century. “We have arrived at a stage of the language which seems modern and differs from our own variety more in its nuances than in its basic structure. The debate about English would from now on concentrate on matters of style and its fitness for purpose.” (Blake, 1996: 271) After Ælfred’s initial attempt, through the virtually complete annihilation under the Norman rule, the English Standard has become stable largely thanks to a plethora of linguists, grammarians and poets fighting for its preservation. Not only did the English Standard of the British Isles survive, it even spread to the whole world, being taught in many non-English speaking countries. Today, the language community of English speakers, native or not, has become larger than any in the history of language itself!

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