

History of English Language and Literature
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Lecture No 3c

The Development of English Language: Old English to Middle English


Good morning and welcome to today's session on the course, The History of English Language and Literature. In today's lecture we continue to look at the development of English language from the early time onwards.

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+ The arrival of the Vikings (876 AD)

- From Denmark and Norway
 - 'a bloodthirsty frat party in popular imagination'
- 1016 – after King Alfred's death
 - Dane's Law – 1018-1042
- A linguistic puzzle
- Norse evolved into modern Scandinavian languages
- Two Major Changes:
 - Old Norse words enter English (the language of the Vikings)
 - Eg: they, them
 - Language becomes simplistic
 - Which form to use?

DANE'S LAW

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And just in continuation with the previous lecture we begin looking at the arrival of Vikings which happened in 876 A.D. Vikings were a group of very violent nomadic tribes who uhh who uhh who were said to have arrived from Denmark and Norway and they were generally constructed in popular imagination as a bloodthirsty frat party. So one could imagine the kind of things they that they did to the lands that they invaded uhh so much so that they were seen as threat in most of the European and non-European uhh neighboring states during that time.

And the case with the land that Anglo-Saxons then inhabited was no different. So we find the Vikings arriving in England soon after King Alfred's death, that is in 1016 and this is also the time as we saw earlier on, the time when the Dane's law prevailed which was from 1018 to 1042. So the kind of influence that the Vikings had on the Anglo-Saxon language, on English language in general its continues to be a matter of linguistic puzzle.

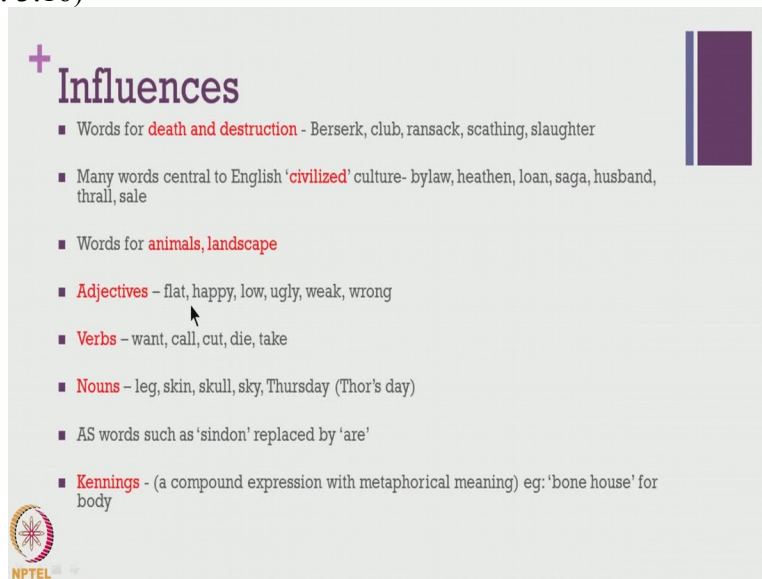
In fact, it was their language, the language of the Vikings uhh, known as the Norse language as a group it was from that most of the Scandinavian contemporary languages have evolved as well. In in terms of English language and the contribution to that the Norse language made to it, there were two major changes that we begin to note uhh the first one being the entry of old Norse words into English language and it is from the Viking uhh Viking's language that they we still continue to use some of the pronouns like they and them.

And also around this time we find that the language begins to uhh become a simplistic in nature, the complexity that the Anglo-Saxon language had uhh inherently built on with begins to wane away. And there also seems to have existed a confusion as to which language to use during that time because there were uhh England had become a a sort of a absorbent ground of different kinds of languages which the different nomadic tribes and the invading tribes where bringing in.

And in fact many linguistics and the contemporary they feel that much of uhh English vocabulary if we survey it in a foundational etymological sense, there is a lot of Vikings Norse influences built into it. And if we look at the uhh uhh look at some of the very direct influences in terms of contribution to sentence structure and especially to uhh vocabulary many of the words for depth and destruction they are considered to have been contributed by the Vikings.


And this also rightly proves the kind of, this also indicates the kind of image that they had uhh among different groups of people during that times. So there is lot of uhh terms associated with violence, death, the battle, warfare etcetera which have been attributed to the Vikings Norse language.

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+ Influences

- Words for **death and destruction** - Berserk, club, ransack, scathing, slaughter
- Many words central to English '**civilized**' culture- bylaw, heathen, loan, saga, husband, thrall, sale
- Words for **animals, landscape**
- **Adjectives** - flat, happy, low, ugly, weak, wrong
- **Verbs** - want, call, cut, die, take
- **Nouns** - leg, skin, skull, sky, Thursday (Thor's day)
- AS words such as 'sindon' replaced by 'are'
- **kennings** - (a compound expression with metaphorical meaning) eg: 'bone house' for body

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The terms such as Berserk, club, ransack, scathing, slaughter, all are set to have evolved from the Norse influence during the Viking uhh during the period of Viking invasion. And also some of the words which are considered to be very central to the to the words that talk about English civilization they are also said to have emerged from the Norse language and there are multiple words for animals and landscapes and even very simple words such as the adjectives flat, happy, low, ugly, weak, wrong, strong uhh few verbs such as want, call, cut, die and take and nouns leg, skin, skull, sky etcetera.

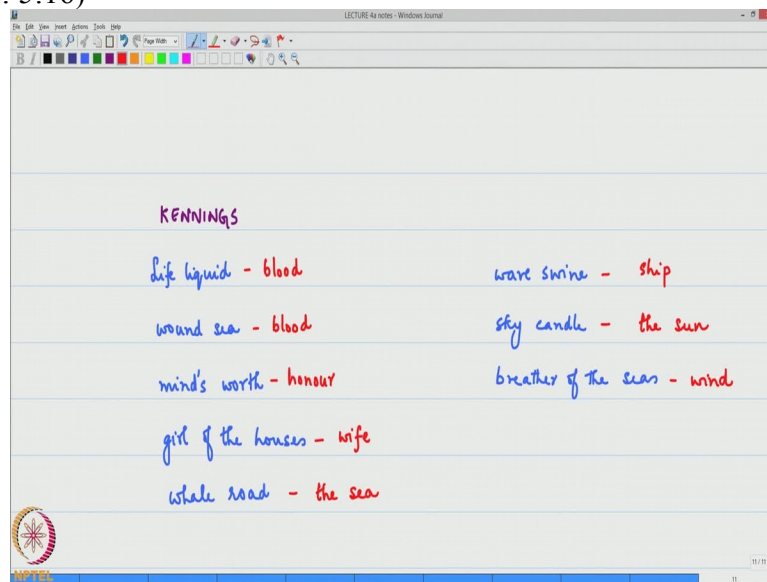
And one of the important contributions being the day of the week, Thursday has been named from the term that existed during the Viking period, Thor's day. It is said to have been uhh a kind of a tribute to one of the Pagan gods that they worshiped and in fact if we later on look at the way in which days of the week the names of the days of the week have evolved, we begin to see that most of them are tributes to the gods that these particular Nomadic tribes and groups worshipped.

And we also find the Vikings replacing some of the words which continued to be quite foundational to English language. For example the Anglo-Saxon used to uhh used a word called 'sindon' in place of the verb 'are' and Vikings replaced sindon with are and we continue to use it even till date. And also the Vikings and Norse language in particular is said to have contributed a

group of linguistic words called known as kennings. Kennings is in fact a a metaphorical uhh expression which is also in constructed in terms of a compound word.

For example one would use instead of body the term 'bone house' which would be metaphorical and which would be using compound words as well.

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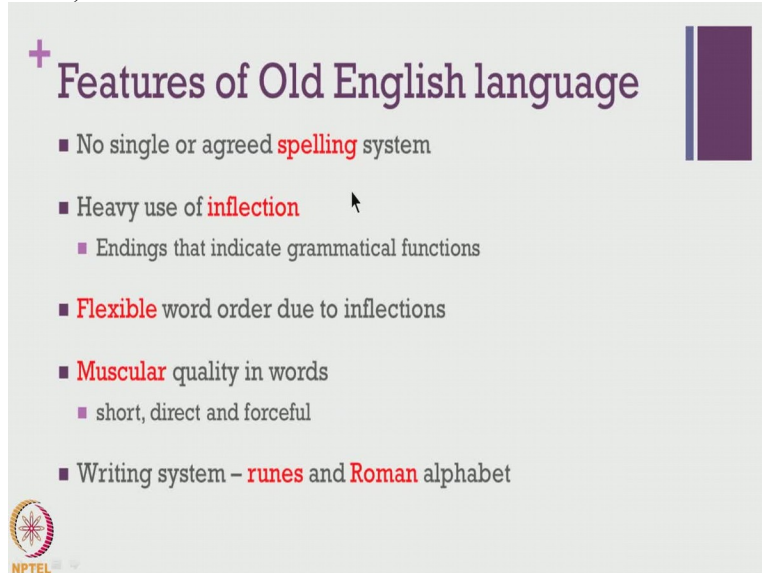
Let us quickly take a look at some of the uhh kennings that exist even today and some of the linguist find it quite interesting to engage with this word game as well. Let us quickly try and see whether we could make out what these different compound words signify. So what could be life liquid, it is nothing other than blood, wound sea is also blood. Now we can see that this in fact a very literal figurative and metaphorical way of uhh talking about things.

And what could be mind's worth? This honour and girl of the houses is wife, whale road is the sea. Now you could see how interestingly this is being uhh constructed. And wave swine is ship, sky candle it is one my favorites, it is the sun, the breather of the sea is the wind. If anyone is interested in this you can perhaps do a little more research and survey on this. This is one interesting way uhh in which language has evolved and one of the interesting ways in which you know we can even talk in many different ways even in the contemporary.

So kennings was one of the common contributions of the uhh Vikings during that time but it has not really survived into the English language but this is uhh a matter of (intellectu) but this is a


matter of linguistic curiosity even in the contemporary. So with that we in some way we begin to look at the general features of old English language.

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+ Features of Old English language

- No single or agreed **spelling** system
- Heavy use of **inflection**
 - Endings that indicate grammatical functions
- **Flexible** word order due to inflections
- **Muscular** quality in words
 - short, direct and forceful
- Writing system – **runes** and **Roman** alphabet



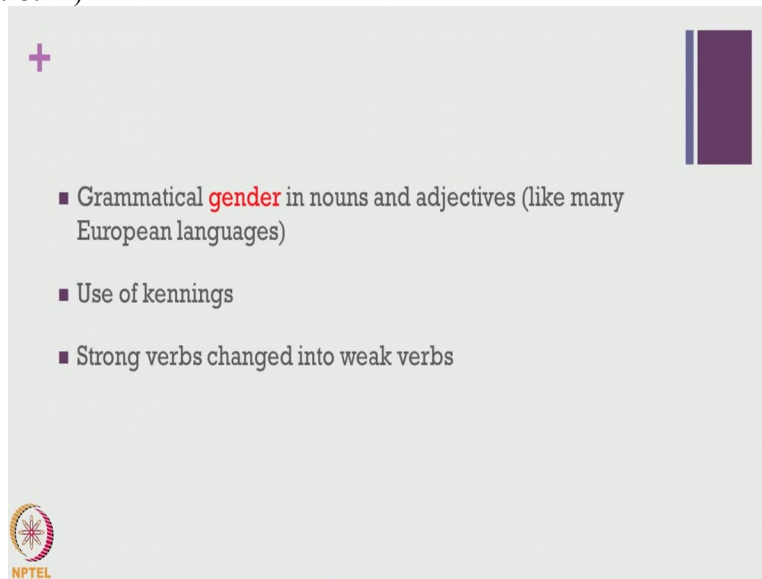
And we begin to see that there was no single or agreed spelling that existed during old English period, in fact different text the surviving manuscripts if we scan through them we find different texts uhh having different spellings and there is hardly any kind of standardization in place. And there is a heavy use of inflection, thanks to the predominant Germanic influences and and inflections are endings in particular words which indicate grammatical functions.

Contemporary English does not have any significant uhh way of inflection. In fact most of the European languages on the contrary still have and due to inflections the word order was quite flexible because if we look at contemporary uhh English it is the word or the verb in place in between different words it is that word order which gives particular meanings. But with inflections it was possible to reverse and have different kinds of word orders which would not affect the word meaning in any way.

And old English uhh during the old English period the words had a very muscular quality. It was not soft. It becomes more (sto) soft and the stress becomes uhh little different with the invasion of French into English language. And we also find that uhh during the old English period most of the words were short, direct and forceful. This is particularly seen in Beowulf which is incidentally the only surviving literary manuscript from those times.

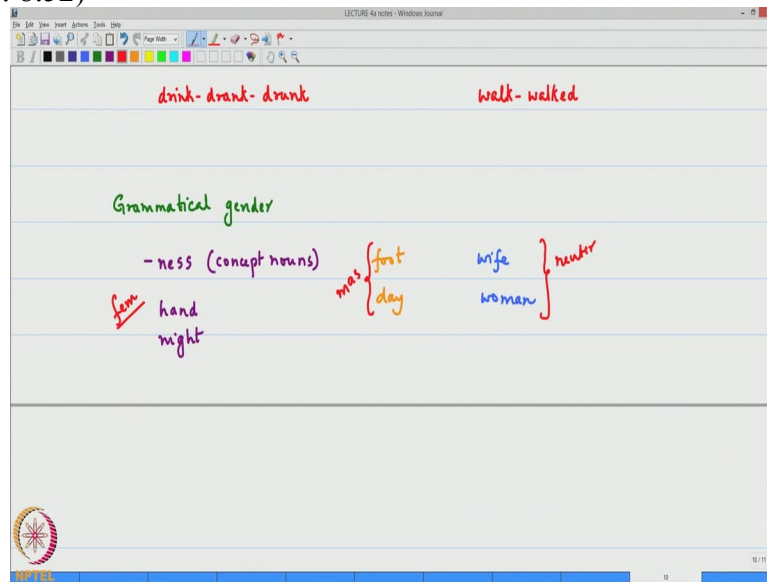
And the writing system was also very different as we see as we saw in the previous session uhh old English is almost like a foreign language, it is quite distant from contemporary English. It does not look, sound or read like English at all. So the writing system largely had Roman alphabet in place and also a system of writing known as runes which is again only a matter of linguistic curiosity in the contemporary. And uh the other interesting factor was that unlike contemporary English the grammatical gender uhh was followed in most of the English dialects.

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And even today in some of the European languages we still have a grammatical gender let us quickly take a look at how grammatical gender operates.

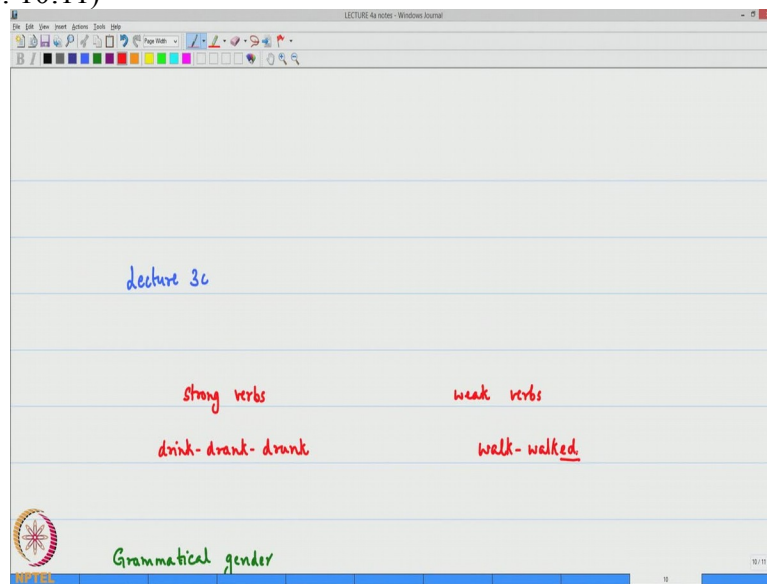
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Let us take a quick look at how grammatical gender operated in old English period. And in contemporary English most of these words, concept nouns ending with a ness like goodness, wellness etcetera or these very simple words they do not have any kind of gender attributed to them but we find that in old English period that was not the case. uhh Concept nouns and certain words like hand and night they had feminine gender and words such as foot and day had masculine gender and very interestingly word such as wife, women etcetera had neutral gender.

So it is very interesting the way the language was uhh organized during that time predominantly because of the various influences including Germanic, Norse and also the other regional dialects that prevailed from the time the Romans left until perhaps the Norman Conquest which happens in 1066. And with the invasion of French form the tens from 1066 onwards we find all of this undergoing a massive change and all also for the very same reason contemporary English is free from inflections, it is free from grammatical gender and it is free from the usage of kennings, so on and so forth.

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We also note that the strong verbs which were used in old English period many of them had changed over period into weak verbs. Strong verbs are these verbs which we now understand as a irregular verbs which have a a different kind of which which uses a different uhh verb when we use the past and the past simple, example drink, drank and drunk. So uhh weak verbs are the ones which the words to which we make the past tense by adding a the ending ed to it.


So during the old English period we note that there are many of the weak uhh verbs many of the strong verbs are transformed into weak words, but however they still have many words such as sing and sang built into English language and they are generally called as irregular verbs. So this also uhh shows us that though some of the aspects in language continue to change, some of the aspects remain static even after many centuries had passed.

So with this we so with this we move on to like the next big thing that happened in history of English language and literature.

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+ After the arrival of the Normans
(1066 AD) – Middle English

- A dialect of French – A big linguistic influence
- Grammar rules get easier, spelling remains inconsistent (based on the writer's dialect)
- OE began to lose the characteristic consonant clusters
- **Metathesis** – a special sound change, rearranging of order
 - Aks – ask
 - Brid – bird
 - Axian – ask
 - Thurgh – thorough

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It is the arrival of the Normans in 1066 A.D. In fact this uhh battle of Hastings which happens in 1066 A.D. which is also known as the Norman Conquest, it marks the beginning of middle English period. Middle English language was characterized by a heavy influence of French and when the Normans arrived they brought with them a particular dialect of French and this was a huge linguistic influence in the way the language was getting shaped from the hence forth.

And we also know that once the French language made its way into English language, the language system got a little more simplified, in the sense that grammar rules got easier. But however, spelling remained quite inconsistent throughout and we find this getting standardized only much later with the arrival of the printing press and during those times, during the old English period as well as the early middle English period the spelling was as per the whim and fancy of each individual writer.

In fact if the dialects in fact if the writer used to follow a different dialect the spelling would change accordingly. So it was not seen as a problem at all, the problem of not having a consistent spelling was not seen as problem at all. And along this time we find old English uhh loses most of its consonant clusters which is why we listen to an old English text today we would note that a lot of consonant clusters are in place making it sound more like a Scandinavian language than a uhh than than English.

And there is also this particular thing that happens a particular linguistic shift that happens during this period which is known as metathesis. Metathesis is fundamentally nothing but the rearrangement of certain sounds from one place to the other. For example, in the old English period ask used to be aks and bird used to be Brid, ask had another form called Axian and thorough was thurgh. So this change in word order happened due to various linguistic influences and some even feel that (an) other historical and geographical reasons are also built into it, but this process in general is known as metathesis. We shall be not be going into the linguistic details of the same in this course.

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The slide features a purple plus sign icon and a purple vertical bar on the right side. The title 'Who speaks what?' is in a purple serif font. Below the title is a bulleted list with four items, each starting with a purple square bullet. The text is in a black serif font. At the bottom left is the NPTEL logo, which consists of a circular emblem with a star and the text 'NPTEL' below it.

+ Who speaks what?

- **English** – commoners, lower classes
 - No standard form
- **French** – aristocracy, monarchy (political, administrative, literary)
- **Latin** – clergy (associated with scholarship and prestige)
- **Greek** – philosophers, scientists, medical practitioners

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And this also brings us to another question, if the land of English people England had been invaded by different nomadic tribes and if all of those tribes were leaving behind the traces of their own languages and their own linguistic dialectal varieties varieties so what were the languages prevalent by the time the middle English period began? So English, French, Latin and Greek were prevalent in middle English period after the Norman Conquest.

There were residues from the tribes and the communities that had passed through England, there was also the current influences in place after the Norman Conquest. So who spoke what during this period? And English was generally used by commoners and lower classes because it was the language of the Anglo-Saxons who were quite violently replaced (())(14:15) first by Vikings and later by the Normans.

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+ Who speaks what?

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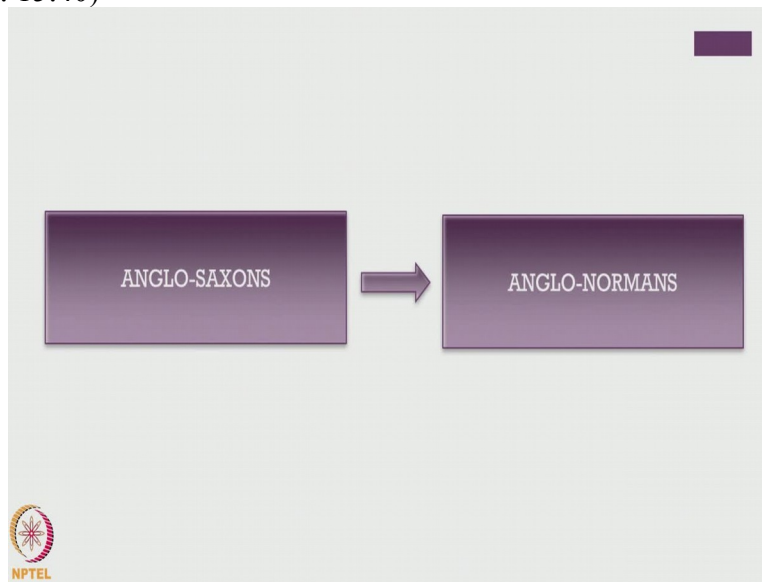


So this was not considered as a standard form then. So each one spoke according to his own dialectical or regional variety. There was French which was the most important language of those times, this is we are talking about the middle ages and the uhh it was a language of the aristocracy and monarchy. For the same reason French was a language of politics, administration and literature.

In fact we do not find any other language other than French dominating the Royal court or even the law court during those times. And then there was this prevalence of Latin, thanks to the increased contribution from Christian missionaries and Roman church and we find Latin being associated with clergy and this is also the language of prestige and scholarship for many centuries in England as we would come to see later. And there was also a little bit of Greek which was prevalent, this was primarily used by philosophers, scientists and medical practitioners.

But however, we have noted even in our general survey of literature of the period that there was not much of a proper literary contribution during the middle English period but whatever little was available uhh tells us about this the (varied con) the varied influences of these different languages getting played out in the literary field as well. Let us move to a quick summary of this situation.

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During this period we have a transformation happening from the Anglo-Saxon uhh towards the Anglo-Normans. So there is still the Anglo-Saxons prevalent in terms of people, language and culture. But they are being heavily influenced and even overtaken by the Anglo-Normans. So in terms of vocabulary also we see this massive distinction. uhh For example words such as sheep, cow and the related words related to animals, agricultural or of manual neighbor etcetera are associated with the Anglo-Saxons because they were the ones who belonged to the working class and who were doing all kinds of labor during that period. And uhh the the words associated with the Anglo-Normans because of the predominant French influence they include word such as Mutton and Beef and this distinction is quite important because the Anglo-Saxons used the words which were part of their every day life which used which included raising of livestock, doing agriculture, etcetera and the Anglo-Normans were using words which were common to them becauseu this was the kind of food which was being being brought to them on a daily basis and they did not have to involve themselves with the any with the other kind of manual labor at all. This

So this social distinction is evident in the way language evolves from the Norman period onwards and later on we find that both of these words uhh blend together and we have a fine mix of everything in contemporary English language.

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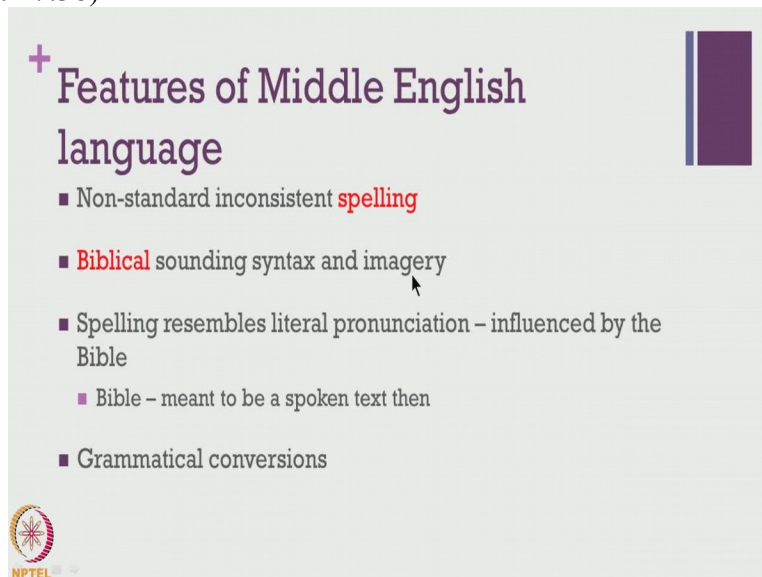
+ French influence

- Vocabulary
 - **Political** terms – prince, throne, court
 - **Chivalry**- honour, glory, duty
 - Building and **architecture**- arch, pillar, castle
 - **Warfare** – battle, armour, captain
 - **Law** – judge, jury, justice, property
 - **Religion** – saviour, prophet, saint




So in this we begin to see the variety of influence that French had on English vocabulary. Most of the contemporary words that we use, the the political vocabulary the words of Chivalry, terms for architecture, warfare, law, religion etcetera, all of them they owe its roots to French language. Also we noted in the previous session that alongside uhh Latin, French also had a major influence on contributing to the vocabulary of English language.

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+ Features of Middle English language

- Non-standard inconsistent **spelling**
- **Biblical** sounding syntax and imagery
- Spelling resembles literal pronunciation – influenced by the Bible
 - Bible – meant to be a spoken text then
- Grammatical conversions

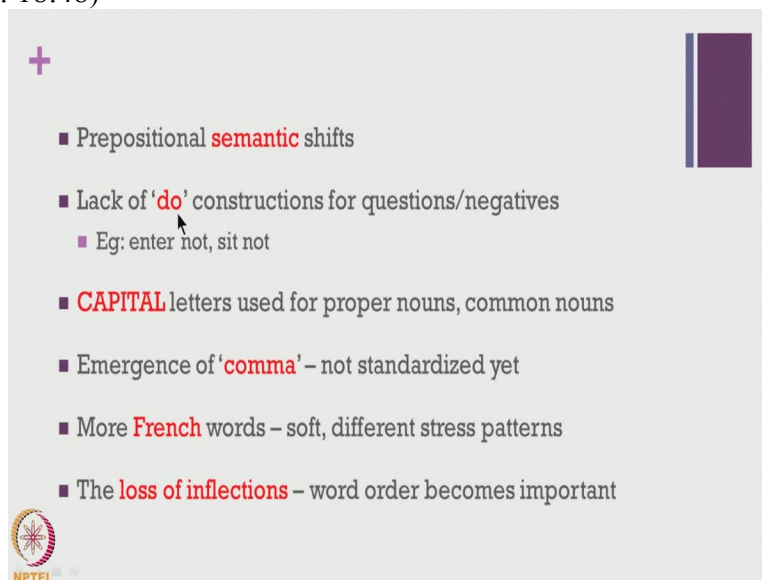


And these were the predominant features of middle English language uhh. Spelling continues to be inconsistent and non-standard and the syntax and imaginary was getting predominantly

Biblical. And this talks a lot about the kind of influence that Christian missionaries and also the church had during the middle English period. And in fact the spelling began to resemble (ris) a literal pronunciation during those times and this was also influenced by the kludgy as well as bible because bible then was meant to be a spoken text, it was uhh it was a mainly the clergy who began to think that bible should be read out to the common peoples so that even the illiterate and the even the ones who cannot really understand uhh bible could find a way of coming closer to that.

So in that sense a lot of biblical imagery and lot of biblical syntax began to be built into the structure of the language. At a later point when we begin to see how biblical translations also paved way to the growth of literature and growth of vocabulary. We will see in detail about the huge influence it had in terms of language and literature.

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- Prepositional **semantic** shifts
- Lack of '**do**' constructions for questions/negatives
 - Eg: enter not, sit not
- **CAPITAL** letters used for proper nouns, common nouns
- Emergence of '**comma**' – not standardized yet
- More **French** words – soft, different stress patterns
- The **loss of inflections** – word order becomes important

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And there were also grammatical conversions in place alongside uhh prepositional semantic shifts. We shall not be going into the linguistic details of the same. And one significant thing about the middle English language was that they did not have do constructions for questions or negatives. For example do not enter, that that kind of a phrase was not available for use then. It was enter not, or sit not. Do enters the do the the term, do enters the construction of language only later during the early modern times.

And this is also the time when they began to use capital letters for proper nouns and common nouns and until then all (lang) all letters were used only in the lowercase as we had already noted in the previous session when we saw a text of the lord's prayer that more the entire text uhh text looks similar, in the same case, there is no intermittent lower case and uhh upper case being used. So capital letters are getting introduced. And also the emergence of comma is also significant during this time and the use of comma was not standardized yet.

So in the text which are available, in the manuscripts which are available we find indiscriminate use of comma even affecting the uhh meaning making process there by. And this a time when more and more French enters English language and this influence is there to (say) stay as we would note at a later point of time and the invasion of French makes the muscular old English a little softer and the stress patterns also begin to vary.

And one significant thing about the linguistic patterns in middle English language is that the Germanic inflections are not noticed from the middle English period onwards. Due to the invasion of French word order becomes more important and the inflections are completely lost from language.

This makes English uhh more this makes English an easier and more flexible form as well.

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The slide features a title 'English replacing French' with a purple plus sign icon. Below the title are two main bullet points, each with a sub-bullet. The first main bullet point is '1362 - The Statute of Pleading - King Edward III' with a sub-bullet 'English in law courts'. The second main bullet point is '1415 - King Henry V - Did not speak French' with a sub-bullet 'English becomes the language of government'. To the right of the first main bullet point is a purple callout box containing the text 'The hundred years war'. To the right of the second main bullet point is a purple callout box containing the text 'Chaucer & Canterbury Tales'. At the bottom left of the slide is the NPTEL logo.

+ English replacing French

- **1362** - The Statute of Pleading - King Edward III
 - English in law courts
- **1415** - King Henry V - Did not speak French
 - English becomes the language of government

The hundred years war

Chaucer & Canterbury Tales

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So gradually we also see that towards the end of the middle English period English gradually replaces French in multiple ways not just in linguistic terms, but also in a in a in a historical and socio political realm as well. So one of the important milestones being the Statute of Pleading in 1362, this was put forward by King Edward the third in his parliament. And this uhh paved way for the use of English in law courts. So uhh French was completely replaced, the argument being that being that many of the commoners failed to understand uhh French language and also it was getting increasingly difficult to do the proceedings entirely in French.

So English replaces French and 1415 is also very significant because King Henry the fifth ascends and he did not speak French. So that was all the more reason for French to get entirely replaced by English even within the royal courts. So English in that sense initially becomes a language of jurisdiction, it also becomes a language of government and if we remember this is also the time when the 100 years war was getting waged against France. So there is a sense of nationalism which is getting consolidated, there is a uhh political element built into this linguistic processes as well, all of which we have noted in detail in some of the previous sessions.

And this is also the time of Chaucer and Canterbury Tales where uhh English gets more prominence as a literary tongue than French is. And by 1425 there is enough evidence to show that English was getting used more and more by the educated upper class, It no longer remains as the language of the working class or the language of the laborers, it acquires certain kind of prestige and nobility. And during this period many of the nobles also stop sending their children for a special French education. By 1476 we find that all of this getting consolidated quite well.

With the invention of the printing with the arrival of the printing press in England we find the language getting standardized and there is no longer a confusion about which form to use or which standard form to use for particular kinds of uses. So uhh (th) this is this fundamentally is the story of English language during the early times and we also note that as we had noted in the many uhh previous sessions it is not just about the linguistic transformation and the linguistic (sta) shifts. But it is also about a certain kind of process aided by various historical, political, religious and social elements uhh built into the structure of society, built into the structure of governance, so on and so forth.

So with this we come to an end of the various influences that we had noted in early old English and middle English period. So we shall be continuing uhh with this lecture at a later point when we begin to see more influences coming in and shaping English language through literary, cultural and other socio political forces. So this is all we have for the time being. uhh Thank you for listening and see you in the next class.