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НАВЧАЛЬНО-НАУКОВИЙ ЦЕНТР ГУМАНІТАРНОЇ ОСВІТИ

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**HISTORY OF THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE
(MIDDLE ENGLISH)**

Конспект лекцій

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CONTENT

PREFACE

The compendium of lectures is the sequel of the course «History of the English Language (Middle English)» and is intended to introduce students to the second period of the English language development. The way in which a few tribal and local Germanic dialects spoken by a hundred and fifty thousand people grew into the English language spoken and understood by about one and a half billion people is very interesting to trace. A lot of emphasis in this compendium of lectures is placed on linguistic (phonological, morphological, syntactic and semantic) analysis of Middle English. The students will learn many facts concerning not only the development of the English language itself but also the development of the country during the period where this language was born and is spoken.

The compendium of lectures takes an important place in the system of education of a philologist, within the framework of the discipline of the student to learn about the history of the English language.

The proposed compendium of lectures will help students to master the theoretical material of the course independently, to test the acquired knowledge in practice, to get acquainted with the classical works of linguists, to build a system of individual work within the discipline.

The students will also get acquainted with the Norman Conquest (1066-1200), the Rise of the Middle Class, Dialectal Diversity of Middle English, the Rise of Standard English, Changes in the Sound System and the System of Spelling, Middle English Literature and a number of different facts from lives of the English.

Topic 1. MIDDLE ENGLISH

Plan

1.1 The Norman Conquest (1066-1200).
1.2 The Rise of the Middle Class.
1.3 French Borrowings.

Most linguists believe that the Middle English period starts from the Norman Conquest in 1066, but there are some who think that this period begins a century later. So in 1066 the most important event in English history occurred. This event changed the official, mainly Germanic language of the population into an everyday language. During this period the language was filled with numerous borrowings; the native language was spoiled so much that it had continuously to struggle to survive. When at last it re-emerged as an official state language it was changed beyond recognition. In order to understand why it happened we should trace the reasons and the process that took place in this period. One of the most important events is historical background, of course. To get a better understanding of the linguistic consequences, let's see a brief survey of historic events of the period.

The event that preceded the Norman Conquest and paved the way to it was the Scandinavian invasion during which the English language was significantly changed and simplified. We got acquainted with this event while we were studying the Old English Period. The very Conquest was the result of 30-year exile of the English kings [1, p. 102].

1.1 The Norman Conquest (1066-1200)

The Norman Conquest changed the whole course of the English language. If there had been no conquest, the English language would have developed as the other Germanic languages retaining more inflections and preserving a Germanic vocabulary.

Normandy is situated on the northern coast of France. The band of Northman settled there in the 9th and 10th centuries. Rollo, the leader of the Dane in Normandy, acknowledged the French king as his overlord and soon the Normans absorbed the most important elements

of French civilization. They accepted Christianity, gave up their own language and learnt French, built lots of amazing cathedrals and churches which we admire nowadays.

It's interesting to know that the relations between England and Normandy had been very close before the Norman Conquest. In 1002, Æthelred the Unready had married a Norman wife, however the Danes drove him into exile and he took refuge with his brother-in-law, the duke of Normandy. Æthelred the Unready had a son who lived in England till the age of 5 and after the exile was brought up in France. So he was almost more French than English. Edward was known as the Confessor. Years later in 1042 when the Danish line died out, he was restored to the throne from which his father had been driven. Edward gave the important places in the government to his Norman friends and so there was a strong French atmosphere in the English court during the twenty-four years of his reign [4].

Edward the Confessor had no children and after his death one of the most powerful earls of England, Harold, was elected king. However, very soon William, the duke of Normandy, claimed his rights to the throne of England because when he had had a brief visit in England, Edward the Confessor had assured him to be his heir. But Harold and the English didn't want to see any other French king on the English throne, so William the Great, as he was then called, started preparations for battle. In September he landed on the south coast of England and nobody opposed him because at that time Harold and his army fought in the north of England against the king of Norway who also claimed his rights to the throne. Harold won the battle and moved south where William the Great and his army had landed. Not far from Hastings he was waiting for William. The battle was fierce. Harold and his two brothers were killed during the battle. Despite the fact that William won, he didn't take the crown. It was only after he burnt the southeast of England that the citizens of London stopped their resistance. On Christmas Day in 1066 William the Conqueror was crowned king of England.

Most people of England didn't recognize William as the king. Many of the English higher class had been killed during the battle at Hastings and others were treated as traitors so William filled the places in the government by his followers. In fact, William's coronation won recognition only in the southeast and he faced with

strong rebellions in the southwest, the west and the north. William had to take ruthless actions to crush a rebellion. As a result, the Old English nobility was practically wiped out. For many years all the significant positions were held by Normans or men of foreign blood.

All important positions in the church were also filled with Norman priests. The two archbishops were Normans. English abbots were replaced too but much slower.

As a matter of fact, it was obvious that the number of Normans who settled in England increased and as they didn't know English they used their own language, French, which became predominant among the upper classes in England. The English language remained the language of the mass. During 200 years the Normans married to the English and gradually they learnt the language of the natives. Through the years some people were able to understand both languages but could only speak one, but the majority was bilingual [4].

In France during the Middle Age period people mainly spoke four main dialects of French: Norman, Picard (in the northeast), Burgundian (in the east) and the Central French of Paris. Linguists believe that after the French took over England, they could bring a mixture of different northern dialectal peculiarities, but with Norman predominating. Due to factors which influence the language, the mixture of the dialects gradually developed into something quite different from any of the continental dialects. In reality this «new language» was not much the same as French because it had many English words in it. Anyone who could speak French could see the difference clearly. And very soon people, especially those who were involved in literature, started to make humorous jokes on this subject. One poet says, «*A false French of England I know, for I have not been elsewhere to acquire it; but you who have learned it elsewhere, amend it where there is need*» [3, p. 69]. Many people, mainly of high class, were not pleased with such a situation and, trying to prevent their children from speaking that «barbarian» language, sent them to France to remove those uncivilized words from their speech [4].

1.2 The Rise of the Middle Class

As it has been mentioned above the French Language dominated in England for many years and English was considered to be the

language of a low class. However, the situation began changing since 1348. How did it happen?

It was summer of 1348. A terrible disease broke out. It started in the southwest of England and in seconds spread all over the country and reached its height in 1349. It turned out to be fatal for the most part of the population. Those, who got infected and were not lucky to come through that illness, died in two or three days. To tell the truth, most people died and only a small number of infected people got recovered. There were some reasons that led to high mortality among the population. One of them was people's incompetent or slight immune system. The other reason was the absence of any system of quarantine which caused fast spreading of the disease through a community. This disease was called «The Black Death» [2].

It should be mentioned that the rich suffered less than the poor. The poor could not shut themselves up in their castles. The mortality was accordingly greatest among the lower social orders, and the result was a serious shortage of labor. This led to the immediate rise in wages. As a matter of fact, the Black Death changed the treatment to the working class and increased its importance as well as the language they spoke.

During this period another class gained its importance and it is a craftsmen and merchant group. Such large towns as London and York became free, self-governing communities, electing their own officers, assessing taxes in their own way, collecting them and paying them to the king and regulating their commercial affairs. The townsfolk were engaged for the most part in trade or in the manufacturing crafts.

Such changes in the social and economic life benefited particularly the English-speaking part of the population, and enable us better to understand the final triumph of English in the century in which these changes largely occur.

At the beginning of the fourteenth century, almost all people knew English but educated people didn't stop using French. They used English more but kept writing in French.

So due to the rise of a middle class the English language revived and gained its former prestige. Why did it happen? The answer is: if people who speak the language are important, their language is important as well. And the working class was really important because

their money payments became fixed and their working conditions gradually improved.

English in the Law Courts. For a long time, probably from a date soon after the Conquest, French had been the language of all legal proceedings. In order to give the English language its dominant place back and to make it the language of the country, an important step was made. In 1356 the mayor of London forced all the proceedings in the courts of London and Middlesex to be in English. It was done to protect the rights of every person because laws and customs had to be learned and used in the tongue of the country and its people [2].

English in the Schools. After the Conquest the French language replaced English not only in a court and in the government but also at schools. As English was becoming more and more used after the Black Death, the language of education had to be changed as well. So English replaced French [2].

The Use of English in Writing. The only niche that had to be filled was writing. Now English was used in all spheres of people's lives and only writing remained unchangeable. There were several reasons for that. Firstly, it was partly a habit, because most people who could write did it mostly in Latin. Secondly, it was partly because Latin was an international written language. Thirdly, English spelling was variable, it didn't have standards how to write words with this or that pronunciation so one and the same word could be written in different ways. As for Latin, it had undergone spelling reform and had become fixed. Its only rival became French because it had also undergone a spelling reform and many people used it while writing. It was until the 15th century when English managed to replace both languages.

Besides the reign of Henry V (1413-1422) seems to have marked the turning point in the use of English in writing. The usage of English in the king's letters was a good example for many people. Apparently, his brilliant victories over the French at Agincourt gave the English a pride in things which were English. The end of his reign and the beginning of the next mark the period at which English begins to be generally adopted in writing. If we want a round number, the year 1425 represents very well the approximate date.

1.3 French Borrowings

All the events mentioned above influenced Middle English Vocabulary. As for a very long time French was in a dominant use almost in all spheres of life, we should pay attention to French words which you have always considered as the English ones.

Let's have a look at some of them.

1 *Governmental and Administrative Words. Government, govern, crown, state, empire, realm, reign, royal, prerogative, authority, sovereign, majesty, scepter, tyrant, usurp, court, council, parliament, assembly, statute, treaty, alliance, record, tax, subject, rebel, traitor, treason, exile, public, liberty, chancellor, treasurer, chamberlain, marshal, governor, minister, mayor, constable, coroner.* Most designations of rank are French*: noble, nobility, peer, prince, princess, duke, duchess, count, countess, marquis, baron, squire, page*, as well as such words as *sir, madam, mistress;* except for the words *king* and *queen, lord, lady*, and *earl*. The list might well be extended to include words relating to the economic organization of society - *vassal, homage, peasant, slave, servant*, because they often have a political or administrative aspect [2, p. 164].

2 **Church Words.** The church was second to the government as an object of Norman interest and ambition. In monasteries and religious houses French was for a long time the usual language. Accordingly, we find in English such French words as *religion, theology, sermon, sacrament, baptism, communion, confession, penance, prayer, lesson, passion, and psalmody,* and others; such indications of rank or class as *clergy, clerk, prelate, cardinal, dean, chaplain, pastor, vicar, etc.*; the names of objects associated with the service or with the religious life and words expressing such fundamental religious or theological concepts as *creator, trinity, saint, miracle, mystery, faith, charity, mercy, pity, obedience*. We should include also a number of adjectives, like *divine* and *devout*, and verbs, such as *preach, pray, confess, adore, sacrifice, convert*, etc [2, p. 165].

3 **Law.** French was so long the language of the law courts in England that the greater part of the English legal vocabulary comes from the language of the conquerors. The fact that we speak of *justice* and *equity* instead of *gerihte* from Old Dutch «court of law», *judgment* rather than *dom* (doom) and so forth, shows how completely the

terminology of French law have been adopted. Even where the Old English word survives, it has lost its technical sense. So such words as *convict, award, blame, imprison, fraud, legacy, executor, innocent* are of French origin [2, p. 165].

4 ***Army and Navy.*** As the army and navy were in the hands of those who spoke French, it led to the introduction of a number of French military terms into English. The art of war has undergone such changes since the days of Hastings and Lewes and Agincourt that many words once common are now obsolete or only in historical use. Their places have been taken by later borrowings, often from French. Nevertheless, the English still use medieval French words when they speak of the *army* and *the navy,* of *peace, enemy, arms, battle, combat, siege, defense, soldier, guard, spy, captain, lieutenant,* and *sergeant.* Verbs like *to arm, array, besiege, defend* remind us of the important French element in English vocabulary [2, p. 166].

5 ***Fashion, Meals and Social Life.*** It is not a surprise that the upper classes have set the standard in fashion and dress and the number of French words belonging to this class occasions appeared. The words *fashion* and *dress* are themselves French, as well as *habit, gown, robe, garment, cloak, coat, collar, veil, petticoat, lace, embroidery, buckle, button, plume, kerchief, mitten,* etc.

The colors *blue, brown, vermilion, scarlet, saffron, russet,* and *tawny* are French borrowings of this period.

Words that pointed to the luxuries: *jewel, brooch, turquoise, amethyst, topaz, ruby, emerald, sapphire, pearl, diamond, crystal, coral, and beryl.*

As for the meals not only are the words *dinner* and *supper* French, but also the words *feast, beef, veal, mutton, pork, bacon, sausage, biscuit, cream, sugar, olives, salad, lettuce, jelly, raisin, fig, date, grape, orange, lemon, pomegranate, cherry, peach.* Among seasoning and condiments, we find *spice, clove, thyme, herb, mustard, vinegar, cinnamon.* The verbs *roast, boil, stew, fry, grate, and mince* describe various culinary processes, and *goblet, saucer, plate* suggest French refinements in the serving of meals. It is melancholy to think what the English dinner table would have been like had there been no Norman Conquest.

A variety of new words suggests the innovations made by the French in domestic economy and social life: *curtain, chair, cushion,*

screen, lamp, lantern, chandelier, blanket, quilt, towel, and *basin* indicate articles of comfort or convenience, while *parlor, wardrobe, closet,* and *garner* (storehouse) imply improvements in domestic arrangements [2, p. 166].

Questions to Topic 1

1 What are the years of the Middle English Period?
2 Who was at the head of the Norman Conquest?
3 What were the consequences of the Norman Conquest?
4 What was the reason of the rise of Middle Class?
5 Give the examples to French borrowings in the following fields:

a) Governmental and Administrative Words;
b) Church Words;
c) Law;
d) Army and Navy;
e) Fashion, Meals and Social Life.

Topic 2. DIALECTICAL DIVERSITY OF MIDDLE ENGLISH

Plan

2.1 Dialects in Middle English.
2.2 The Rise of Standard English.

2.1 Dialects in Middle English

One of the striking characteristics of Middle English is its great variety in the different parts of England. This variety was seen both in the forms of the spoken language and in the written literature. In the absence of any recognized literary standard before the close of the period, writers naturally wrote in the dialect of that part of the country to which they belonged. Giraldus Cambrensis (a historian of those times) in the twelfth century remarked that the language of the southern parts of England, and particularly of Devonshire, was more archaic than that of other parts with which he was familiar. Then

William of Malmesbury, a historian in 1095-1143, had complained of the harshness of the speech of Yorkshire, saying that southerners could not understand it. Such observations were noticed in later centuries. Even Chaucer, by whose time a literary standard was in process of creation, wrote about this problem.

The language differed almost from county to county, and noticeable variations are sometimes observable between different parts of the same county. The features characteristic of a given dialect do not all cover the same territory; some extend into adjoining districts or may be characteristic also of another dialect. Consequently, it is rather difficult to decide how many dialectal divisions should be recognized and to mark off with any exactness their respective boundaries. In a rough way, however, it is customary to distinguish four principal dialects of Middle English: Northern, East Midland, West Midland, and Southern. Generally speaking, the Northern dialect extends as far south as the Humber; East Midland and West Midland together cover the area between the Humber and the Thames; and Southern occupies the district south of the Thames, together with Gloucestershire and parts of the counties of Worcester and Hereford, and the Kentish districts. However, Kentish preserved individual features [3].

The peculiarities that distinguish these dialects are partly matters of pronunciation, partly of vocabulary, partly of inflection. A few illustrations will give some idea of the nature and extent of the differences. The feature most easily recognized is the ending of the plural, present indicative, of verbs. In Old English, this form always ended in *-th* with some variation of the preceding vowel. In Middle English, this ending was preserved as *-eth* in the Southern dialect. In the Midland district, however, it was replaced by *-en*, while in the north, it was changed to *-es*. Thus we have *loves* in the north, *loven* in the Midlands, and *loveth* in the south. Another fairly distinctive form is the present participle before the spread of the ending *-ing*. In the north we have *lovande*, in the Midlands *lovende*, and in the south *lovinde*. In later Middle English, the ending *-ing* appears in the Midlands and the south, thus it was difficult to see the dialectal distinction. We could see Dialectal differences more clearly between Northern and Southern; the Midland dialect often has an intermediate position, tending toward the one or the other in those districts lying

nearer to the neighbour dialects. Thus the characteristic forms of the pronoun *they* in the south were *hi, here* (*hire, hure*), *hem*, while in the north forms with *th-* (modern *they, their, them*) early became predominant. In matters of pronunciation, the Northern and Southern dialects sometimes presented notable differences. Thus OE $\bar{a}$, which developed into an $\bar{o}$ south of the Humber, was retained in the north, giving us such characteristic forms as Southern stone and home, beside stane and hame in Scotland today. Initial *f* and *s* were often voiced in the south to *v* and *z*. In Southern Middle English, we find *vor, vrom, vox*, and *vorzoþe* instead of *for, from, fox,* and *forsoþe* (*forsooth*). This dialectal difference is preserved in Modern English *fox* and *vixen*, where the former represents the Northern and Midland pronunciation and the latter the Southern. Similarly, *ch* in the south often corresponds to a *k*; in the north: *bench* beside *benk*, or *church* beside *kirk*. Such variety was fortunately lessened toward the end of the Middle English period by the general adoption of a standard written (and later spoken) English [3].

2.2 The Rise of Standard English

Out of this variety of local dialects there emerged toward the end of the fourteenth century a written language that in the course of the fifteenth won general recognition and has since become the recognized standard in both speech and writing. The East Midland district contributed most to the formation of this standard. It was the East Midland type of English that became its basis, particularly the dialect of the metropolis, London. It is considered that there were three factors which led to this:

1 The English of Midland region occupied a middle position between the extreme differences of the north and south. It was less conservative than the Southern dialect, less radical than the Northern. In its sounds and inflections it represents a kind of compromise, sharing some of the characteristics of both its neighbors. Its intermediate position was recognized in the fourteenth century by Ranulph Higden. Ranulf Higden or Higdon (c. 1280 – 12 March 1364) was an English chronicler and a Benedictine monk of the monastery of St. Werburgh in Chester. He is believed to have been born in the West of England, taken the monastic vow (Benedictine) at Chester in

1299, and travelled over the north of England. Higden was the author of the *Polychronicon*, a long chronicle, one of several such works of universal history and theology. It was based on a plan taken from Scripture (religious texts) and written for the amusement and instruction of his society [2].

2 The East Midland district was the largest and most populous of the major dialect areas. The land was more valuable than the hilly country to the north and west, and in an agricultural age this advantage was reflected in both the number and the prosperity of the inhabitants.

3 A third factor, more difficult to evaluate, was the presence of the universities, Oxford and Cambridge, in this region. In the fourteenth century, the monasteries were playing a less important role in the spreading of learning than they had once played, while the two universities had developed into important intellectual centers. It is concerned that Cambridge had more influence in supporting of the East Midland dialect than Oxford because Oxfordshire is on the border between Midland and Southern and its dialect shows certain characteristic Southern features.

Much the same uncertainty attaches to the influence of Chaucer with his *The Canterbury Tales*. It is also believed that Chaucer's importance was primary among the influences bringing about the adoption of a written standard. However, some linguists have doubts because it is unbelievable that the language of the greatest English poet before Shakespeare was not spread by the popularity of his works and, through the use of that language, by poets who looked upon him as their master and model. But it is nevertheless unlikely that the English which was used in official records and in letters and papers by men of affairs was greatly influenced by the language of his poetry. Chaucer's dialect is not in all respects the same as the language of these documents, probably identical with the ordinary speech of the city. It contained characteristics of the emerging modern standard which came from the Northern dialects: third person plural pronouns starting in *th-*; *adverbs* ending in *–ly* rather than Southern *–lich.* However, Southern *–eth* continued to be used in the third person singular and *be/ben* in the present tense plural; Midlands past participles ending in *–en* were also to be found in it (later many were replaced by weak participles). London native tongue in contrast kept

third person plural *her* and *hem* and the occasional *marker* of the past participle with *–y*. Chaucer was a court poet, and his usage may reflect the speech of the court and to a certain extent literary tradition [3].

By far, the most influential factor in the rise of Standard English was the importance of London as the capital of England. Indeed, it is altogether likely that the language of the city would have become the prevailing dialect without the help of any of the factors previously discussed. In doing so it would have been following the course of other national tongues — French as the dialect of Paris, Spanish as that of Castile, and others. London was, and still is, the political and commercial center of England. It was the seat of the court, of the highest judicial tribunals, the focus of the social and intellectual activities of the country. The London economy was especially important as well. There was a great flow of migration at that time and it cannot be fully reconstructed, but clearly these people brought to London their local speech which mingled with the London idiom and then survived or died as the silent forces of amalgamation and standardization. They took back with them the forms and usages of the great city by which their own speech had been changed. And in return London English took as well as gave. It began as a Southern and ended as a Midland dialect. By the fifteenth century, in the East Midlands had had a fairly uniform dialect, and the language of London agrees in all important respects with it. The history of Standard English is almost a history of London English.

Questions to Topic 2

1 Name the principal dialects during Middle English.
2 What are the peculiarities that help to distinguish the dialects?
3 Which dialects had more clearly dialectal differences?
4 Which dialect had an intermediate position?
5 Why was the East Midland type of English that became the basis to the Standard English?

Topic 3. CHANGES IN THE MIDDLE ENGLISH PRONUNCIATION AND SPELLING

Plan

3.1 Changes in the System of Spelling.
3.2 Middle English Phonology.
3.3 The Great Vowel Shift.

3.1 Changes in the System of Spelling
(Borrowed from L. Verba. History of the English Language)

French habits in writing were traced during ME, and the sounds themselves began to resemble European forms, no strange letters complicated reading as all the letters were Latin. As you know there are specific sounds in English which in OE were marked by letters specific only for the English language. During ME these sounds were replaced by digraphs (a combination of two letters representing one sound) [1].

ӡ, Þ, Ðð, Æ and Ƿ were replaced by Latin letters. Now let us discuss them more detailed.

The Latin letter ӡ was used to indicate 4 different consonant sounds: [g']; [g]; [j]; [γ].

1 [g'] is reflected in modern English as [dʒ]: e.g.: OE brycӡ [g'], OE ecӡ [g'] > [dʒ] (Mod.E. bridge, edge). In French borrowings it was marked as it was in the French language by *j — judge, June*.

2 [g] is reflected in modern English as [g]: e.g.: OE sinӡan > Mod. E. sing.

3 [γ] is reflected in modern English as [j]: e.g.: OE ӡeolu > MnE yellow, OE ӡeard > MnE yard, OE ӡear > MnE year, OE dæӡ > MnE day, OE wæӡ > MnE way.

Æ is called æsc or ash and was pronounced in OE as in the word c**a**t. In ME Æ was replaced with «a».

Ƿ is called ƿynn or wynn and was pronounced in OE as in the word **w**ill. It is interesting to know that the earliest Old English texts represent this phoneme with the digraph **«uu»**, but scribes soon borrowed the rune ƿynn Ƿ and started to use it instead of **«uu»**. It remained a standard letter throughout the Anglo-Saxon era. Perhaps,

under the influence of French orthography during the Middle English period, **«ρ»** was replaced with the French **«uu» – double-u** once again, from which the modern «w» was developed.

Þ (þorn, thorn) and **Ð,ð** (eð, eth). In Old English these sounds were largely interchangeable, so *þu* and *ðu* were pronounced the same [θu]. In ME **Þ** and **Ð** were replaced with «th» due to rather complicated historical reasons involving Greek aspirated consonant shifts. þ, though, was sometimes replaced with «y», since the two look very similar when handwritten. This is why you'll see signs saying «Ye Olde Pub» - it's supposed to be pronounced «The Olde Pub».

The letter *q* always accompanied by *u* is introduced to denote either the consonant *k* or the cluster *kw* — *quay; quarter, queen*.

In spelling long *ū* was replaced by digraph *ou*, in the French tradition: *hūs — hous, mūs — mous, ūt — out*;

Long sound *o* is now reproduced by *oo: fōt, tōð —> foot, tooth*.

Long Old English *ē* was marked either by a digraph *ee* or by simple *e*, and mute *e* was added at the end of the word: *mētan — mete, meete (to meet)* or turned into *ie; feld — field; ðēof — thef — thief (like French chief, relief).*

The sibilant [tʃ] formerly reproduced by *c* before or after front vowels was replaced by a digraph *ch: cild, cēosan, hwilc —> child, chesen, which* (the same sound was found in the words *chambre, chair*, taken from French).

The sound [dʒ] of various origin is marked by the letters *j, g, dg* — courage, joy, bridge.

The sound [ʃ], formerly rendered by *sc* is rendered by the combinations *sh* and *sch: scip, fisc, sceal —> ship, fish, schal*.

The sound [k] formerly *c* before consonants is rendered by *k* — *cnāwan — knowen; cniht — knight* [1].

3.2 Middle English Phonology

Let us see and compare the pronunciation of vowels before the Great Vowel Shift.

1 **Vowel a/a:** The choice between a long or short vowel sounds depended on his or her user. So people could say either:

e.g.   a) tale [ta:lə] or [talə] for the word tale;
          b) name [na:mə] or [namə] for the word name.

2 **Vowel e/e:** The choice between a long or short vowel sounds depended on his or her user. So people could say either:

    e.g.   a) thre [θre:] or [θre] for the word three;

          b) he [he:] or [he] for the word he.

3 **Vowel i/i:** The choice between a long or short *i* is controversial. Some people think that the choice depended on the spelling of the word; thus *i* would be pronounced [i] and *y* as [i:]. The problem lies in the fact that there were many spelling variations of one and the same word at that time.

    e.g.   The personal pronoun *I* was pronounced as [i:].

Note: the diphthongs used today did not exist at that time.

4 **Vowel ʊ/u:** The choice between a long or short depended on the spelling; thus, when reading the letter *u* alone, it was pronounced [ʊ]. But when reading the words with *ow*, it was pronounced [u:]. Also, pay attention that *w* was usually pronounce as [w]:

    e.g.   a) but [bʊt];

          b) now [nu:];

          c) two [two:] not [tu:] [1].

3.3 The Great Vowel Shift

The Great Vowel Shift is often abbreviated as GVS. It really began around the 15th century during the time of Chaucer and lasted to the 18th century. The GVS was first studied by Otto Jespersen, a Danish linguist who invented the term. It should be understood that though these were the big changes, GVS didn't happen overnight. It didn't happen that one day people woke up and started pronouncing vowels one way than on a certain day we just changed. It was a gradual shift. It took place over about a hundred or two years of time. Now, what is Great Vowel Shift? It affected the pronunciation of long vowels, short vowels were unaffected. Before the GVS people pronounced vowels using the front of their mouth, then over a period of time they started pronounced long vowels with the back of their mouth. For example, the word *house* as we know it now was pronounced as [hu:z] in OE, the word *mode* as we know it now was pronounced [mu:d] and so on [4].

    Let's compare:

Word	Vowel pronunciation	
	Late Middle English before the GVS	Modern English after the GVS
bite	/iː/	/aɪ/
meet	/eː/	/iː/
meat	/ɛː/	
mate	/aː/	/eɪ/
out	/uː/	/aʊ/
boot	/oː/	/uː/
boat	/ɔː/	/oʊ/

Now it can be asked a question: How do we know that since we have no recordings of how this or that word was pronounced in OE before the GVS. In short, we don't know with 100 per cent certainty but linguists rely on many different suppositions. ***Supposition*** is an idea or theory that is believed to be true, even though there is not sufficient proof. However, they come to specific conclusions which are based on spelling, letters, rhyming songs and misspellings. For instance, misspellings often betray phonetic pronunciations of the word. So it helps us to draw certain conclusions on the way certain words were spoken before and after the GVS. One more question can arise: why did the GVS occur? There is no one specific reason why the GVS started or why it stopped. There are few different theories to why it happened. One theory is that after the Black Death, people moved east from southern England, so the dialects and culture were blended and it affected pronunciation. One of the major theories is language contact: when speakers of different languages interact closely, it is typical for the languages to influence each other. There were several conflicts between England and France on those days. England wanted to isolate itself more from France and therefore confirmed its own language. Furthermore King Henry VIII wanted to separate England from Rome through growing patriotism and language independence.

Diphthongs

ME	ME spelling	ME examples
[aɪ]	ai, ay, ei, ey	day, wey
[ɔɪ]	oi, oy	joye, Troie, destroye
[aʊ]	au	taught, lawe
[ɔʊ]	ow	knowe, trowe
[eʊ]	ew	lewed, fewe (very few words were pronounced [eʊ])
[ɪʊ]	ew	newe, trewe

Now let us have a look at some ME consonants:
1) *kn* – know [knu:];
      knight [knɪxt];
2) *wh* – white [xʊaɪt];
3) *gh* – night [nɪxt];
      light [lɪxt];
4) *th* – thei [θeɪ] for they;
      thinketh [θɪŋkeθ] for think [3].

For various reasons — nobody knows what the primary and what the secondary reasons of the most fundamental changes in Middle English language structure were, the first change in the phonological system to be mentioned is the levelling of sounds — vowels in the unstressed syllables. As we know, Old English had a fixed stress on the first syllable. So not only the final, but also middle sounds in polysyllabic words tend to change various sounds to one neutral sound *shwa*, [ə] marked as *e*. In Old English at the end of the words we might find whatever sound: *cara, caru, care* — now all the forms merged into one *care*; in this way we may say that the paradigm was simplified; at the same time in verbs various endings also merged into a single sound form — *wrītan, writen, writon* — *writen*. Final sounds *m* and *n* are pronounced indistinctly in such forms and are also on the way to being lost altogether: *carum, stanum* — *care, stone*. Final *n* was either pronounced or not depending on the following sound — and so we have variants in some forms (the form of the infinitive *writen* — *write*).

We should also mention that there were quantitative changes in vowels. In Old English a short or a long vowel might be found in any position; they were absolutely independent phonemic units. The Middle English vowel system was basically different. The quantity of vowels becomes dependent on what follows the vowel.

Questions to Topic 3

1 How were most diphthongs in ME pronounced?
2 What is the Great Vowel Shift?
3 What is letter Ƿ called?
4 In what position wasn't the sound l pronounced?
5 What is letter Þ called?
6 What is letter Æ called?
7 When did the Great Vowel Shift start?

Topic 4. MIDDLE ENGLISH MORPHOLOGY
(Borrowed from L. Verba. History of the English Language)

Plan

4.1 Middle English Noun.
4.2 Articles.
4.3 Middle English Verb.
4.4 Middle English Syntax.

The changes in English grammar may be described as a general reduction of inflections. Endings of the noun and adjective marking distinctions of number and case and often of gender were so changed in pronunciation as to lose their distinctive form and hence their usefulness. To some extent, the same thing is true of the verb. This levelling of inflectional endings was due partly to phonetic changes, partly to the operation of analogy. The phonetic changes were simple but far-reaching. As a result, a number of originally distinct endings such as *-a, -u, -e, -an*, and *-um* were reduced generally to a uniform *-e*, and such grammatical distinctions as they formerly expressed were no longer conveyed. Traces of these changes have been found in Old

English manuscripts as early as the tenth century. By the end of the twelfth century they seem to have been generally carried out [1].

4.1 Middle English Noun

Nouns in Old English differed from each other by having declension in endings. However, with the endings being levelled, there was no point in distinguishing the very classes.

In OE Nouns had the category of gender which was lost during ME; his does not apply to personal pronouns because such pronouns as he and she determine living beings.

As for the category of number, it was preserved. In OE endings which indicated the plural originally were:

-as (of the a-stems masculine, r-stems masculine);

0 (a-stems neuter, some r-stems);

-u (neuter a-stems, i-stems, s-stems, some r-stems);

-a (o-stems, u-stems);

-e (masculine i-stems, some root stems);

-an (n-stems).

Because of the levelling of the unstressed vowels all theabove mentioned came to:

-es;

0;

-e or *0;*

-en [1, p. 118].

Thus, in the end ending-es became the rule for most of nouns. French and Scandinavian borrowings had ending -es in plural (*two felawes; the chambres and the stables; fresshe floures*).

However, some nouns kept their OE irregular plural form, e.g. *man — men*, *foot — feet*, *goose — geese,* etc. Some former -n-stems still retain their suffix as a marker of the plural form. So in Chaucer's works we find the following plurals:

Thou seist, that oxen, asses, hors, and houndes... (you see that oxen, asses, horses and hounds...);

from hise eyen ran the water doun... (from his eyes the water ran down);

to looken up with eyen lighte (to look up with light eyes) [1, p. 119].

As you know there were four cases in Old English but they were reduced to two in Middle English: the Nominative and the Genitive. In Old English the ending in the Genitive were the following: *–es, 0, –a, –an,* but in Middle English *–es* becomes predominant. So now both plural and the Genitive had the ending *–es* and in the long run it was perceived as the ending of both meanings.

e.g. he hadde a fyr-reed *cherubynnes* face (he had fire-red cherub's face)

at the *kynges* court (at the king's court)

His *lordes* sheep (his lord's sheep)

a *wydwes* sone (a widow's son) [1, p.119].

4.2 Articles

It is essential to mention that there had been no articles before. There was a demonstrative pronoun *ðæt* which helped to show case of the nouns which stayed the same in Nominative, Genitive, Dative, and Accusative. It was the pronoun *ðæt* which was declined, changed its form and was the real marker of case of the nouns. There is an opinion that this led to excessive use of the demonstrative pronouns in Old English and therefore it weakened their demonstrative function. Thus in Middle English people started to use form of the numeral *ān* (one) to name a person or thing unknown or unmentioned before. Articles had two forms — *the* from reduced *ðata* and *an, a* from the numeral *ān* [1].

4.3 Middle English Verb

In Old English there existed all types of verbs: strong, weak, preterite-present and irregular. All of them were preserved in Middle English. However, while an occasional verb developed a strong past tense or past participle by analogy with similar strong verbs, new verbs formed from nouns and adjectives or borrowed from other languages were regularly conjugated as weak. After the Norman Conquest and because of the influence of new words, many strong verbs changed over in the course of time to the weak inflection. Nearly a third of the strong verbs in Old English have died out early in the Middle English period. The loss has continued in subsequent

periods and today more than half of the Old English strong verbs have disappeared completely from the standard language [6].

Despite of this tendency, strong forms didn't appear weak for one night. Weak and strong forms were used side by side for a long period of time. For example, *oke* as the past tense of ache was still written throughout the 15th century although the weak form *ached* had been also in use for a hundred years. In the same way we find *stope* beside *stepped*, *rewe* beside *rowed* and others. However, there were strong verbs which had weak forms but didn't survive in the standard speech: *knowed* for *knew, teard* for *tore, blowed* for *blew* [1].

Loss of Grammatical Gender

One more important change was loss of grammatical gender. The gender of Old English nouns was not often determined by meaning. Sometimes it was in direct contradiction with the meaning. Thus *woman* (OE *wīf-mann*) was masculine, because the second element in the compound was masculine; *wife* and *child*, like German *Weib* and *Kind*, were neuter. Moreover, the strong adjective and the demonstratives chiefly showed the gender of nouns in Old English but not the declension as it is in a language like Latin. The support for grammatical gender was removed when the adjective appeared to have only one ending and the demonstratives *this, that, these,* and *those* received the fixed forms [7].

4.4 Middle English Syntax

In Old English the grammatical functions of the nouns which followed each other were clear from their endings, say, the nominative and dative cases. In Middle English they might become uncertain. The best way to avoid this uncertainty was the use of the possible patterns of word order. The process of development of word order in Late Middle English and Modern English can be seen in the Peterborough Chronicle which was written between 1070 and 1154. In the text it is possible to trace first a significant loss of inflections and afterwards a corresponding firmness of word order namely the patterns of subject and verb (SV). If we compare, we will see that in Old English there was VS order and, in subordinate clauses, S... V (with the finite verb

in final position). But it should be noticed that such a language was Middle, not Modern English in other words it was transitional [1].

Questions to Topic 4

1 How may the changes in English middle grammar be described?
2 What endings were reduced to a uniform –e? (name the letters)
3 What way did Possessive Case appear?
4 How did the Noun change in Middle English? Give brief description.
5 What articles appeared in Middle English?
6 Give short characteristic of the Middle English Verbs.
7 Compare the word order in Old English and Middle English.

Topic 5. MIDDLE ENGLISH LITERATURE

Plan

5.1 Geoffrey Chaucer.
5.2 God's English.

5.1 Geoffrey Chaucer

Geoffrey Chaucer was the first writer of the newly emerged England. He told the English what they were. In *The Canterbury Tales* in particular he describes characters the English can still see around them today and he writes of them in the new English, Middle English, English that had somehow withstood the battering given by French and come back to begin its fight to regain control of the country in which it had been nourished.

At the end of the fourteenth century, English speakers talk directly to their people, through skilful stories told by a group of pilgrims to ease the time as they ride from Southwark in London to Canterbury Cathedral. Most importantly of all, Chaucer decided to write not in Latin - which he knew well - not in the French from which he translated and which might have given him greater prestige, but in English, his own English, London-based English [4].

Studying Chaucer's works, we will understand what English achieved in these three hundred Normalized years. Chaucer wrote forty-three thousand lines of poetry, two substantial prose works and curiosities such as ***A Treatise on the Astrolabe*** for the education of his son, Lewis. *A Treatise on the Astrolabe* is a medieval instruction manual on the astrolabe (which is a device historically used by astronomers and navigators to measure the inclined position in the sky of a celestial body, day or night).

Chaucer was a Londoner, born in the mid 1340s, son of a London vintner, John Chaucer. In his adolescence, he became a page in the service of the Duke of Clarence and later served in the household of Edward III. It is important to emphasize that London was tiny by modern-day comparisons — a population of about forty thousand. There were sometimes dangerously infected places in which you did not risk drinking the water. A page at court would most likely be sent on messages and little missions all over the city and be able to observe all the variety of life, life then being much lived on the streets.

Chaucer served in one of the campaigns in the Hundred Years War, was taken prisoner, and ransomed. There was material here well used and his rather grand marriage, to the daughter of Sir Payne Roet, whose sister later gave him an access to the centre of power. The idea of a writer making a living solely through writing was not entertained at that time. Chaucer had an income to find. He discovered ways to do this developing his art as a writer. In the 1370s he began to travel abroad on diplomatic missions for the king. There was a trade agreement he negotiated at Genoa; on a mission to Milan he encountered the dazzling achievements of Italian poetry. Petrarch and Boccaccio were alive and Dante was cherished and much discussed. There is evidence of their influence in much of his work [2].

After about ten years in the saddle abroad, during which time he composed *The Parliament of Fowls*, *Troilus and Criseyde* and translated Boethius' *The Consolation of Philosophy*, he settled in London to become Controller of the Petty Customs. In 1386 he was elected as a Knight, or MP, for the shire of Kent. He began work on *The Canterbury Tales* and it is in this period that his fortunes fluctuate: Chaucer gets into debt; he recovers to become Clerk of the King's Works; he soon quits that for the unprepossessing post of

Deputy Forester at Petherton in Somerset; he takes a lease on a house in the garden of Westminster Abbey in 1399 and dies the following year.

About twenty to twenty-five per cent of the vocabulary used by Chaucer is from the French. Let's have a look at the opening lines of *The Canterbury Tales*.

<blockquote>
Whan that Aprill with his shoures soote
The droghte of March hath perced to the roote
And bathed every veyne in swich lycour
Of which vertu engendred is the flour;
When Zephirus eek with his sweete breeth
Inspired hath in every holt and heeth
The tendre croppes …
Thanne longen folk to goon on pilgrimages [4, p. 143].
</blockquote>

In that short extract there's an average of at least one French word per line: «April», «March», «perced», «veyne», «lycour», «vertu», «engendred», «flour», «inspired». Often they have meanings now lost: «lycour» = moisture; «vertu» = power. Later, «corage» = heart; «straunge» = foreign, distant. «Zephirus» is from Latin, «root» is from Old Norse. But there is no sense that English had been taken over. This language is English. All the words called by linguists «function words» - pronouns and prepositions — are from Old English; the nuts and bolts and the basic structure held.

Here is a Modern English translation of these opening lines:

<blockquote>
When April with his sweet showers
Has pierced the drought of March to the root
And bathed every vein in such moisture
Which has the power to bring forth the flower,
When also Zephyrus with his sweet breath
Has breathed spirit into tender new shoots
In every wood and meadow …
Then people love to go on pilgrimage [4, p. 144].
</blockquote>

What Chaucer did most brilliantly was to choose and tailor his language to suit every story and its teller. The creation of mood and tone and the realisation of characters through the language they use is something we expect of writers today, so it is difficult to realise how

extraordinary it was when Chaucer did it. He proved that the reformed English was fit for great literature.

Chaucer planted English deeply in the country which bore its name, with a brilliance and a confidence that meant that there was no looking back: Confidence in England and English was growing. The increasing use of the surname may perhaps be an oblique confirmation of this. They were needed, to differentiate between people with the same Christian names, as the pool of Christian names in common use was very small at this period. «Geoffrey» is Germanic but came to England through the Normans. «Chaucer» is French, from the Old French «Chausier», shoemaker, perhaps from the place in which his grandfather had lived in Cordwainer (Leatherworker) Street. We saw that in the north the suffix -son became prevalent: Johnson, Rawlinson, Arnison, Pearson, Matheson, Dickson, Wilson. More generally, in this Chaucerian period, other surnames came in, often based on where people lived — Hill, Dale, Bush, Fell, Brook, Field, or words ending in *-land* and *-ton*. Maybe this was a belated catching up with the Norman-French nobility, all of whom were *«de»* somewhere or other, de Montfort, for instance. Then there were the occupational surnames: Butcher, Baker, Carver, Carter, Carpenter, Gardiner, Glover, Hunter, Miller, Cooper, Mason, Salter, Thatcher, Weaver. Place, occupation, inheritance, all these had to be stamped through man and woman, fastening them to their place, giving them full identities in a language and a country that was beginning to feel like theirs.

We still have over fifty handwritten copies of *The Canterbury Tales* from the fifteenth century and we know that Chaucer reached an audience which included London merchants and Richard of Gloucester, the future King Richard III. Before the fifteenth century was out, William Caxton had printed two editions of *The Canterbury Tales* and they have never been out of print since. They have been enjoyed, imitated, copied, re-translated, put on stage, screen and radio, and generations have rightly regarded Chaucer as the father and founding genius of English literature.

A century and a half after his death, a monumental tomb was erected in his honour in Westminster Abbey. It is in what has become Poets' Corner, just a stone's throw from the house in which he died in 1400 [3].

But Chaucer was not alone in creating written stories. There is Langland's **Piers Plowman** written in c.1370–90. It is a Middle English allegorical narrative poem by William Langland. It is written in unrhymed, alliterative verse divided into sections called passus (Latin for «step»). Piers Plowman contains the first known allusion to a literary tradition of Robin Hood tales. There is also **Sir Gawain and the Green Knight** which is a late 14th-century Middle English chivalric romance. A chivalric romance is fantastic stories about marveled-filled adventures, often of a knight-errant portrayed as having heroic qualities. *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* is one of the best known Arthurian stories (stories about legendary King Arthur). It describes how Sir Gawain, a knight of King Arthur's Round Table, accepts a challenge from a mysterious «Green Knight» who challenges any knight to strike him with his axe if he will take a return blow in a year and a day. Gawain accepts and beheads him with his blow, at which the Green Knight stands up, picks up his head, and reminds Gawain of the appointed time. In his struggles to keep his bargain, Gawain demonstrates chivalry and loyalty until his honour is called into question by a test involving Lady Bertilak, the lady of the Green Knight's castle.

5.2 God's English

In the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries the movement was under way to force English into a central and commanding place in the society whose first and expanded tongue it was. The state had to be challenged, and the Church. It was with the Church that English had its most violent struggle [3].

Later medieval Britain was a religious society. The Roman Catholic Church controlled and covered all aspects of earthly life. It also held the keys to a heaven and hell which were very real in the minds of most who were fed constantly and cleverly with priestly persuasions, stories of miracles, promises of eternal happiness and threats of eternal torture and damnation. You challenged the might of the Church only if you were extremely powerful and even the powerful would be scared and crack when the full range of the Church's instruments of power and conviction were brought to bear. But there were those in England, men of faith, totally had the idea that

English should become the language of God and in a series of heroic efforts they set out to make that happen even though it would invoke the fearsome wrath of the Holy Roman Catholic Church.

The central power of words in fourteenth-century England lay in the Bible. There was no Bible in English. There had been some partial translations of the Gospels and parts of the Old Testament in Old English and there were Middle English versions of the Psalms. In formal terms, God spoke to the people in Latin. The proper relationship between the believer and the Bible was one mediated by the priest in Latin. He would interpret scripture for the common people. The Bible was in Latin — a language wholly inaccessible to the vast majority, and Bibles were few. The priest, it was argued, being ordained a true man of God, would avoid sinful misinterpretation and heresy. He would make sure the devil was shut out. This meant that it was impossible for most English people to know the Bible for themselves [3].

If you wanted to communicate with God in English, you might be lucky with an idealistic local priest who would preach a sermon on a biblical text - but his starting point and his finishing point would be in Latin.

Priests had huge power those times and it would be a terrible struggle to take this power from them and to replace Latin into English. The battle would eventually tear the Church in two. The first rumblings began in the second half of the fourteenth century. It would take many lives. But many people were ready to die for it, to make English the language of their faith.

The prime mover in the fourteenth century was a scholar, John Wycliffe. It is considered that he was born near Richmond in Yorkshire. When he turned seventeen, he was admitted to Merton College, Oxford. John Wycliffe was described as a charismatic man and a fluent Latinist. He was a major philosopher and theologian who believed passionately that his knowledge should be shared by everyone. From the walls of Oxford, Wycliffe began a furious attack on the power and wealth of the Church [2].

He wanted to separate the eternal, ideal Church of God from the material one of Rome. In short, he believed that if something is not in the Bible there is no truth in it whatever the Pope says — and, incidentally, the Bible says nothing at all about having a Pope. When

men speak of the Church, he said, they usually mean priests, monks, canons and friars. But it should not be so.

A full Bible in English was unauthorised by the Church and potentially heretical, even seditious, with all the savage penalties including death which such crimes against the one true Church exacted. Any translation was very high risk and had to be done in secrecy.

Wycliffe inspired two biblical translations and rightly they bear his name. Both versions are made from the Latin Vulgate version and follow it so closely that it can be incomprehensible. Wycliffe prepared the first translation but the burden of it was undertaken by Nicholas Hereford of Queen's College, Oxford. He would have needed the help of many friends as well as recourse to a great number of books. It was not only the translation itself, a mammoth task, which faced them: The Bible had to be spread too. Rooms in quiet Oxford colleges were turned into revolutionary cells, scriptoria, production lines were established turning out these holy manuscripts and from the number that remain we can tell that a great many were made. One hundred and seventy survive, a huge number for a six-hundred-year-old manuscript, which tells us that there must have been effective groups of people secretly translating it, copying it, passing it on. Later, hundreds would be tortured, dying the most horrible deaths, for their part in creating and distributing to the people the first English Bible. Yet Wycliffe and his men believed they were to change the world and for a brief moment, it seemed, they had. The Wycliffe English Bible was completed and it was read [4].

But in many places it was not an easy translation. In the opening lines of the Bible, many familiar phrases do have their English origin in this translation: «woe is me», «an eye for an eye» are both in Wycliffe, as are words such as «birthday», «canopy», «child-bearing», «communication», «crime», «to dishonour», «envy», «frying-pan», «godly», «graven», «humanity», «pollute» and others. All of these and many more were read first in Wycliffe's Bible.

The criticism of Wycliffe's Bible is that it is too Latinate. The Latin version was translated word for word, even keeping the Latin word order, as in «Lord, go from me for I am a man sinner» and «I forsoothe am the Lord thy God full jealous». Another result was that the text itself is shot through with Latinate words, some directly imported. There are over one thousand Latin words that turn up for the

first time in English whose use in England is first recorded in Wycliffe's Bible, words such as «profession», «glory» — a good word for this Bible [3].

By the standards of the day it was a bestseller and at first the Church merely condemned Wycliffe. They complained that he had made the scriptures more open to the teachings of laymen and women.

Meanwhile Wycliffe began to organise and train a new religious order of preachers who were travelling from place to place around England. Their typical dress was a russet-coloured woollen robe. They carried a long staff. Initially most were those fearless Oxford scholars, though they were quickly joined by «the low born» in extraordinary numbers. Their purpose was to spread the Word of God, literally, in English.

It had the characteristics of a guerrilla campaign. They were out to bring God back to the people through the language of the land. They appeared in the highways, byways, taverns and inns, on village greens and in open fields preaching against the Church's wealth and corruption and proclaiming Wycliffe's anti-clerical ideas. They were spied on, they were observed. They became known as the **Lollards**, the name deriving from «lollaerd», from «lollen» that means to mutter or mumble. They called themselves Christian Brethren.

The Church could not tolerate that. On 17 May 1382, there took place a show trial in Blackfriars in London. Eight bishops, various masters of theology, doctors of common and civil law and fifteen friars met to examine Wycliffe's works. They declared Wycliffe's work as heresy. Wycliffe's followers were also condemned. The synod ordered to arrest preachers throughout the land. Many of those caught were tortured and killed [3].

Wycliffe had been defeated. His Bibles were outlawed. The doors of the Church, from the greatest cathedrals to the lowliest parish churches, were still the monopoly of Latin.

On 30 May, every eparchy in the land was instructed to publish the verdict. Wycliffe became ill. He was paralysed by a stroke. Two years later he died on the last day of 1384.

In 1399, Henry IV was to accept the crown in English. Chaucer delighted readers and appreciators of English everywhere with The Canterbury Tales. But the Church slammed the door.

Yet the Lollards risked their lives and carried on, meeting in hidden places, especially in Herefordshire and Monmouthshire. One contemporary chronicler wrote that «every second man» he met was a Lollard and they «went all over England luring great nobles and lords to their fold». English was proving its worth as a language of protest against central authority and certain restless nobles and lords might well have welcomed that [3].

William Langland was a Lollard and his religious poem, *Piers Plowman*, was published in 1390. It was the most popular poem of its day, and it shows how deeply Wycliffe's ideas had bitten in. Langland wrote in the West Midlands dialect and while Chaucer's base was London and the proficient in the arts, *Piers Plowman* gathered in the provincial and the strongly religious-minded rural population. His poem is written in alliterative verse; Chaucer had used a regular natural structure and rhyme schemes breaking away from the older tradition.

After Wycliffe's death and despite the censure and severity of the Church, copies of Wycliffe's Bible continued to be produced and circulated - even when it became a mortal crime to own any of Wycliffe's works. With astonishing courage, Catholics who spread the English language were prepared to challenge the Pope and take a chance with their lives and their eternal souls in order to read the word of God to the English in their own language.

But the hierarchy could not bear it. In 1412, twenty-eight years after Wyclifife's death, the Archbishop of Canterbury ordered all of Wycliffe's works to be burned and in a letter to the Pope entered a list of two hundred and sixty-seven heresies «worthy of the fire» which he claimed to have chosen from the pages of Wycliffe's Bible. The Archbishop called John Wycliffe the son of the Serpent, a child of Antichrist, as he had malice when he had translated Scripture in the mother tongue.

The question can arise – why was the Church so angry? Perhaps that's because Latin was considered the language of the Holy Book and they thought that it had to be kept inviolate. However, Wycliffe had threatened the very voice of the Church and God with his ideas and beliefs. From this awful example we can see how powerful the language van be [3].

The Church was not finished with him yet. The Emperor Sigismund, King of Hungary, called together the Council of

Constance in 1414. It was the most imposing council ever called by the Catholic Church. In 1415 Wycliffe was condemned as a heretic and in the spring of 1428 it was commanded that his bones be exhumed and removed from consecrated ground.

With the Primate of England looking on, Wycliffe's remains were disinterred and burned, thus, presumably, it was thought, depriving him of any possibility of eternal life. For when the Last Judgement came and the bodies of the dead rose up to meet those souls chosen to live with God, Wycliffe would be unable to reunite body and soul and so, if he had not already perished in hell, as they prayed for and hoped, he would certainly perish at the last.

The Bible remained in Latin and Wycliffe's failed attempt was an implacable and damning lesson to anyone foolish enough to attempt to mount another unholy attack on the side of English.

Wycliffe's remains were burned on a little bridge that spanned the River Swift which was the tributary to Avon. His ashes were thrown into the stream. Soon afterwards a Lollard prophecy appeared:

The Avon to the Severn runs,
The Severn to the sea.
And Wycliffe's dust shall spread abroad
Wide as the waters be [3, p. 93].

As you see these lines are written in English.

That is how the Middle English period finished and all the above mentioned events paved the way for the next period known as Modern English.

Questions to Topic 5

1 Who was Geoffrey Chaucer? Tell in brief his background.
2 What literary works by Geoffrey Chaucer do you know?
3 Give characteristic of «The Canterbury Tales».
4 Who is Wycliffe and what influence did he have on the English language?
5 What Middle English poets and their works can you name?

TOPICS FOR PRACTICAL CLASSES

1 The Norman Conquest (1066-1200).
2 William the Conqueror.
3 Edward the Confessor.
4 The rise of middle class in Middle English.
5 Chaucer and the birth of English Literature.
6 The Canterbury Tales by Chaucer.
7 Sir Thomas Malory: biography and works.
8 Julian (or Juliana) of Norwich.
9 The War of Roses.
10 King Henry VIII.

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APPENDIX

A

As we have seen from the above lectures, Middle English Literature has a great impact on the English Language itself. The following excerpts from ME Literature will help you to get acquainted with the works of famous writers and poets of those days.

Let us look at Chaucer's The Miller's Prologue:

Oure Hooste lough and swoor, «So moot I gon,
This gooth aright; unbokeled is the male.
Lat se now who shal telle another tale;
For trewely the game is wel bigonne.
Now telleth ye, sir Monk, if that ye konne,   5
Somwhat to quite with the Knightes tale.»

The Millere, that for dronken was al pale,
So that unnethe upon his hors he sat,
He nolde avalen neither hood ne hat,
Ne abyde no man for his curteisie,   10

But in Pilates voys he gan to crie,
And swoor by armes, and by blood and bones,
I kan a noble tale for the nones,
With which I wol now quite the knyghtes tale.
Oure Hooste saugh that he was dronke of ale,   15

And seyde, «Abyd, Robyn, my leeve brother;
Some bettre man shal telle us first another.
Abyd, and lat us werken thriftily.»
By goddes soule, quod he, that wol nat I;
For I wol speke, or elles go my wey.   20

«Oure hoost answerde, tel on, a devel wey!
Thou art a fool; thy wit is overcome.»
Now herkneth, quod the millere, alle and some!
But first I make a protestacioun

That I am dronke, I knowe it by my soun;   25

And therfore if that I mysspeke or seye
Wyte it the ale of southwerk, I you preye.
For I wol telle a legende and a lyf
Bothe of a carpenter and of his wyf,
How that a clerk hath set the wrightes cappe.   30

The reve answerde and seyde, stynt thy clappe!
Lat be thy lewed dronken harlotrye.
It is a synne and eek a greet folye
To apeyren any man, or hym defame,
And eek to bryngen wyves in swich fame.   35
Thou mayst ynogh of othere thynges seyn [5, p. 145-146].

B

     Another excerpt is from Layamon's works. You can also come across some other spelling of his name such as Laghamon or Lawman. He is an English poet of the late 12th and the early 13th century. He became famous for his legends about the king Arthur and the Knights of the Round Table.

An preost wes on leoden; Laʒamon wes ihoten.
he wes Leouenaðes sone; liðe him beo Drihten.
He wonede at Ernleʒe; at æðelen are chirechen.
vppen Seuarne staþe; sel þar him þuhte.
on-fest Radestone; þer he bock radde.   5

Hit com him on mode; & on his mern þonke.
þet he wolde of Engle; þa æðelæn tellen.
wat heo ihoten weoren; & wonene heo comen.
þa Englene londe; ærest ahten.
æfter þan flode; þe from Drihtene com.   10
þe al her a-quelde; quic þat he funde.
buten Noe.& Sem; Iaphet & Cham.
& heore four wiues; þe mid heom weren on archen.

Laʒamon gon liðen; wide ʒond þas leode.
& bi-won þa æðela boc; þa he to bisne nom.   15
He nom þa Englisca boc; þa makede Seint Beda.

An-oþer he nom on Latin; þe makede Seinte Albin.
& þe feire Austin; þe fulluht broute hider in.

Boc he nom þe þridde; leide þer amidden.
þa makede a Frenchis clerc;   20
Wace wes ihoten; þe wel couþe writen.
& he hoe ȝef þare æðelen; Ælienor
þe wes Henries quene; þes heȝes kinges.
Laȝamon leide þeos boc; & þa leaf wende.
he heom leofliche bi-heold. liþe him beo Drihten.   25

Feþteren he nom mid fingren; & fiede on boc-felle.
& þa soþere word; sette to-gadere.
& þa þre boc; þrumde to are.
Nu bidde[ð] Laȝamon alcne æðele mon;
for þene almiten Godd.   30
þet þeos boc rede; & leornia þeos runan.
þat he þeos soðfeste word; segge to-sumne.
for his fader saule; ða hine for[ð] brouhte.
& for his moder saule; þa hine to monne iber.
& for his awene saule; þat hire fie selre beo. Amen [5, p. 148].   35

Below you can read a translation for the first lines of the above poem which will help you compare and understand the difference in words and spelling in ME and present day English.

A priest was among people, Layamon was named
He was the Liefnoth's son, let God have mercy on him
He lived at Areley, at a lovely church
up Severn's bank. Blissful he thought it
dose to Redstone. There he book read
it came on his mind a merry thought
that he wanted of the English nobles tell
what they were called and from-where they came
that England first owned
after the flood which came from God
which killed all which that it found
except Noah and Sem, Japhet and Ham
and their four wives who with them were on the Ark [5, p. 148].

Here you have a chance to read the Introduction to a poem of Sir Gawain and the Green Knight in both Middle English and Modern English variants:

Lines 1-19
Siþen þe sege and þe assaut watz sesed at Troye,
þe borȝ brittened and brent to brondeȝ and askez,
þe tulk þat þe trammes of tresoun þer wroȝt
Watz tried for his tricherie, þe trewest on erþe:
Hit watz Ennias þe athel, and his highe kynde,   5
þat siþen depreced prouinces, and patrounes
bicome

Since the siege and the assault were ceased at Troy
the battlements broken and burnt to brands and ashes
the man that the plots of treason there made/framed
was tried for his treachery, the worst on earth
It was Aeneas the noble and his high kin   5
that afterwards conquered provinces and masters
became [5, p. 151].

Weinȝe of al þe wele in þe west iles.
Fro riche Romulus to Rome ricchis hym swyþe,
With gret bobbaunce þat buiȝe he biges vpon fyrst,
And neuenes hit his aune nome, as hit now hat;   10
Ticius to Tuskan and teldes bigynnes,
Langaberde in Lumbardie lyftes vp homes,
And fer ouer þe French flod Felix Brutus
On mony bonkkes ful brode Bretayn he settez
wyth wynne,   15
Where werre and wrake and wonder
Bi syþez hatz wont þerinne,
And oft boþe blysse and blunder
Ful skete hatz skyfted synne.

Wellnigh of all the wealth in the western regions
From rich Romulus to Rome's riches quickly

with great arrogance that city he set up first
and named it with his own name, which it now has   10
Tirius started towns in Tuscany
Longbeard lifted up homes in Lombardy
And far past the French water Felix Brutus
on many broad banks he puts Britain
with joy   15
where wars, vengeance, and wonder
at times have been wanting and often both bliss and turmoil
Very quickly have changed again [5, p. 151].

Lines 37-49
þis kyng lay at Camylot vpon Krystmasse
With mony luflych lorde, ledez of þe best,
Rekenly of þe Rounde Table alle þo rich breþer,
With rych reuel oryȝt and rechles merþes.
þer tournayed tulkes by tymez ful mony,   5
Justed ful jolile þise gentyle kniȝtes,
Syþen kayred to þe court caroles to make.
For þer þe fest watz ilyche ful fiften dayes,
With alle þe mete and þe mirþe þat men
couþe avyse;

This king was at Camelot during Christmas
with many gracious lords, the best people
worthy of the Round Table all those fine brothers
with fine revelry and carefree joy
there held men tournaments from time to time   5
jousted gallantly these gentle knights
The went to the court to do carols (dances and singing)
for there the feast lasted a full fifteen days
with all the meat and mirth that could be

Such glaum ande gle glorious to here,   10
Dere dyn vpon day, daunsyng on nyȝtes,
Al watz hap vpon heȝe in hallez and chambrez
With lordez and ladies, as leuest him þoȝt.
With all þe wele of þe worlde þay woned,
þer samen

such noise and glee glorious to hear   10
dear sounds during the day, dancing during the nights
all was heaped high in the halls and chambers
with lords and ladies as lovely as could be
with all the wealth of the world thay lived there
together

þe most kyd knyȝtez vnder Krystes seluen,   15
And þe louelokkest ladies þat euer lif haden,
And he þe comlokest kyng þat þe court haldes;
For al watz þis fayre folk in her first age, on sille,
þe hapnest vnder heuen,
Kyng hyȝest mon of wylle;   20
Hit were now gret nye to neuen
So hardy a here on hille.

the best knights under Christ himself   15
and the loveliest ladies that ever had life
and he the noblest king that held court
because this fair folk in their prime, in the hall,
the blessed under heaven
the king highest of will   20
it were now great trouble to name
a hardier army on a hill [5, p. 152].

D

  These two excerpts are from Piers Plowman by William
Langland. It was written between 1370 and 1390. This piece of work
is written in unrhymed and alliterative style.
I (lines 1-30)
In a somer seson . whan soft was the sonne
I shope me in shroudes . as I a shepe were
In habite as an heremite . vnholy of workes
Went wyde in this world. wondres to here
Ac on a May mornynge . on Maluerne hulles   5
Me byfel a ferly. of fairy me thouȝte
I was wery forwandred . and went me to reste
Vnder a brode banke . bi a bornes side

42

And as I lay and lened . and loked in the wateres
I slombred in a slepyng. it sweyued so merye   10
Thanne gan I to meten . a merueilouse sweuene
That I was in a wildernesse . wist I neuer where
As I bihelde in-to the est. an hiegh to the sonne
I seigh a toure on a toft. trielich ymaked
A depe dale binethe . a dongeon there-inne   15
With depe dyches and derke . and dredful of sight
A faire felde ful of folke . fonde I there bytwene
Of alle maner of men . the mene and the riche
Worchyng and wandryng . as the worlde asketh
Some putten hem to the plow. pleyed ful seide   20
In settyng and in sowyng . swonken ful harde
And wonnen that wastours . with glotonye destruyeth
And some putten hem to pruyde . apparailed hem ther-after
In contenaunce of clothyng. comen disgised
In prayers and in penance . putten hem manye   25
A1 for loue of owre lorde . lyueden ful streyte
In hope forto haue. heueneriche blisse
As ancres and heremites . that holden hem in here selles
And coueiten nought in contre . to kairen aboute
For no likerous liflode . her lykam to plese [5, p. 150].   30

E

It's also important to get acquainted with Scots literature. We can refer John Barbour with his «Brus» and Blind Berry with his «Wallace».

Below you can read a poem «Wallace» which is about a firefighter who defended Scotland from England.

BUKE FYRST
OUR antecessowris, that we suld of reide,
And hald in mynde thar nobille worthi deid,
We lat ourslide, throw werray sleuthfulnes;
And castis ws euir til vthir besynes.
Till honour ennymys is our haile entent,
It has beyne seyne in thir tymys bywent;

Our aid ennemys cummyn ofSaxonys blud,
That neuyr yeit to Scotland wald do gud,
Bot euir on fors, and contrar haile thair will,
Quhow gret kyndnes thar has beyne kyth thaim till.
It is weyle knawyne on mony diuerss syde,
How thai haff wrocht in to thair mychty pryde,
To hald Scotlande at wndyr euirmar.
Bot God abuff has maid thar mycht to par: [4, p. 120].

And here is the one of the translations of «Wallace». While comparing, you can notice that it is not easy to read and understand some words and spelling but you can see that the grammar itself has strong similarity to Modern English one.

First Book
Our ancestors, who we should read of,
And hold in mind their noble worthy deeds,
We let pass by, through veritable slothfulness;
And continually occupy ourselves with other business.
To honor our enemies is our whole intention.
It has been seen in bygone times;
Our old enemies came of Saxon blood,
Who never yet to Scotland would do good,
But necessarily and against their will.
How great kindness there has been revealed to them.
It is well known on diverse sides,
How they have tried in their mighty pride,
To hold Scotland down evermore.
But God above has lessened their might: [4, p. 120].

Now let us read one of John Barbour's earliest works written in Scots. It is a heroic romance about Robert the Bruce, King of the Scots in the late thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries.
Storyis to red ar delitabill,
suppos that tha be nocht bot fabilll
Than suld storyis that suthfast wer,
And tha war said on gud maner,
Haf doubill plesans in hering.

44

The fyrst plesans is þe carping
And the tothir the suthfastnes
That schawys the thing richt
as it wes
And suth thingis that ar likand
To man is hering ar plesand.
Tharfor I wald fane set my will,
Gif my wit micht suffis thartill,
To put in writ ane suthfast story,
That it lest ay furth in memory,
Sa that na tym of lenth it let,
na ger it haly be forʒet [4, p. 116].

Compare the Modern English translation of the above written poem.
It is delightful to read stories,
Even if they are nothing but fable,
Then should stories that are truthful,
If they were told in good manner,
Have double pleasure in hearing.
The first pleasure is the talking,
And the second the truthfulness.
That shows the matter rightly, as it
was;
And true things that are attractive
Till many hearing it are pleased.
Therefore I would fain set my will,
If my wit might suffice for it,
To put in writing a truthful story,
That it last forever in memory,
So that no length of time may block it,
Nor cause it wholly to be forgotten [4, p. 116].

F

During the lectures you learnt that there were different dialects in Middle English. This excerpt will introduce you to Southern dialect.
Al so þu dost on þire side:
vor wanne snou liþ þicke & wide,

an alle wiȝtes habbeþ sorȝe,
þu singest from eve fort amorȝe.
Ac ich alle blisse mid me bringe: 5
ech wiȝt is glad for mine þinge,
& blisseþ hit wanne ich cume,
& hiȝtep aȝen mine kume.
þe blostme ginneþ springe & sprede,
boþe inettro & ek on mede.   10
þe lilie mid hire faire wlite
wolcumeþ me, þat þu hit w[i]te,
bit me mid hire faire blo
þat ich shulle to hire flo.
þe rose also mid hire rude,   15
þat cumeþ ut of þe þorne wode,
bit me þat ich shulle singe
vor hire luve one skentinge:
& ich so do þurȝ niȝt & dai,
þe more ich singe þe more I mai,   20
an skente hi mid mine songe,
ac noþeles noȝt over-longe;
wane ich iso þat men boþ glade,
ich nelle þat hi bon to sade;
þan is ido vor wan ich com,   25
ich fare aȝen & do wisdom [5, p. 414].

О. А. Дзюба, О. М. Харламова

HISTORY OF THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE
(MIDDLE ENGLISH)

Конспект лекцій