

Suggested Solution to U210A TMA1 : Option A

Prepared by: Prof. Mohammad Awwad, Course Chair

Dr. Hayat al-Khatib, Assistant Professor of English, Lebanon Branch

Compare the Old English text of the story of *Caedmon* with its modern translation (as reproduced in *English: history, diversity and change*, Chapter 3, pp. 111-112). What significant changes in the English language do these two texts demonstrate, and why did such changes occur?

Outline

- Introduction
- The story of *Caedmon*
- Spelling and Sound System
- Vocabulary
- Grammar
- Inflectional morphology
- Internal and external causes of change
- Conclusion

Introduction

Old English (OE), or controversially Anglo-Saxon English, is a term used by modern scholars to refer to the period after the fifth century Germanic settlement in Britain 450-1150 AD (Baugh: 51). After defeating the Vikings and amid a surge of nationalism and Englishness, King Alfred (849-899) attempted to standardize his West Saxon dialect and thus ordered the translation of literary works from Latin into Old English. Bede's *Ecclesiastical History of the English People* was among such translations. *Caedmon's hymn* was one of the earliest translated Anglo-Saxon poetic forms to spread the Christian belief. It is also the earliest surviving Northumbrian Version of Old English text. The two versions of Caedmon exhibit both variation and continuity. At first glance, the OE text is unintelligible to native speakers of modern English. Once more carefully examined, some aspects of usage, pronunciation, and meaning are easily recognized and related to Modern English.

In this essay, we will compare the OE text of Caedmon with its modern English translation. The comparison will address the sound system, vocabulary and grammar focusing on both inflections and word order. We will also provide an assessment of these changes together with their likely causes.

Spelling and Sound System

People familiar with English orthography are aware that English spelling does not allow a systematic representation between language in its written form and the way words are pronounced (Graddol, Cheshire and Swann, 1994 (2001 printing): 139). According to Harris (1990: 68), English does not allow such a representation because, "the alphabet ... (used in) English had not been designed for English. It had been borrowed from the Romans ... who had borrowed it from the Phoenicians, who lived where Lebanon is now. (Hence) the alphabet did not always fit the sounds of the English language". Therefore, OE used new symbols to represent sounds not present in the Latin alphabet: /ð/ pronounced as *th* in "three", /þ/ pronounced as *th* in "that", and /æ/ pronounced as *a* in "cat". We should point out, however, that the more important differences between the two texts relate to the sound system itself, not to orthography. The major sound differences between OE and Modern English are as outlined in table (1).

OE	Modern English
1. [u]/ hus, ut, nu	[aw] in house, out, now
2. [o]/ ond, mon, onswereðe	[æ] and, man, answered
3. [ei] he ¹	[i:] he
4. [i:] tide	[ai] tide
5. [x] represented in orthography by /h/ ² followed by a consonant as in hrofe, meahthe, neahthe	[Ø] roof, might(y), night
6. [hwð] in hwæðre, hwðt	[hwð/wð] as in whether, and what
7. [swð] in onswereðe	[sð] answered
8. [č] written as c in ic, sprecende, heofonrices	Modern English does not have words where c is pronounced č

Table 1: Sound differences between OE and Modern English

Although our focus has been on the **differences** between OE and Modern English, we should point out that many OE words are similar to their Modern English version. A list of such words is given in Table 2 under vocabulary.

Vocabulary

The meaning of a good number of words used in *Caedmon* is clear, and identical with their meaning in Modern English, as illustrated in Table (2).

OE	Modern English
reste	rest
mon	man
onslepte	slept
stod	stood
hwæt	what
hwæðre	whether
sceal	shall
song	song
sing(an)	sing
heofon	heaven
grette	greeted
Gesette ³	seated
gehyrde ³	heard
gemynde ³	mind/memory
halette	hailed
onswereðe	answered

Table 2: OE words similar to their Modern English cognates

OE	Modern English
gebeorscipe	feast
swefn	dream
frumsceaft	creation
hwæþugu	something
modgeþonc	conception
endebyrdnesse	order
beboden	entrusted

Table 3: OE words that look like foreign words

The meaning of other words is by no means clear. They look like foreign words, and are not used in Modern English. Table 3 provides a sample of these.

¹ OE **he** was pronounced [heI] as in Modern English **hay, day, say**, etc.

² When used as the first letter in the word, OE /h/ had the same pronunciation it now has.

³ Deleting the prefix {ge-} (pronounced [jð]) makes it easy to relate the word to Modern English.

Grammar

Unlike Modern English, OE sentence structure is basically of the SOV rather than SVO type. The main verb comes at the end of the sentence preceded by its complements. The following are illustrative examples taken from *Caedmon*:

OE text	Literal translation into Modern English	Idiomatic translation into Modern English
1. Para heord him wæs pære neahte beboden	Whose care to him was that night entrusted	Whose care was entrusted to him that night
2. Ond pæm wordum sona monig word in pæt ilce gemet Gode wyrðes songes to geþeodde	And to those words at once many words in the same metre of God worthy songs (to) added	And to those words (he) at once added many words in the same metre of God's worthy songs

The continuity of the language is also maintained. The poem also has sentences whose structure is identical with that of modern English. The following are illustrative examples:

1. Pæt he forlet pæt hus
that he left the house
2. hwæt sceal ic singan?
What shall I sing?
3. He ærest sceop eorðam bearnum heofon to hrofe
He first created/made (on earth for men) heaven as a roof.

Inflectional morphology

What compensates for and justifies what looks like free word order of OE sentences is the inflectional nature of the language. Nouns, pronouns, adjectives, and the definite article, are inflected for case, number, and gender. **Gebeorscipe**, for example, becomes **gebeorscipes** when used in the genitive case as in **pæt hus pæs gebeorscipes** (the house of the feast); **God** becomes **Godes** as in **Godes scyppendes** (of God the Creator); **monncynne** becomes **monncynnes** as in **monncynnes Weard** (of mankind the guardian).

When used in the dative case OE **þeos** (this) becomes **þeossu** as in **of þeossu gebeorscipe** (from this feast); **pære** (that) becomes **pæme** as in **from pæm wordum** (and to those words). Also notice that **he** in the nominative changes into **him** in the dative as in **Para heord him wæs ...beboden** (whose care was entrusted to him), into **his** in the genitive as in **his leomu** (his limbs), and into **hine** in the accusative as in **hine halette and grette** (hailed (and greeted him).)

As far as verbs are concerned, Caedmon has only two examples that show number agreement between modals and their subject noun phrases: **Hwæt sceal ic singan** (what shall I sing) and **Nu sculon herigean** (now we shall praise).

However, analysis of additional OE material confirms the inflectional nature of the language, as indicated in tables (4), (5), taken from (Graddol et al: 116-117).

	Singular		Plural	
Nominative	Drihten	the lord (subj.)	Drihtnas	the lords
Accusative	Drihten	the lord (obj.)	Drihtnas	the lords
Genitive	Drihtnes	of the lord	Drihtna	of the lords
Dative	Drihtne	to the lord	Drihtnum	to the lords

Table 4: OE noun inflections

	Singular	Plural
1 st person	Ic singe I sing	We singaþ we sing
2 nd person	Pu singest you sing	Ge singaþ you sing
3 rd person	He singeþ he sings	Hie singaþ they sing
	Heo singeþ she sings	
	Hit singeþ it sings	

Table 5: OE verb inflections

Internal and external causes of change

As we have pointed out in the sections about grammar and morphology, English changed from an inflected language into a word order language. Its vocabulary acquired a high percentage of French words as a result of the Norman Conquest in 1066.

The major internal cause for the loss of OE inflections was two-fold. First, the inflectional system itself was not efficient as it did not assign the same noun, for examples, different case markings. This made Roger Lass argue that the language was "ripe for analogical remodelling" (1992, p. 104). Second, in the course of natural change "the stress in English speech tended to fall increasingly on the first syllable of words". This stress pattern resulted in the reduction of all weakly stressed vowels of inflectional suffixes into [ə], which made them non-distinctive and thus redundant (Graddol et al: 118).

The most important external cause of change was the invasion of the land by various peoples: the Romans, the Angles, the Saxons and Jules, the Vikings, and the French. As a result of Viking invasions that started in AD787 and culminated in the Danes taking the throne from AD991 to 1042, a large number of Scandinavian words, and grammatical forms were adopted in English. Another more important result was the breakdown of inflections due to direct contact between the Vikings and the English, which resulted in their doing away with both Scandinavian and Anglo-Saxon inflections, which were of a similar range but with different realizations. What we have here is a breakdown of inflections due to the two joint forces of internal linguistic change and social contact. (Graddol et al: 120).

The Norman Conquest was another major external cause especially with regard to its effect on English vocabulary. The conquest took place in 1066 and lasted for about 300 years, during which English became a minority language in terms of written texts. French was the more dominant language spoken at the Royal Court, and by the nobility, and aspired to by anyone seeking a higher social status. As expected, the lower classes continued to speak Old English. By the fourteenth century "about 21 percent of the English vocabulary derived from French, in comparison with about 9 percent soon after the conquest" (Graddol et al: 123).

We should also point out that growth in the economy, the increased power of the monarchy, the translation movement, and the literary movement contributed to the developments of a move towards a national language with its own terms of trade, politics, law, and literature.

Finally technological developments and scientific discoveries played an important role in the development and enrichment of English lexis. New words and phrases were needed to express new concepts and theories in astronomy and magnetism.

Conclusion

We have examined the OE *Caedmon* text and pointed out its similarities to and differences from Modern English.

Our comparison focused on the sound system, inflectional morphology, and the grammar of the two varieties of the language. We pointed out why inflections were lost, and why and how vocabulary expanded and changed. Finally we showed that the massive changes that affected OE were due to both internal and external causes, the two sometimes working together as in the case of the loss of word inflections.

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